

**Another Country
Evaluation Report**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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You are reading the executive summary of an evaluation report reviewing the outcomes of *Another Country*; a major arts residency that took place in Warwickshire in 2005-6. The full report is available from Artists in Warwickshire Education.

Another Country was initiated by Artists in Warwickshire Education (AWE) and delivered in partnership with Rugby Art Gallery and Museum (RAGM) and the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA). The project was funded through a grant from Arts Council England, with additional contributions from AWE, RAGM and inIVA.

The project centred on residencies by two visiting artists from London who worked with a range of groups in the rural village community of Great Alne, exploring themes linked to cultural exchange. Groups included Great Alne Primary School and The Seymour Centre; which is part of Warwickshire's pupil reintegration unit (PRU). Links were also made with the Women's Institute, the Young Farmers and the Cricket Club. The theme of 'another country' was taken as the starting point for exploring how different cultures are perceived and depicted. These ideas were linked to the themes of enchantment, other worldliness and characterisation depicted in Shakespeare's work – focusing particularly on *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The choice of theme was prompted by a major year long schools' Shakespeare festival in Warwickshire led by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The project sought to meet a number of aims through a diverse programme of activities. Key intentions were to explore perceptions of cultural difference within and between communities and to address rural cultural deprivation. The project would offer the opportunity to take part in collaborative, creative activities that would enhance community cohesion and be showcased publicly. The project would also encompass a major commission for one of the residency artists, to be shown at RMAG and would offer an artist from Warwickshire the opportunity to learn from working alongside two more experienced artists.

The programme began with a launch event at which the artists showed a short film made that day exploring their initial explorations and perceptions of Great Alne. Sound artist Charlie Dark then worked predominantly with a Year 5 and 6 class at primary school exploring music, poetry, sound and performance, assisted by Perveen Chohan - an artist from Warwickshire seeking to build her experience of working with children. Work at the primary school culminated in a performance by the children at The Bridgehouse Theatre in Warwick. Film maker and photographer Trevor Mathison worked with students at The Seymour Centre and with The Young Farmers. Work produced at the PRU was exhibited at The Royal Show. Various workshops and social events were attended by villagers. Charlie Dark was also commissioned to create a major sound installation for RAGM based on his residency. The project was extensively documented by artist and photographer Barbara Jones.

Further details about the project and those involved in its delivery can be found in the full report.

The evaluation focused on reviewing whether the project had met its aims. It was undertaken through interviews with key partners and participants, and by reviewing

documentation, which included photographs, sound files and video. Key outcomes of the project were as follows.

Evidence showed that the project had begun to explore an interesting approach to extending understanding of cultural diversity, challenging racism and countering racial stereotypes. The theme of *Another Country* offered a strong conceptual framework that enabled the idea of culture to be explored at many levels. Through sustained contact, positive relationships had been forged between artists and participants and it was clear that preconceptions on both sides had been challenged through the two-way process of cultural exchange. Explorations of cultural diversity could have been further extended through enhancing the opportunities to explore cultural differences and preconceptions between different groups in the village, as well as between artists and participants.

Evidence showed that the project had broadened access to the arts for those living in an isolated rural area. A key factor in this was the fact that both artists worked with new technologies. The primary school and The Seymour Centre valued the fact that the project had offered them access to new cultural experiences. The impact on villagers was however less extensive than had been hoped as fewer numbers took part than had been the intention. One reason for this was that a key local advocate left the village shortly after the project began.

Evidence showed that the project had been very effective in promoting awareness of local cultural heritage and in endorsing rural traditions. Participants had been able to see their own cultural practices through new eyes and appreciate the differences between perception and reality. At The Seymour Centre, where students and their families had been filmed on location talking about their backgrounds and daily lives, this had had a particularly marked effect on the students, their families and staff. The Young Farmers group had also valued the opportunities to showcase their work.

Although participation in workshops and social events was less extensive than had been hoped, it was clear that the project had served to enhance community cohesion, including enhancing the relationships between The Seymour Centre and the village and between The Seymour Centre and the primary school. Social events had been an important aspect of the project.

Evidence suggests that *Another Country* also served effectively to widen people's experiences of contemporary art. This was particularly notable in the way that insights were gained into the use of new technologies and in the blurring of boundaries between art, poetry, music and theatre. Charlie Dark's commissioned installation at RAGM had contributed to this, with comments in the visitor's book indicating that visitors had relished being intrigued and challenged by his work.

Across many aspects of the project, participants had clearly gained from their involvement in hands-on arts activities and the fact that the outcomes of these were showcased publicly. For children at the primary school, a range of outcomes were identified relating to the social and emotional aspects of learning, with Charlie's style of working encouraging children to think critically and question their ideas. For one student at The Seymour Centre, involvement in the project led directly to a decision to study

photography at college. Villagers enjoyed their participation, but would have gained more if there was a stronger sense of working towards a designated outcome. That the benefits for them were felt most strongly around their contributions to the artists' initial video piece highlighted how involvement in community arts activities can take many different forms.

It was only at the primary school that themes from Shakespeare were explored directly. Had the focus on Shakespeare had been highlighted more overtly, this may have helped to secure involvement in the project by villagers as it would have provided a clearer sense of focus and a starting point that people would have felt comfortable with.

The project was effective in providing new opportunities for artists. This was particularly notable for the two artists for London in terms of bringing their work to a rural market, as well as in enabling a less experienced artist to develop her skills.

All three partner organisations had gained in terms of extending the reach of their programmes and in building new partnership opportunities for further work.

There was a strong sense from all those involved in delivering the project that it had offered the opportunity to explore new strategies and approaches for arts projects and that the approaches explored will help to inform the development of future projects.

Another Country was an ambitious project at many levels; in the breadth of its aims, the range of activities offered and the number of partners involved in delivery. Consequently, it proved a complex pilot project to develop and manage. As a result, organising partners gained a wide range of insights into managing similar projects efficiently and effectively in the future. Insights were gained into the practicalities of working with artists living a distance away, the importance of working with a local advocate and the need for a single point of project management. The project also highlighted the need for honest discussion and a shared willingness to embrace the sensitivities likely to be raised by any exploration of cultural exchange. A range of positive outcomes were identified for all the groups that were involved. The most striking success of *Another Country* however is the contribution it makes to the debate about the role of the arts in addressing issues around cultural diversity.