

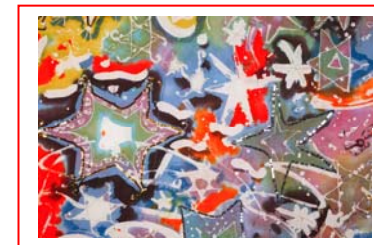
# SKIPPKO

creating change through the arts

## Not On My BUS Route!



### FINAL PROJECT REPORT



## About Skippko and about the project

Skippko is a Leeds based arts charity aiming to transform lives and empower people through exciting and innovative creative arts projects. We bring people together through workshop programmes, related events, exhibitions and training. Our arts workers act as group facilitators using a wide range of creative art techniques to create a piece of group art work to increase people's confidence, skills, sense of self worth and allow people to learn from each other. By participating in our group process participants can realise their full potential, developing relationships and skills.

*Not On My Bus Route!* was an exciting new arts project which ran from February to October 2008, and focussed on the communities along the 2 and 12 bus route in Leeds (chosen as it passes through a wide range of communities on its journey to and from the city centre, but it doesn't go past Leeds Art Gallery!) The people living along the bus route are linked by it but may never know this – they may be getting off the bus as their neighbours are getting on. The project brought together 5 groups of people from different communities who would not normally meet, but who are connected by the bus route.

The aim of the project was to enrich participants' lives by breaking down barriers around their engaging with and viewing art in a formal setting, making the artworks more accessible, and by stimulating a connection with art on their own terms and with reference to their own life experiences. Participants also benefited from increased confidence, motivation, self-esteem and a sense of 'belonging'.

Community cohesion was an important focus of this project – participants were given the chance to meet and engage with people outside their own local communities and to build new social networks, thus facilitating a greater understanding of each other's cultures and values.

Skippko worked with participants to create group pieces of artwork using Leeds Art Gallery as an inspiration. Each group met for two hours once a week for 15 weeks, and all sessions were facilitated by two artists. Linking sessions gave a chance for the groups to meet up to create further artwork during the project, and to share their ideas, thoughts and experiences.

The project culminated in a large celebratory event at Leeds Art Gallery, where all artwork was exhibited, and participants received attendance certificates. Some of the participants also took a trip round the bus route, handing out postcards of the finished artworks to passengers, with the support of Skippko staff.



## Key features of the project

### 1. Engaging with and finding meaning in 'Art', both in and out of the gallery

The majority of the project participants had never visited Leeds Art Gallery before. A key moment early on in the project, therefore, was giving everyone a chance to visit the gallery, to introduce participants to both the collections and the physical space, and starting to break down barriers. This was followed by a linking session where several groups came together to work in the gallery, becoming art detectives and completing a quiz about some of the artworks, before creating a large piece of artwork together.



Using the gallery, which is full of art from different cultures, as the common starting point, enabled participants to see and experience a range of viewpoints and ideas about both themselves and about art, which they did not previously have access to.

Having made the connection with Leeds Art Gallery, many participants said at the end of the project that they will return there in the future, bringing friends and family. The project has changed attitudes towards galleries and the relevance of art to people's lives. Many of the groups will also continue with creative activities when they meet in the future. The Artful Dodgers, a group formed specifically for this project, want to continue meeting, to add new members, and to fundraise to run another art project. In addition, several members have gone on to join in with other groups and activities in their community centres, something that they would not have considered before taking part in this project. As one group member said of the final event: "This has been the best day of my life. I've never received a certificate before."

All the artwork created during the project will be in display within the various communities.

## 2. 'Community Cohesion': Building bridges between different communities

Skippko's way of working is designed to enable participants to deepen their links with each other, develop friendships and share experiences, and this was an important feature of this project. The five community groups taking part in *Not On My Bus Route!* came from a wide range of social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds:

- ★ *Artful Dodgers* – a mental health support group supported by Neshama (Leeds Jewish Care Services) and based in Moortown, north Leeds;
- ★ *Button Hill Club* - an Afro-Caribbean social group for older people from the Chapeltown area of Leeds;
- ★ *Koshish* – a self-help group for Asian women with mental health issues, based in Harehills;
- ★ *Sitara* – a support and social group for Asian women of all ages from across the city, supported by Women's Health Matters and based in Harehills;
- ★ *Women Making Choices* – a women's support group from Beeston, south Leeds, supported by South Leeds Health for All. Participants were white working-class British women.

*Not On My Bus Route!* was specifically designed to bring together people from diverse communities, and allowed them to step outside those communities, to visit new places and to experience new things together. Building bridges started with the people in each group, experiencing both the familiar (their own group) and the unfamiliar (other groups, other places.) Coming together to share their stories, to share food, to share their responses to artwork, and to work together allowed participants to experience a different environment outside their own familiar communities, and to meet people they wouldn't normally have the chance to meet.

As one of the Sitara group members said, at the final event:

"What I've enjoyed personally, for myself, it's given me the opportunity to work with older women from my community like Aunties and Grandmothers, creating a relationship with these people. It's been an experience of something which I've always wanted to do and Sitara has given me this opportunity.

A Star – that's what Sitara means – it's about having a voice and sparkling. As women, and as Asian women, its not something we often get a chance to do, so coming to this and doing all the activities has been incredibly enjoyable.

What can I say? We all know this ourselves from what you can see today."



### 3. Other benefits for participants

Skippko's way of working gives the ownership of the creative process and the direction of the project to the group members themselves, giving people influence over the ideas they wish to share and how they are seen by others. This method has proved to be empowering for people who may not have the same control over other aspects of their lives, enabling them to grow in confidence and gain a huge sense of achievement. Using a variety of artistic techniques and our facilitation skills, we encourage groups to develop creativity, regardless of previous experience and involvement in the arts.

In participants' own words:

- ★ "Brilliant! What humour and humility – we are all connected by more than a bus route!"
- ★ "Everyone has different ideas about art. It was nice to meet people from different ethnic origins and therefore different ideas about how they work."
- ★ "It was lovely meeting the other groups and seeing what they do"



- ★ "More confident to have a go at stuff now"
- ★ "I enjoy every bit of the time we spend here. That's down to the experience that we get from Skippko."

Relationships have improved even within the groups, as people have been able to develop and deepen friendships. Participants have developed skills in listening to and accepting each other, in working as a group and making decisions together. They have learned that it's ok to disagree or to have a different opinion – they can still come to a decision. And of course there's the sheer fun of being able to relax and come together to create something!

## 4. Benefits for Skippko and useful lessons for the future

*Not On My Bus Route!* gave Skippko a number of opportunities for development. This was the first time we had used a common starting point, the Gallery, as the basis for a project, and this proved to be very successful. Using Leeds Arts Gallery also enabled us to build an important new partnership with the Gallery Education Officer, who provided advice and training on using the gallery as a resource for working with groups. Skippko workers were also given training on how to engage people with art, how to overcome the barriers to people's engagement and how to facilitate participants' expressing their feelings about art. All of this will help with the future development of the organisation.

Other transferable lessons for future projects:

- ★ Have a good idea! – the project was well thought out, well developed and very thorough in what it aimed to achieve
- ★ Flexibility and responsiveness - Skippko's way of working provided opportunities for people to be engaged at their own pace and their own level, and allowed for the project to develop in response to participants' needs and concerns
- ★ Funding – working with and engaging people from disadvantaged communities takes valuable time and resources that are not always available, and this project was able to achieve what it did through adequate funding being available
- ★ Time – sufficient time was allowed to manage the project effectively – to liaise with partner organisations, to meet with group members, to carry out health and safety checks etc
- ★ Partnerships – Skippko had several very supportive partners, who understood the aims of the project and what we were trying to achieve, and who provided resources where they were able.

