

# WARM CREATE NORTH

## Project Review

# What is WARM?

WARM was a creative initiative supported by Arts Council England that was dedicated to exploring the role of the arts in providing warmth and support to displaced communities. It was a creative residency at Newcastle City Library, a Community Arts Project, an Enterprise Development project, a Research project and a collective response to a creative line of enquiry, all at the same time. The project provided creative professional opportunities to nine creative practitioners from Ukraine, but now living in North East England, and was managed and delivered through a partnership between Newcastle Libraries, the Council's Arts Development Team, and our Create North team.

## How the idea came about...

We had previously worked with Newcastle Libraries on a project called 'The Fifth Size Book Adventure', which had explored how artists could utilise their practice to respond to a collection of large books within the collection at Newcastle City Library. Keen to work with them again, we contacted the Library team in Spring 2023 to start exploring ideas that related to issues that the Library and their service users were using at the time. At the time, the Cost of Living Crisis was at its height, and many public spaces were providing 'warm spaces' to vulnerable people in their community. This led to us asking these questions...

*What do we mean by 'Warm'?"*

*"Is a warm space literally just a heated room?"*

*"Is it about providing a warm welcome?"*

*"Is it about feeling safe and valued?"*

We felt that this would make for an interesting line of enquiry for an arts project. What role can the arts play in providing warmth for vulnerable people and communities.



## What happened next?

It was important from the outset that the project be designed in partnership with the people we hoped would participate in it. We initially set out to devise the details of the project with organisations that worked with people at risk of homelessness. City Library hosts some of the Council's homelessness services, and the connection between housing and accommodation and warmth were obvious. However, the capacities of those services meant that we found it difficult to find the time for a discussion. After a few different approaches, Andrew, our partner at the Library Service, suggested reaching out to Alison in Council's the Arts Development Team for support.

# Working with the Ukrainian Community

Alison was already working with a community of recently arrived Ukrainians who had moved to the UK as a result of the war. She knew of a couple of creative people who had been involved in previous projects, and felt that they would be interested in helping to shape a project with us. So, we arranged a meeting with Alla and Emma in Newcastle Library in the Autumn of 2023. They were really excited about taking part, and we started to bring together the various ideas that formed the shape of the project.

We all felt it was important that everyone involved in the project was a beneficiary of it in some way, and that this was not a project where the arts were 'done' to a community.

## The Project

The project was built around three creative residencies, hosted in City Library and delivered in partnership with Ukrainian communities across the northeast. The goal was to explore different perspectives on experiencing 'warmth', including notions of being welcomed into a new community, feeling safe, friendship and empathy.

Each residency would concentrate on a distinct art form: Pottery, Dance, and Singing/Music. These artforms were identified by Alla and Emma as areas of interest within their community.

We would recruit nine Ukraine artists to design and lead the residencies tailored to three different groups within the Ukrainian community with the aim of allowing them to share their experiences and express themselves through creativity and arts activities. The culmination of each residency would feature in an exhibition in the City Library where the groups showcase their work, offering valuable insights into what warmth means to them.

To further enhance the sense of warmth, Create North and three regional artists would work alongside the Ukrainian artists, offering insights on how newly settled practitioners can build their creative practise and integrate into the creative community in the region. We wanted the project to be a bridge for the Ukrainian creatives to forge a fulfilling life in the region, contributing to the cultural landscape and connecting with their adopted community.

At the end of the project, everyone involved – the Ukrainian leads artists, the regionally based artists, the participating groups, Create North and Newcastle Library staff – would come together to reflect on what's been learnt so that we could share our understanding of how a sense of warmth can be manifested across communities.



# The UK-established artists

Having identified the three artforms, we wanted to engage a lead artist who was already established in the cultural network of the North East, and who had experience of working as a participatory practitioner. Through our creative network and through speaking with Alison, Alla and Emma, we identified three artists we felt were suitable. They were:



## **Annabel Talbot, Ceramics Artist**

Annabel is a Newcastle-based artist specialising in ceramics and pottery, and has led a number of participatory arts programmes in the North East.



## **Bridie Jackson, Musician**

Bridie Jackson is a performer, creative practitioner, composer and sound artist, well known for composing innovative, voice centred bespoke scores for Theatre, Opera, Dance, Film and exhibitions and has created work with a range of arts organisations including Theatre Hullabaloo, Open Clasp and Meta 4 Dance.



## **Rachel Jean Birch, Dancer**

Rachel is co-director and founder of Moving Art Management, and is a freelance producer, teacher, dancer and creative entrepreneur, specialising in dance.



# Recruiting the Ukrainian artists

We created a short advert to promote the opportunity to be involved, which Alla also translated into Ukrainian. To apply, applicants needed to provide some details and answer three questions:

1. Tell us about yourself and why you are interested in this project – Your experience as a creative person- The artforms you are interested in- Any professional experience you have
2. What can you offer to the project? – How your creative skills could support the residencies- Connections you may have with community groups
3. What would you like to get from the project? – How you think the project will help you to develop your career- What you would like to do after the project

We had identified a lack of interest from the Ukrainian community as a risk to the project, as we felt it was important that a community of creatives formed as the project developed, and were concerned that we would not have enough applicants. In the end, interest in WARM from creatives from the Ukrainian community was higher than expected. We had budgeted for 9 creatives to be involved in the project, and 27 expressed an interest in taking part.

Whilst maintaining the original concept, and therefore selecting and engaging with nine artists, we were still able to engage other applicants as project participants, working with the lead artists. The nine selected Ukrainian artists will be at different stages in their careers, encompassing both experienced and emerging practitioners. We wanted to enable them to leverage their creative skills, and they had interests in a wide variety of forms, such as photography, film-making, visual arts, crafts, music, and dance, that complemented the main focus of each residency.

The nine artists were:

Aliya Klochko (Dancer), Alla Maistrenko (Photographer), Anna Krivuta (Songwriter), Emma Vynokurva (Creative Producer and Photographer), Jane Lovoza (Dancer), Lucy Nychai (Multimedia Artist), Maryna Cepkova (Architect), Roksolana Hrudzhyk (Painter), Svitlana Sanina (Singer)

## Starting to Work Together

In March 2024, the 9 Ukrainian artists met and started to work with the 3 regionally based creative practitioners over two days to design the three residencies. This activity took place in Newcastle City library. Whilst designing the residencies, practitioners also considered how they might learn from the initiative and apply the learning to the development of their own creative commercial practise.



# What Each Group Did

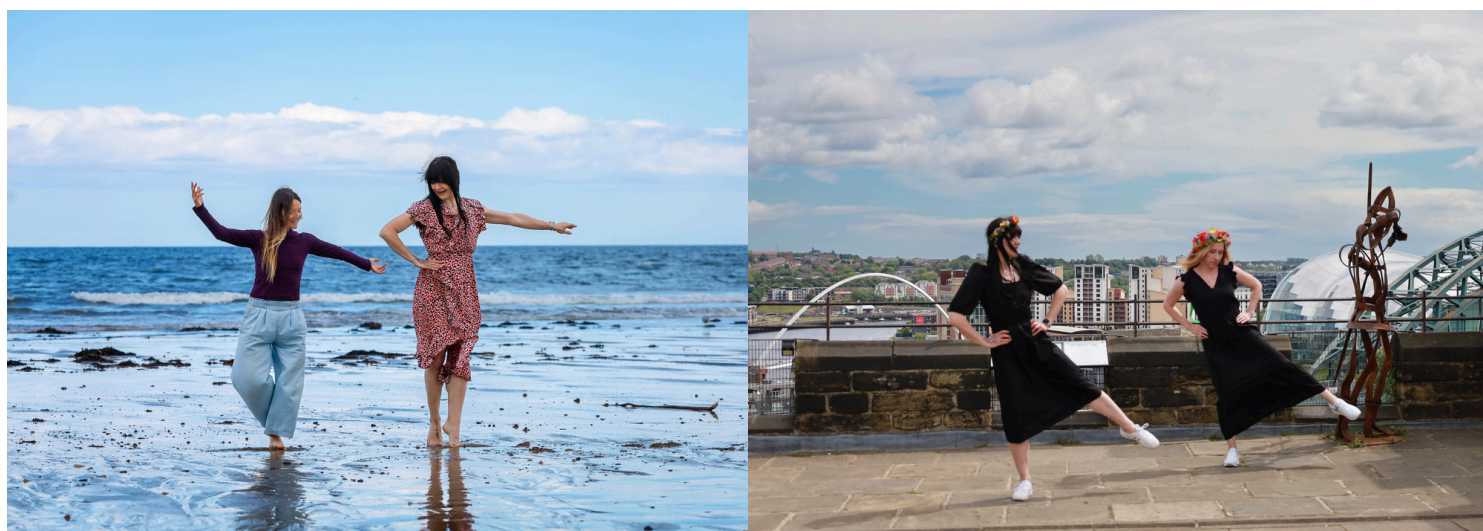
**Ceramics Group:** The Ceramics cohort worked with other Ukrainian creative practitioners, recruited from the other applicants to the project, to create a collection of pottery capturing their personal responses and experiences during challenging times called 'Warm Practices'. Using ceramics as a medium, the works reflect the artists' responses to themes of warmth and unity in the face of uncertainty, violence, separation and pain, and speaks to the resilience and solidarity they found during these difficult times.

"The exhibition includes a conventional negotiation table, a round table, a table that invites dialogue, invites expression, so that in the world we can find meaning in being on the same side, on the side of legal human rights, which allows us to feel safe in our own countries. We invite everyone!"



**Dance Group:** The Dance cohort created an exhibition that celebrated the intersection of dance, photography, and the captivating landscapes of the North East. They brought together dance enthusiasts, both seasoned and new, to explore the language of movement in some of the region's most iconic locations.

The creative process involved a two-day photoshoot where participants engaged in 45-minute dance sessions in various locations across Newcastle and Sunderland. These sessions were photographed to create the exhibition presented in the Library.





Music Group: Whilst the planned approach worked well for the Ceramics and Dance cohorts, it became clear that the professional priorities the music cohort artists were very disparate and that a collaborative project would not help them to fulfil their ambitions. Instead, Create North worked with each of the artists independently.

Photographer Emma Vynokurva created a new exhibition called PRITANI – a research art project about tattoos as a form of self expression, a symbol of individuality and a person’s individual story. Emma photographed people with tattoos and worked with them to provide some interpretation for the exhibition. We supported Emma to recruit her participants by putting a call-out on our newsletter, and Emma then arranged to meet with each participants separately.



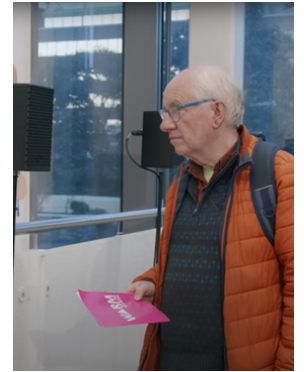
The other two musicians, Anna and Svitlana, faced some unexpected challenges during the course of the project. Both returned to Ukraine during the project, with one unable to get back to UK due to disruptions to the travel networks. In the end, and became difficult to meet their hopes and expectations within the budget and timeframe of the project. Both were invited to perform at the exhibition launch event, which Anna was able to do, but Svitlana was delayed in getting back from Ukraine. Although the project has now ended, we continue to support them to find opportunities to achieve their personal professional goals.

Lead artist Bridie Jackson worked with two Ukrainian artists to create a soundscape piece. Bridie facilitated recorded conversations with a range of people, including staff who are based at City Library, a practise English reading and writing group who meet there, and a cohort of Ukrainian artists who had been involved in WARM. The conversations delved into a range of thoughts on the topic of warmth, including relationships, love, safety, faith, nature, tactility and generosity. Snippets of the recordings were woven together to create a gentle sonic framework, allowing these stories and thoughts to take centre stage in the piece.

# The Exhibition

Supported by our team at Create North, the four exhibitions were displayed in City Library for a week in October 2024. Taking up high-visibility public spaces on across three floors, the exhibition was seen by everyone who entered the library during that time. Accompanied by an interpretation programme written by the artists, the four exhibitions represented very different responses to Warmth.

The week-long exhibition was launched at a special event with invited guests, friends and family. Guests were able to view the exhibition, meet and talk to the artists, and enjoyed some Ukrainian refreshments.



# Professional Development Workshops

During our contact time with the Ukrainian artists, we were able to get to know them and understand where they felt they could benefit from advice and guidance in establishing themselves as professional creative practitioners in the North East. With our support, the artists identified areas of development and we created a series of workshops that were hosted at the Library.

This programme included sessions on costing and pricing work, developing a business plan and commercialising creativity. We were able to offer these workshops to the wider cohort from the Ukrainian community.



# Impact of the Project

The main cohort of 9 artists from Ukraine, who were all at different stages of the creative careers, benefited in the following ways:

- A paid opportunity to create new work
- Worked directly with and learned from established artists Bridie Jackson, Annabel Talbot and Rachel Jean Birch, learning through partnership and developing their networks
- Learned from each other and developed their own community of support
- Worked on a participatory programme with others, developing promotional / marketing, planning and community delivery skills
- Took part in Professional Development workshops led by Create North, exploring how to cost and price their work, develop a business plan and learn about fundin
- Designed and delivered their exhibitions, including the launch and dissemination events
- Became better connected with other creative people from across the North East

**Library:** Improved understanding of the library's role in using the arts to welcome displaced people, being a positive contributor to the support available for the city's newly arrived communities.

**Create North:** Developed experience of working with displaced communities, adding to and developing the diversity of the existing network of creative practitioners in North East, and testing and evaluating new ways of working.

**Community Groups:** Became more comfortable in new spaces, empowering them to express themselves freely without fear of judgment or exclusion, and connect & engage with other individuals & organisations, encouraging social interactions & the formation of new networks.

**Regional Artists:** Developed mentoring skills and a new network of creative practitioners.



## Watch the WARM Video

We feel that the structure and format of Warm is a fresh and interesting way to explore how the arts can serve as a source of comfort, community, and resilience. The WARM project offers a unique model for using creative residencies as a way to engage marginalised or displaced groups, helping them find connection, stability and support. By fostering creative collaboration between established local artists and newly arrived creatives, the project enabled meaningful cultural exchange and personal development for all participants. As the WARM project wraps up, it leaves behind a legacy of support, skills, and partnerships that demonstrate how arts-led initiatives can play an essential role in building warmer, more inclusive communities. Through this pilot, we hope to inspire future projects that use the arts as a bridge for empathy, expression, and community cohesion across diverse backgrounds.

The WARM model presents a flexible and replicable framework that could be adapted by other organisations working with hard-to-reach or marginalised communities. By designing an arts residency that prioritises co-creation and community involvement, organisations can empower participants to shape their own creative journeys and outcomes, fostering a sense of ownership and relevance. Essential to this model is a focus on partnership—collaborating with local services, established creatives, and community leaders helps ensure that the residency responds to real needs and cultural contexts. This approach not only enables participants to develop their creative and professional skills but also strengthens their sense of belonging and support within the wider community. By offering paid opportunities, professional development workshops, and a public platform to showcase their work, other organisations can provide tangible benefits to participants while also raising awareness of the unique perspectives and experiences of marginalised groups. This model could be particularly effective within libraries, community centres, and arts organisations looking to broaden their outreach and support through meaningful, arts-based interventions.

We hope in sharing our learning, other organisations will be able to consider how taking a collaborative approach to a creative line of enquiry can be used to connect disparate communities through artistic expression.



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