



Child Health and
Wellbeing Network
North East and North Cumbria



STAR- South Tees Arts Project

Overview

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Foreword

As the Arts and Creativity Executive Lead I have been delighted to watch how this project has developed from its first inception into an innovative programme targeting those with the least opportunity to engage in the arts. I am excited to see the first shoots of success identified in the research, and even more so that STAR has already been taken on its next iteration to maximise impact and reach.

Initiatives like these take partnership and integration to a new level, and without the passion and engagement of all the partners involved it would not have succeeded, so I extend my gratitude to those who helped shape it in the early days and to the steadfast partners who have seen the delivery through, at times on good will. These are listed below and have been brought together through the Child Health and Wellbeing Network's Strategic support and kept together by TIN Arts operational delivery.



Finally, I would like to thank The Tees CCG Mental Health Team, NENC Mental Health Clinical Network, NHS Charities Together, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust Charity and the County Durham Community Foundation. They have shown fantastic commitment to exploring the role of the creative arts in improving health, educational and social outcomes in primary schools. If we are serious about giving every child the best start in life we need to sustain and spread this sort of approach, so that we can generate robust evidence of benefit. In the long-term STEM needs to become STEAM with art and creativity as an equal partner.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Drinkwater'.

Prof. Chris Drinkwater

Child Health and Wellbeing Network's
Executive Lead for Arts and Creativity



Introduction

In 2020 The Integrated Care System's North East and North Cumbria's Child Health and Wellbeing Network and key regional partners came together to design an innovative locality-based project which aimed to increase access to the arts for those living in deprived areas of South Tees to improve their health and wellbeing. The innovation was developed without funding, and through commitment of the multiple partners, before funding was successfully secured.

Evidence highlights the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of taking part in dance and wider arts activities in particular supporting participants through creative and engaging ways to express themselves and develop self-awareness, identity, social and emotional learning skills.

The project also incorporated the Network's *Family Support* priority, learning from research to include the 'family' in the experience to further enhance the impact achieved.

The First Programme included:

- A timetabled weekly Universal Dance Class Offer to primary school age children with wrap around family support intervention and two-family Theatre experiences.
- Schools were chosen in partnership with public health colleagues considering levels of deprivation, ethnic mix, and pupil premium to prioritise underserved communities.
- In the 2020/21 school year the programme commenced but was interrupted by the pandemic. The team worked with the schools to create an alternative support programme within the national restrictions and a revised programme commenced in September.
- In the 2021-22 academic school year, dance artists worked across two schools with pupils in Year 1 and 5 (ages 4-5 and 9-10) through weekly dance sessions exploring creative and engaging ways to develop social, emotional, and physical skills.
- These local dance artists worked with Northern Ballet as the programme was framed through their children's ballet Pinocchio preformed locally giving a family theatre experience to all involved.
- Although the original face to face engagement programme with families was affected by the pandemic, throughout the project families were offered supportive interventions tailored to their wider family needs through experienced, school-based link workers

- Researchers from Teesside, Northumbria, Huddersfield, and Newcastle Universities came together to evaluate the programme to capture and understand better the children, their parents, teachers, and dance artists' views on the development and implementation of the STAR project.
- The research team used qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups with dance artists, teachers, and parents, combined with innovate data collection methods (Graffiti walls, VoxPops, songs and surveys) with children.
- STAR was a finalist in the 2022 Health Service Journal Most Impactful Project Addressing Health Inequalities Award.

Outcomes

Anecdotal stories and observations (outside of the formal research process) give a positive and engaging response to STAR.

- Teachers highlighted the positive impact the children felt in an outlet for expression and a buzz regarding the performance.
- Families pride in seeing their child in the celebratory performance and the awe of the theatre trip, often a new experience to many families.
- Schools noted the benefit of family link workers and the trust the local community had in this 'school' based resource, enabling access into homes where support was beneficial.
- The Children put it simply as 'amazing', 'cool' and 'awesome!'



Figure 1. Word cloud of children's one -word summaries of the STAR project (n=19)

A Research Team conducted an evaluation of STAR using qualitative methods giving a report rich in feedback on the experience. The research evidence highlighted improved behaviour, academic skills, wellbeing and social functioning. The findings offer critical learning, which will guide the next phase of the project (STAR 2):

- The Children noted: contributed to our **emotional and physical wellbeing**: ‘Feeling more confident’, ‘More fit and well’ and ‘Full of energy’ (see fig 1)
- The teachers noted: children **more engaged** in class, better listening, **less disruptive behaviour**, improved **creativity, social & literacy skills**
- The Parents noted: **proud** to celebrate the achievement of their children
- The Artists noted: activity contributes to children’s **creative, social, cognitive and physical skills**, as well as **increasing their confidence**
- The Link worker noted: support enabled **improved behaviour** in the home, **increased social networks** for families and families were **better able to meet the children’s emotional needs**.

Family Support findings were also positive with 20 families receiving home support from a family practitioner and two student social workers. The Outcome Star data collected demonstrated progress in all eight areas of family support ranging from 9 to 18% but in particular by:

- helping families to set boundaries and improve behaviour (of their children and partners; 18.3%):
- increasing their social networks (16.9%) and
- improving their family routine (14.6%).

Families also improved their education and learning (13.8%), and were better able to meet the emotional needs (13.1%), while keeping their children safe (13.1%).

The research team identified three mechanisms crucial for the success and future development of the STAR project.

- **Communication.** Effective communication emerged as a major factor for a successful dance programme both across the professionals and families themselves
- **Connecting** Linking dance and art activities to the school curriculum to support skill gaps, e.g., literacy skills, storytelling, and mental health support.
- **Collaborating** - Collaboration between partners supports the successful delivery of the integration project. The ethos of the partnership ensures adaptability and flexibility of the project, although some partners were less involved and struggled to make links with different teams in STAR 1.

Research findings: quantitative



Initial findings from survey's undertaken:

In response to their engagement with STAR and as a result of participating in the programme (in selected areas):

- 74% felt particularly creative
- 73% felt fit
- 67% felt well
- 66% felt happy
- 64% felt confident
- 56% had good fun with their friends
- 36% felt they were able to pay more attention in class
- 31% more able to express themselves with movement



Figure 2. summary of quantitative data from research report

STAR Films and Research Report

In the network's role to share good practice resources on this work are freely available to promote learning and spread.

These include

- Overview (Primary Film)
- Focus on families (Supplemental short film)
- Teachers Perspective (Supplemental short film)
- Full Research Report
- Details on a Network Huddle workshop to explore the project and future spread.

All of these can be found here:

<https://www.tinarts.co.uk/current-projects/star/s-t-a-r-resources-for-sharing/>

STAR 2

The second iteration of STAR began in November 2022 embedding the findings from the STAR '1' research. STAR '2' seeks to broaden the universal offer by working with all pupils in host schools (3 schools in total from one multi academy trust).

STAR 2 also seeks to develop as a replicable sustainable model and is currently identifying how the costs associated with STAR 2 can be kept as low as possible whilst delivering the greatest impact, ensuring spread and sustainability.

To achieve this STAR 2 is being delivered in repeated shorter blocks (or cohorts) with a more condensed scheme of work.

Engaging families continues to be of great importance for all partners involved in STAR so Children North East are piloting and testing new ways to connect with and support families in the context of a shorter, more condensed delivery dance programme.

Find out more

If you would like to find out more about STAR please contact The Child Health and Wellbeing Network: england.northernchildnetwork@nhs.net