

Isle of Wight
area of outstanding
natural beauty

Supporting Young Minds

Isle of Wight AONB extension May-August 2023



Report by Independent Arts



Background

This project builds on the work done on the Isle of Wight as part of the Artsworld investment programme, Supporting Young Minds, during the 12 months to March 2023; specifically the Newport art trail, created by a group of young people based at the arts for wellbeing charity Independent Arts.

For that project, the young people set out to make some of the unfriendly spaces of Newport better places for young people and the wider community to be. They wanted to create public art works that would encourage young people to get outside, be more physically active, and engage with the Isle of Wight Biosphere.

Supported by Independent Arts and IW Creative Network, the young people wrote a call out to artists, a shortlist of three was selected to pitch to them at a Dragons' Den selection event, and Laura Hathaway was chosen by the young people as the artist they wanted to work with.

Between autumn 2022 and spring 2023, the group produced a number of large scale mono artworks around Newport, supported by local businesses. These included window paintings in the old Topshop building in St James' Square, (thanks to architect Sarah Chatwin) and Stainless Games in Newport High Street, and a mural at the Southern Vectis bus station on Bowling Green Lane.

Generous funding from the Isle of Wight. AONB meant that the project could be extended into the summer of 2023 with the specific focus of increasing engagement of young people with the AONB.



Some of the young people with Laura Hathaway on the final day of painting at the Little London carpark

The AONB project

The cohort

There was open recruitment of participants for the AONB extension via Independent Arts' existing contacts and social media. In total, 10 young people engaged with the project at least once: four from the original Newport project, one from the Sandown and Lake project, three who had taken part in previous independent Arts projects and two new participants. Eight of the 10 became regular participants, taking part in between three and six of the seven - typically five hour - sessions. The participants were aged between 12 and 19.

The process

The challenge of increasing engagement of young people with the AONB is that very few young people live there. So from the outset, it was decided that the solution would be to 'bring the AONB to the young people' by extending the Newport art trail with an AONB focus.

Supporting Young Minds is all about youth voice, so it was important that the young people involved completely understood and 'bought in' to the project. This meant arranging a visit to the AONB to ensure the participants' engagement was authentic.

Arriving at Compton Bay



On Saturday 24th June 2023, five young people caught the number 12 bus from Newport bus station (the site of their previous mural) to Compton Bay. They were accompanied by artist Laura, Hathaway, Independent Arts' programme manager Peta Rainford, and filmmaker Bruce Webb (see 'public engagement' below). By catching a public bus, rather than arranging transport privately, the accessibility of the AONB to young people was emphasised.

The young people were encouraged to explore the bay, using a range of media supplied by Laura. In addition, they made their own pigments using mud, clay and vegetation and used this for mark making and creating images.



Taking inspiration from found objects, and pigments made with earth, clay and vegetation

Asked for words that described how they felt when they were creating art in Compton Bay, they said:

Inspired
Relaxing
Peaceful
Happy
Calm



Exploring Compton Bay through drawing, painting and mark making (top left), gallery on the cliff (top right), being inspired by grasses and flowers (below)



When asked, at the end of the project, why the visit to Compton Bay was important, the young people said that it enabled them to **“contrast town/AONB”**, but also emphasised **“Island connections/community”** - they were surprised at how accessible Compton Bay was to them. They felt that the visit helped them in **“bringing natural life to the ugly parts of Newport,”** **“So Islanders, feel lucky to be in a place with such natural beauty.”** One added: **“Compton is a place I’ve never been to, and I am excited to revisit.”**

Before the young people could start on the mural, they had to prepare the wall (which the owner, Hursts, had kindly given permission for the project to use.) Artist Laura Hathaway was keen that they should understand the work necessary to make the surface suitable for painting the mural (see photos opposite). Two sessions were used to remove flaking paint and apply two coats of white paint. On reflection, these sessions were important in cementing the young people’s connection to the project and their ‘ownership’ of the wall.

A final preparation session was held at Independent Arts’ Creative Hub, when the young people used black paint on white paper to develop their research from Compton Bay, reinterpreting the shapes and patterns they found there. They also used books and the Internet to research things they didn’t see on the day, but could be expected to be found off the coast of the Isle of Wight. Again, these were reproduced as mono images and patterns (see photo.)



The mural

The mural was painted over five, typically five-hour, sessions. The sessions had to be cancelled and rearranged on several occasions because of poor weather, and it a testament to the commitment and resilience of the young people that they all remained committed to the project until the end - only missing sessions when it was unavoidable, due to work, holidays and other prior commitments.

The preparatory images created at Compton Bay and Independent Arts were made available as references and the young people were encouraged to use these as inspiration for the images and shapes they created on the wall.

The young people were free to paint what they wanted, where they wanted it. Although the styles and skill level of the young people varied, visual consistency was achieved by getting them to move around, so their individual styles appeared throughout the mural. They also worked on and developed each other's work.



Interestingly, one of the unexpected outcomes of working on the mural, in what would generally be thought of as the fairly bleak urban landscape of the long stay carpark, was that the group became very aware of the richness of nature around the river there. A red admiral butterfly regularly landed on the mural (see photo above), much time was spent watching ducks, and the group was excited to spot a hummingbird hawkmoth hovering by the buddleia.

When the original SYM group appointed, mono artist, Laura Hathaway, one of the reasons they gave for doing so was that they felt that the black and white work brought out the colours of nature. This has definitely been the case with the mural in Little London carpark.



When asked how they felt when working on them mural/how working on the mural made them feel, the young people said:

Therapeutic
Yippee!
Messy!
Relaxing

Their comments particularly focused on the importance of collaboration and teamwork to the project. One said: **“It is a group effort, as we all add to each other’s drawings, and it’s exciting to see how different people interpret the same drawing.”** Another added: **“We all mix around the space to mix our different styles together.”**

Artist Laura Hathaway described the whole project and the impact it has has on the young people involved:

“Beginning in Newport in the hustle and bustle of a busy lively bus station, travelling by bus though the town, through villages and gradually into the countryside arriving at Compton Bay in a hazy mist where the air was close, it felt like we are truly transported into another realm.

“The group of young people, many of whom had never been to Compton Bay were really eager and happy to begin exploring and experiencing such a beautiful area. The strong impact of this visit to the AONB was really significant to our creative journey within this project as it inspired many conversations about flora and fauna, the island environment, art and personal experiences.

“The visit inspired and informed the amazing mural created by our group of young people, who not only gained exposure to the AONB but gained confidence, self worth, made friends, strengthened friendships and had a very unique creative outlet. It was wonderful to see them naturally grow and to explore a bond within nature and creativity, I felt so proud of everything they achieved!”

Public engagement

The mural is a public work and interaction with the public was an important part of the process of creating it. Lots of people stopped to admire the work and talk to the young people and Laura. It was an opportunity to talk about the AONB and how the mural was inspired by the visit to Compton Bay.

As was the case with the previous SYM projects, the interactions were extremely positive for the young people, boosting confidence, and enhancing self-esteem.

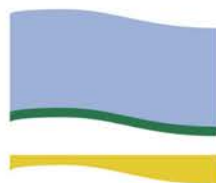
To further increase public engagement, filmmaker Bruce Webb was commissioned to document the project, filming Laura and the young people on the trip to Compton Bay and during the making of the mural.

It is hoped that the film will encourage other young people to hop on a bus and visit the AONB and also take a look at the mural.



Richard Grogan of the Isle of Wight AONB said:

“I think the mural is a wonderful spectacle visible to the community and visitors to Newport and the Quay in particular. The size and space is complemented by the many much smaller elements, so , that like the landscape that has inspired it, wonder and exploration is stimulated with the detail as well as the view. Landscape is that relationship between the large, small and the human impact on both. Congratulations to all involved especially the artists and the enablers at Independent Arts who brought it about.”



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