

Case Study

# Active Ashfield:

engaging non-arts audiences through creative partnerships



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First Art partnered with Ashfield District Council to weave arts into an established non-arts event.

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# Active Ashfield

engaging non-arts audiences

## About First Art

First Art is a partnership that links cultural and community organisations working within the former coalfields of North East Derbyshire and North East Nottinghamshire. It is one of 21 Creative People and Places\* projects across the country, funded by Arts Council England.

## About Active Ashfield

Active Ashfield is a programme run by Ashfield District Council (ADC) in Nottinghamshire to encourage more people to get physically active.

Ashfield is an area of former heavy industry, including mining and textiles. It has a heritage of sporting achievement, producing local heroes like cricketers Harold Larwood and Bill Voce as well as modern Olympians and Paralympians.

The Active Ashfield programme contains a number of well-attended events with a focus on sport and physical activity.

## Arts for non-arts platforms

We saw Active Ashfield as an opportunity to introduce high quality artists and acts to existing non-arts platforms. In doing so, we hoped to attract a traditional non-arts audience to arts activity.

We introduced an increasingly ambitious range and depth of outdoor arts into Active Ashfield events. We wanted to explore the meeting point between arts and sport and broaden the understanding of being 'active' to include dance, circus, visual arts and carnival.

## \*Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places is about more people choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the places where they live.

Funded by Arts Council England, there are now 21 independent Creative People and Places projects in areas where people have fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts.

## The major platform

We identified Active Ashfield Games as a major event in the overall programme. It is a small olympics-inspired festival held in Kirkby-in-Ashfield town park. It was a perfect platform to build on the success of the Cultural Olympiad and connect arts and sport.

## The target audience

Working with the Audience Agency's Area Profile report for our area, we identified that Kirkby had larger than average audience sectors of Facebook Families\* and Up Out Street\*. This meant that our main available audiences were younger, semi urban and with a taste for family friendly entertainment.

## Working in partnership

We knew health and wellbeing was a priority for ADC. We pitched our involvement in Active Ashfield to them as a way of helping to deliver that agenda.

Our partnership with ADC was essential to the process. They were able to provide the framework of an established event within which we were able to programme an arts offer.

We took ideas and suggestions from ADC who wanted to mark Rio 2016 Olympics and Paralympics and the legacy of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Working with these ideas we were able to bring a taste of Rio to North Nottinghamshire.

## \*Facebook Families

'Younger families, mainly under 50 years old living in city suburbs and on the edges of towns throughout the UK, but more predominant in the Midlands and across the North.'

The Audience Agency,  
Audience Spectrum overview

## \*Up Our Street

'The majority live in or just outside towns and smaller cities across the industrial North and the Midlands.'

The Audience Agency,  
Audience Spectrum overview

## Shaping the arts offer

Due to limited time and resources, we brought in existing touring work from Pif Paf Theatre, Tumble Circus (Ireland) and Mahogany Carnival Arts. We chose the work based on its suitability for the site, the audience and the active theme of the event.

In addition, we commissioned local Nottinghamshire artists to run arts and craft activities in local libraries. They worked with participants to produce Rio themed banners for a carnival parade, which was led by local samba musicians.

We also drew on the experience of our Creative People and Places consortium partner City Arts Nottingham. City Arts has a track record of producing colourful and jubilant community celebrations. We were able to use the mobile City Arts Dome as an additional venue to programme craft-making, circus skills and drumming workshops.

## Results

- 1,800 people attended the Active Ashfield Games\*
- 200 people participated in arts activities

The project succeeded in:

- Developing a stronger relationship between First Art and ADC, leading to a strategic outlook
- Bringing high quality arts to places that may not have experienced this before
- Breaking down barriers and perceptions about the arts
- Injecting ambition and aspiration about what is 'active'

Our partnership with ADC on Active Ashfield has led to discussions about more joined up working across the area. These discussions are in progress with a view to establishing a new strategic programme of arts activity.

## \*Attendance

Both days of activity were severely effected by bad weather and were well down on similar days of activity in 2015.

## Recommendations

### Add creativity to an existing event:

Applying our creativity to an existing event that had a proven draw was successful. We introduced non-arts audiences to arts activity.

### Look beyond your own resources and infrastructure:

You may not always have the capacity and infrastructure you need to deliver an ambitious idea. Consider working with partners who can offer the support you need.

### Look for partners with complementary skills:

ADC were an excellent partner and took care of many of the technical, health and safety and event organisational issues. That meant, as a creative team, we were able to concentrate on the creative programme.

### Research council priorities:

If you want to work with your local council, research their priorities. Being able to make a case for how you can help deliver their agenda is vital if you want to build strong working relationships.



Image courtesy of First Art © S.M. Scully

## Further resources

[First Art Website](#)

[First Art Facebook Page](#)