

Case Study

Harkat: a journey of discovery and art



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Author: Katie Musgrove, Super Slow Way



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Artist residency reveals culture and food as powerful ingredients for engagement

Guide

Katie Musgrove
Super Slow Way



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Harkat: a journey of discovery and art

The project

Super Slow Way supported community arts organisation Action Factory to base internationally renowned Filipino artist Alwin Reamillo at Canalside Community Centre in Burnley for 8 weeks.

The residency and associated activities brought the community together and attracted over 300 participants.

The idea

With their support, Action Factory hoped Alwin would engage with local residents and open a creative dialogue about 'community', 'migration' and 'a sense of place'. The dialogue would result in a piece of work, which reflected the area and its communities.

Alwin came to the project with the idea of creating a floating structure that could be processed along the canal. He was inspired by the idea of a South East Asian Spirit House, which could be decorated with improvised wind chimes, fishing floats and upcycled materials. The title for the project came from the Urdu word 'harkat' meaning motion or journey.

Action Factory hoped that the residency would lead to increased usage of Canalside Community Centre. They wanted to develop a stronger sense of community and ownership of arts and cultural activity in the local area.

About Super Slow Way

- Super Slow Way is 1 of 21 Creative People and Places projects funded by Arts Council England
- It exists to support and commission new arts activities with people in Pennine Lancashire
- Working authentically in collaboration with communities is fundamental to its success
- Super Slow Way supports people to host artist residencies and offer artists the opportunity and time to build relationships through a meaningful process

The residency

Action Factory and Alwin met and engaged many local people throughout the residency.

To ensure he understood the local communities, Action Factory arranged for Alwin to visit key areas and people:

- community leaders
- Canal & River Trust colleagues
- Queens Street Mill
- Local artists Angie Da Silva and Urmila Chowdry

Alwin held regular open drop-in workshops within the community centre. Action Factory also approached specific groups to organise workshops for them in their own venues.

Numerous workshops and mini-events led up to a final celebration event and small procession of the floating structure. Each participant brought their own story and input, which steered the course of the project.



Target audiences

- Local residents of Canalside Community Centre
- Regular users of the canal
- St Peters Primary School, Burnley (local to Canalside)
- The local Filipino community in Burnley
- Canalside Residents' Association
- The wider Burnley community

Main activities

- Community welcome feast
- Burnley Canal Festival (Fringe)
- Filipino Feast
- Harkat final celebration event

Involving people

Alwin talked to everyone and anyone he met. He connected with the Filipino community almost immediately. He identified a marketplace where they bought food and soon discovered that there were a large number of nurses within the community. They were really excited, and surprised, to welcome a Filipino artist to Burnley.

With every person Alwin spoke to, word spread a little further. The community were keen to celebrate Alwin's arrival so Action Factory held a welcome feast. Local residents brought samozas, byriani, pakora and sweet rice.

Action Factory found that food, and the sharing of homemade dishes, was a great way to attract larger groups and stimulate engagement. The act of sharing brought the community together and chatting over a meal put people at ease.

Key stats

- 301 participants
- 21 formal workshops
- 12 open workshops
- 4 events
- 1 main artist (Alwin)
- 3 Action Factory members



Balancing different audiences

Local children were interested and curious about the project from the outset, which was great. However, it also brought its challenges. Some children - often quite young children - turned up unsupervised. The fact that children were so actively involved also became a barrier to engaging adults and older teenagers because they perceived the project to be a 'kids thing'.

Action Factory approached this challenge from two angles:

1. actively engaging with adult groups and organisations within their own venues
2. facilitating child-friendly activities alongside adult-orientated activity



'It was great to see all the communities come together to support this project.'
Local resident

The impact

Arts and Community

The project encouraged more interest in arts and cultural activities from the local community. Over 300 people took part and it brought the community together.

Learning from Alwin

The project had a profound impact upon the Action Factory team's attitude and approach to socially engaged practice.

New connections

The collaborative nature of the project sparked new connections. It introduced Canalside Community Centre to a local charity, New Neighbours, who are now negotiating to rent office space in the centre. The rental income would provide much-needed funds for the centre.

The project also brought together two asylum seeker charities who are now looking at how they could share resources.

Links

www.harkatburnley.com

www.superslowway.org.uk/projects/alwin-reamillo-harkat

www.action-factory.org

'It's been really great to see the street come alive again: everyone mixing and chatting. It's like the old days.'
Local resident

'Working with Alwin made us [Action Factory] more aware of the political and social arts in general and how much impact it can have.'
Action Factory

Top tips

- **Double the time you think you'll need** - having only eight weeks made it challenging to make a meaningful impact within the community and to follow up on the many groups with which dialogue was initiated.
- **Do as much groundwork as you can beforehand** - Alwin played a key role in engaging communities. That meant there was a limit to how much could be done before he arrived but the more you can do, the quicker you can get started.
- **Identify key things you can communicate early on** - due to the organic nature of the project, Action Factory found it difficult to communicate to the community centre and local residents what would take place. That resulted in a weak initial response. Work with your artist to identify a few things you can get people excited about in the early stages.
- **Consider incorporating food into your project as a means of bringing people together** - the welcome and celebration feasts were really successful in uniting communities and stimulating conversation.
- **Plan for how you will balance the needs of different target groups** - the fantastic reaction from children in Burnley made local adults think the project wasn't for them. Think about those scenarios and plan for them to ensure you engage the widest possible audience.
- **Don't hold everything inside the same venue** - the outdoor Canal Festival event helped generate a strong presence within the community and created an opportunity for local people who wouldn't enter the community centre to engage with activities.

Links

[Harkat Burnley website](#)

[Super Slow Way website](#)

[Action Factory website](#)

[Creative People and Places website](#)