

Arts in Libraries 2025/26: Strengthening Communities, Creativity and Place

A summary of impact on local communities & the wider cultural ecology

Now in its eighth year as part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio, Arts in Libraries (AIL) continues to demonstrate the long-term value of sustained cultural investment.

In 2025/26, the programme delivered clear outcomes for local people by working with a wide range of strategic partners and talented artists to bring high-quality arts activity to communities. It has continued to reduce the barriers to participation, strengthen wellbeing, and create meaningful opportunities for connection, learning and enjoyment.

The programme has delivered long-lasting value by utilising libraries and other local venues to support stronger local identity; increase community pride; and encourage participation in areas where access to arts and culture is otherwise limited. At the same time, the programme has continued to invest in artists and creative practitioners by generating opportunities for them to develop practice, build networks, reach new audiences and secure new work.

200 programmed activities	14,030 total audience engagements
166 artists and creative practitioners engaged	34 partnerships sustained
99% positive audience ratings	84 Net Promoter Score

The feedback from our audiences, artists, partners and community gatekeepers provides compelling evidence of the programme's public value:

- by widening access to culture in priority communities,
- sustaining a high-quality, relevant and accessible programme,
- strengthening the local creative ecology, and
- contributing to wider priorities around participation, wellbeing, skills and place.



Participants in Creative Alternatives



St Helens Great Potato Festival

"Great to see good theatre in local spaces that feels relevant to people's lives."

Audience member

Scale, Reach and Delivery

- **A substantial programme of activity:** 200 programmed activities (423 different sessions) were delivered across the year, including 71 for children and young people.
- **Strong audience reach:** the programme engaged 14,030 people through in-person attendances and online engagements.
- **Something for everyone:** exhibitions, performances, festivals, talks, workshops and participatory activity were delivered across St Helens Borough.
- **Investing in people and partnerships:** the programme engaged 166 artists and creative practitioners and sustained 34 local partnerships.
- **Ensuring a place-based focus:** more than half of all activity took place in communities ranked amongst the 20% most deprived nationally.

"AIL's approach to genuinely supporting local artists has helped to boost the strength of the local creative sector massively through access to space, to make, meet and work together." Artist

Impact, Value and Strategic Contribution

- **Widening participation:** the programme engaged audiences from all 18 of St Helens wards, with three quarters living in St Helens and strong representation from lower-income and less engaged groups.
- **Delivering exceptional experiences:** 99% of attenders and participants rated their experience positively, and the programme achieved a Net Promoter Score of 84.
- **Creating meaningful social value:** the programme has helped to reduce isolation, supported wellbeing, and strengthened local connection and belonging.
- **Contributing to sector resilience:** artists have been able to develop their practice, extend their networks, reach new audiences and securing follow-on work and funding.
- **Increasing aspirations and career pathways:** schools-based and youth-focused activity has increased access to high-quality creative experiences and supported confidence, literacy, creativity and pathways into continued engagement and future careers.

"We would love to have Kevin and his team with us again next year if possible. The children have enjoyed every aspect of his workshops and they have proven to benefit the children greatly." Teacher

2025/26 saw the Arts in Libraries programme continue to deliver strong return on public investment through a model that is high quality, inclusive, partnership-led and responsive to local needs. The evidence clearly demonstrates that it has continued to extend access to arts and culture while strengthening the local creative ecology, supporting artists and practitioners, and contributing to wider priorities around participation, wellbeing, skills and place.

Finally, the findings make a strong case for continued investment in the AIL programme: it has been successful its delivery model; effective in reaching priority communities; contributed to national strategic outcomes; and, it has created lasting value for audiences, communities, partners and the wider arts and culture sector.