



Starcatchers Summary Report
Creative Skills Programme 15 / 16

Starcatchers

Starcatchers is a pioneering organisation that specialises in performances and creativity for babies, toddlers and young children aged 0-5 and their parents and carers in Scotland.

We believe that Scotland's youngest citizens should be able to engage with, and participate in, high quality performances and creative experiences that are made by exceptional artists who understand the needs of this unique audience. Our work is designed to nurture young children's creative and cognitive development, sparking their imaginations.

Through the evolution of our community engagement work and residencies, placing artists in communities to engage with babies, toddlers, parents, carers and educators, Starcatchers has developed a way of working which is innovative, inspirational and aspirational. Using this approach to support Early Years practitioners in Scotland to develop and use their creativity in their daily practice has positively impacted on childcare students and professionals across the country.

The Creative Skills Programme

The Creative Skills Programme is practical, artist led training designed to support Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) practitioners to feel, and be, more creative. Following on from the success of the pilot programme in 2013-15, which was independently evaluated and proven to deepen understanding of arts and creativity and to help participants integrate knowledge and skills gained into practice (1) the Scottish Government funded Starcatchers to continue to deliver and develop this innovative programme in 2015-16.

CONTEXT:

“Offering opportunities for stories, conversations, listening, rhymes, singing, mark making, environmental print, and creative and imaginative play are all effective and fun ways of developing literacy

pg 61, Pre-Birth to Three Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families Learning and Teaching Scotland National Guidance

“Children who experience a wide range of activities like being read to, singing nursery rhymes and drawing, from an early age score higher in cognitive ability tests at age 3 than children with less experience of these activities.”

GUS Key Findings: <http://growingupinScotland.org.uk/about-gus/key-findings/#2>

The expressive arts and creative activity are mentioned in one form or another in every key policy document for ELC in Scotland. Specific expressive arts experiences and outcomes outlined within **Curriculum for Excellence, Pre-Birth to Three Guidance** impresses the importance of shared creative activities for literacy skills (2) and easing transitions (3), while the **Play Strategy for Scotland** emphasises the role of creativity and imagination as part of play (4). The **Growing Up in Scotland** research highlights the importance of shared creative activity (reading, singing, drawing) for young children's cognitive development (5) and children's overall happiness and ability to adjust to school (6), and Education Scotland's **How Good Is our Early Learning and Childcare** (HGIOELC) cites “Developing creativity and skills for life and learning” as a quality indicator (7). Locally and internationally, research highlights the important role the arts and shared creative activity can play in narrowing the attainment gap for some of our most vulnerable children (8) (9) (10).

Despite this practical training in arts and creative skills is not generally available to Early Years professionals at college undertaking NC & HNC courses, and at university it is often only available as an individual 'opt-in' course. Without the benefit of training, the range of creative activity taking place in nurseries and childcare settings is largely based on the existing skills, understanding and confidence of individual staff. This can negatively impact the full implementation of national policy, and the range and quality of positive creative experiences for our youngest children.

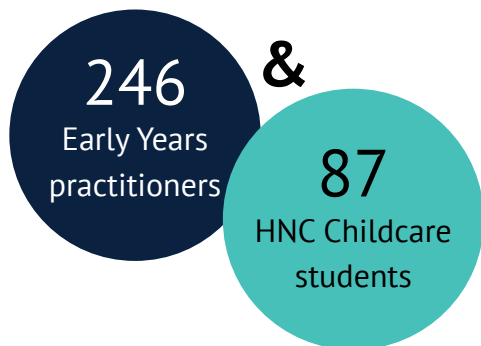
Core Creative Skills Programme 2015-16

The Creative Skills Core Programme was delivered to Early Years Professionals in 10 areas across Scotland: City of Aberdeen, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Fife, Highland, Inverclyde, Midlothian and South Lanarkshire.

Practitioners across sectors benefitted from the training, including staff in nursery and family centre settings, teaching assistants, early stage primary teachers, health workers, childminders and play workers. This cross sector approach builds local connections and gives participants valuable insight into how the same ideas can be adapted and applied in a variety of different situations.

The programme was also delivered with HNC Childcare Practice students at Glasgow Kelvin College and Dumfries and Galloway College, where the sessions were embedded into the core timetable.

In 2015/16



engaged in the Creative Skills Core Programme.

The Creative Skills Approach

The Creative Skills Programme takes an assets-based approach, empowering Early Years practitioners to gain creative skills and confidence and develop their own creative practice with the young children in their care. Artists share a toolkit of open-ended, playful approaches to drama, visual art, music, creative movement, puppetry and storytelling, encouraging practitioners to adapt ideas and explore them within their settings, and engage in reflective practice. A child-led approach is emphasized throughout, sharing ideas that give babies and young children opportunities for communication, self-expression and developing their own creative skills, supporting the delivery of the UNCRC, key GIRFEC principles and Curriculum for Excellence.





Key Successes 2015-16

94%
of practitioners

&

98%
of students

increased understanding in the importance of arts and creativity within an early years context

90%
of practitioners

&

83%
of students

are now confident or very confident to use creative activity with young children

82%
of practitioners

&

80%
of students

use creative activity more in their settings

All of which has resulted in children having more opportunities to be creative, with

78%
of practitioners

&

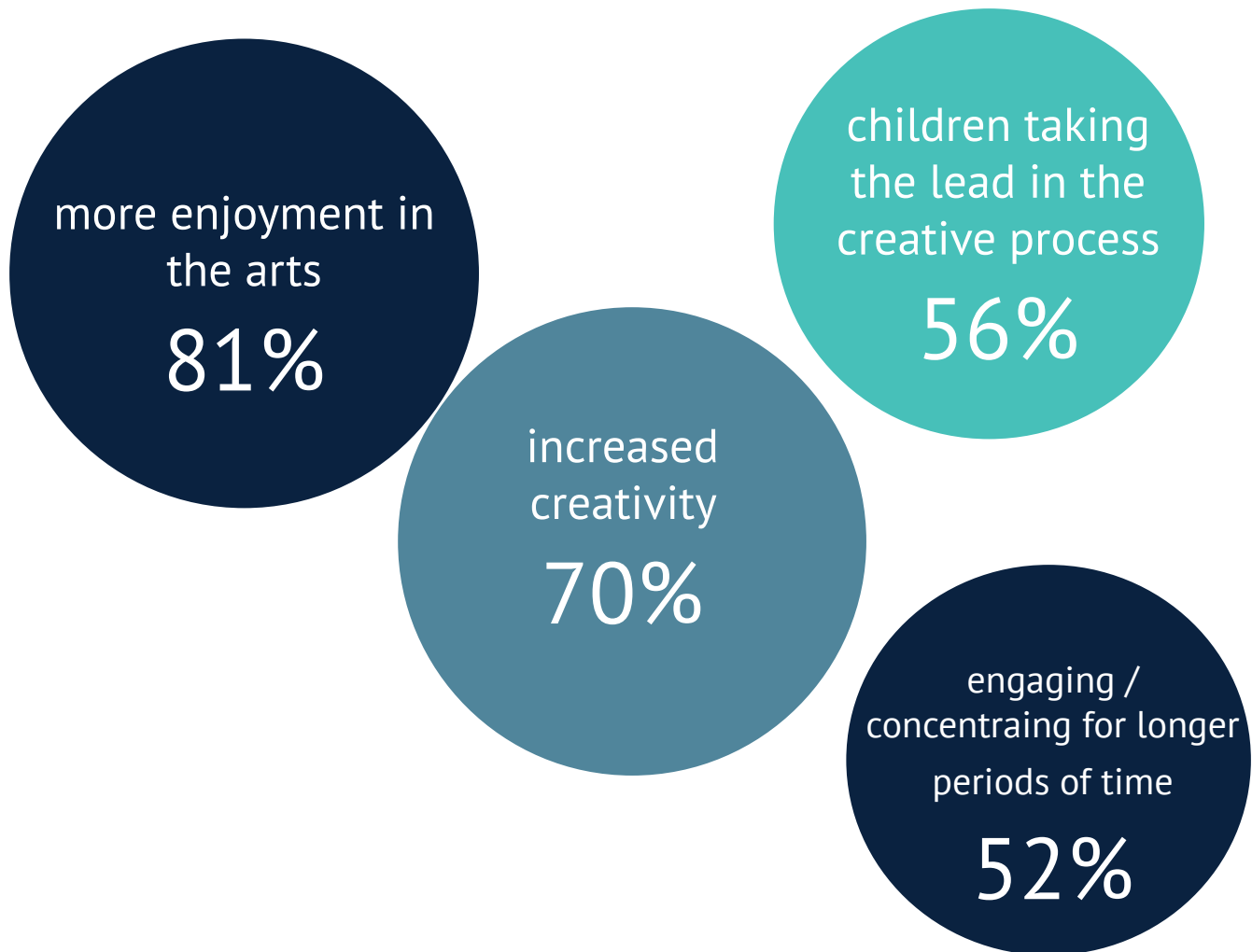
86%
of students

reporting an increase in creative arts experiences in their settings

At a strategic level, the Creative Skills Programme is now recognised as core activity with Scottish Government, receiving funding from the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund for 2016 - 2019

Longer term Impact on Children, Practice and Settings

An online survey was sent to all participants who have taken part in the Creative Skills Programme since 2013, gathering data on the effect the training has had on their practice, their setting and the children they work with. Benefits identified for children included:



I work in a nurture group with some of our most vulnerable children and this approach, with creativity, has been so valuable...(making) improvements easier for the children
previous Creative Skills participant



My knowledge and confidence as a practitioner has changed – arts and creativity are becoming more embedded into the setting which allows the children to have more control/say in their own learning
previous Creative Skills participant

Creative Skills in Early Childhood Practice an SQA certified, 24 credit, level 7 qualification

Starcatchers worked with Glasgow Kelvin College staff and Dr. Rachel Drury to develop and deliver a new qualification, Creative Skills in Early Childhood Practice (CSECP). Five students took part in the practical, artist led Creative Skills Programme, additional classes exploring child development from an arts and creativity perspective, wrote reflective blogs and a 2000 word essay, and completed a practical exam. Four students successfully completed this qualification in addition to their HNC in Childhood Practice.

“

The course was brilliant for linking the theory with practical skills, it's really deepened my understanding of the arts and creativity and how to use it in my practice.

Student feedback, CSECP

Extending the original Creative Skills Programme and converting it into a recognised qualification has been beneficial in terms of greater recognition of the time and effort involved in attending the training, and deepens the learning of the participants. A full scale pilot of the qualification, delivered as an evening course for ELC practitioners, will be delivered with Glasgow Kelvin College beginning January 2017, with the aim of embedding the qualification into the wider ELC training landscape.



Spotlight on... Midlothian Council

In 2015-16, Midlothian Council arranged cover within settings so practitioners could attend the Creative Skills Programme within their usual hours of work. The training was spread across five days, and supported by the Early Learning and Childcare Team with the Early Years Development Officer being present throughout the training to work with practitioners to identify changes in their practice and within their settings.

“ It’s been really helpful, especially from a Quality Improvement point of view... to ensure that we’re on the same page with what we’ve grasped from it, that follow-up’s really beneficial... To explain and show what we’ve implemented, changed, adapted, thought about...there’s lots of practice that’s being changed. Sometimes it’s really hard to document that but there is so much that we’ve done already
Practitioner, Midlothian

“ Follow up visits to the settings were really valuable – sometimes practitioners don’t even realise the ways their practice is changing, but we were able to see significant positive change and reflect on that
Early Years Development Officer, Midlothian

Participants who took part in 2015-16 are being supported to become Creative Champions. The training has been cascaded to other ELC practitioners in Midlothian, with the Midlothian Creative Champions being supported to run Creative Skills Workshops for practitioners working with under 3s, and 3-5s. These Creative Skills Workshops will continue to be delivered in 2016/2017 with more Creative Champions stepping forward and taking the lead in sharing their new knowledge, skills and good practice. Midlothian is keen to continue to support the Creative Champions with their ongoing enthusiasm and creativity, and will run two master classes in 2016-17 specifically for the original Creative Champions where Starcatchers’ artists will offer new ideas and bring their knowledge in different art forms.

While practitioners have benefited from and appreciated this integrated approach to Creative Skills, staffing levels made it difficult to find the cover needed to free practitioners to attend the training. Large scale structural changes taking place within ELC at Midlothian Council in 2016-17 in response to the anticipated expansion of funded childcare hours has compounded this issue. Midlothian Council are keen to continue to offer this training therefore have managed to negotiate a shorter, twilight version of the programme that supports their new delivery model in 2016-17. This will have the same level of ELC team input and follow up support to ensure the training makes that all important transition into practice.



Spotlight on... Hillend Children's Centre, Inverclyde

Hillend Children's Centre is an integrated setting that offers early learning and childcare for children aged two to six years old, as well as placements for children with Additional Support Needs from birth to aged three. Two members of Hillend staff had taken part in the Creative Skills pilot programme, and having seen the profoundly positive impact on their practice, the centre manager and 10 other members of staff took part in the Creative Skills Programme in 2015-16.

The training coincided with a Starcatchers artist residency **Moving Matters**, where Skye Reynolds, a creative movement artist, worked with the staff and children one day a week for five months. The impact of the residency has been independently evaluated by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships who found strong evidence of the impact of Creative Skills training:

- There was strong evidence about the benefits of pairing the residencies with the Creative Skills Training. Practitioners who had done the training felt more confident about experimenting with creative approaches in the workplace, and said that the residencies helped develop and support their learning.
- The benefits of the combination of training and residency were especially evident at Hillend, where most of the practitioners (including the manager) had undergone the Creative Skills Training—creating a whole-centre, supportive ethos of learning about creative approaches. (11)

The combination of Creative Skills training and artist input directly within the setting is particularly effective, and Starcatchers is exploring how this model could be applied with a particular focus on closing the attainment gap for Scotland's least advantaged children.



“

Inverclyde has been involved in Starcatchers' Creative Skills Programme since 2013 and the training has been vital to a change in approach and mindset. The role of arts and creativity has become increasingly embedded within the everyday practice of our Early Years settings and is absolutely fundamental to the wellbeing and development of our children and practitioners
Quality Improvement Officer, Inverclyde Council

Additional Creative Skills Training

In 2015-16 an additional **480** practitioners, students and artists took part in taster sessions, additional training days and Inspiration Days. These included:

- **Introduction to Creative Skills in Orkney**
- **break out sessions at the Bookbug Conference**
- **a programme of additional CPD for Aberdeen City Council**
- **one day creativity conference with Scottish Out Of School Care Network (SOSCN)**
- **24 Creative Play sessions within ELC settings across Scotland**

Creative Skills training specifically for managers was piloted, looking at different attributes of the Creative Environment and how an open-ended, playful approach to the arts supported delivery of the curriculum and key policies.

100%
respondents said the
content was relevant or
extremely relevant to
their practice,

&

87.5%
recognising
creativity as a very
important topic

“ You did a great job! Thank you so much, you have made me more confident in myself!
You are AMAZING! You explained everything easily. I will definitely recommend!
Feedback from “The Creative Environment” Manager’s training

24 ELC settings across Scotland hosted Creative Play sessions, where Starcatchers’ associate artists worked with ELC practitioners taking part in the Creative Skills Programme to host creative play sessions for children and their parents and carers. 100% of parents/carers polled said they were inspired to try more creative play ideas at home, and practitioners felt more supported to use their newfound skills.

“ I was very pleased with their creative play day, which I feel is a unique way for children and adults to learn and grow together. My son had so much fun and we were able to continue with what he has learned in the afternoon at home
Parent feedback, Creative Play Session



Meeting Key Challenges

Evaluation of the Creative Skills pilot project (2013-15) identified barriers to increasing more creative approaches within Early Learning and Childcare, most notably a lack of support from parents and carers, and in some cases colleagues and management, stemming from a limited understanding of the well-established social, emotional and cognitive benefits of the arts and creative approaches. There was also concern that local authorities and managers were under increasing pressure to improve numeracy and literacy rates, leaving less time for the arts and creativity.

In January 2016 Starcatchers launched Arts From The Start (AFTS), a ten month campaign to highlight the benefits of arts and creativity, sending posters, flyers and links to more information to every nursery in Scotland. To date, the AFTS social media campaign has engaged hundreds of people, and developed resources, linking arts and creative activity to attachment, social skills, increased cognitive development, and making a powerful case for the arts as a tool to help close the equity gap for some of Scotland's most vulnerable children. For more information please see www.artsfromthestart.org



New Challenges and Opportunities

The Scottish Government's dual commitment to extending the free provision of ELC to 1140 hours and Raising Attainment for All/Closing the Gap will shape the Early Learning and Childcare sector over the next three years, offering both challenges and opportunities for the future of Creative Skills.

To improve both the quality and quantity of ELC provision, the existing ELC workforce need to be able to access high quality training as well as new practitioners being trained. The Creative Skills Programme is now well recognised as a powerful and effective way to improve the creative practice of ELC practitioners and students, and will play an important role in that upskilling. However, staffing levels in some local authorities make it difficult to release practitioners to attend training.

A full scale pilot of the qualification Creative Skills in Early Years Practice will be delivered with Glasgow Kelvin College beginning January 2017, with the aim of embedding the qualification into the wider ELC training landscape. Starcatchers has already registered interest from other FE colleges across Scotland, and will explore the possible expansion of the qualification in future years.

There is a wealth of academic evidence that proves creative approaches to the arts, and shared creative activity in particular, hold the key to closing the attainment gap for Scotland's least advantaged children. It is vital the Attainment agenda looks beyond short term literacy and numeracy interventions, and Starcatchers will seek to work with partners across Scotland, through the Creative Skills Programme and through our wider advocacy work, to measure and celebrate the positive impact the arts and creativity have for our youngest children.

The Creative Skills Programme has the greatest impact when practitioners are supported to make real changes, by both setting managers and at a local authority level. Starcatchers will continue to support these changes whenever possible, and will seek to develop even closer working relationships with the ELC workforce at all levels.

The combination of Creative Skills training and artist input directly within the setting is particularly effective in supporting widespread changes in creative practice, and Starcatchers is exploring how this model could be applied with a particular focus on reducing the equity gap for Scotland's least advantaged children.



“

It has given me ideas of activities that I can do with children and families with no resources required, and games to help develop trust, confidence, peer relationships
participant, Dundee 2016

“

It's helped me realise the children have endless capabilities. I never realised what was in them to begin with
Participant, Inverclyde 2016

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9. Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development (2002), "Significantly, the relationship between arts involvement and academic performance was found to be robust for students from low-socio-economic (SES) backgrounds." Pg 71
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