

# STARCATCHERS

## Stripy Nest Report 2019





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**Names have been changed to protect identities of those involved.**

**The project was supported by The National Lottery Community Fund (Awards For All), Baily Thomas Charitable Foundation, Ponton House Trust, Souter Charitable Trust and Trefoil.**



## About Starcatchers

Starcatchers is Scotland's National Arts and Early Years Organisation specialising in creating exceptional arts and creative experiences for babies, toddlers and young children aged 0-5. We work with artists who specialise in work for the under 5s to create beautiful art installations, and live performances of theatre, dance and music. We deliver engagement projects across Scotland, placing artists directly into communities. Our year-round professional development programmes for artists and early years practitioners develop their practice using arts and creativity with very young children.

**[www.starcatchers.org.uk](http://www.starcatchers.org.uk)**

## Executive Summary

Stripy Nest was a creative project with Canal View Primary School in Edinburgh, focusing on supporting children with additional support needs (ASN), including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as they transitioned from nursery to Primary 1.

The project took place between June and October 2019 and the aim was to reduce anxiety and stress for children during the challenging time transitioning from nursery to primary school. The approach was to engage artists to work with the children to co-design an interactive playground installation together which could continue to be on site once the artists completed the sessions.

Starcatchers focussed on facilitating creative experiences that promoted inclusive play, positive social experiences, the strengthening of relationships, and the familiarisation of the new primary school playground environment.

Starcatchers has an ongoing relationship with the Wester Hailes area in Edinburgh, where Canal View Primary and Nursery is based. Starcatchers has delivered its flagship 'Expecting Something' project for young mums under 25 and their babies under two for six years, based at the WHALE Arts building, and also delivers Creative Skills training for Early Years practitioners from the Wester Hailes Education Centre. Starcatchers previously worked with Canal View Nursery in 2015 through our "Wee Wanders" project. Strong trusted partnerships between Starcatchers, the education settings and local area were key to delivering this co-design project that gave agency and choice to very young children with additional support needs.





## **Context**

### **Location**

Wester Hailes is a post-war housing estate constructed in the 1970s. Quality of life in the neighbourhood is affected by a number of issues including housing construction, overall layout and the design of dwellings. These problems are typical for high-rise public housing constructed in the 1970s. The area has also suffered from a major image problem and is identified with high levels of crime, alcohol and drug dependency. The residents of Wester Hailes tend to be young and are often unable to take advantage of local employment opportunities due to their lack of skills and access to childcare. Together, these issues have resulted in challenges that have affected the social and economic structure of Wester Hailes. Outmigration, the action of leaving one place to settle in another (usually within a country) has contributed to a high proportion of households dependent on support from social services.

The area has a current population of approximately 11,500, with a higher proportion of children than Edinburgh as a whole, and the percentage of children living in poverty at 44.6% compared to the 18.6% Edinburgh average and 18.2% Scottish average.

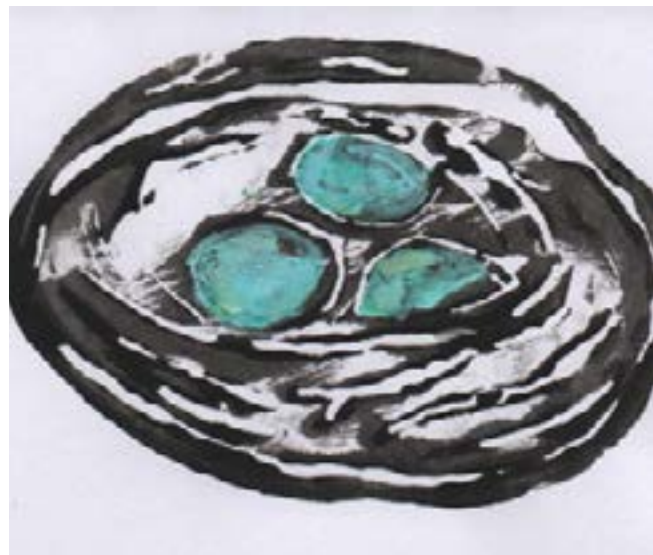
### **About the Nursery and School**

Canal View Primary School is located in the Wester Hailes area of Edinburgh overlooking the Union Canal. We have woodland areas attached to both the school and nursery playgrounds which our children are able to use for outdoor learning. Our Nursery has its own woodland area and a custom-made outdoor play area. This includes a mud kitchen and a variety of equipment that frequently changes according to the children's interests and learning. Currently we have 64 full time pupils in our Nursery.

## Creative Context

Stripy Nest was created by Early Years Artist Kirstin Abraham and delivered in collaboration with Starcatchers' Associate Artist Katy Wilson and playworker Max Alexander. They co-designed the installation with 30 children aged between 4-5 years old, and over the project delivered participatory arts activity with a total of 70 P1 children and 18 adults, including seven teaching staff and 11 parents/family members.

The inspiration for this project, and its name, came from Kirstin's seven-year-old son who has ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder). Given his support needs he has, at times, found his own school playground a difficult place to be. Kirstin describes, "He's a wonderful little boy fascinated by the stripe patterns on zebras which, like children, are all different. He needed somewhere he could feel calm and safe – a nurturing nest". He inspired the idea behind the project, matching the evidenced need for similar support for children at Canal View Primary and Nursery.



## Artistic Team



### Kirstin Georgia Abraham

Kirstin is a visual artist and play practitioner born in Gibraltar and currently based in Fife, Scotland. Her work focuses on creating sensory experiences, installations and play spaces that increase wellbeing and positive mental health in children. She is passionate about collaborating with children and young adults with additional support needs, disabilities and visual impairments to co-design sensory installations. She has worked as a play worker with children and young people with a diverse range of additional support and complex needs since 2016, and is extremely passionate about the making the arts as accessible as possible for this community and their families. She believes in the importance of facilitating creative play, and that the arts have an incredibly powerful and positive effect on children who struggle emotionally and physically.





## Katy Wilson

[Katy](#) creates new worlds and environments designed to make you feel good, relaxed and inspired. She makes work for children of all ages and facilitates sessions for children to be creative. Katy works at the National Galleries as an arts educator and is often employed as a theatre set designer, giving her a wide-ranging experience of designing structures that are interactive for children. Collaborating with young children and working up their ideas and visions to something professional is one of her favourite ways to work. Katy has worked on Starcatchers projects since 2006 and created Starcatchers' creative play installation space for babies 0-24 months and their adults, Blue Block Studio.

*'Children's ideas are fluid; adults can get stuck in their creative activities but children rarely do. I enjoy listening to children and putting their ideas on a platform, which makes children feel empowered when they see them realised.'*



## Max Alexander

[Max](#) is a play worker, artist and consultant based in Edinburgh. He specialises in working with children and young people who are disabled and/or have additional support needs. He uses playfulness and creativity to co-create meaningful, exciting unique spaces and experiences. He has six years' experience working in school, playground and community settings and currently works at The Yard Adventure Centre. The Yard creates havens of adventure play, fun, and friendship for disabled children and their families in the east of Scotland.

*'If one hundred people wrote a guide to creating inclusive play spaces the result would be one hundred different guides. That's no bad thing, they could be a hundred fantastic and useful guides filled with innovative and creative ideas, but, "inclusive" is not a fixed state. And, as it is informed by multiple ever-changing factors, it never will be. I believe inclusion should be an ongoing collaboration amongst the people within a space, it's about accepting that no one person will ever find the answer, only, an answer.'*

## What happened?

### Overview

Thirteen creative arts sessions took place at Canal View Nursery and Primary School between June and October 2019.

Three Early Years Artists worked with a total of 70 children aged 4-5 years old during the nursery and school day.

They also created three family sessions which were delivered at WHALE Arts during the summer holiday period, engaging with children, parents and the wider family.

The artists and children explored a wide range of creative arts-based activities including: creative gardening; sculpture using clay, playdough and plasticine; outdoor drawing and painting; weaving; positive destruction sessions with a range of materials; building proprioception-focused obstacle courses.

When the new school term began in August 2019, the Stripy Nest installation was ready for children to explore and play with in their new 'big' playground. Children and artists continued to work on the installation, which was then handed over to the school in December 2019 for long term use.

Project Structure		
Phase	Dates	Key Activity
1. Research	10, 12, 17, 19, 24, 26 June 2019	Six sessions took place in nursery. Artists built relationships with the children and tested different creative ideas to assess their interests, needs and choices.
2. Development	July 2019	Artists worked on practical, logistical and creative ideas based on the findings in June.
	31 July, 2 August 2019	These were further tested and developed at three family sessions across two days.
3. Delivery across the transition from nursery to p1	2, 4, 9, 10, 11 September 2019 24, 30 October 2019 9 December 2019	Artists worked with 30 children across seven sessions to co-design and build their Stripy Nest installation.  Artists made a final visit to the installation, handing it over to the school.

## 1. Research

### The Children

During the research phase, artists worked with groups of preschool children and the Early Years staff in the nursery class. Six sessions took place between artists and the 30 children aged four and five year olds who were making the transition to P1 after the summer holidays. The first two sessions lasted the full nursery day, allowing the artists to build rapport, relationships and trust with the children by joining in with the usual timetable and bringing in some new ideas and play. The remaining four sessions were structured to provide more intense, participatory activity for the last hour leading up to lunch, then allowing artists and nursery staff to discuss observations over the lunch break, before resuming with another group of children for an hour after lunch.

Nursery staff highlighted that eight children attending the school nursery had been diagnosed with ASN and a number of others were still being assessed. The majority of the 30 children in the class making the transition were noted by staff as having high level support needs.

During this phase, artists looked to make connections with children and be led by their ideas, interests and needs. This open-ended, play-based, approach ensured that the activities delivered were fun, creative and relevant, connecting meaningfully with children and their support needs.





*'Having observed children in the nursery and identified children who might particularly need some extra input and space to help them regulate emotions, we could then plan our sessions with those children and their needs in mind. Both the proprioception session and positive destruction session were direct responses to what we'd seen in the nursery setting. We were able to create creative play opportunities where those children could safely explore their emotions, boundaries and sensory needs.'* – Max, Playworker

Central to the co-design approach was ensuring the children had time and space to communicate their feelings and needs, whether through traditional use of verbal language or through other means of communication, such as Picture Exchange Communication System, Now & Next Boards. The artists were actively listening and responding, providing an attuned and appropriate reaction so the children could see action resulting from their own voices.

Inclusion was key throughout the project and artists focused on developing relationships with the children that helped build trust and ensured that children were comfortable and able to lower any barriers to engagement. Gaining a good sense of support needs enabled artists to design the sessions to best accommodate the children they worked with. This helped children express themselves fully during the creative session.



## **The Creative Sessions**

At the start of the research period we tested the assumption that the playground can sometimes be an intimidating and anxious experience for younger children, particularly those with additional support needs. It was observed that the nursery space provided a better environment for those with ASN.

*'The nursery children have open access to a garden – where they can water the plants, climb and create with loose parts like tires and plastic playground furniture and pedal around freely they create their own jobs, challenges and collaborations with all the objects. When they move up - like in many primary schools the playground is just a wide-open concrete space.'* - Katy

*'Some children with ASN find social situations very challenging, stressful and anxious. Everyone is different, and we respect this.'* - Kirstin

The artists took the time to introduce children gradually to the P1-3 playground. Offering a range of fun and creative activities helped raise their confidence in an unfamiliar setting.

*“We began working with the children in the playground with colour stripes – we planned to build a space but the wind took flight with our crepe paper kites and the kids ran with delight – the paper whipped in massive circles like an instant festival and the colours popped against the grey playground- the wind had completely changed our plan but it showed us something new and maybe this element and the elements could be brought into the design.” - Katy*

The artists set up a variety of open-ended experiences for the children to explore, including: creative gardening; sculpture using clay, playdough and plasticine; outdoor drawing and painting; weaving; positive destruction sessions with a range of materials; and building proprioceptive obstacle courses. These provided a richness of opportunity for artists to observe and interact with the children on their own terms, with children in the lead and making their own choices, as opposed to following a set group activity.



*‘Each part of the obstacle course focused on a different aspect such as lifting, pushing, jumping etc. This helped me to decipher what kind of play each child found calming.’ - Kirstin*

The artists were able to gather vital information which aided the development of the installation and complemented the collaborative nature of the project:

*‘We chatted [with the children] about having a part of our creation that is living, maybe in soil so something can grow and be attended to by the kids. Something ever changing and different depending on the elements. So many of us feel safe and comforted around nature.’ - Katy*

This key finding – creating something living, part of nature – became the creative impetus for building the Stripy Nest installation with the children.

During this period, in the run up to the end of term and finishing nursery, the School's Deputy Head commented that, 'the project provided an additional context in which the children discussed and considered their transition'.





## 2. Development

Following the Research phase, the artists took two weeks to consolidate their research, reflect on the children's expressed needs and wants, and to explore and develop emerging themes for the installation.

A studio space at WHALE Arts was provided for the artists to further develop session content and to test structural and material ideas not yet safety-tested for the children. The result was a strong creative direction for the installation.

*'Making outdoor structures in a primary school is a completely new field for me as an artist and I hadn't quite realised what a minefield it can be and how much trickier it would be than any other area of research I have done with Starcatchers. I think we were only on the tip of the iceberg with this learning! There are so many limitations that we had to go through and discover. We broadened our ideas on materials - so many materials were considered and had to be dismissed, which also involved talking to different makers who we have never worked with before and collaborating with ideas that couldn't always be pursued.'* - Kirstin

The installation was developed around three geometric metal frames, the larger of the three acting as the main nest or socialising area, with the two smaller frames symbolising 'eggs'. These structures are flexible enough to feature a range of materials to create environments which best support the needs of the children.

Whilst at the WHALE Arts, artists also took the opportunity to connect with the local community and involve them in the process.

A Stripy Nest consultation session was delivered on 31 July for children involved with the school project, along with their parents and other family members. The larger geometric dome structure was built in the studio for families attending the session, this enabled artists to assess how participants interacted with the structure.

The consultation, as well as offering hands-on activities, also provided a platform to present the ideas and themes that had been developed from research sessions in June.

*'We chatted about the idea of pause place for children, the school playground and the environment being overwhelming.'* - Kirstin

One parent loved the idea of a 'pause place' or 'solo space.' She stated her older child with ASN, who also attended Canal View, would have greatly benefited from a space like this in the playground during his time at the school.

From the research gathered in June, artists were made aware of a child who had challenges with mobility. To ensure the nest promoted inclusion for all, the geometric frames were adjusted to support her needs. An artist at The Forge in Edinburgh successfully adapted the domes by removing some of the crossbeams to create a widened access point. Supports were then put in place to aid the structure's stability. Adapting the installation to suit individual needs was positively received by families.

It was also encouraging to hear one parent was interested in becoming more involved in the project into the future.

The practical element of the sessions provided an opportunity for participants to build a nest. Working with an array of materials like brightly coloured wools, t-shirt yarn and a variety of tapes, participants weaved and adorned the geometric dome in colour. Sticks





were used to make a pretend campfire that extended on to structure. Participants enjoyed drawing on the large windows with coloured chalk pens and using yarn and wool to weave around people and other objects in the room.

Valuable feedback was gathered during this consultation, further aiding the co-design process, highlighting both needs and benefits of the installation as well as raising any concerns, particularly around safety.

One parent stated, *'This is the first time I has been involved in an activity for this long without wanting to leave the room.'*

We considered several things: the materials used and the dimensions of the structure, making sure these fell within regulations and safety guidelines. We sought advice from ROSPA, worked with the school and the authority's playground committee, talking through ideas and developments.

Two additional sessions were delivered at the Whale Arts Centre on 2 August as part of their Early Years Arts Summer Programme. It was noted that some families from the school attended these sessions, along with other families within the community who also had children with ASN.

By the end of the Development Phase, the artists and the school had achieved a plan for an installation that could remain outside and yet also be dismantled and brought back into the school as and when necessary. Compliance with safety regulations of both the Council and ROSPA meant this was a good compromise to building what is termed a 'permanent' structure ie: playground equipment, building structures etc. The flexibility of the three Stripy Nest frames, and their possibilities for evolving over time, reflects the voices of the children and the agency they can experience as they grow and progress through Primary 1. It also allows for the new nursery cohort to express themselves through the installation in their own way.



### 3. Delivery

Seven creative sessions were scheduled in the Primary School between August and October to aid the children's transition from the nursery setting into P1. Each session consisted of 45-60 minutes of immersive, participatory creative play with groups of about 15 children at a time. Each session also included observation time, where children played freely at morning break and lunch break with the artists closely attuned to their interactions, behaviours, moods and interactions. At the end of each session, there was time for the adults to discuss together, artists, teachers and classroom assistants. During this period, the Stripy Nest installation was built and then utilised in both the playground's grassy area and the woodland space to the rear of the school.

Upon their first post-summer visit, the artists presented a social story to the children. Social Stories are often used for children with ASD to help prevent anxiety by depicting the social situations they may encounter. As well as offering reassurance to children, the social story acted like a refresher for the project, offering an overview for the upcoming sessions. The social story was delivered to all of P1 and offered those children from feeder nurseries the chance to be introduced to ideas and feel included in the process.

Children attended the creative sessions in their colour groups, there were four groups in total. Colour groups offer a solution for dividing a class into appropriate and manageable groupings for activities. Approaching the allocation in this way ensured that all 30 P1 children experienced the Stripy Nest sessions. Five sessions were delivered in this way over a 3-week period. This culminated in a special visit from Maree Todd, the Minister for Childcare and Early Years. Several other guests were present including senior staff members from Starcatchers and Canal View Primary.







*Minister for Children and Young People Maree Todd MSP said:*

*'It was my pleasure to watch and play with the children in Canal View Nursery and Primary School today. The Stripy Nest project offers a wonderful variety of play-based experiences for children as they make the transition from nursery into primary school.'*

As well as highlighting the Stripy Nest project, the ministerial visit offered a chance for the school to discuss their new play-based learning approach with the minister. Play-based learning has seen the school move away from having a desk and chair for each pupil to a more flexible, open layout that encourages messy, creative and free play.

*Children's Minister Maree Todd said:*

*'It is essential that all transition stages are handled sensitively, inclusively and positively. Play-based learning aims to spark children's imagination and creativity, providing them with long-lasting happy learning experiences.'*

Stripy Nest complemented the recent shift by the school to a play-based learning approach in P1.

*'This is a big driver for the way we work in our school, Starcatchers fed into that with this project.'* - Depute Head

Two final sessions, lasting two hours each, were delivered after the October break, engaging children with diagnosed ASN. Artists worked with three children over these two sessions who had previously been highlighted by staff as struggling with their transition. This work was predominantly delivered in the playground where artists and children continued to explore themes which helped them better acclimatise to their new environment and lessen their anxieties. These sessions were really valuable to the artists' research, allowing more one-to-one time with children from the group with Additional Support Needs. It proved a beneficial opportunity for children who struggle socially to play in a much smaller group. These sessions also allowed their teachers to spend more



time with these pupils, get to know them and have a positive fun interaction together. The learning from this part of the project was that these small-group sessions arguably contributed the highest quality of learning, participation and benefit to children of most need.

## The Final Installation

At the end of the project, Starcatchers handed ownership of the Stripy Nest installation and associated materials over to Canal View Primary School. A large metal frame 'nest' is currently situated in the school grounds, woven into the natural surroundings through the use of willows, plants and flowers as well as ribbons, string and fabric. Children can go inside the nest, as well as the two adjacent 'eggs', smaller structures nearby. The installation has been in place for six months and is forming part of the landscape, weathering well and avoiding damage or vandalism. These can be continually added to, changed or moved as required by the children or the school.





## Project Findings

- Creativity gives children a voice
- Promoting calmness and regulating emotions
- Reducing anxiety leads to positive experiences in the playground

### Creativity Gives Children a Voice

Creative activities offer an avenue for children to express themselves, particularly for very young children or those with additional support needs for whom verbal communication is developing. 'Co-design' or 'Participatory Design' is an approach which actively involves stakeholders in the design process. In this project it helped ensure the final installation was shaped directly by the interests and support needs of the children involved. With the exception of the logistical and technical aspects of the design and build, this project was a child-led process, with very young children having agency over the decisions being made, seeing their thoughts represented in the actions of adults around them, and feeling the real-world application of Children's Rights.

*Kirstin stated,*

*'It's not enough to simply ask very young children what they need. Giving the children various creative loose part materials really aided self-expression throughout this project. We didn't dictate what they should do with these, we took their lead, and allowed them to use them as they wished- this influenced my practice as I took inspiration from their ideas and creations, which helped develop sessions and the project. We've observed, listened, interacted and responded to ensure what they are communicating is incorporated into the playground installation.'*

*'I enjoyed listening to T's ideas in his drawing of the future - it was an abstract picture which he had decided to draw without prompt ...it would never have been deciphered and given a platform without having the ability to have extra adults in the room listening to individual ideas.'* - Katy

*'Creative experiences with nests and weaving was a huge hit. You could see how happy they were, everyone was really engaged in the activity.'* – School staff



## Creativity promotes calmness and helps regulate emotions

Using creativity to promote calmness was a central outcome of the project:

*'Charlie was really happy and calm while making art - he was curious and experimented with lots of ideas. In class he is known as one of the most disruptive kids, I think being able to express himself and make his own enquiries outside was really positive for him and the difference in his behaviour while pursuing something creative was really stark.'* – Katy

The installation itself featured three sensory spaces which supported children's ASN by offering different environments they could explore to help them regulate their emotions using creative means. The woodland space provided fantastic natural calming environment for sessions and installation. Children utilised a range of materials and found ways to connect with the nature around them. The co-designed structures were placed throughout the woodland area and the group explored interesting ways of integrating the structures with the trees.

Teaching staff noted that pupils enjoyed the sessions and that creative activities made the children happy; it was a great way to release stress and promote calmness. 'They loved it.' Staff have highlighted that the structures are being used on a regular basis:


*"When we do go up into the woods for our outdoor learning time in the woods the structures are being used. They really like them, they like being inside them."*

Staff noted they find the structures effective and have now incorporated one of the smaller structures into the new loose-parts area.

*"They really like to go inside it and you will find kids just sitting in there."*

Staff have developed ideas from sessions and have woven bamboo through the structure.





*“With luck, over time, it will grow into a little nest which is leafy, and they can interact with nest and loose parts.”*

By including a living element into their design, children are encouraged to nurture and take care of their surroundings.

Children with ASN can often seek proprioceptive input to self-regulate emotional and behavioural responses to sensory stimulation, such as a noisy, busy playground. Proprioceptive is about the awareness and position of our bodies. The artists focused on this during sessions, encouraging a variety of creative play opportunities which would have a calming effect, including a proprioceptive obstacle course. Children and artists lifted heavy coloured water bottles back and forth across the playground, wrapped their bodies in stretchy neon lycra, jumped, crawled, threw, floated, spun and balanced.

## **Reducing anxiety leads to positive experiences in the playground**

Artists worked with children in the playground to aid their transition into the space.

*‘We wanted to particularly work with children who might find the transition tricky and potentially stressful- perhaps they have additional support needs, or anxieties that might get lost or come to the surface in a challenging way’ - Katy*

*‘Some children with ASN find social situations very challenging, stressful and anxious. Everyone is different, and we respect this. We don’t want to increase anxiety and MAKE children play together, some children/people prefer to play/be alone at times and find comfort in this and can often self-regulate in doing so. We don’t want to stop this in our Stripy Nest sessions or installation, we want to offer opportunities for this, and we encourage dipping in and out.’ - Kirstin*

Stripy Nest creative sessions were successfully used to regulate children’s emotions and artists tailored sessions according to individual’s needs. For example, Positive Destruction (bashing taped up boxes, throwing clay) was planned to support children with heightened anxiety, which often manifests itself with acts of aggression. We used what is often perceived as negative energy, in a positive and creative way.

Providing sessions like this allowed children to self-regulate in a creative, safe and appropriate way. As all sessions focused on movement and proprioception which also encourage positive and individually appropriate self-regulation.

Artists worked with children, both in their last term of nursery and then again at the start of their first term in primary school. This provided a sense of continuity for some children making this transition.

The importance of this continuity was highlighted when Kirstin (Lead Artist) received a hug from one girl with an ASN. The child said, "I missed you!" on the first session back after summer. During sessions there was a focus on artists making positive connections with children. This often led to good artist / participant relationships and a sense of trust. Further to this, establishing relationship whilst children were still in EYC, offered some reassurance to those who may have been feeling a little anxious about the move to P1.

*'Having the continuity of Katy, Max and I returning after the summer was just as important and beneficial as the installation throughout their Nursery-P1 transition.' - Kirstin*

It was also noted that Play Worker Max also received a delighted response from a boy with a complex additional support needs including learning difficulties and limited speech. Artists and staff agreed this was a huge development given that this child, in particular, had been struggling a great deal in the playground.

Sessions in the playground allowed the children to experience a positive creative experience with their peers in smaller social group. This worked well with children with ASN as they were able to work closely with others, using new activities to help strengthen relationships with individuals they clashed with in a classroom setting.





#### *Artist Observation:*

*'The sessions following October half-term break consisted of smaller groups in the playground. Teachers were wary of bringing out Connor and Harrison, as they said they were a bad dynamic which often ended in a negative, hostile situation. Both children were really interested in the materials we had placed in the playground (rolls of large paper, chunky chalk, mini bamboo boats and rolls of tinfoil and coloured paper). Both boys worked on their own individual 'mini projects' and were busy creating, and began to mimic each other's ideas, then began to work together as part of a team – wrapping up their teacher with large rolls of paper and also running through the paper together, and turn taking to do this - which was a pretty big deal with this dynamic. The teacher commented that they had worked well together at the session.' and MAKE children play together, some children/people prefer to play/ be alone at times and find comfort in this and can often self-regulate in doing so. We don't want to stop this in our Stripy Nest sessions or installation, we want to offer opportunities for this, and we encourage dipping in and out.'* - Kirstin

New creative experiences help build self-esteem and confidence in children and, through positive interactions, helps strengthen peer relationships. Given the often challenging dynamic within the playground these are small steps which can be taken. Staff noted, *'Building self-esteem and confidence aids positive social experiences. I am sure it contributes but the playground is still a tricky place.'* - Deputy Head

We delivered creative sessions in other areas of the school grounds including the woodland area.

*'Placing the installation in the woods, a space the children had not yet experienced, was very positive as it offered a 'magical' place for the children to come play. When they were leaving the session, the children asked their teachers if it would stay there.'* - Kirstin



## Capturing Evidence

We gathered evidence through various creative means: through film and photography we captured the colourful, creative and positive energy of the children; through creative conversation we were able to identify how children were feeling and facilitate activities that promoted calmness; through offering creative spaces for children to self-identify the one that best-suited them and, in turn, take steps to regulate their emotions.

Artists held a feedback session where children communicated by drawing, which offered an insight into their experience: smiley faces, hearts or a drawing of an activity they had enjoyed. Artists also gained feedback through conversation with children, both in direct questioning and through shared activities:

- I liked it in the woods
- Yes, I liked the nest, I liked building it
- I liked the nest in the woods
- I decorated it.
- singing baby shark
- I liked hiding
- Birds seeds, wiggly worms
- Fun
- Cosy
- I liked it all
- I wanted to stay for longer
- When are you coming back?
- Are you going to have more music?
- I liked, tying you to a tree





## Summary of Findings

Rhona Matheson, Chief Executive of Starcatchers, said:

*'The creative process has been as valuable as the creation of the installation itself. The children have explored their own views and feelings, communicated this and have seen something tangible grow from it. They can see that they have impact, that they have a voice.'*

Staff at Canal View Primary School appreciated the value of both the approach and the concept:

*"There are loads of kids who need it. It's a great idea, and if you could build a Stripy Nest in every school which was a safe space for kids, that would be brilliant." - Deputy Head*

Artist's feedback included how many playground spaces simply do not support children with additional support needs:

*'The open design of the school playground doesn't work for kids with ASN... It's too open and intimidating. It too noisy and has no structure, which can be very stressful for kids with ASN. This can cause kids with sensory issues to also shut down and become introverted and less socially confident. The design of the playground needs to take this into consideration as your environment effects your mood and well-being. Canal View Primary has all this incredible space which is sadly very uninspiring and out of date - a concrete 'carpark' style playground. It really does have the potential to be used to create something incredibly inspiring that will enhance the children's moods and imagination and be a space everyone wants to be in! - Kirstin*

## Conclusion

We creatively engaged children with additional support needs who made their transitional journey from Nursery to Primary 1. We observed the benefits of supporting children throughout this period, of delivering sessions before, during and after they made the transition. Feedback from the children and staff highlighted they enjoyed the Stripy Nest project. Our findings demonstrate we helped improve confidence and the ability for children to self-express; we employed techniques that helped reduce anxiety levels and promote calmness; we strengthened peer relationships and contributed towards positive experiences in the playground.

The project highlighted a number of challenges during its development and delivery which is valuable learning for future working, centred around the high number of children with varying support needs, the lower ratio of staff to children once in P1, and the demanding change of the transition on most children at this point in their lives. It will always be a very challenging environment to work in, but the evidence is clear that the activity is of benefit to the children to allow for a supported period of change, growth and development.





# STARCATCHERS

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