Crafts Council
Make:Shift:Do Case Study
Harris Museum, Art Gallery and Library

Crafts Council's Make:Shift:Do programme works with makerspaces and Fab Labs to engage a diverse audience with cutting-edge approaches to making, changing perceptions of the meaning of 'craft' and revealing its real world potential.

In 2019 Make:Shift:Do delivered three mini action-research projects exploring how makerspaces and community groups can work together to co-produce projects. We think that, when projects are led by the passions, interests, and concerns of the communities involved, exciting applications for new craft technologies will emerge.

We're interested in learning from the process of delivering these projects in order to develop and test co-creation models which we can share with the wider makerspace community.

THE PROJECT

The Harris Museum, Art Gallery and Library, Preston, wanted to make their Makerspace offer more accessible to people with specific access needs. They worked with Caritas Care's Futures Xpress (FX) project, a day service offering personalised, individual care and support for individuals with a profound learning or physical disability.

Before the project, FX had been holding their own art sessions at the Harris for about a year. Through Make:Shift:Do, the Harris hoped to form a closer,

more collaborative relationship with FX that would result in collaborative programming.

Creative Programmer Catherine Mugonyi consulted with the group informally during their self-led sessions at the museum, then worked with them to design sensory workshops that introduced new techniques and processes. She shares her experience of delivering the project here.

Key themes: Working with community groups; flexibility; sensory making and enjoying the process!

How was your project co-produced?

The FX group leaders were central to the development of this project. They acted as advocates for FX participants. Several participants had limited speech and the group leaders were able to spend a good deal of time with them and their carers, finding out what sort of activities were appealing. They know their members really well and gave the Harris team valuable insight into planning activities for disabled people. There were several adaptations that we wouldn't have considered without their input, such as:

- The importance and accessibility of sensory activities
- The focus on the enjoyment of the making process rather than the end product—the activity doesn't have to be high-tech or complicated for participants to have a fulfilling experience
- Giving plenty of time for the activity so that participants can make at their own pace. They may also need time to get settled in as well as taking informal breaks to eat or take medication
- Having a variety of making options and tools available, e.g. people with muscle weakness may not be able to operate traditional tools, such as knives to cut clay. Rulers that can be pressed into the clay to cut it were an alternative tool that require fewer fine motor skills but still do the job
- Have alternative activities available in case participants finish early and want to do something different

Some elements of the project were more community-led than others:

- The time/schedule of the activity: the FX group leaders knew what the participants' needs were and made sure that the activity was flexible enough to accommodate this. The 'on the day' timetable was led by FX for the above reason.
- FX coordinated travel to the venue, they made sure that the appropriate support was in place to get people to the activity.
- 'On the day' changes to the activity (taking objects home rather than scanning and 3D printing) were led by the requirements of participants

The Harris held the budget for this project. Fortunately, the Harris already has a Makerspace budget, so we were able to spend more if needed. As a result of this, the group was encouraged to think about their 'ideal-world' activities. Then we would try and make it happen within budget rather than starting with a budget and working backwards. We wanted to make sure that the group didn't feel as though we were limiting their options. The pottery activity was one of the 'wish-list' items which could realistically take place within budget.

What elements of the project were the most successful?

Taking time to get to know the group. Regular contact, even if it was just a quick 10 minute catch up chat, was really helpful in building the relationship.

The group leader really knew the participants well and had a great understanding of what they enjoy and what would give them the most satisfaction. Focusing on the sensory elements of the making process rather than the finished product was a real revelation. This was clearly reflected

during the main activity: joyful squeals of 'squidgy, squidgy, it's so squidgy!', coos and gasps of delight when mixing colours, group members who were previous averse to tactile activities happily taking part.

The group were so pleased with their creations that really wanted to take them away on the day rather than scan them at the next session. Even though this was different from the initial plan, we thought that it was important to go with this as it was clear that the hands-on making part of the process was important to them and they wanted to remember that.

What were the challenges?

In February 2019, we hosted Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon installation and a moon-themed exhibition which proved incredibly popular. We welcomed over 50,000 visitors during three weeks in February 2019. This was right in

the middle of the period when the project activity was due to take place. It meant that staff and resources were focused on supporting Visitor Services during this busy time. Unfortunately, we had to postpone the Make:Shift:Do activity.

We learned to:

- allocate more than one project contact/lead, who can be available in busy times
- avoid holding activities during the school holidays (if that works for that audience)
- consider how busy the space would be;
    - at busy times it was more difficult for wheelchair users to get around the building
    - the large number of families could result in a rather unsettling amount of noise

Setting a revised date for the activity proved tricky as we needed to coordinate the availability of the group, artists and staff. The group usually visits on Thursdays, but there were dates which were not workable due to outside factors (illness, a big birthday celebration and medical appointments).

We learned to:

- start the planning administration well in advance and confirm dates with all parties at least 6 weeks before the beginning of the programme.
- build flexibility into the programme by including more sessions led by Harris staff as a back-up. This would work well if we needed to make changes at short notice.

We did not carry out the scanning and 3D printing activity as planned. It was clear that the group were more interested in the pottery part of the activity and wanted to spend more time on that part of the activity and take their work away on the day.

We learned:

- to be more flexible. Sticking to the plan isn't the most important thing here. We're looking at the quality of the experience and access to making activities. We have still been able to do this without the tech element.
- the group are co-producers, if part of the activity isn't working for them, they have the right to change it. They may not know this until the activity has started. This can be a little frustrating when you have an agreed plan, however at this early stage in the relationship it's important to respect the members' decision. Ideally, once the relationship has developed further, we can look at more challenging activities, but ultimately the participants need to feel happy and comfortable with trying the activity and the environment in which the activity takes place

- changing the activity doesn't mean that the original plan has to be forgotten. Talking about the activities that took place opens up an opportunity to discuss the part that we chose not to do. We can talk about looking at other, more relevant ways to use Makerspace equipment. Think of the activity as a conversation starter.
- brief artists properly about how the project works and what you know about the audience. Make sure that you know what to do in the event of a cancellation and that the artist has a few alternate options at hand.

What tools, techniques and infrastructure have you developed to enable communities to continue to play an active role in your organisation?

Setting aside extra time for community projects. Regular informal contact is so important in developing trusting, strong partnerships. We need to make sure that we set aside enough time for this as contact needs to be ongoing in order to build trust and develop a genuine relationship where all parties feel valued. Contact shouldn't stop as soon as a particular activity has ended.

Actively listening, being approachable, friendly and willing to get 'stuck in' (rather than treating the partnership as a formal work project) really helps to set the tone of the relationship and helps to put people at ease. Communities are giving their free time to help us, so we should make that experience an enjoyable one. Good clear communication is key, especially being sensitive to people's preferred methods of communication; being able to 'read the room' is a great skill that will make the process much easier.

Starting projects with conversations to set out hopes and expectations, before refining these to form an activity plan.

How has delivering the project allowed you to reach out to new audiences?

We're in the process of sharing project information. We did not publicise the activity before it took place as we were working with an existing group. We've used this project to trial Makerspace activities for people with learning and physical disabilities before opening up activities to the wider public.

Now that we have information and images from the activity, we can share the project more widely. We plan to do this mainly through our social media accounts, encouraging people to tell us what they would like to see as part of the future Makerspace programme.

We will specifically encourage suggestions that will help make future activities more accessible.

What tips would you give other makerspaces looking to develop co-created projects?

If you're finding it hard to find people to work with in the first instance, try approaching existing groups or networks. They will already have great insight into what their members need, enjoy and value. They are also more likely to have their own established communication and organisation methods, which can really help lighten the general workload and spread the news about your Makerspace.

Be prepared to be challenged on your perceptions of Makerspace activity. We thought that including a tech element would be central to the project and warmly welcomed. However, we found that our participants didn't share this feeling, centralising and enjoying the hands-on, tactile part of the activity more.

Don't forget more traditional crafts. Sometimes we can get caught up in the lights, beeps and sparkles of new technology. It's good to remember that there is a lot of love about for traditional forms of making. We found that our participants were keen to explore pottery, printing and textiles as they have limited access to these activities compared to computers.

Anything else you'd like to tell us?

Spending time with the group was so important. Finding out how we could put activities together for a group with such varied needs was a real eye opener! It also gave us a great deal of insight into our general building access and where we can make real changes to improve facilities or services.

It felt wonderful to see everyone enjoying craft and making and we can't wait to do more with FX and open up activities to the wider community.

Step-by-step: how was the project delivered?

	Number of participants	What took place
Week 1	10	Initial meeting to find out about the group. They were holding a self-led session - making paintings for the Harris open exhibition. We had a general discussion about what they already do and how they use the venue.
Week 4	4	Meeting the group leader and support workers to discuss potential activities and possible limitations. Identified sensory stimulation is something that the whole group will enjoy.
Week 8	2	Catch up with group leader to discuss workshop content and inclusion of a tech element
Week 9	2	Confirmation of dates for workshops
Week 13	10	Visit group during their art session; informal catch-up and discuss planned activity.
Week 14	2	Phone call to group leader to discuss challenges around staff capacity (unusually high visitor numbers meant that staff were needed to support visitor operaton) Sessions postponed and potential new dates in late March and April were circulated to the group leader and artists.
Week 17	2	Meeting with Louise from Pottery Preston to discuss workshop content

Week 20	16	Polymer clay workshop led by Louise from Pottery Preston— 2 hour session making press-moulded bowls or discs with stamp decoration.
Week 20	2	Post workshop feedback with group leader Conversation to capture the immediate reaction to the workshop and go through photo permissions.
Week 21	N/A	Scanning & 3D printing – cancelled We did not carry out the scanning and 3D printing activity as planned. It was clear (on the 11 April) that the group were more interested in the pottery part of the activity. They wanted to spend more time on that part of the activity and take their work away on the day. The session leader was notified on 11 April and is working on an alternative future activity.