

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action



Connected Communities Festival, Durham University, June 2015

www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/ccfestival2015/

Story-telling and model making in the West End of Newcastle

This was offered as part of Benwell and Scotswood Community Arts Festival: 17 and 24 June, Riverside Community Health Project, Carnegie Building, Benwell; 8 and 22 June, Pendower Good Neighbour Project, Sunnybank Centre, Benwell; 24 June and 6 July, Bridgewater School, Benwell; 8 and 14 July, Action for Children, St James' Church, Benwell.

- a) **What happened** – Four groups of children (from Bridgewater School, Pendower Good Neighbour Project, Action for Children and Riverside Community Health Project) participated in two sessions (story telling followed by a model making session). The focus of the sessions was to consider 'If Benwell was an animal, what would it be?' After the story telling the groups chose their animal to represent Benwell (choices included a husky dog, fox, eagle and lion) and they made the animals in the model making session.
- b) **Participants** – 58 children and young people and 22 adults (mostly parents).
- c) **Summary of any feedback received** – Everyone enjoyed the sessions; in one case, it was observed how the group gelled from individuals and pairs, into one large group helping each other tuck the pieces of tissue paper over the largest gaps on the husky; these events provided opportunities for the children and young people to stay active and social amongst their peers and connected to their community.
- d) **Any learning/reflections** - The *storytelling* was a really effective way of engaging people of all ages including children from BME backgrounds such as Roma and SE Asian communities in discussing their experiences and thoughts about the areas they live in. The experienced storyteller was able to hold their attention for extended periods and get everyone to contribute and to listen to each other. *The model-making* was a different kind of opportunity to engage people in talking about their areas, and equally effective. It was also a really good way of getting people to share in making something together with a visible output at the end.
- e) **Any follow-up activities** – The organising group plans to display these four models locally after the summer, and also would like to extend the project across other groups and organisations if funding can be obtained.