COVID AND SOCIETY:

The Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Young People and the potential contribution of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In October 2020 the British Academy commissioned Newcastle University's Humanities Research Institute to report on the potential contribution of research in the arts, humanities and social sciences to understanding the impact of COVID-19 on society, with a specific focus on children and young people. This report has been produced to address this issue but also should be considered in the light of the three hundred years economic hit as a result of the response to COVID-19 reported by the UK government in November 2020[1] and the potential consequences this is likely to have in terms of economic scarring and for public spending in the years to come.

The 'dive' was carried out in November 2020. The project aimed to synthesise evidence relevant to the policy areas specified by the British Academy namely Health and Wellbeing and Communities, Culture, and Belonging. Specifically it provides a 'live' picture of the research and the creative solutions being delivered by researchers and partners (arts and cultural, charities, and the voluntary and community sector) impacting upon the well-being of children and young people during the pandemic.[2]

A wealth of numerical data have been amassed in recent months about the immediate consequences of the pandemic in terms of health, employment etc., and this is essential to understand the current predicament. In our writing below we have taken a rather different approach by examining the experiences of researchers and local organisations working in the field, dealing with the day-to-day impact of the consequences of the pandemic and on those looking to support the mobilisation of local communities. Our data come from interviews with key contributors carried out in the north east but the inference we would draw is that the issues raised in this report would be equally valid elsewhere. So we would argue that the data are locally derived but nationally relevant. We have privileged a bottom-up approach, working with people who know their communities, rather than a more conventional top-down national policy perspective.

In this summary we start by describing what we did to address these issues, then outline what our respondents told us in terms of challenges and opportunities, commenting specifically on the impact on our project themes: namely, *Cohesion*, *Governance*, and *Inequalities*. We then summarise some issues which are key to the arts, humanities and social sciences working together to provide solutions to some of the problems identified. And, finally, we look to the future and make a number of recommendations for different parties to help communities adjust to the new reality.

1. **What did we do?**

REFERENCES
[1] https://www.ft.com/content/3bb47397-4ce1-3bb6-85d7-35a31f053c00
[2] The academics and partners that we spoke to work with diverse groups of children and young people, from babies through to young people with families of their own; it includes those from BAME backgrounds, those with special educational needs and disabilities, from households experiencing different forms of poverty.

The project was overseen by Jennifer Richards (Director, Humanities Research Institute, Newcastle University) and James Law (Professor of Speech and Language Science, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University), with Hazel Sheeky Bird and Rachel White conducting interviews with over thirty academics, service providers and community organisations working in the north east of England. A full list of the contributors is provided in appendix 1.

Since the data we wanted to collect are 'live' in the moment, we chose to use interviews as our method of data collection, and to give priority to experiences/observations as they are being formed. We strongly believe that the current situation is unprecedented, and that we need local knowledge that is attentive to change, and open to new ways of working both during and post-pandemic. We asked researchers and partners working with children and young people how their work is changing and what challenges and opportunities they were encountering. Researchers told us that existing research projects are being paused, reassessed and rethought and the same was the case for our partners. It was also acknowledged by respondents that there is no complete dataset and little relevant empirical or secondary/routine data which spoke to these issues, simply because it has yet to be collected. On one issue all were agreed: existing societal challenges (inequalities, access to services etc.) have all been exacerbated by COVID-19.

We wanted to gain insight into what is happening 'on the ground' in research projects as well as in communities. We also wanted to explore what interviewees thought was the value of arts and humanities and qualitative social science research for understanding the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people both during and post-pandemic. We believe that, going forward, we will need new ways of working, across disciplines and within communities, to address the effects of the pandemic on serious societal challenges for children and young people, their families, and for society more generally.

We chose children and young people not only because we have a multidisciplinary cluster of research excellence in this area at Newcastle University, with strong local and national partnerships, but also because we understand that the impact of the pandemic on this group is acute, and that it will have implications for society for many years to come. The researchers interviewed for this report work alongside partner organisations in their communities, and their methods are people-focused as well as reflective (through reading, writing, critical thinking etc.): they are participatory, collaborative and dependent on multiple conversations. Our researchers agree that this methodology has enabled them to be responsive to the moment and quick to pivot and readjust. Indeed, we propose that methods of this kind, which are core to arts, humanities and social science research, are also appropriate for a moment of social crisis and anxiety such as the one we are tackling at the moment. As one social science researcher explains *'the world is messy, because that's the world we are interested in. I mean . . . this is actually what we research . . . because . . . we don't just go in and measure children'* (Liz Todd, Director of NUiSS; ECLS). It becomes clear, as one reads through the interviews, both just how messy this world has become but also how beneficial is the interrelationship between partners (charities, voluntary agencies, archives, schools) and arts,

humanities, and social science researchers. And it is, of course, also important to observe that these partnerships do not develop overnight. They progress over sustained periods of time and are built upon trust and the establishment of common objectives.

The report is organised as an executive summary and recommendations, based on information shared with us in interview. The interviews were carried out in November 2020 by two research associates on the project, Dr Hazel Sheeky Bird and Dr Rachel White, working with Professors Jennifer Richards and James Law at Newcastle University, UK. Over the course of three weeks, Rachel and Hazel conducted thirty-four interviews with academics, and representatives of partner organisations (voluntary agencies; libraries and archives), all of whose work involves children and young people. The interviews were broadly structured around the British Academy's cross-cutting themes of governance, cohesion and inequalities. The self-reflective nature of the interviews allowed participants the space to think and to consider their work and the implications of Covid-19 for future practice. The process was iterative and the interviews explored the dominant emerging themes. The interviews will be published in the Humanities Research Institute's [Research During Covid](#) web page.

2. What did our respondents tell us?

Loss/challenges
- There have been substantive delays to essential research projects resulting from the COVID lockdown and these are affecting understanding of access to education and other support services and engagement with agencies.
- Arts sector income in the region is down 40%. In 2016, the arts sector in the north east generated £400 million (£203 million Gross Value Added) and employed approx. 2,450 people.[3] As a consequence the loss of arts enrichment programmes is impacting on children and young people's well-being (*Ben Dickenson, Executive Producer, City of Dreams*).
- The effects of furlough, much needed by the individuals who would otherwise have lost their jobs, has made it challenging to continue many projects that aim to make a difference, even if they were not formally stopped.
- Digital alternatives to face-to-face interactions, while relatively pervasive, are not always a realistic solution or accessible for those that they are intended to reach because of a lack of hardware and internet access.
- There is an increasing need for more evaluation of the impact of research projects in the community. COVID-19 has exposed this as an area in need of urgent attention with regard to the impact of the lockdown on children's mental health and the potential role of interventions whether driven by arts, humanities, and social sciences in addressing this issue.

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[3] CEBR. (2019). *The economic value of arts and culture in the north of England*. A Cebr Report for Arts Council England.
https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20Economic%20Value%20of%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20the%20North%20of%20England%20report%204th%20July%20.pdf

- There are concerns about gaps in national data collection and what this will mean for future research.
- There are concerns about the future of arts programmes. Schools have spent money to become COVID-secure and so will have less money available for extra-curricular activities. Some schools remain eager to defend the arts, but others will need to focus time and resources on the basics and helping children to catch up.

The challenges have not changed per se, but have been made exponentially worse and it is too early to tell how this will look and what the effects will be. Between 750 and 800 schools were due to take part in the Shakespeare Schools Festival, but this number has dropped to between 250 and 300. They have adapted the programme to be delivered online with recorded performances. The unique selling point of the project is the location and the opportunity for children to perform on a professional theatre stage, which cannot happen under current restrictions. Local theatres have had to use the furlough scheme so maintaining communications and relationships with them is made much more difficult.
Ruth Brock and Michael Tucker, Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation

There are massive problems really in our capacity to measure the impact of the arts. And that's something that needs addressing, because then we can make a very forceful and clear argument. . . until you can say, Well, look, there's this longitudinal study on the impact of poetry and young people on this cohort of young people aged from 13 to 25. . . we're struggling around to make a case, which we know is true. **Sinéad Morrissey, NCLA**

Opportunities
- Despite the challenges posed by the lockdown, many partnerships have flourished, between charities, between researchers and partners when they were able to be flexible. People and communities have come together.
- There are opportunities for new working practices that can lead to wider participation (although this often depends on maintaining a network of partnerships).
- Some arts organisations and libraries have been able to strengthen their relationship with local communities by functioning in effect as charities (although there are concerns about the economic sustainability of this).
- Many researchers and partners were able to adapt their provision quickly, and move online; or satisfy the new (and maybe future) demand for online resources (from families and schools).

New ways of working have emerged from the Covid-19 lockdown due to partners innovating. This has brought arts and cultural organisations into contact with far more diverse communities than they would engage with at the venue: for example, Streetgames is a strategic partnership that developed during lockdown between the voluntary and community sector and arts organisations combining holiday hunger interventions with creative participation. Due to the need to engage audiences in open spaces, some organisations have reached far more diverse groups of children

and young people than previously: for example, Dance City, Newcastle, held outdoor community dance sessions in the street. **Ben Dickenson, City of Dreams**

"The Talking Time Project", funded by the Nuffield Foundation, is a randomized, controlled trial of a universal intervention to promote language development in preschool children. The project was stopped with lock-down in March 2020, with significant implications for the planned interventions. The team (James, Law, Newcastle; Julie Dockrell, UCL; Sandra Mathers, Oxford) have used this time to think creatively about how best to both assess the children and deliver the intervention programme to teachers, anticipating that even when the pandemic is under controls things won't be the same. They have changed the assessments so they can be administered online but also, more importantly, they have substantially changed the training programme so it is now an online resource. This makes it accessible to many more teachers, and easily updateable. **James Law, ECLS.**

3. Overarching Project themes

We focussed on three of the overarching project themes identified by the British Academy.

Cohesion: How has COVID impacted on relationships within and between communities of people and ideas? This relates to making decisions at a time of change, and cohesion as a day-to-day practice (e.g. being neighbourly), and as a shared value (e.g. a societal glue).

Governance: How has COVID impacted on relationships between national and local actors, accountability for decisions, and freedom of the individual? This relates to welfare; use of devolved powers; politicians vs experts; individual citizens' voices.

Inequalities: What has been the role of COVID in highlighting, ameliorating, causing, exacerbating inequalities. This relates to inequalities of place, religion and belief, sex and gender, economics and class, race and ethnicity, health and disability.

Cohesion

An emerging theme across the interviews is the barriers to working with partner organisations, including schools, that have emerged as a result of COVID. These barriers impact upon the cohesion between researchers and partners, and will have longer-term impact in terms of their relationships and work with young people. However, some researchers and partners have used this time as an opportunity to overcome traditional competition: e.g. West End Children's Community - schools, the local authority and other community and cultural organisations made an agreement to form a kind of governance structure, working collaboratively with communities in a very local area for the needs of children and families. Others pivoted towards their local communities (Seven Stories), creating new ways of working with schools and families in need of resources. This interconnected way of working is a new opportunity.

Working with Barnardo's Community Family Hub East, Food Nation and 'Byker Best Summer Ever' project led by Byker Community Trust, Seven Stories offered 14 digital storytimes, 35 doorstep storytelling performances, 367 books, 345 lockdown storypacks, family activity packs 600 hot meals and 225 recipe packs to 126 families

> *in Byker. They also worked with Byker Primary School and St Lawrence's RC Primary School to provide 28 digital storytimes and story-inspired activities for use with keyworker children and families schooling at home.* **John Beattie and Sarah Cotton, Seven Stories**

> *The West End Children's Community, formed of schools, the local authority and other charities and cultural organisations, made an agreement to form a kind of governance structure, working collaboratively with communities in a very local area for the needs of children and families. This was able to keep going during the main lockdown. The children's community received money for face-to-face play activities, the only ones provided in that area. For example, the Elswick Lamp-Post Play Project, supported by the West End Schools Trust, West End Children's Community and Sussed and Able, took place over six weeks in the Elswick area of Newcastle. PLAY in NEWCASTLE staff delivered a series of outdoor play sessions in areas identified by schools by schools. In all, 44 children took part in a range of activities including pebble drawing, clay modelling, dance offs, making music.* **Karen Laing and Liz Todd, ECLS**

Governance

The researchers and partners who addressed this issue regretted the lack of local/regional autonomy, and nuanced regional data. Local Authorities used to have an important role to play in education, but no longer do. The relationship between schools and the Department for Education in Westminster can be problematic, and has become even more so during this period. Other concerns expressed included the impact of the Coronavirus Act, which passed through parliament easily, taking away Local Authority statutory requirements to provide services for example to those with Special Educational Needs. In practice, the Local Authorities have not gone down the route of stripping out provision but there is a concern that over the coming months that financial restrictions will be amplified and local authorities will have difficulty offering sustained support to non-statutory services (Janice McLaughlin, GPS)**.** It was also recognised that community networks and resilience have been enhanced by DfE's funding, which has provided local authorities with the community networks for delivering food and knowing the families that needed help and communicating public health messages. In many cases COVID has brought tensions between the local and the national into sharp relief.

> *The relationship between local government and mutual aid groups needs to be looked at. National government recognises the role that communities play in the recovery from COVID-19, but the level of complexity in negotiating the relationship between local government, the informal volunteering sector such as mutual aid groups, and the formal volunteering sector such as foodbanks need to more research.* **Alison Atkinson-Phillips (Oral History Unit) and Silvie Fisch (Oral History Unit)**

> *Levelling up needs to be about people and joining the dots between social and economic policy, investment in social infrastructures as well as physical. Devolution*

> *can benefit children in poverty in NE.[4] Most levers that could address child poverty are held by national government, but local mayors and authorities can work together and bring these issues to national attention.* **Amanda Bailey, Director of the North East Child Poverty Commission**

Inequalities

Researchers and partners noted unequal access to food, to books, to tech, impacting on children and young people's well-being and education. We already knew that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to go to a school that does not have a library, and that there are disparities in school library provision across the four British nations.[5] The closure of schools exacerbated existing disparities for struggling families during lockdown. And although many provided on-line teaching, not all parents were able to make use of the services for a host of reasons. As a specific example the lack of social contact is likely to have an effect on children's speech and language skills. Children for whom English is a second language who do not have regular social contact with English speakers because of lockdown and self-isolation, will see their English language skills deteriorate. Waiting lists for speech and language therapy were already very high before the pandemic struck and are likely to increase especially in inner city areas (James Law, ECLS). Digital poverty is also recognised as a huge problem for disadvantaged communities that has been brought into sharp relief by COVID. According to research undertaken by the National Foundation for Education Research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, limited pupil access to IT at home is a significant challenge, particularly for schools with the highest levels of deprivation.[6] Government schemes were only able to address this problem in a limited way.

> *After the first lockdown was imposed in March, it soon became apparent that many children did not have access to digital devices (hardware and wi-fi) particularly those in areas of high deprivation. Our team consulted community leaders, teachers, literacy experts and refuges to ascertain how best to support this audience. They told us they wanted creative projects to encourage children to read, write and make; alternatives to 'screen time' as well as online resources; and tasks that would be accessible to children at home and at school, and that did not require adult supervision. Our discussions confirmed the fact that many children have limited or no access to computers or art materials. Based on this feedback, we worked with children's illustrator, Vivian Schwarz, to create an entirely new printed activity pack, aimed at children 5-11. The pack required very few additional materials, offering creative ideas such as 'cut out and keep' masks, map templates, comic strip*

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[4] Round, Anna, & Sarah Longlands. (2020). Child Poverty and Devolution in North East England. *Institute for Public Policy Research* (report commissioned by the North East Child Poverty Commission).

[5] Great School Libraries. (2019). *Survey update and findings on phase 1*. https://d824397c-0ce2-4fc6-b5c4-8d2e4de5b242.filesusr.com/ugd/8d6dfb_a1949ea011cd415fbd57a7a0c4471469.pdf

[6] Nuffield Foundation. (2020). *The most disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be engaged in remote learning*. https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/disadvantaged-pupils-less-engaged-in-remote-learning

> *templates and craft activities that used recycled paper. Over 50,000 packs were distributed to schools and voluntary, community organisations, via food banks, community development organisations, charities, refuges, schools and libraries across the UK from Norwich to Edinburgh.* We also put a PDF of the pack on our website and emailed the link to 25K schools so that teachers could download and print for their students. **Anna Lobbenberg - Digital Programmes Manager, Manager of *Discovering Children's Books*, The British Library**

> *There is an IPPR report on increase in personal debt, and it shows that BAME households in particular are affected. National level data on child poverty and BAME communities is available – 46% of BAME children are growing up in poverty nationally – but there is very little in terms of data below the national level.* **Amanda Bailey, Director of the North East Child Poverty Commission**

> *Community networks and resilience has been enhanced by the Department for Education's funding of these programmes. This provided local authorities with the community networks for delivering food and knowing the families that needed help as well communicating public health messages.* **Greta Defeyter, Northumbria University**

> *The closure of schools and leisure facilities, the contraction of essential children's and youth services, and increased exposure to stress, poverty, hunger, abuse and domestic violence during lockdown, will have significant and enduring consequences and entrench existing disadvantage and discrimination along socio-economic, racial and ethnic lines. This is especially true for children in conflict with the law. The response to the pandemic has heightened the conditions that draw children into contact with the criminal justice system (CJS) and had a detrimental impact on those currently within it, again perpetuating existing disparities especially for care-experienced and BAME heritage children.* **Kathryn Hollingsworth (Law)**, excerpt from 'General-relational Justice in the Covid-19 Recovery Period: Children in the Criminal Justice System'

4. The Value of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences working together.

The potential role for arts, humanities and social sciences

The arts, humanities and social sciences, particularly in combination, have the potential to make a major contribution to exploring individual and group perspectives, framing questions which are of societal importance and thinking through practice and policy implications from the perspective of the individual and their community. The researchers we interviewed study social relations in the present and past (with all looking to the future too). Key to this process is that the academics interviewed all work closely with partners in the community and that those that we interviewed in the community, in turn, all worked closely with members of the academy. There should be many more opportunities for exploring the value of such collaborations in the future.

Arts, reading and well-being

The provision of arts programmes and access to them have been severely challenged since the start of lockdown. Afterschool clubs have yet to be re-started and this reduces children's opportunities to engage in arts-based creative activities that cannot fit into the school day – as one of our respondents said, *'Families lacked resources to be creative at home with their children'*. Arts, literacy and well-being are interconnected, but it is not clear that it is sufficiently understood as an area that requires investment and further research. Literacy feeds into individual wellbeing through reading for pleasure on the one hand, or through reading to access opportunities on the other. We know that children who read for pleasure are predicted better success in life than those who do not. According to the OECD, reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than the social class of their parents.[7] Reading for pleasure has a range of health benefits, including mental well-being, for children and young people and these were apparent during the main lockdown.[8] Acting on this research our partners – the British Library and Seven Stories – and researchers have provided resources: online resources, books, stories on the doorstep.

> ***The Shakespeare Schools Foundation*** *ran a project in 2019 titled 'Shakespeare For All' and its aim was to 'evaluate how curriculum-linked resources that promote a creative and active approach to learning can impact attainment for children at primary schools in areas of high deprivation' with a second focus on the impact of the project in Special Education Needs and Disabilities School[9] . They measured academic attainment and social development. They saw outstanding results. Lower attaining children in particular saw a big improvement in both areas. Lower-attaining children also made the greatest gain in the area of Aspiration and Ambition as they became more engaged learners and pushed themselves further. This is particularly important for children from areas of deprivation as it 'has the power to break vicious cycles and help them realise the opportunities that are out there'.[10]* **Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation (Ruth Brock and Michael Tucker).**

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[7] OECD. (2002). *Reading for change: Performance and engagement across countries. Results from PISA 2000*. New York: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

[8] Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for pleasure: A research overview*. The National Literacy Trust. https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/reading-pleasure-research-overview/

Clark, C., & Teravainen-Goff, A. (2018). *Mental wellbeing, reading and writing. How children and young people's mental wellbeing is related to their reading and writing experiences*. The National Literacy Trust. https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18_-_FINAL2_qTxyxvg.pdf

[9] Shakespeare Schools Foundation (2019). *Shakespeare For All: Evaluation Report*. https://shakespeareschoolsfoundation.rooftop.io/sites/72/2017/02/09114305/Shakespeare-4-All-Report.pdf

[10] Ibid.

The importance of stories.

At the heart of the response to COVID is the development of stories both personal and collective, to understand individual experiences and to empathise with others. This may be reading books, being read to, writing your own stories or simply listening to the stories of others. These stories underpin some of the issues associated with mental health and wellbeing in the community. This process of story-telling is central to much of the people-focussed research which we encountered, especially with children and young people. Much of this has closed down over the last few months or simply gone online – but it is not always as effective on Zoom as it is in person. Other researchers have argued that there is a need for better understanding of national and local stories and the use of critical skills to understand their application, noting it has been extremely difficult for people to glean information or '*to feel that there's a consistent message that speaks to them and their interests; this has divided responses to the pandemic'*.

> *We know that when we work in partnership with Seven Stories we can develop and deliver arts-based enrichment experiences that positively impact the lives of children young people. Before starting the archive project at Walker Riverside Academy, we asked the students to complete a LawSeq self-esteem questionnaire, which is a self-reporting survey on self-esteem. Some of the scores returned evidenced extremely low levels of self-esteem. At the end of the project, all of the students who completed the programme expressed a desire to engage with more archives and continue working with Seven Stories. But it was the qualitative feedback that was interesting. When asked what they were most proud in terms of what they'd done, overwhelmingly the responses referred to increased confidence.* **Dr Hazel Sheeky-Bird, post-doc researcher, SELLL**

Enhancing the role of digital humanities.

Digital provision/digital alternatives emerged as a major theme in our interviews. What had been a benefit to modern life, an add-on for many, became over night the sole means of communication, or getting things done. In fact, of all the stories we heard, this aspect had been thrown into sharpest relief by the pandemic. Many interviewees talked about digital poverty, and gave compelling evidence of the uneven distribution of tech to schools and indeed in the home. Collecting data on this, as many social science researchers have been doing, is essential to make visible these inequalities of access.

There is also, however, a sense of opportunity, and confidence in the role that arts and humanities, underpinned by the high-level technical expertise available in the university, can play by providing:
(a) basic digitisation for partner organisations, e.g. via shared hubs;
(b) online materials for schools and families through researcher-partner collaborations
(e.g. the British Library's Discovering Children's Books project);
(c) link-up between regional and national libraries, building towards a national collection.

There is an opportunity to rebalance the digital work of Universities between topics conventionally grouped as STEM subjects namely Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths and those grouped as SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities, the Arts for People and the Environment/Economy) subjects. In this scenario the *digital humanities* – which includes questions of ethics and access, and which engages with heritage – is invaluable. We argue that digital humanities must be part of this conversation to both improve digital literacy, and ensure the long-term functionality of the new data systems and digital interventions produced now, ensuring they are fit for purpose.

The scramble for online resources that occurred at the start of the spring lockdown helped the Discovering Children's Books site receive significant attention. As the Library pivoted to digital, we launched a series of creative campaigns that aimed to offer stimulating and uplifting activities during the Covid period. We wanted to inspire children across the country to work on projects collaboratively, despite the fact that they were living in isolation from their peers. We worked with a range of high-profile authors and illustrators, capitalising on existing relationships. We managed to engage hundreds of children around the UK, from Motherwell, Newcastle, and Cumbria to Cardiff, Brystol and Plymouth. There were contributions from online art clubs and children at home, and from key workers' children and vulnerable children in school. By delivering digital campaigns in lieu of the face-to-face outreach workshops that we had planned prior to the pandemic, the Library was able to engage appreciably more students, teachers and parents nationwide and thus to exceed their original KPIs. In the eight months since launching the site, it has reached 280,000 unique users, thus already significantly outstripping ourannual target of 240,000. **Anna Lobbenberg - Digital Programmes Manager, Manager of *Discovering Children's Books*, British Library**

Digital poverty is a huge problem for disadvantaged communities. Experiences of a trust of primary schools in the West End of Newcastle show how variable access to tech has been through government schemes, with some schools receiving less than a third of promised electronic devices, others none. According to research undertaken by the National Foundation for Education Research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, limited pupil access to IT at home is a significant challenge, particularly for schools with the highest levels of deprivation.[11] **Karen Laing, Newcastle University)**.

Genuine participatory research has been key.
The key to research in this area is understanding the voice of the individual and the way that they participate in their community. Participatory research has enabled researchers and partner organisations to respond quickly to new challenges. All of our researchers

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[11] Nuffield Foundation. (2020). *The most disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be engaged in remote learning*. https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/disadvantaged-pupils-less-engaged-in-remote-learning>

engage with these methods, although in different ways, with social science researchers theorising about them by working closely with communities. This approach is key to developing the most appropriate and sustainable interventions in communities. Going forward: we will need to develop guidance and understanding of how this works best.

> *The sustained relationships with schools, forming out of lockdown, meant that the British Library could consult teachers when shaping future digital campaigns (launching January), coming out of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education's Reflecting Realities report (2020) on diversity in children's books.* **Cecily Chua, Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers Volunteer**

Looking forward.

Like many engaging with their communities, researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences have sometimes struggled to keep up with the demands triggered by the changes associated with lockdown. They have done relatively well documenting the changes and especially the effects that lockdown has had on vulnerable communities. But, in the future, the key will be in the analysis of what builds resilience in communities, not just from time-limited interventions, but from sustainable changes to the way that community members support one another. It would be valuable to understand which organisations – and partner-researcher relationships – were able to innovate and why. We also need a better understanding of the network of relationships (from charities to voluntary agencies to Galleries, Libraries and Museums to universities) that support children and young people; the value of participatory research; the value of creative arts to well-being and life chances; and a re-balancing of digital opportunities: we need data science, yes, but we also need basic digitisation of resources and digital literacy.

Finally, we make a number of recommendations for taking these debates forward based on this 'dive' into the experiences of our respondents and the belief that the experience of the pandemic calls for some bold new thinking.

5. Recommendations

For local organisations

The solutions to the problems thrown up by COVID-19 are, in many ways, similar to those which come out of other crises. Communities need to come together to find their own solutions. Asset-based approaches are common in public health but need to be used more widely and then compared and it should be required that they include the arts and humanities. It is unlikely that one size will fit all. There is likely to be a need for financial support of some kind but this need not be great and funders can readily catalyse this sort of activity. But key from our perspective is that these local innovations are evaluated to test their value and, where appropriate, good practice is shared.

Good local policy is ideally informed by data collected in conversation with teams who work across sectors (health, education, voluntary etc) as well as from literature reviews of the best existing research. In practice, much of the data upon which decisions are made is retrospective and only as relevant as it is meaningful to the people on the

ground. In practice, data created by the arts and humanities is where regeneration starts.

When it comes to children and young people schools are central to any offer and they should be actively engaged promoting the necessary adaptations in collaboration with their community partners.

For the research community

Arts and humanities and social sciences need to work together to address both the immediate and the longer-term societal challenges for children and young people. Our findings suggest both that arts and humanities research can be very responsive to community need; they can provide texture to people's experiences which may be a challenge for other types of research.

The voice of the community needs to be embedded in research if innovations coming out of those interventions are to 'work' in the sense of being both acceptable and sustainable. Similarly, we need to understand the impact of collaborations on the ground, and the best methods to both understand and evaluate their 'success'

We need to put flesh on the bones of the statement that interdisciplinary research is needed to address social challenges. We broadly agree with the statement but argue that we need to engage more with what that should look like in practice to realise the promise of positive change from collaborative academic research in the short and longer term.

For the funders of research

There is a need for solution-focused research prefaced on the identification of problems by local communities

Genuinely interdisciplinary research needs to be commissioned looking at creative solutions to local needs combining the best of arts, humanities and social science approaches.

For government agencies

Large scale, top down, solutions to local problems brought about by the pandemic, as with any other crisis, are probably not the solution to helping communities adapt to change. There is an urgent need for a local articulation of problems arising from the pandemic and universities, charities and local community arts organisations are well placed to facilitate this process with the necessary support coming from national government agencies. There is no connected coordination of this activity at local level, and there are likely significant disparities in terms of capacity across the UK. There is no well-developed data available to allow local comparisons.

APPENDIX 1 - CONTRIBUTORS

Academics consulted: Alison Atkinson-Phillips, Bruce Davenport, Greta Defeyter, Silvie Fisch, Matthew Grenby, Sarah Hill, Kathryn Hollingsworth, Peter Hopkins, Karen Laing, James Law, Janice McLaughlin, Ann McNulty, Katie Markham, Sinead Morrissey, Lucy Pearson, Michael Richardson, Karen Sands-O'Connor, Paul Seedhouse, Alison Shaw, Hazel Sheeky Bird, Heather Smith, James Stanfield, Liz Todd, Helen Wareham, Sarah Winkler-Reid, Larry Zazzo.

Partners consulted: British Library (Anna Lobbenburg), Children North East (Michele Deans), North East Child Poverty Commission (Amanda Bailey), City of Dreams (Ben Dickenson), Seven Stories (John Beattie and Sarah Cotton), Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation (Ruth Brock and Michael Tucker).

APPENDIX 2 – FURTHER MATERIAL

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