

RESTOKE SMALL FOLK

Final Report. June 2021





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RESTOKE SMALL FOLK is a project that aimed to form and deliver a children's dance company for 5-11 year-olds in Stoke-on-Trent. With an emphasis on creative child-led dance, this project provided opportunities for children to participate in dance workshops and performance work, facilitated by professional dance-artists as well as guest-artists working in other disciplines. This report charts the progress made during year 2 of a 2 year programme. Covid-19 meant that the delivery of Restoke Small Folk was moved online. The resulting underspend on venue hire, plus core-funding from Esmee Fairbairn, has meant that Restoke extended the programme by 6-months.

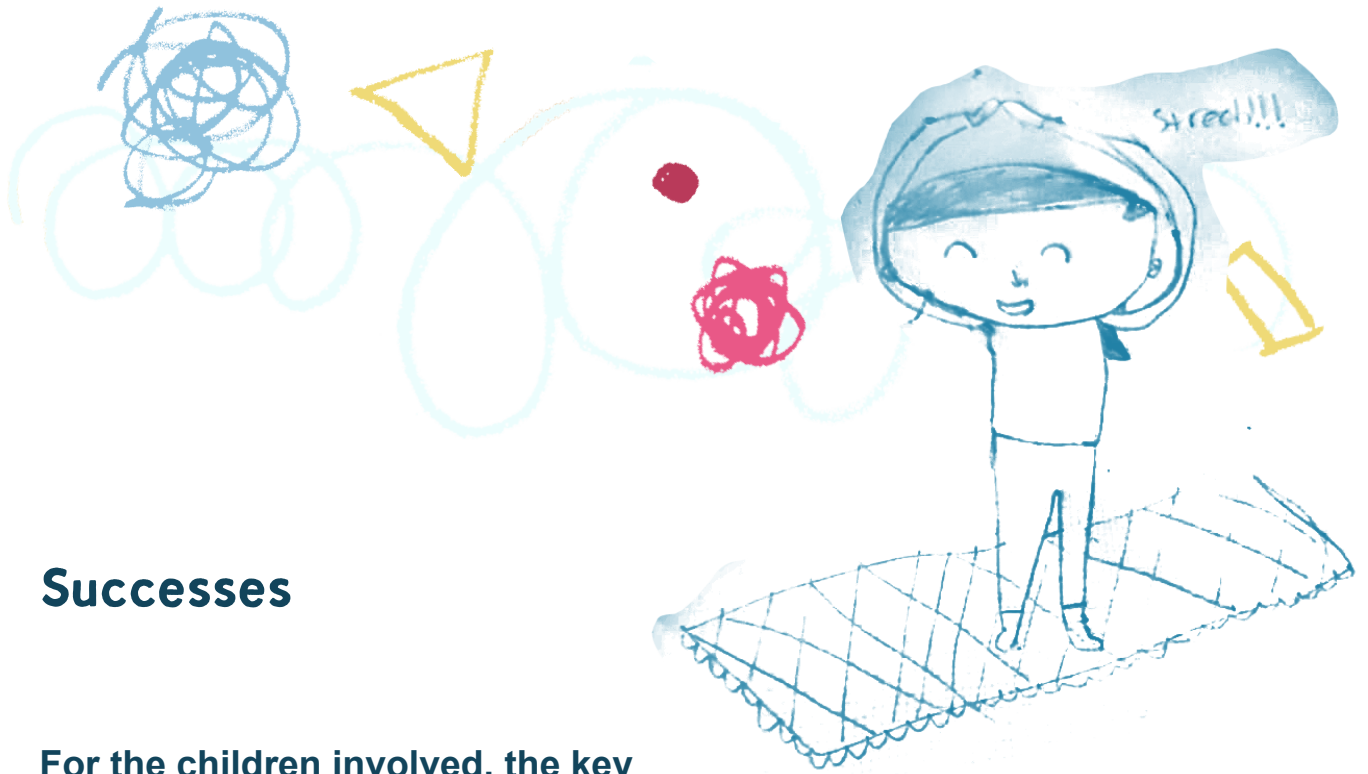
1 Aims and Achievements

As outlined in the interim report, Restoke and collaborators spent an exciting and successful first year developing the Restoke Small Folk core group, co-creating performances and trying out other art forms. Restoke started 2020 with a year of exciting collaborations planned...

In 2019, Restoke applied for core funding from Esmee Fairbairn, which was granted in February 2020. This marked the beginning of Restoke's hunt for their own workspace, which would ensure the Restoke Small Folk (as well as other Restoke project participants) would have a suitable, secure and reliable venue in which to create and collaborate together.

Outside of the Small Folk sessions, Restoke were starting to action their performance project MOTHER, which would have involved a cross-over with the children's company, bringing together Restoke's professional performance work and Restoke Small Folk for the first time.

Unfortunately, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, most of their plans had to be canceled and instead came 15 months of adapting to challenges and embracing online delivery. Despite these challenges, Restoke have managed to maintain a core group of members meeting online throughout this difficult time, and have still achieved many of the aims of the programme for all involved.



Successes

For the children involved, the key achievements that the project met were:



Developing skills and confidence in creative dance and performance through an emphasis on developing individual movement languages.



Feeling ownership over the Restoke Small Folk company and its future direction.

For Restoke, the key achievements that the project met were:



Having 15 children aged 5-11 participating in weekly creative classes (although these numbers reduced to between 7-10 during the pandemic).



Having engaged children who would not usually participate in extra-curricular arts activities.



Having more young voices present in the development of Restoke's work.

Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Restoke Small Folk programme, overall, has still been successful in bringing children together from a broad range of ages and backgrounds to find commonality, creativity and joy together.

“We have been inspired by how creating a core group of confident and creative young people influences and supports newcomers to the group. This funded period has proved to us how important it is to have groups where children can find their own creative voice, be heard and work together. Particularly vital for children in Stoke-on-Trent is the removal of the economic barrier to taking part which means we have reached children who do not have easy access to the arts. This group has become a part of our core activity and will be built into all Restoke’s further plans and funding endeavors.”

- Clare, Restoke Co-Director.

Case Study 1- Inclusivity & Belonging

Hugo and Guilio

Hugo and Guilio joined the Restoke Small Folk in November 2020, after their parents found out about the sessions on Restoke’s social media. Guilio joined first but was in a ‘bubble’ with Hugo and his mum, so Hugo was often at their house and they joined in together.

In March 2021, Hugo started joining in each week from his own house. Both participants have settled in quickly and become part of the group despite never having met in real life. They are confident to ask questions, contribute ideas and talk about themselves. Hugo initiated the idea for the Restoke Small Folk Talent show, which was his highlight of the online sessions.

Challenges

There were aims outlined in Restoke's application that were more challenging to achieve in the final year of the programme.

Performance making

“The work of co-creation, in our experience with adults, takes a lot of time and trust building. Whilst we have been able to create more democracy and shared decision making during our online sessions in 2020, we have not been able to fully explore co-creating performance with children, but it is still something we are committed to in the legacy of this work.” - Clare, Restoke Co-Director

Testing and evidencing approaches to co-creation with children

With the environment for successful co-creation unavailable to Restoke for the majority of the remaining programme, evaluating and evidencing approaches (beyond what was achieved in the interim report) has been difficult. Again, this is something Restoke is committed to in the legacy of the work, and may prove to be, with continued engagement and ongoing reflection, a valuable insight into the effects of the pandemic on children's creativity and confidence.

More on this in the Evaluation Methodology section.



2 Activities

Starting on the 11th January 2020, Restoke delivered 8 sessions in person with 21 children. They paused for the first lockdown, after delivering the final in-person session on 7th March 2020.

Restoke started delivering sessions on Zoom on the 29th May 2020 and delivered 51 sessions to a total of 16 children aged 5-11, with an average of 7-10 attending each week. This amounts to a total of 59 hours of contact time from January 2020 to June 2021.

Part of the programme included bringing in guest artists. Restoke organised 2 guest sessions online and one remote creative activity:



21/11/20

Visual Artist Rebecca Kremer

who led an illustration workshop called 'Christmas Wishes' focusing on the Small Folks' hopes for Christmas and the New Year after a challenging year.



20/12/20

Filament Theatre Company

designed a creative Christmas gift which was sent to members of the group through the post - The Cherry Coloured Coat story-pack was created to fill the gap left by Christmas performances and theatre experiences for children in the winter of the pandemic. The story pack was filled with tasks and creative activities for them to explore alongside links to the online illustrated audio play.

23/01/21

Dance Artist Pei Tong

delivered a Chinese Dance workshop. This idea was met with huge enthusiasm from the Small Folk, as half of the group are Chinese. They enjoyed the opportunity to share their cultural activities and begin to prepare for Chinese New Year, learning a dance which the group could practice and repeat in February around the New Year.



Year 2 Delivery and Attendance



8

In person
sessions
delivered

51

Zoom sessions
delivered

2

Guest sessions
delivered

59

Hours of contact
time

38

Children aged
5 to 11 attended

7-10

Children attended
sessions regularly

3 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology of Restoke Small Folk focused on capturing the children's responses by engaging them in creative opportunities to feedback on their experiences of the sessions and reflect on their hopes for the development of the company.

Engaging an external evaluator ensured a more objective response than if this was captured solely by the workshop leaders. However the workshop leaders have fed into the evaluation, through taking an ethnographic approach to research, noticing individual journeys, successes and challenges which arose, as well as the collective experiences of the group. Workshop leaders used journals to write up key observations after each session.

The external evaluator was guided by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and Shared Intelligence Pilot Study Report on Quality Principles (Sharp & Lee, 2015), implementing creative evaluation methods designed to platform the perspectives of children and young people. The Quality Principles investigated in year 1 included authenticity, inclusivity, active involvement, belonging and personal progression. In this period there was strong evidence to suggest these principals were being attained, and that creativity, confidence and ownership of the group was developing well. In year 2, evidence of the continuation of this development was overshadowed by the significant changes that had to be made to the programme.

Good quality reflective sessions and observation of group dynamics was greatly limited by the remote nature of the programme.

Evidencing the development of co-creation approaches (the crux of the year 2 evaluation) was not possible. Restoke found that the environment created by remote, online sessions was not conducive to the deep level of group and individual engagement required to achieve this aim.

By the end of the programme, Many of the Year 1 participants were no longer attending online sessions, since in person provision for young people had resumed by this point, making it difficult to chart personal progression over time.





As in year 1, facilitators Clare and Georgina continued to observe group and individual creative journeys, taking time at the end of sessions to debrief and discuss any developments they noticed. Formal group reflection and evaluation was limited to 1x1 hour session with the Small Folk, in which the group took part in remote, interactive tasks aimed at evidencing the achievement of some of Restoke's key aims for the programme, as well as capturing the children's' opinions about the quality of the programme in the context of the pandemic.

Raw data and approaches used can be found in the appendix.

4 Process

Venue

Venues have always been a barrier to Restoke's work, and the beginning of January 2020 marked a second change of venue as their space, All Saints Church Hall, closed down. Restoke was able to use the dance studio at The Mitchell Arts Centre (which was their original choice of location). The Mitchell Arts Centre committed to Saturday mornings, but only up until the Spring.

"During the past 15 months, even when we could have resumed in-person activity with Restoke Small Folk, none of the venues we work with have been open, and alternative venues were not able to accommodate new groups." - Clare Reynolds, Restoke Co-Director

In February 2020 Restoke were successful in achieving core funding from Esmee Fairbarin Foundation, and one of their commitments over the next 2 years was to find their own venue. This has come in the shape of The Ballroom at Fenton Town Hall – a former civic building in Stoke-on-Trent. In late 2020 Restoke acquired capital funding from Arts Council England to restore the first floor Ballroom back into a community venue, after it had been used as a Magistrates Court for 50 years. Plans and opportunities for Restoke Small Folk at The Ballroom will be detailed later in the report.

Covid19

Restoke's biggest challenge has obviously been the Covid-19 pandemic, and the organisation could never have foreseen how long it would affect all their work for. After hoping that the initial lockdown would just mean a pause in activity, Restoke realised the severity of the situation and set up workshops on Zoom.

The move to online delivery limited the possibilities of creative dance, particularly the opportunities for group work, contact, social bonding and performance. However, the delivering team maintained the ethos of Restoke Small Folk- which was to build skills and confidence in creative dance, share ideas and skills, and to encourage input into the direction of the company and the work.

Ultimately, the group lost core members who didn't attend online sessions, some tried and didn't enjoy the format, others Restoke never heard from. However the company did also gain new members, who quickly bonded and have become confident members of the group despite the fact they have never met each other in person (see case study 1).

It is only in the last month (May/June '21) that numbers have dropped to 2-3 households per week. Restoke attribute this to good weather, lockdown easing, and in-person alternative provision for children happening elsewhere.

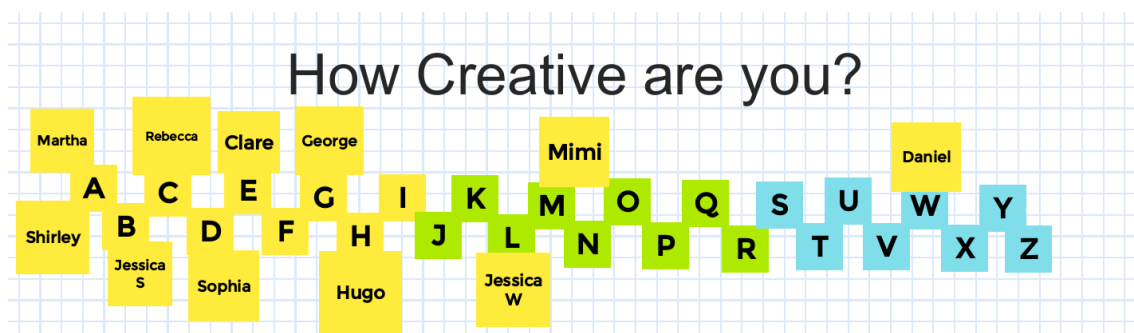


“It was really nice to [meet up in person] because I like dancing, but covid was bad so I thought it was sad because covid can spread really fast” - Small Folk Member

Case Study 2- Digital Barriers

Daniel

Daniel is one of the youngest members of the group. He started attending sessions in September 2019 with his sister Rebecca, and both settled in quickly. Daniel displayed a natural gift for moving with great freedom and creativity, and enjoyed dancing. However, when the sessions moved onto Zoom in 2020, he drifted away from the group within the first two months. Daniel’s sister Rebecca stayed an active participant but Daniel found the online sessions difficult and was choosing to play instead. Daniel returned to the group for the evaluation session and, in one task, marked his creativity (on a scale of A-Z) as ‘W’- the lowest of the group. In another task he said he was too shy to demonstrate his favorite way to move. Daniel’s story may point to the effects of the pandemic on children’s feelings of creativity and confidence, particularly if they haven’t felt comfortable to participate in group activity online.



5 Outcomes

“We are proud that we maintained a group online for over a year. That we could offer the stability of our weekly sessions and a place for joyful dancing in a difficult year.”

New Members

The group welcomed 6 new children during the pandemic, 3 of whom have become committed members. Some have joined in from different places, one member has moved away from the area and is still able to join in from their new home, another is currently living in Dubai and is still joining in each week.

Ownership

The facilitators have attempted to create a democratic online space where the members of the group made decisions and led aspects of the workshops.

Examples include:

Deciding on themes Unlike in the in-person sessions, unless working on a performance, the online sessions became themed, meaning members could help choose and suggest themes for each week. It also meant Restoke could play with the fun features of Zoom, such as backgrounds and filters and also opportunities for games and quizzes which the group love.

Leading aspects of the workshop Some members of the group planned and delivered warm-ups, cool downs and creative tasks which they worked on between the sessions. Others planned quizzes or scavenger hunts for their peers.



Talent Show performances The group expressed an interest in doing a talent show where they could share their other skills. Restoke held a Small Folk Talent show where everyone shared something they loved doing including playing a musical instrument, singing, sharing drawings, showing lego and Minecraft builds and hula hooping.

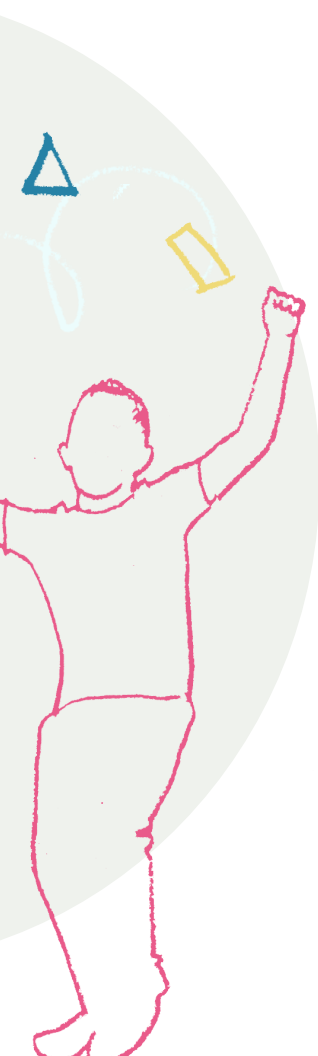
Connection

The Small Folk stayed connected during a time of disconnect. They have celebrated birthdays together, shared home schooling challenges, marked landmarks of the pandemic such as returning to school and seeing friends and family.

Fundamental to this has been the establishment of the core group before the pandemic and the continued participation from some of this core group. Their confidence and familiarity in creative movement, improvisation and sharing their ideas has inspired new members of the group and kept the sessions lively and interesting for everyone.

The Restoke Small Folks' ideas for when they can meet up again:

More dancing
Haunted Ballroom Performance
Dance Battles
Christmas and Easter performances
Invite a big audience to watch us perform



6 Plans



Restoke Small Folk at The Ballroom

As Restoke move into a new venue, their main focus for the first year is to engage people from the local community of Fenton. Fenton is one of the 6 towns of Stoke-on-Trent and is locally known as the 'forgotten town'. It is ranked in the bottom 15% of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. By taking on this space inside a former Town Hall, Restoke will be able to reach some of the people least likely to have access to creative activities and social infrastructure. Restoke plan to work closely with schools and community organisations to ensure their work is embedded in the community, and that everyone feels able to access The Ballroom.

In June 2021 Clare & Georgina began delivering weekly creative dance sessions with years 3 & 4 at Our Ladys Primary School- the closest school to Fenton Town Hall. These sessions are an opportunity for Restoke to build close links with the school and meet children and families in the immediate vicinity in preparation for Restoke Small Folk resuming in The Ballroom.

Upcoming plans for Restoke Small Folk and Restoke's work with children and young people include

Throughout August 2021

Summer creative sessions

During August Restoke will be running workshops in creative dance and creative writing.

August 28-29th 2021

Children's Weekend Take Over

Over the August bank holiday weekend Restoke will work with artist Megan Clark-Bagnall to gather children's feedback and ideas about the future of The Ballroom, ending in a celebration event.

September 2021

Restoke Small Folk

In September weekly sessions will resume on Saturdays 10-11. To continue to engage local children/families Restoke will also run an after-school dance club at Clarice Cliffe School in Fenton.

This work is funded by the Co-Creating Change programme (Battersea Arts Centre), which is focused on consultation around The Ballroom, using Restoke's methodology of co-creation to involve people of all ages in shaping the future and potential uses of the venue.



Long term

Restoke's long term plans include:

'School in Residence' programme - offering one Fenton school per year the opportunity to be Restoke's School in Residence at The Ballroom. This will include every child in the school getting at least one term of creative dance sessions, Creative days in The Ballroom, and a 'take-over' week/fortnight in July.

RISE - As mentioned in the original application and interim report Restoke are planning to focus on their work with children and young people to co-create a performance, RISE, about young people's aspirations for the city. In conversations with people in Fenton, including MPs, Councillors and teachers, low-aspiration has been identified as an issue for children and schools in Fenton. Therefore this mission feels more important than ever. Once the Ballroom is opening and running Restoke will begin fundraising for this important work.

7 Finance

Restoke Small Folk final spending

Item	Notes	Rate (£)	Units	Total	As of 27th July 2021	Spending notes
INCOME						
Fees:						
Session fees	By donation or 'pay what you can'.			1080	431.1	Donations lower than expected.
Tickets for sharing event	1 sharing event per year, suggested donation of £2.50 per audience member	2.50	68	170	0	No opportunity for sharing event.
Grants:						
Aziz Foundation	Application successful, funding confirmed April 2018			2000	2000	
Ragdoll	80%			12940	10352	Received
TOTAL INCOME				16190	15371.51	Final amount received (including Ragdoll final instalment)
EXPENDITURE						
Artists:						
Lead artist	4 taster sessions, 72 weekly sessions, 2 planning sessions, 2 evaluation sessions, 2 performance sessions.	50	82	4100	4095	
Assistant artist	4 taster sessions, 72 weekly sessions, 2 planning sessions, 2 evaluation sessions, 2 performance sessions.	25	82	2050	3480	More was spent on this role as it was much more integral to the running of the sessions. Responsibilities meant we paid a slightly higher rate than planned
Guest artists	1 guest artist per half-term, 6 half-terms per year	50	12	600	530	
Resources:						
Space hire for sessions	36 sessions per year	20	72	1440	1011.38	Space hire & Zoom subscription
Costumes for sharing events	15 costumes each year	10	30	300	60	Underspend due to sharing events not taking place.
Materials for sessions	£50 per half-term	50	12	600	498.85	This total also included the cost of repairing the assistant artist's laptop which she needed to deliver online sessions for us.
Marketing:						
Design work for branding/flyers, promotion and PR.	1w 3d	150	10	1500	1346.28	
Print costs				100	0	Included in marketing costs above.
Evaluation:						
External evaluator	3 days observation/interview time per year plus 3 days report writing time	150	9	1350	1125	A little less spent than planned. Lack of in-person sessions meant less input was needed.
Documentation - photography	1 half-day per term plus 2 sharing events	75	8	600	300	Underspend due to in-person session not taking place.
Documentation - film	2 half-days per year plus 2 sharing events	125	6	750	0	Not needed.
Evaluation report print				100	0	Not needed
Management:						
Project Manager	4 set-up days, 1 day per half-term, plus 2 sharing events	150	18	2700	2925	A little more spent on this role as more time was needed here.
TOTAL EXPENDITURE				16190	15371.51	Final amount spent



8 Images

Due to safeguarding procedure during the pandemic, online sessions were not recorded, and the evaluation session was recorded for internal purposes only. Restoke felt that this was appropriate considering the children were often dialing in from their homes and bedrooms. All photographs from year 1 were taken by project photographer Jenny Harper, can be viewed and downloaded via the following link. Most photographs are cleared for reproduction, please check individual photos with Restoke before using.

<https://gallery.jennyharperphotography.com/restokesmallfolk/>

Bibliography

Sharp, C. and Lee, B. (2015). Using Quality Principles in Work for, by, and with Children and Young People: Results of a Pilot Study (Draft Final Report). Slough: NFER.
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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/loD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf

Appendix

Measuring feelings of creativity

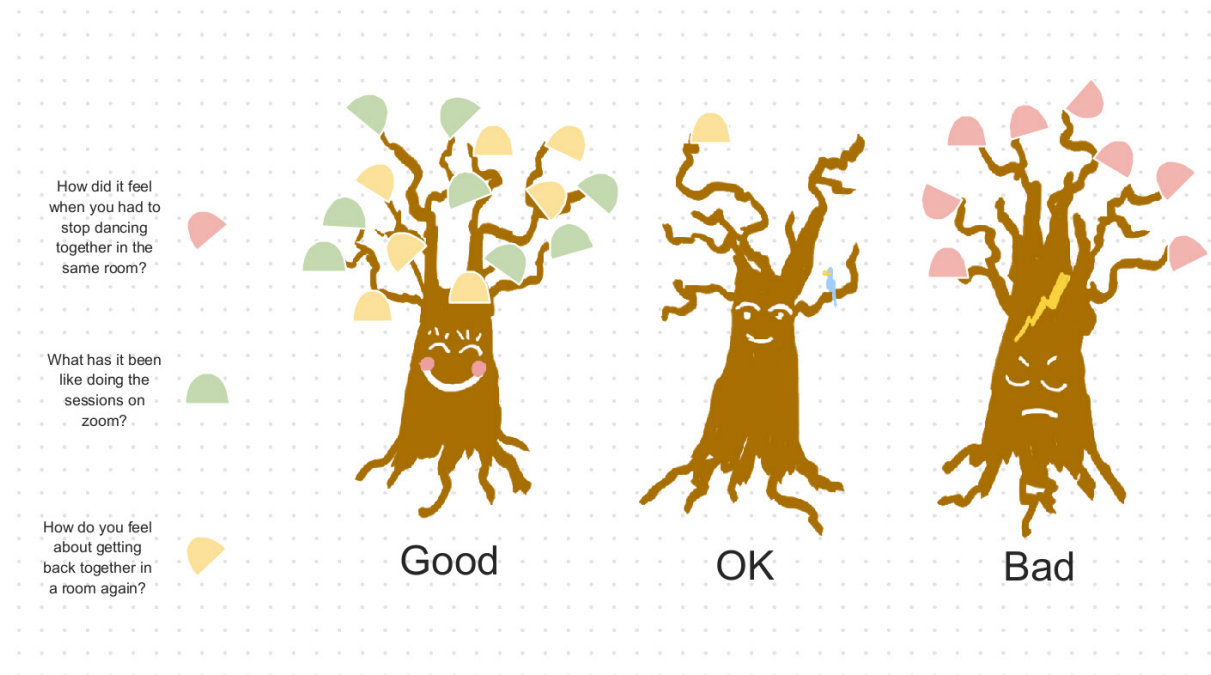
Following the guest artist workshop by poet Gabriella Gay on letters of the alphabet in year 1, the external evaluator used the alphabet in an exercise to measure how creative members of the Small Folk Company felt at this early stage of the programme. The Children were asked to think about how creative they felt they were, and write their name on the letter they felt represented their level of creativity, 'A' being the most creative a person can be, and 'Z' being the least. '. The activity was repeated remotely in year 2. Fewer participants were involved

Raw Data

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
Year 1	7	2	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Year 2	2	1	1	1		0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	V. High					High					Medium					Low					V. Low					
Year 1	75%					20%					0%					0%					5%					
Year 2	62.5%					12.5%					12.5%					0%					12.5%					

Measuring feelings about the past year

During the evaluation workshop, children were asked to comment on how they felt about what had happened to the Restoke Small Folk sessions over the course of the pandemic. They answered by putting leaves on 'good, OK and bad' trees and were asked to elaborate.



Raw Data

Q1

How did it feel when you had to stop dancing together in the same room?

Good: 0 OK: 0 Bad: 8

Q2

What has it been like doing the sessions on zoom?

Good: 8 OK: 0 Bad: 0

Q3

How do you feel about getting back together in a room again?

Good: 7 OK: 1 Bad: 0

The future of Restoke Small Folk

In the evaluation session, the children were asked to help the evaluator finish an illustrated story of Restoke Small Folk. This meant imagining what was going to happen with the company in the future. This question was designed to gauge their sense of ownership of the direction of the company, and their sense of agency and continuity.

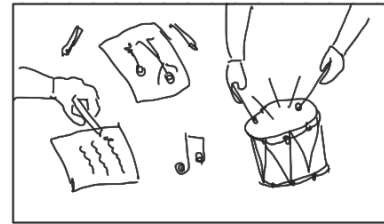
The Story of Restoke Small Folk



2 years ago, the Restoke Small Folk met for the first time at All Saints Church Hall to be creative together



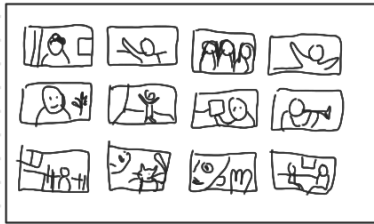
They did a lot of moving and dancing together with Clare and Georgina



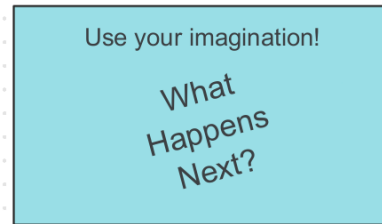
They did other creative things too, like drawing, writing and drumming with other artists.



They even performed a dance they had created at a festival! (In the pouring rain!)



Then for 1 whole year, they had to stay at home. But the Small Folk still got together online



Then, when it was safe to get back together...

Raw Data

- More dancing
- Haunted Ballroom Performance
- Dance Battles
- Christmas and Easter performances
- Invite a big audience to watch them perform

RESTOKE

