



# SHARING OUR LIVES



## EVALUATION REPORT

JANUARY 2024



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## **Executive Summary**

*Sharing our Lives* is a story-centred, community driven project which collected and shared stories of migration to and around Thurrock, Essex. The project drew on Together Productions' expertise in delivering music-based projects which bring together the community through participation, collaboration, and creativity and an active interest in the collection and sharing of migration stories. *Sharing our Lives* is Together Productions' first National Lottery Heritage Funded project, where the team explored cultural heritage, memories, and migration stories through story sharing, oral history, visual arts, and music.

A total of 1992 people have been involved in the project as participants, story gatherers, story sharers, visitors, audience members, or collaborators. Although all project work is complete, there will be several elements of the project which will continue to engage a wide variety of audiences such as the displaying of artworks in community settings, the depositing of recorded oral histories at both Essex Record Office and Thurrock Museum for posterity (where interviewee permission allows), and the creation of a Story Sharing Toolkit which will sit on the [Sharing our Lives website](#) as a legacy resource for those wishing to collect stories. Larger project collaborators and participants include:

- Students at the Gateway Learning Community, across 5 schools (aged 9-11)
- Girl's Empowerment Initiative members (<18) and an adult group, comprising of some of the Girls' mothers
- A local young Gospel Choir
- Singers at Thames Opera Company
- Grays Gurdwara

Together Productions engaged a total of 13 creative and heritage practitioners throughout the project, including musicians, lyricists, historians and filmmakers. The project was also overseen by a Steering Group formed of local stakeholders, experts and partners who guided the formation of the project at the beginning and took part in debriefing activities at the end of the project.

This evaluation is drawn from analysis conducted by an independent evaluator, who, prior to this project, was not affiliated with Together Productions. This is to reduce any bias in the evaluation process. Methods used include individual and group surveys, feedback interviews and activity observation. It aimed to be non-extractive and non-intrusive to participants' journeys through the project.

*“I believe that sharing our stories is one of the most powerful things we can do. It can help us to heal, connect with others and inspire change. I encourage others to share their stories if they feel comfortable doing so”*

Sharing our Lives Oral History Interviewee

**Logic Model** – Developed August 2022

The National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes that have guided this logic model are as follows:

- a) *A wider range of people will be involved in heritage*
- b) *Heritage will be identified and better explained*
- c) *People will have developed skills*
- d) *People will have learned about heritage, leading to a change in ideas & actions*
- e) *People will have greater wellbeing*

These are referenced in the logic model below.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
<p>£99,478 investment from the National Lottery Heritage Fund</p> <p>£5544.80 in volunteer contributions from the Steering Group and Heritage Champions (464 hours @ London Living Wage £11.95 per hour)</p> <p>£8500 in in-kind contributions of venue hire for workshops, rehearsals and events, loan of recording booth and audio recorder, Gateway Academy Trust staff time, Anglo Asiatic</p>	<p>12 Heritage Champions will be recruited from the local community and trained in oral history recording</p>	<p>12 people will have new oral history interviewing skills and have a broader awareness of spoken heritage and aural tradition (c, d)</p> <p>Heritage Champions will be recruited from diverse backgrounds and from groups that do not traditionally engage with heritage (a, c, d)</p>	<p>Awareness, learning, skills, knowledge, motivations</p>	<p>Actions, behaviours, practice, decisions, policies</p>	<p>Larger scale changes: at an economic, social, environmental level</p>
			<p>Heritage Champions will have greater confidence and communication skills, leading to them telling others about oral history and heritage (a, b, c, d, e)</p> <p>A wider range of people's stories will be preserved and shared for the first time (a, b, d, e)</p>	<p>Heritage Champions will have greater confidence and communication skills, leading to them telling others about oral history and heritage (a, b, c, d, e)</p> <p>A wider range of people's stories will be preserved and shared for the first time (a, b, d, e)</p>	<p>Intangible heritage, such as stories and memories, will be celebrated and recorded throughout the project, leading to a change in ideas about what heritage is (a, b, d, e)</p> <p>Contributing to a local heritage initiative will increase the connection between people and place in Thurrock (a, b, d, e)</p>

Arts & Heritage Alliance staff time				
<p>Expertise from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project Manager</li> <li>- Project Coordinator</li> <li>- Project Producer</li> <li>- Together Productions staff</li> <li>- Oral Historian</li> <li>- Steering Group Members</li> <li>- Workshop leaders</li> <li>- Engagement Pathways Coordinator</li> <li>- Graphic Facilitator</li> <li>- Digital Engagement Producer</li> <li>- Filmmaker</li> <li>- Photographer</li> <li>- Musical Director</li> <li>- Musicians</li> <li>- Writer</li> <li>- Archivist</li> <li>- Transcriber</li> </ul>	<p>15-20 new oral histories of people living and working in Thurrock will be recorded and archived</p>	<p>New stories will be recorded for the first time, contributing to a new archive relating to the local history of Thurrock (a, b, d)</p>	<p>An archive will be created which will be used for future research into Thurrock's history, prompting other stories to be preserved for the future (a, b, d)</p>	
<p>Additional stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thurrock Council</li> <li>- Gateway Learning Community Tryst</li> <li>- Tilbury on the Thames Trust</li> </ul>	<p>A Steering Group will be created and engaged throughout the project, made up of local community stakeholders who will oversee the delivery of the project and how stories are shared</p>	<p>Group members will develop governance and leadership skills throughout the project (a, c)</p> <p>Connections will be formed between local individuals and organisations through their involvement in the project (a, e)</p>	<p>Collective responsibility relating to the project and the stories recorded and shared will lead to an increase in connectivity and wellbeing within the Steering Group members (e)</p>	<p>The model of involving a Steering Group will become more prevalent within heritage projects, as organisations work with a wider range of stakeholders to ensure that projects engage with and are representative of local communities (a, b, c, d, e)</p>
	<p>An education programme will be delivered to local primary and secondary school students and their families, with a toolkit for future engagement produced</p>	<p>Local school students and their families will learn about previously untold stories as a result of the project (a, b, d)</p>	<p>Students and their families will learn about stories from the past together, which may spark intergenerational learning and conversations within</p>	<p>The resources provided will lead to a shift in how the past is taught in schools, as schools engage students with heritage through creative activities</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Essex British Red Cross</li> <li>- Anglo Asiatic Arts &amp; Heritage Alliance</li> <li>- Thurrock Museum</li> </ul> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audio recording equipment</li> <li>- Event and rehearsal space</li> <li>- Workshop space in schools</li> </ul>		<p>Students will learn how to record and display historical narratives around migration and community, developing their creative interpretation skills (a, b, c)</p>	<p>families and communities about heritage (a, b, d, e)</p> <p>Students and their families will also share their own stories, perhaps for the first time, and contribute to an archive of local stories for future use (a, b, d, e)</p>	<p>such as music or drama (a, b, d)</p>
	<p>12 creative workshops will be delivered for participants including asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, which will engage them with history, migration stories, curating a digital archive, exhibitions, and composing new songs</p>	<p>People who haven't engaged with heritage previously will get involved with creative workshops exploring the past (a, b, c, d)</p> <p>Connections will be formed between service users and service providers during workshops (a, b, e)</p>	<p>Social isolation and loneliness will be tackled through a series of workshops where relationships and trust will build over time (a, d, e)</p>	<p>These target groups will become a priority engagement group for heritage and arts organisations as a result of the project (a, d, e)</p> <p>Ideas and beliefs about asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, that can sometimes be negative, will be challenged and changed as a result of their long-term involvement with the project and heritage (a, b, d, e)</p>

	<p>The newly recorded heritage will be displayed at final sharing events to coincide with Windrush 75 celebrations</p>	<p>Contributors to the project will see the new stories displayed and showcased creatively, allowing them to feel part of 'something bigger' and learn about other people's stories (a, b, d, e)</p> <p>Non-contributors will learn about stories from around the community (a, b, d, e)</p> <p>Linking with a number of Windrush 75 celebrations will reach a wide audience who will learn about local history and community heritage (a, b, d)</p>	<p>Exhibitions showcasing local heritage in the area may become more popular as a result of the project, encouraging more people to get involved with heritage (a, b, d, e)</p>	<p>Heritage and social community events may become a priority for the various project stakeholders and local authorities in the area (a, b, d, e)</p>
<b>Assumptions</b>		<b>External factors</b>		
<p>Partners and stakeholders will support with delivery of activities</p> <p>Recruitment of consultants is successful</p> <p>Recruitment of participants is successful</p> <p>Successful partnerships with other community organisations are made and sustained throughout the project</p>		<p>Risk of potential Covid-19 restrictions coming back into force throughout 2022-23</p> <p>Costs of materials and contractors rising due to the impact of the cost of living crisis may impact project budgeting</p>		

## Activity Analysis

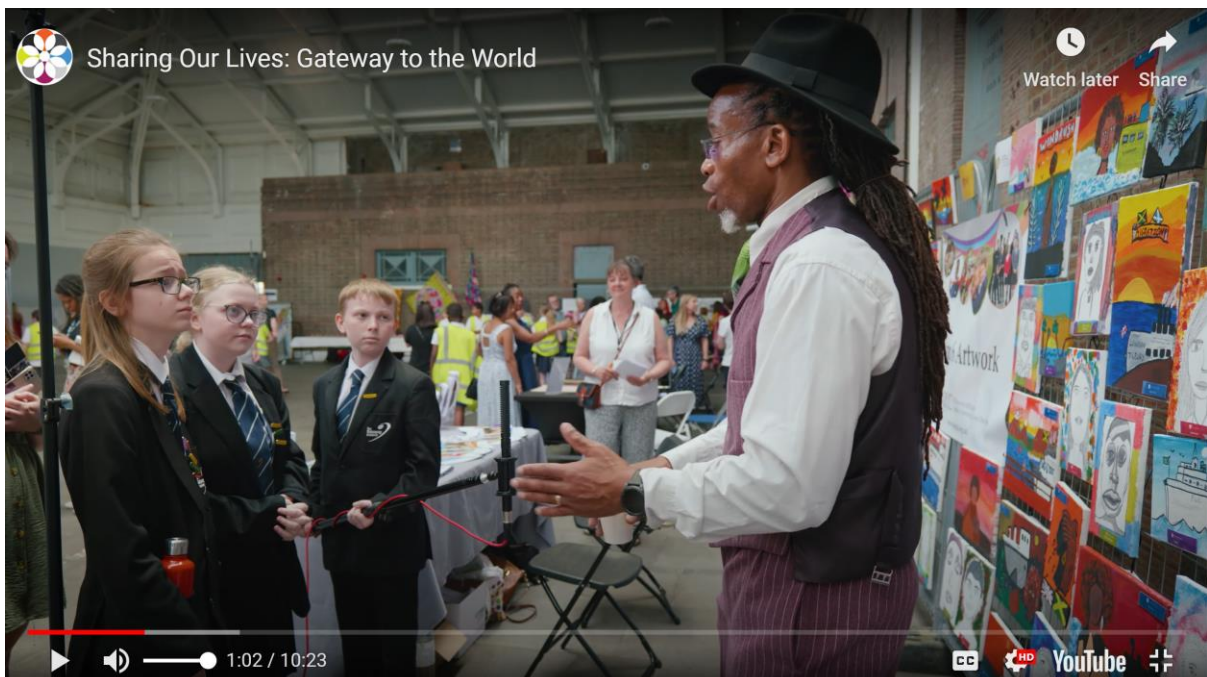
### 1. FIND & RECORD – Heritage Champions

#### Outline

Throughout the project, a total of 77 members of the community were recruited as ‘Heritage Champions’ who were to FIND and RECORD migration stories relating to Thurrock. These people came from a wide range of backgrounds and were of all ages. They were then trained in oral history interviewing, story gathering, filmmaking, and video editing by specialist consultants who were engaged on the project. The Heritage Champions were embedded in the project throughout, activating and collecting stories from the community which contributed to the project outputs.

Approximately 45 Year 5, 6, & 7 students from Gateway Learning Community (comprising of Tilbury Pioneer Academy, Gateway Primary Free School, Lansdowne Primary Academy, Herringham Primary Academy, and Gateway Secondary Academy) took part in heritage, story collecting, and songwriting workshops and collected stories from people who had migrated to Thurrock. A further 9 students went on to take part in filmmaking workshops and create a film showcasing migration stories, specifically about the arrival of the Empire Windrush at the London International Cruise Terminal in Tilbury. These students visited the Cruise Terminal and explored physical and intangible heritage of the Windrush generation.

32 adults took part in the project as Heritage Champions and underwent training in heritage skills. The Heritage Champions were real community activators and often encouraged friends and family to get involved in the project, this was crucial to the success of the project.







## Successes

The diversity of lived experience and cultural background of the Heritage Champions was a real success of the project. By engaging with the Gateway Learning Community, the project reached a larger number and wider range of students, aging from Year 5 to Year 7, and also supported more teachers to engage with cultural heritage and migration stories as the team worked with a total of 5 schools.

Heritage Champions were recruited from across the community, notably in places of worship, community spaces and online, leading to a real breadth in the experience and knowledge of the participants. When they came together at training sessions, for instance the oral history training session at Grays Gurdwara, inter-cultural socialisation and learning took place.

## Reflections & learning

Unfortunately, some of the project partners listed in the funding application were not able to commit to the project post-funding award for various reasons, including staffing changes and capacity limitations. For instance, the Red Cross were unable to facilitate workshops with refugee and migrant groups as hoped, therefore missing out a key audience from the project.

There were also challenges in working with community groups who had initially committed to the project. Notably, the team lost contact with one group after delivering one session which was owed to staffing changes and funding cuts by the organisation when the team was re-contacted. Extra sessions were able to be delivered with this group to complete their participation.

Although Together Productions is a key player in the Thurrock community and the team are well-connected, it has been difficult to reach out to new partners and collaborators throughout the project. Unfortunately, these changes to staffing, funding and capacity are rarely foreseen, although can have a drastic impact on the ways in which a project develops and is delivered. However, throughout *Sharing our Lives*, the team proactively adapted and the collection of stories recorded throughout the project is richer and more diverse because of this.

There were also some changes relating to the Heritage Champion engagement. This shifted slightly from the original format that all Champions would take part in every element of the project as it became apparent that this wasn't possible for many of them who were volunteering their time to the project. Therefore, the Champions took part in as many or as few elements of the project they could commit to.



Heritage Champion training at Grays Gurdwara, January 2023.

## 2. CURATE – Story Collecting

### Outline

Throughout *Sharing our Lives*, a total of 51 stories have been collected and recorded in several formats; from traditional oral history recordings, to more informal vox-pop recordings, and from being captured by a visual artist, to inspiring a creative response through song lyrics. The diverse format of the collection reflects the diversity of the migration stories to Thurrock and the ways in which people engage with heritage here. Stories were collected in the following ways:

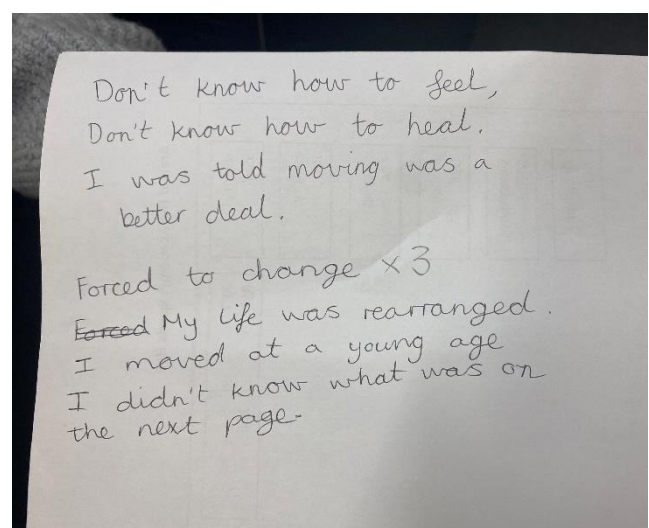
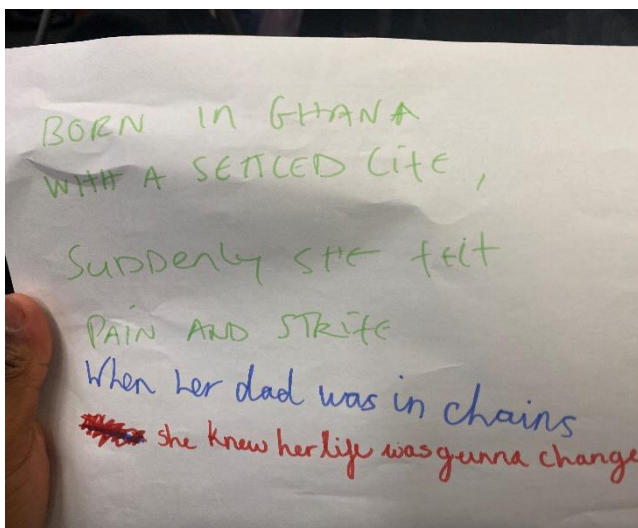
**Oral histories** – The Heritage Champions (both students and non-students) were trained in oral history recording by an oral history specialist and many recorded stories of family,

friends and community members. Together Productions also worked with an Oral Historian to record longer-form interviews with key members of the community. Interviewees in the audio interviews came from a range of backgrounds, including Ghanaian, Jewish, Caribbean, Indian and Brazilian heritage. The team also recorded migration stories from local industry sites, including the former Bata Shoe Factory, now Bata Heritage Centre. Many employees came from Czechoslovakia, as did the company, so recording stories of former workers and their families provided a rich insight into this.

**Films** – Stories were also collected on film by a professional Filmmaker and film cohort of the Heritage Champions. A number of filming days were set up, including at Grays Gurdwara and at Aveley Community Hub, where the Champions recorded video interviews with participants sharing their migration stories. Not only did the Champions learn about heritage skills, they learned and practised digital creation and editing skills throughout several filming and editing sessions.

**Visual art** – A visual artist who specialises in the presentation of people’s lives, memories and stories was engaged as part of the project to illustrate the stories of those involved in the project. They created 4 smaller works from the audio recordings in addition to 1 larger piece. The large artwork is in a mural-style and depicts elements from over 50 of the migration stories which have been shared and recorded, both formally and informally, at events, activities and recordings throughout *Sharing our Lives*.

**Songs** – Music was a key element of this project. Building upon Together Productions’ skillsets and networks, a musical team (formed of a Composer and Lyricist or Rap Artist) was brought in to engage participant groups with heritage through music. The musical team worked with 3 groups: students at the Gateway Learning Community, a young Gospel Choir with members from across Thurrock and singers from Thames Opera Company to co-compose 3 original pieces built from and inspired by stories that project participants had collected.



Song lyrics written by students at the Gateway Learning Community

## Successes

The range of story collecting methods meant that this became accessible and enjoyable for a wider range of participants. This also added extra excitement for interviewees and storytellers, as they were encouraged to share their stories by, in particular, the visual artist. Younger people gravitated towards the filmmaking skills, and 3 younger, non-student Heritage Champions made their own films. One of these films explored the migration of a Ukrainian family to Thurrock following their evacuation from their home due to the ongoing war.

The innovative methods of interpreting migration stories captured the interest and imagination of the young people involved in the project, including those who weren't seen to be contributing much throughout the session. Participants at the Gospel Choir musical workshop commented:

*"I found it fun especially as we learnt about each other and made an amazing song"*

*"I enjoyed everything to be honest, the song writing was also very fun although I can admit I didn't contribute much"*

*"I enjoyed making the song and I can't wait to perform it"*

The *Sharing our Lives* collection represents the wide range of backgrounds of the Thurrock community. Story sharers came from a diverse range of backgrounds and included many religions, cultural backgrounds and migration stories. Many of the stories shared are extremely personal, reflecting the capability of the Heritage Champions and the team to successfully encourage these migration stories to be shared.

## Reflections & learning

As with any story collecting project, it took time to build the connections and trust within the community that's needed to record personal stories. The story collection has continued until the conclusion of the project and there are always more stories to record. Allocation of time to build these relationships and a longer planned story collection phase would help mitigate the challenges that came with this.

The innovative and exciting story-collecting methods were a real asset to *Sharing our Lives*, however, during feedback sessions it was noted that many of the stories, particularly collected by students at Gateway Learning Community, were simply taken down in note form by students/interviewers and therefore the team didn't have access to the "full story" further into the project. This was particularly an issue during the song writing workshops; when notes about stories were sometimes vague, they couldn't provide clarity or context for the participants or musical team who were writing song lyrics.

The team also noted that there has been some learning about the ways in which the project is communicated to partner groups and participants, particularly in order to ensure participant retention throughout the whole project journey. The team found this a challenge, especially because the project was purposely designed to be open-ended in order to ensure that it was community led.

### 3. SHARE – Story Sharing

#### Outline

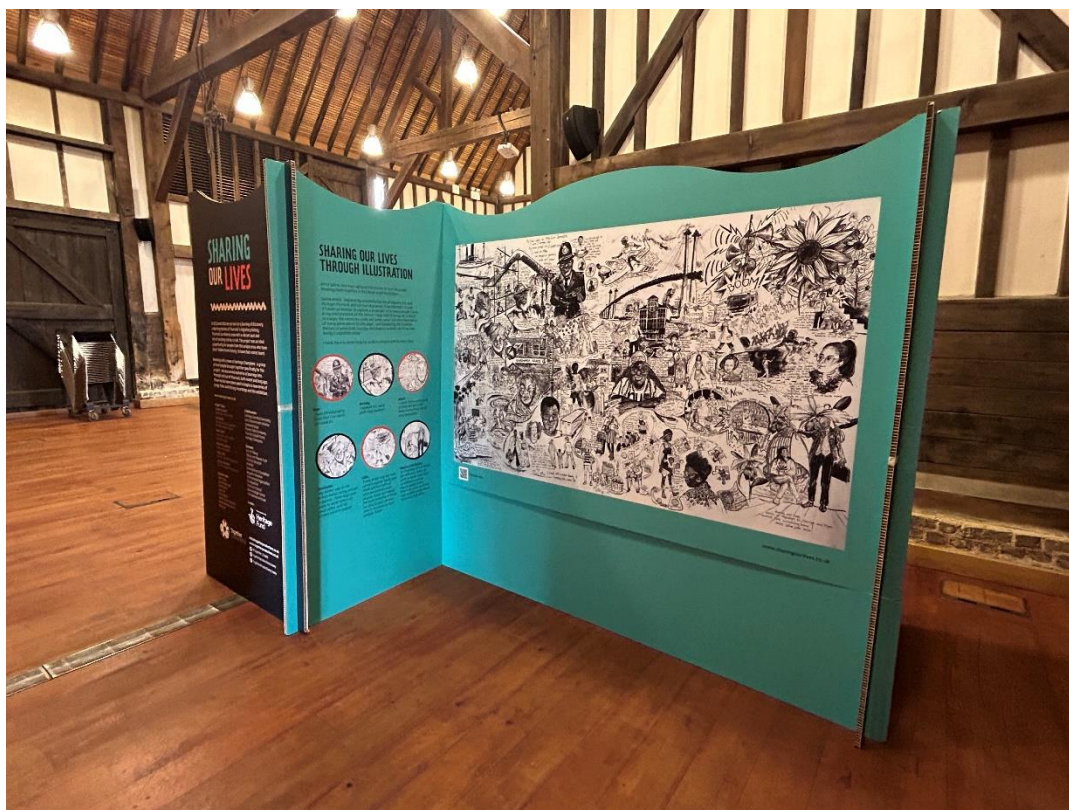
After collecting migration stories relating to Thurrock, the project was to share them with the wider public in a variety of ways and settings. They were shared through:

- A pop-up exhibition
- 1 large original artwork commission & 4 smaller artwork commissions
- 5 heritage-based films shown via YouTube
- 15 clips from audio interviews shared on the *Sharing our Lives* website
- 3 new original musical pieces, performed at various events

#### Exhibition –

A pop-up exhibition, curated by the project team, showcased the migration stories recorded throughout the project. It featured images, artwork, quotes from interviews and information about the project. The exhibition was displayed at events and locations across Thurrock, including the Windrush 75 celebrations, the Purfleet T100 event and at Thameside Theatre Gallery. Throughout the course of the project, the exhibition has been viewed by 1,714 people and will be an excellent legacy resource of the project which can be used and shared by Together Productions for years to come.

The exhibition was also displayed at Thurrock Town Hall in October 2023 for Black History Month.



Exhibition in situ, including large visual art piece, 2023

## Artworks –

5 new artworks were commissioned from a Visual Artist specialising in illustrating people's stories and memories. This medium lent itself well to visually present migration to Thurrock in a way that honoured participants' stories and actively engaged new audiences with heritage who were drawn in by the busy pieces. The artist produced a large piece which took elements from over 50 stories, and 4 smaller pieces which focused on 5 participants' migration stories.

The project team are currently in talks with Thurrock Council in order to find a permanent home for the large artwork within Thurrock Town Hall.

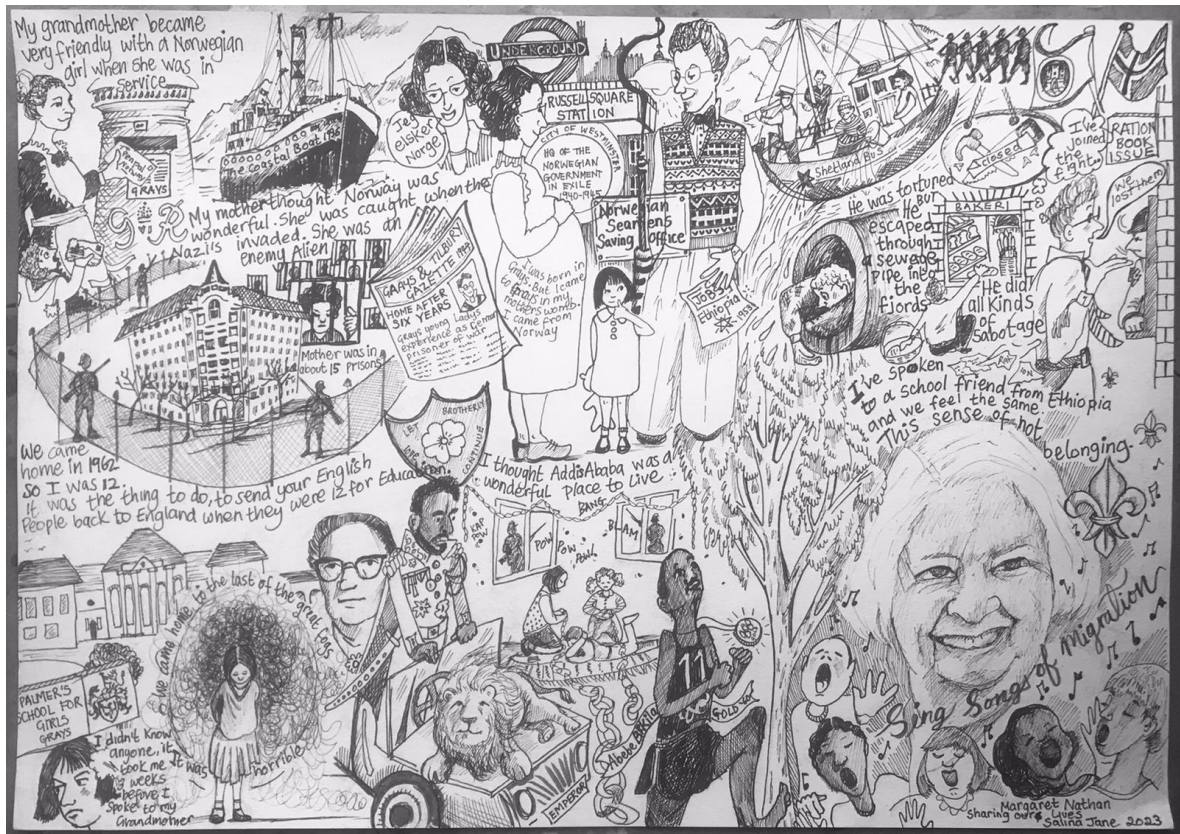


Illustration of an interviewee's migration story by the visual artist

## Films –

5 short films were created as part of the project, which can all be found on [Together Productions' YouTube Channel](#). 4 of the videos tell stories of migration, as recorded by Heritage Champions, and 1 video maps the journey of Gateway Learning Community students across their involvement with the project, created by the Project Filmmaker. Cumulatively, the videos have achieved 519 views and are all subtitled to increase accessibility.

## Audio clips –

A number of clips have been created from oral histories recorded with the community, both by Heritage Champions and an Oral Historian, 15 of which have been shared on the *Sharing*

our Lives website and more uploaded to the [Together Productions Soundcloud](#). Cumulatively, these have achieved 156 listens via the Soundcloud platform.

### Songs –

3 original songs were co-composed by the musical team (Composer and Lyricist or Rapper) and community groups around Thurrock. The first key group was students at the Gateway Learning Community, where 45 students took part in musical workshops following their heritage skills training. Students worked with a Composer and a Rapper to devise both melody and lyrics to their piece, [“Bursting with Joy”](#), which students performed at the school Arts Festival in summer 2023.

The second group was a local young people’s Gospel Choir in Tilbury, coordinated by one of the oral history interviewees. The group came together during the school holidays for a 1-day workshop exploring migration stories of participants and their friends and families, musical exploration and lyric-writing. 12 young people engaged with the workshop and took part in the co-creation of the song, [“The Look”](#).

To create the third piece, “Welcome to the Estuary”, the musical team worked with local choir members in Thames Opera Company and used many of the stories relating to migration from India as their inspiration. 20 people took part in the workshops to devise the piece, which incorporated traditional Indian instruments and Punjabi phrases.

Feedback from the Gospel Choir workshop:



**Legacy materials** – The team have also produced several legacy materials, drawing on their experiences of the project, its successes and the lessons learnt about delivering a heritage project and technical knowledge from specialist consultants including artists, filmmakers and historians. The ‘*Sharing our Lives Toolkit*’ will be available on the project website and is a resource which gives information to readers on how to collect stories,

whether that is through audio recording, video recording or visual art. The guide is aimed at a wide and diverse audience, and the text is accessible to all abilities.

The team are also in talks with Gateway Learning Community to develop a unit of work based on the *Sharing our Lives* project which would sit within every students' PSHE curriculum. The school were keen to continue working with the Together Productions team to deliver a similar scheme of work in subsequent academic years due to the impact of the project on students. The team will develop resources to make activities more self-led, but may also provide opportunities to facilitate sessions with heritage and creative practitioners based on oral history, migration stories, visual art and music because of the added benefits of these. This could also be shared across Thurrock and the wider UK.

### **Successes**

The range of mediums used to collect and share migration stories is a real strength of the project when it comes to curating and sharing them with participants and the wider community as they become more accessible to a wider range of people who may not usually engage with written or (audio) recorded stories.

By engaging with a more diverse range of groups than initially intended, the project was able to reach more people from different backgrounds, sometimes singing about experiences of someone unknown to them or from a different culture. This meant that participants of the musical workshops embedded themselves within the stories and cultures of others, as facilitated by Together Productions.

### **Reflections & learning**

There were changes to the groups engaged due to programming, capacity and funding challenges, as previously discussed, however, this led to a richer experience for many of the participants and allowed the project to engage with a wider range of collaborators and participants.



## **National Lottery Heritage Fund Outcomes**

### **i. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage**

*Sharing our Lives* has engaged a broad range of people as collaborators, participants and audiences throughout the project. The team have worked with primary school children and secondary school young people at the Gateway Learning Community in Tilbury, young people from across Thurrock who are part of a local Gospel Choir, members of the community of all ages with heritage from across the globe, including elders, from the African, Asian, European, South American and Oceanic communities. Notably, a key stakeholder in the project was Grays Gurdwara, who kindly provided a venue and hospitality for many of the project activities and encouraged many of its members to get involved in the oral history recordings.

Participants commented that they enjoyed taking part in the workshops and activities, *“Today was really fun and a really nice experience. I would definitely do it again”*.

Group leaders from the Girls Empowerment Initiative commented on the value of exploring heritage through art in informal settings: *“When you find out where you have come from, you really understand where you are now.” “It’s validation for the girls, finding out and exploring their identity and heritage is really important.”*

At the outset, the team engaged a local community activator which allowed connections to be made between Together Productions and the wider community. This proved to be extremely valuable to the outreach aims of the project and relationships built throughout the course of the project due to this community activator.

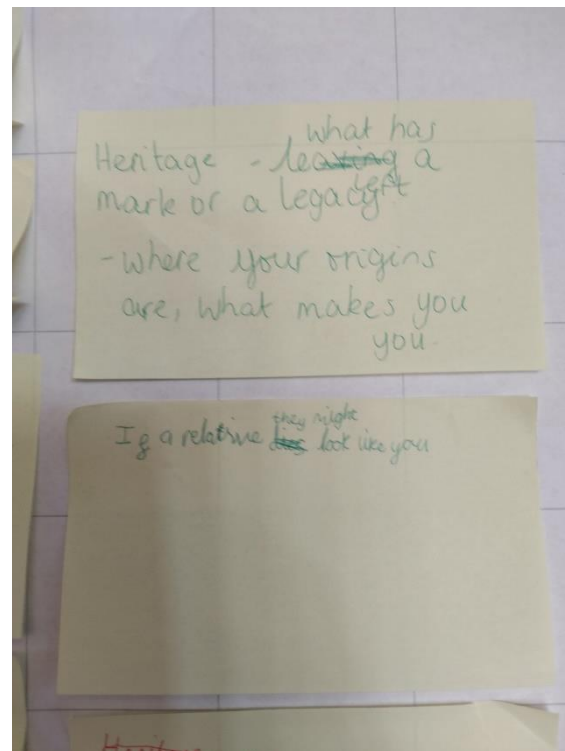
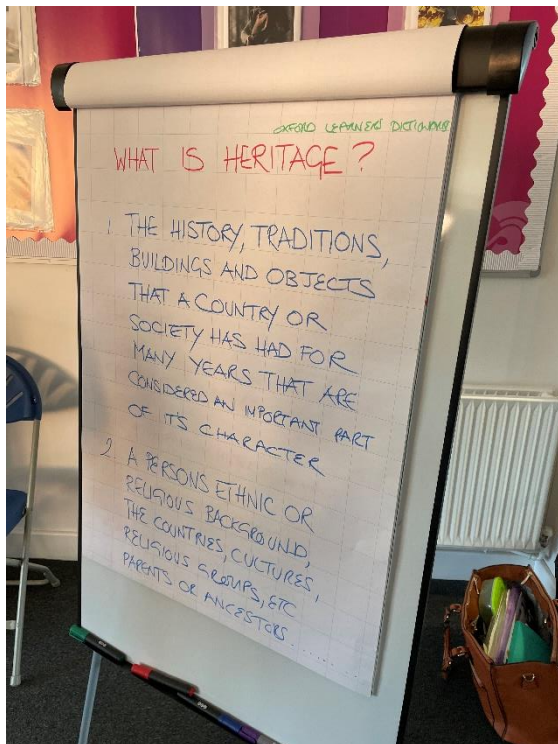
The team was also diverse in terms of their heritage and lived experience of marginalisation, including queer and/or disabled members as well from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

### **ii. Heritage will be identified and better explained**

*Sharing our Lives* has identified and better explained many aspects of Thurrock’s local history and the wider history of migration, particularly in the context of the large port at Tilbury Docks and its connections to the Empire Windrush. The project has engaged people from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, allowing their stories to be recorded and shared, often for the first time. Similarly, the innovative and exciting methods of sharing these migration stories has helped to better explain them by creating visual, audio-visual and musical responses to the stories to engage wider audiences in creative, new ways. This is reflected in a quote from the project Creative Producer:

*“One thing that stuck out to me was how the large mural drawing allowed conversations to open-up that may hadn’t have happened otherwise. People could connect to it and we gave them a space to share that connection. Sometimes just using verbal dialogue isn’t enough”*

Links with heritage organisations across Essex have been made and, where possible, material will be donated to both Essex Record Office and Thurrock Museum for posterity.



Activity during a workshop at Gateway Learning Community where young people defined heritage and explored their identities

### iii. People will have developed skills

The key skills development aspect of *Sharing our Lives* was the engagement, training and support of Heritage Champions to collect and share Thurrock migration stories. In total, 77 people (45 students and 32 non-students) were engaged in the capacity of Heritage Champions, and training was given in heritage skills such as oral history recording, and other skills such as filmmaking and editing. At the oral history training session, 100% of Champions either Strongly Agreed or Agreed that they had “learnt something new today”.

Heritage Champions also visited The National Archives (Kew) and The Migration Museum to explore this heritage further, something which many participants hadn't done before and wouldn't have been able to do if it wasn't for the project.

Many participants in the musical workshops reported that they haven't taken part in anything like this before and that they learnt “*how to make songs from stories*”. One participant said:

*“Today was a really great, new experience for me, coming together with a group of people to see the devising process for a song”*

The 'Sharing our Lives Toolkit' will also act as a legacy of the project and will be an accessible resource which advises readers on how to collect stories and memories through audio, video, visual art and written word. It shares practical tips about story-collecting and information about the wider context of migration histories, particularly to Thurrock.

This project was also hugely transformative for the project team and provided a lot of learning for all involved, including creative practitioners and heritage freelancers. Practitioners worked in new and exciting ways during *Sharing our Lives*, and have developed skills in facilitation, community engagement and collaborative working, which they will take forward into future projects. One practitioner said:

*“Every moment I spent working on this project was profoundly transformative for me. While it’s hard to pinpoint specific skills, my involvement undeniably ignited an interest within me to be further involved in community filmmaking projects and workshops.”*

#### **iv. People will have learned about heritage, leading to a change in ideas and actions**

As a result of the project, there is now a greater awareness of migration stories to Thurrock within participant groups, particularly amongst young people at both Gateway Learning Community and from the Gospel Choir group. Many of the teachers and group leaders found this to be a positive thing, noting that this may lead to increased tolerance in the long-term. One teacher commented:

*“It’s great that the students are learning about migration and the history of other cultures from across the world...it will help them think about how other people’s experiences are different to their own and make them more tolerant of others.”*

#### **v. People will have greater wellbeing**

*Sharing our Lives* has had a significant impact on many participants in terms of wellbeing, not only in their physical and mental happiness, but also feelings of connectedness to the local area, to other people and to their/others’ heritage and culture. In using creative and participatory techniques to engage participants with story sharing, the project has impacted their wellbeing, with one student from Gateway Learning Community saying:

*“I love doing music. It makes me want to dance and I’m always happy when we finish doing music. I love writing the words and using the instruments”*

During observations, participants involved in the music sessions actively engaged in a positive manner during melody and lyric development sessions.

The project has also impacted the wellbeing of those who shared their stories with the project. During interviews and when reflecting on their experiences of being involved in the project, interviewees describe it as *“almost therapeutic”*. One participant remarked:

*“Sharing my story with Sharing our Lives was a very emotional experience. It was difficult to relive some of the things I’ve been through, but it was also cathartic. I felt a*

*sense of relief and accomplishment after sharing my story. I felt like I was finally able to let go of some of the pain and trauma I've experienced...*

*...I also felt a sense of connection with others who have shared their stories in Sharing our Lives. It was comforting to know that I wasn't alone in what I've been through. I felt like I was part of a community of people who understand what its like to struggle and overcome adversity."*

## **Conclusion**

### **i. Closing statement**

Together Productions' first heritage project, *Sharing our Lives*, has allowed the team to explore heritage through creativity, music, and visual art. Building on its existing work, the project has been hugely successful in engaging new audiences from a diverse range of backgrounds and lived experiences with the concepts of oral history, story sharing and everyday heritage. Using the story of the Empire Windrush's docking in Tilbury as a starting point, the project cleverly engaged multi-generation participants with the history of migration to Thurrock, Essex and the wider UK and collected over 50 new stories itself. The project supported a team of Heritage Champions to collect migration stories, which were then shared through workshops, visual arts, music, film and a physical exhibition; providing something for almost everyone throughout the project.

The project was not without its challenges; issues surrounding funding and capacity of partner organisations meant some were unable to take part, and it proved difficult to get through the door of some communities. However, the team were adaptable and flexible throughout, engaging a Community Activator to open-up dialogue with communities such as the Sikh community at Grays Gurdwara. The long-term engagement of 5 schools at the Gateway Learning Community for the duration of the project was a real success. The team are currently building upon this new relationship by developing a unit of work which will sit within the PHSE curriculum about migration stories and personal story discovery. This, in addition to a story collecting toolkit created by the team, will continue the legacy of the project in Thurrock and wider region.

Overall, *Sharing our Lives* has been a joy for all involved, and Together Productions look forward to developing the relationships and learning from this project in future community-led projects and initiatives.

The *Sharing our Lives* website can be accessed [here](#).

Project videos can be accessed [here](#).

### **ii. Next steps**

- Offering CPD for singing facilitators, introducing the methodology of using heritage and stories to compose songs to be performed within the community.
- Offering CPD for teachers to ensure that they are comfortable and knowledgeable in teaching migration histories, and satisfying their curiosity and eagerness to learn more about migration to Thurrock.
- The development of a *Sharing our Lives*-related unit of work for the Gateway Learning Community, which would sit within every student's PSHE curriculum.
- Finding a permanent home for the large artwork created as part of this project. The team are currently in talks with Thurrock Council about housing it at Thurrock Town Hall.
- Build on relationships created throughout this project, with organisations such as Grays Gurdwara and the Girls Empowerment Initiative.

- Develop relationships and opportunities for collaboration with local organisations with whom links have been made as a result of *Sharing our Lives*. For instance, the Afro Food Fest and Thurrock BME Network.

### **iii. Recommendations**

- Connecting artists, creative practitioners and heritage professionals from the beginning of the project could have enriched the creative and heritage-based outputs.
- Delivery of a final project celebration event could have wrapped up the project neatly, ensuring that participants feel valued and stories showcased.
- In the future, the team may think more about the way in which a project is communicated to participants to particularly encourage active participation and engagement with the co-designed aspects of the project.
- The team recognised that there could have been more members of the team with lived experience of migration. This could be addressed through wider recruitment, or involvement of local people in a governance capacity; i.e. through the Steering Committee.
- Using a wide range of outputs to convey heritage and migration stories was particularly successful, with something that appeals to almost everyone. The visual piece was a particularly striking and impactful method of sharing these stories.

**Appendix - Photographs**

**Heritage Champion Training**

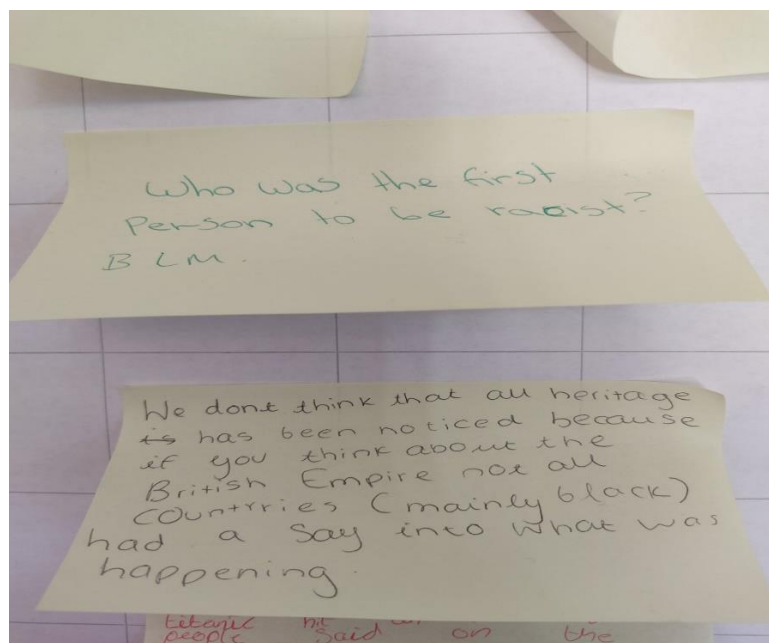


Heritage Champion training at Grays Gurdwara

## Participatory Outreach Workshops



Heritage and story collection workshops with students from 5 schools at the Gateway Learning Community



Reflections on racism and the British Empire from students

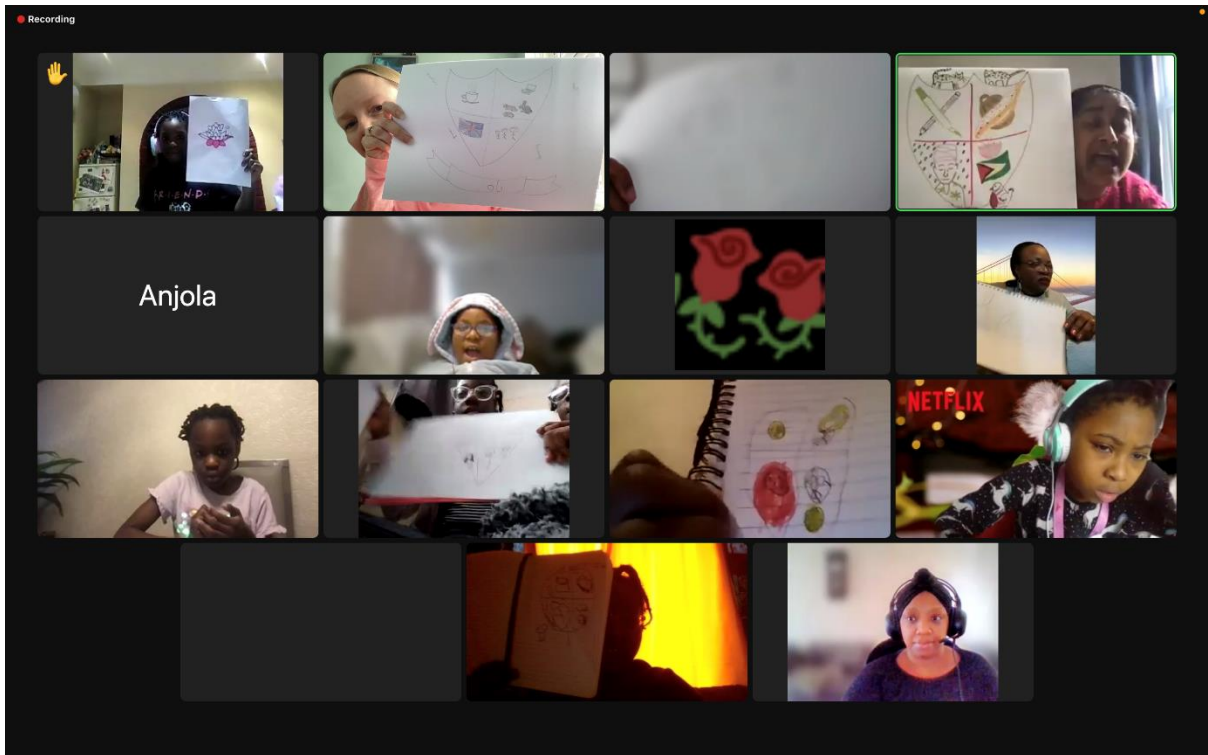




Song writing workshop at Gateway Learning Community – working with a Composer to develop a melody to their original composition



Song writing workshop at Gateway Learning Community – session led by a Rap Artist to develop lyrics to the original composition



Girls Empowerment Initiative online workshop with visual artist, exploring heritage and identity



Workshop with mothers of members of the Girls Empowerment Initiative with the team, exploring how heritage can be shared through visual art

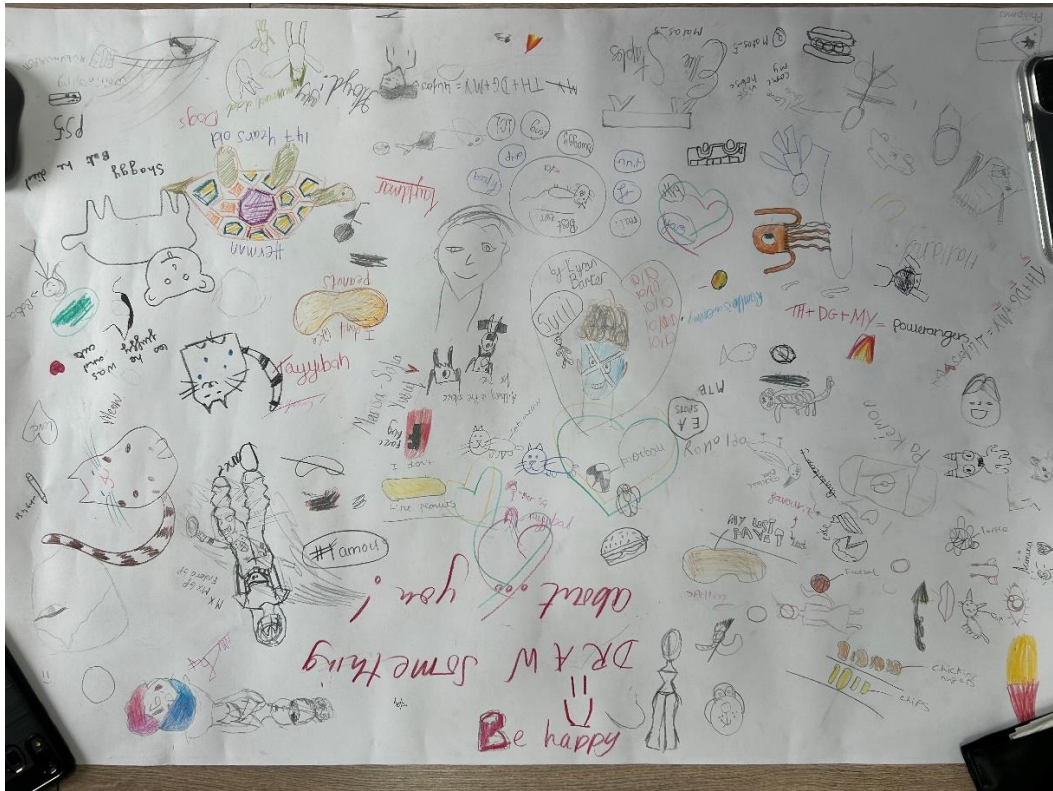


Workshop at Grays Gurdwara with members of the Sikh Community

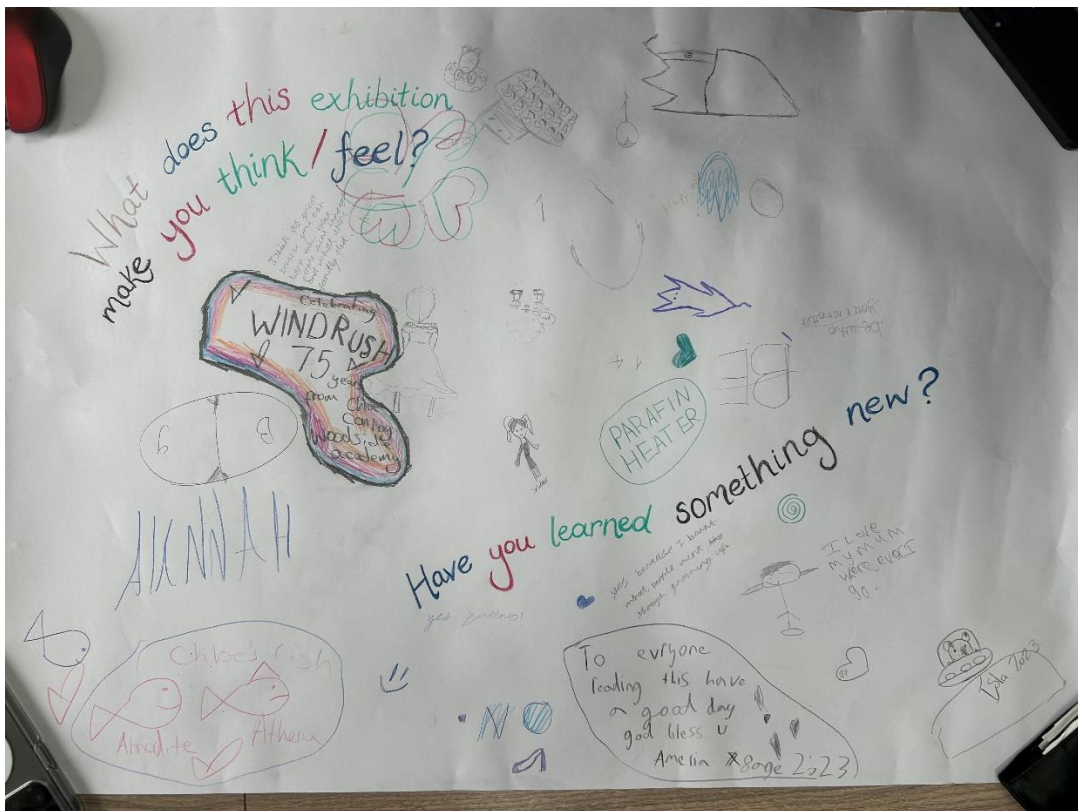


Music composition workshop with local Gospel Choir; facilitated by Composer & Lyricist

## Creative Responses to the Project



Windrush 75 visual art activity



Windrush 75 visual art activity

Videos



Gateway Learning Community Video



'Migration stories to Thurrock' video

## Glory to Ukraine

This soundscape tells 15 year old Ollia's story of her and her family's experience of the Russian invasion and their journey to England. Ollia's eloquently told story starts at the beginning of the war to the present day. A story of fear, worry but ultimately love of her family and her country.

Directed, Produced and Edited: Daniel Callow  
Story Collector: Kelsey Callow

Special thanks to Ollia and her family for sharing their story.

'Glory to Ukraine' video



'Gateway to the World' video (Tilbury Docks)



'Thurrock's Sikh Community' video