



Lookout 21: uncovering and investing in local creativity



Lookout 21 participants from Kent Autistic Trust. Image: Gary Weston.

LV21 is the decommissioned lighthouse ship turned arts venue based on the River Medway at Gillingham. In 2013, LV21's Lookout 21 project recruited out of the ordinary local community members to work with professional artists to explore their interests and creativity and inspire others to do the same.

How did the project come about?

LV21 is owned and run by artist Paivi Seppala and photographer and filmmaker Gary Weston. LV21 has been at the centre of Medway's creative heart for six years. Gary and Paivi were also instrumental in creating the original bid for funding from the Creative People & Places programme that led to the creation of Ideas Test.

Having been a floating cultural venue for the area for many years, Gary and Paivi were aware of some of the extraordinarily creative people that lived locally but

wanted to support them and uncover more by commissioning three very different projects on board and around the ship. Lookout 21 was born.

What worked and what were the challenges?

Lookout 21 was a great success in terms of introducing LV21 to new audiences in the area. More than 1100 people visited LV21 during the period of the Lookout 21 project, with more than 50% of those being first time visitors and 70% attending more than one workshop.

What happened?

Paivi says: “Lookout is an observatory, a retreat for reflection, a laboratory for testing new ideas, a meeting place for swapping stories, sharing skills and building lasting partnerships. But most of all, it is an outlet for local people to celebrate what’s on our doorsteps, share dreams and work on their most creative ideas for improving access to great arts for all.”

Gillingham resident and prolific member of voluntary and community groups Colin Turner worked with Magz Hall and Jim Backhouse of [Radio Arts](#) to combine practical engineering and artistic radio skills. Colin, Magz and Tim created a series of workshops and events on LV21 and around Gillingham where people could try out radio making as well as donate sounds to create a ‘Human Foghorn’ for the ship. Jim and Magz documented their time aboard LV21 with a series of [audio recordings](#) and the residency resulted in a participatory [online sound map](#), which collected, archived and shared local sounds submitted by local people. Colin said: ‘I’m a firm believer in collaboration and that great results come from sharing skills and interests, getting people involved in new activities, and this project reaffirmed this.’

The second Lookout commission was led by [Kent Autistic Trust](#) (KAT) who wanted to explore how working with professional artists might open up opportunities for their service users to build confidence and get involved in the arts. Medway visual artist Wendy Daws worked with the autistic adults to create an immersive, multi-sensory underwater world that friends and family were invited to step into. KAT staff noticed that those who took part were more willing to step outside of their comfort zone as a result of the project. Christine Edwards-Daem, KAT Operational Manager for Medway, said: ‘Some people have just been amazed, others have found it very funny and again some people have just found it magical and can’t stop mentioning the SHIP and the Captain!’

The third commission, *Deep Sea Treasure*, saw three generations of one Sittingbourne family working with local theatre companies Dizzy O’Dare and Play on Words Theatre youth group to create a new [radio play](#) based on Grandfather Robin Neale’s extensive knowledge and passion for the history of the River Medway.

What was learned and what difference did the project make?

The huge diversity of local people and their passions were uncovered, as well as the benefits of holding events outside of a venue in order to attract new audiences – taking creativity out into the community. Many of those who took part in the commissions have continued their creative journey. Since *Making Waves* ended, Engineer Colin Turner has continued to pursue his interest in sound art and, working with Jim and Magz of Radio Arts, ran a series of radio-making workshops in Spring 2014 in venues around Kent including The Beaney and Turner Contemporary.

Artist Wendy Daws who worked with Kent Autistic Trust has recently received support to run her own project in care home settings in North Kent and Robin Neale now acts as an advisor to Dizzy O'Dare and says he has been newly inspired to finish his memoirs: 'I never knew that my stories would be of interest to anyone outside my family and friends so wasn't sure what would come out of the collaboration. I really enjoyed the whole process of sharing memories around old photos and some of the artefacts I have collected over the years. I have been writing my memoir for a few years now and this project has given me the extra push to keep going with it.'

What's happening next?

To share learning and inspire people to develop their own project ideas beyond LV21, a small network of temporary onshore *Lookout Posts* was set up across the area. LV21 wants to help local residents to take the lead and set up their own 'observatories' in places where people meet – libraries, cafes and pubs, community centres, sport halls, parks and buses...

As part of the integral learning, skilling up and skills sharing element of the *Lookout* experiment we will also investigate the viability of setting up a 'Time Bank' with a view to build a local economy structure fuelled by skills and resources exchange, co-production and stronger community connections. If you would like to submit a proposal or get involved please [contact us](#).

A complementary programme of *Lookout* workshops, taster and skills sharing days, and networking events accompany the project. To find out more visit LV21's [events page](#).

To find out more about Ideas Test visit: www.ideastest.co.uk, follow us on twitter @IdeasTest, and on facebook at www.facebook.com/ideastest

