

Case Study

The Carnival of the Creatures

Background

Parents And Teachers In Art (Patina) was set up in 2002 because it was felt in Lewes that the national curriculum did not place enough emphasis on the importance of art in primary education. Parents and teachers wanted to be proactive and developed the idea of an annual parade with the costumes made by the children.

Lewes is a very artistic community and the parade has become a right of passage to celebrate the moment when local youngsters leave primary school and enter adolescence. Over the years it has become part of the cultural calendar and an event that the whole community gets involved in.

Previous themes had been much broader and more open to interpretation including “We do like to be by the Seaside” and “Lights, Camera, Action”.

When the Sustainable Communities Fund was approached for support, Patina was asked to make the event more relevant to the National Park and to ensure that the theme was embedded in the children’s education.

Patina Lewes responded with “The Carnival of the Creatures – Moving On 2015” which was based on animals and plants of the South Downs.



The project

Patina applied for a £5,000 grant from the Sustainable Communities Fund and was successful because the artwork was inspired by the downs and the project was firmly embedded in education on the species of the South Downs for the many youngsters and adults involved. The fact that the event had such a strong track record of community support and involvement also gave strength to the bid.

In order to deliver this theme Patina entered into its first ever partnership with Sussex Wildlife Trust. Caroline Croft of Patina said “This was a fantastic partnership which brought so much to all the children and families involved in our project and established a relationship which will be enduring for our two organisations. This an a model which we would definitely like to repeat.”

Michael Blencowe of Sussex Wildlife Trust inspired the year 6 students, artists and parents with 16 hugely informative and entertaining presentations on the species of the South Downs and this work was supported with further in-class learning and events.

The number of participating schools has increased steadily over the years, with a new addition this year to take the total to 16. The species were allocated at random to each school and announced with much anticipation with the opening of a sealed golden envelope to reveal each school’s creature.

48 art workshops were delivered across Lewes and surrounding villages where over 400 year 6 pupils along with 8 local artists and 55 parents developed their “carnival arts” to create costumes and structures relating to each animal. Students from the local secondary school returned to their primary schools to help with the art and their samba band also played in the parade. The artwork was created with cost, recyclability and sustainability in mind using materials such as willow and tissue paper.

“The Moving On Parade is the biggest celebration of South Downs Wildlife ever.”

Michael Blencowe, Sussex Wildlife Trust

The outcome

After months of preparation and fundraising, 10th of July - parade day - arrived and the sun shone on the children's big day. A hugely supportive community cheered them through town, with the children dressed as adonis blue butterflies, rose chafers, yellow meadow ants and two-colour mason bees to mention but a few. Michael donned an outfit himself and announced each school and species as they passed the crowd of more than 1500 spectators on Lewes High Street. The day was completed by a flashmob dance and party in the town park for the children, and a free swim for them all in the town's "Pells Pool" lido.

The programme booklet offered key event information and importantly gave thanks to the many supporters and sponsors. This year it also contained information on all of the South Downs species that were represented by the schools in the parade.

Another new addition to this year's event was the post parade exhibition which allowed parts of the community which could not witness the parade to view the resulting pieces of art and appreciate the thought and artistry in the children's work by seeing it close-up, along with interpretation, facts and figures.

Feedback has been incredibly positive with pages of heartfelt quotes like "It made me feel "This is my town, I love it here." (quote from a parent) and "I have just watched today's Moving On Parade and, as ever, I found it impossible not to feel embarrassingly emotional and proud to be involved in this beautiful visual spectacle" (quote from a resident).

Thanks to the National Park's support, Patina could build more substance into Moving On by adding stronger educational elements into the project and integrating the wildlife theme into its activities all year. These included a fundraising "Full Moon Walk Up the Downs" organised jointly with the Sussex Wildlife Trust which over 150 people attended and the "Creature Quest" activities led by the Lewes District Council Rangers.

The theme was more focussed than in previous years and this opened doors for new partnerships and innovative approaches making 2015 one of the most successful years in the event's 14 year history.

The future

The success of this year's event has laid the groundwork for 2016. Moving On is now seen as a year-long series of community events, art workshops and educational activities that culminate in the joyous and hugely colourful celebration that is the local children's Moving On Parade.

A professional new website has been developed which, along with all of the other advancements made this year, adds another level of credibility. This has given Patina more confidence in its fundraising ability.

Fundraising is already taking place for next year with Patina festive lanterns being hired to homes and businesses and a fundraising party being organised in the Town Hall on 23 January 2016.

Patina also wants to build the cross generational work and is seeking to engage care-homes and other parts of the community in future years.

For more information on the work of Patina please visit - <http://patinalewes.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/Patina-295236207159627/>.

Photographs of this year's event can be viewed here - <http://www.carlottaluke.com/people-and-portraits/patina-moving-on-parade-2015/>

