

Case Study

A South Downs Alphabet

Background

The project was developed through a partnership between the South Downs National Park Authority and The Write House, a group of independent historians and authors based in Sussex, and was generously supported by Snake River Press.

The South Downs Alphabet involved young people working with the University of the Third Age to explore, research, discover and be inspired by the special qualities of the South Downs National Park. It used Eleanor Farjeon's 1939 *A Sussex Alphabet* as a lens through which to view the modern day National Park and brought the work of this lesser known writer to a new generation of people.

Through a series of workshops, inspiration events and field visits, participants discovered the heritage that makes the South Downs special to them and wrote poems about their experiences. This resulted in the creation of a South Downs Alphabet, published alongside a reprint of the original (previously out of print) *A Sussex Alphabet*.

The project enabled a total of 741 engagement contacts to take place with participants ranging from 7-89 years. It captured the imagination of schools and adult learners and enjoyed a high level of media interest.

An inter-generational workshop



The Project

The project ran from November 2015 to March 2017.

Schools are looking for innovative ways to engage pupils with literacy, a key focus in the National Curriculum, which is both relevant and provides a stimulating local context. This project addressed that need.

The project began with three inspiration events at venues in Hampshire, East and West Sussex introducing the South Downs National Park and the work of Eleanor Farjeon. Actors brought Eleanor's work to life by using a participatory drama workshop to recreate Eleanor Farjeon's poem '*All the Way to Alfriston*'. A total of 250 attendees aged 7-89 joined these events.

Two intergenerational workshops followed, allowing school children and members of the U3A to share experiences and start thinking creatively about their experience of the South Downs. These were followed by six site visits to Stedham Mill, Devil's Dyke, Seven Sisters Country Park, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Malling Down and Petersfield Heath engaging a total of 177 participants.

Participants used these experiences to create their own poems capturing what the South Downs meant to them, nearly 80 years after Eleanor Farjeon wrote her original A-Z. The final poems were selected by a panel and 28 were published in a beautiful book produced and published by Snake River Press.

The books are sold individually or as a box set and are retailed at book shops and other outlets across the region as well as being available online at snakeriverpress.co.uk. They were officially launched at three events across the National Park in March 2017, attracting 384 attendees.

“Listening and sitting outside, making notes in our mini books helped me with my writing – it encourages me to do anything.”

Dominic, pupil (formerly a reluctant writer)

The outcome

In total nine schools and eight U3A groups were involved in the project. The project enabled a total of 741 engagement contacts to take place.

The inter-generational focus was extremely well received by all concerned and both school children and adults expressed how positive they found the experience.

The key project outcome was the engagement of children and members of the U3A in understanding the special qualities of the South Downs through workshops and site visits to the National Park. Their understanding and inspiration was captured through the creation of poems and the final output of the South Downs Alphabet poetry book. In addition, the reprint of the original *A Sussex Alphabet* brought this piece of cultural heritage to life for a whole new generation.

The project was delivered within budget. The total project cost was projected to be **£91,000** and included a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund for £18,500, funding from SDNPA of £14,100 and in-kind support to the value of £58,350. The final project cost was **£78,397** with in-kind support slightly lower than anticipated at £45,950. This was due to the reduced amount of time commitment needed by expert volunteers to complete the tasks required.

This project represented good value for money for the SDNPA achieving high levels of engagement across a wide audience. It generated new curriculum focused resources for the Learning Zone and resulted in two beautifully printed books retailing at outlets across the National Park as well as online.

£1 from the sale of each book will be donated to the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service and will contribute to the ongoing conservation of the heritage in the National Park. The sale and marketing of the books is managed directly by Snake River Press.

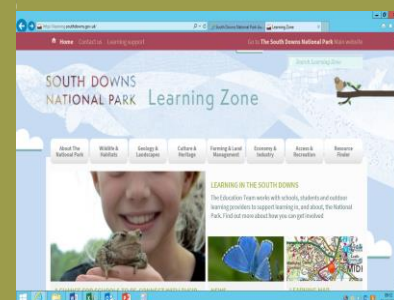
The Future

The project created a lasting legacy through the final product of the book box set and the accompanying learning resources. These are locally relevant learning resources which support English and literacy work in schools in and around the South Downs National Park. Resources are hosted on the South Downs National Park Learning Zone.

The use of drama to introduce the work of Eleanor Farjeon was a great way of capturing the imagination of the children and introducing them to the poem ‘*All the way to Alfriston*’. The film of this performance will be shared more widely as a legacy resource.

The project has engaged more schools in the SDNP learning network and has widened our contact with eight U3A groups across the National Park in a new and positive relationship.

For further information view learning.southdowns.gov.uk/



The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan*

The project contributed to the following outcomes:

Outcome 6: There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits it provides.

Outcome 7: The range and diversity of traditional culture and skills has been protected and there is an increase in contemporary arts and crafts that are inspired by the special qualities of the National Park.

* <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/key-documents/partnership-management-plan/>