

End of project evaluation report of South Downs Alphabet project

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Executive summary

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 is supported by Snake River Press and renowned local author Lynne Truss.

The South Downs Alphabet involved young people working with the University of the Third Age in exploring, researching, discovering and being inspired by the special qualities of the South Downs. 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 *Sussex Alphabet*, published alongside a reprint of the original (previously out of print) *A Sussex Alphabet*.

The project engaged a large number of people aged 7-90 from areas within and outside the South Downs across all three counties. It captured the imagination of schools and adult learners and enjoyed a high level of media interest as well. The outputs from the project were far greater than anticipated and it has resulted in a lasting legacy through the beautiful final publications and the experiences of the hundreds of people involved in the journey.

The project

The South Downs have a strong association with well-known writers, poets, musicians and artists: Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Hilaire Belloc, Edward Thomas, Joseph Turner and Eric Ravilious to name but a few.

Eleanor Farjeon (13 February 1881 – 5 June 1965) was an important literary figure from World War I onward. Her series of poems, *A Sussex Alphabet*, captured the essence of the county she loved. This project took a wider perspective than the original book covering the three counties that make up the modern day South Downs National Park: Hampshire, East Sussex and West Sussex. Schools across the National Park took part in this inter-generational project alongside University of the Third Age groups. The aim was to bring Eleanor Farjeon's love of the landscape,

and her funny, poignant and relevant poetry alive for a new generation culminating in a reprint of the original Sussex Alphabet book alongside a new book of poems written by participants as they explored what the South Downs mean to them in 2016-17.

The project started in November 2015, the first workshops took place in March 2016 and the books were launched at events on 21 and 30 March 2017.

English is a key element of the National Curriculum with increasing focus being placed on literacy achievement, both within primary and secondary schools. Schools are looking for innovative ways to engage pupils with literacy which are both relevant and provide a stimulating local context. This project filled that need.

Project outcomes involved 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. A full list of these is explored in Appendix I.

Key findings and recommendations

Project management was through a project team consisting of Amanda Elmes, (SDNPA), Dr June Goodfield, Debbie Greenfield and Cheryl Lutring (The Write House). The project was governed through the SDNPA COVE theme programme board with a mid-project review going to P&P committee.

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The project outcomes are summarised in the table in appendix I. All the key outcomes were achieved with the exception of the archival sessions.

The approach adopted in this project has created a lasting legacy through the final product of the book box set and the accompanying learning resources. This will be an important locally relevant learning resource to support the English/literacy work in schools in and around the SDNP and will be hosted on the SDNP Learning Zone as well as the Sussex University of the Third Age (SUN) website. The approach has engaged more schools in the SDNP learning network and has widened our contact with eight U3A groups across the National Park which is a new and positive relationship that can be explored for future project work.

The engagement by schools and U3A groups was really positive. In total 9 schools and 8 U3A groups were involved in the project and 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 have found the experience.

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'. By recording the interactive performance this has created a resource that can be shared more widely as a legacy resource.

The support from author Lynne Truss gave the project additional credence with the U3A audiences and has encouraged wider participation than was anticipated from this sector. There was also a very positive word of mouth through the U3A networks encouraging people to participate that were not involved in the original inspiration events.

The outdoor learning techniques developed to explore sense of place with participants were another positive development. These learning resources have already been shared with the National Trust as part of the work they are doing on Spirit of Place.

The proposed archival research sessions were not delivered as part of this project as project participants did not opt to take up this opportunity. Effort was refocused on additional outside visit opportunities which were very popular with groups.

Recommendation: *In future the detail of delivery options could be discussed with target audiences before the project detail is finalised. This would require an element of pre-project research that would need separate funding but may tighten up the delivery elements during the project delivery phase.*

The project received a large amount of publicity and media interest thanks to Jo Glyde at SDNPA. BBC South made a film about the project as part of their programme on Books that made Britain and filmed children from Midhurst Primary School on the South Downs at Burpham discovering a letter written by Eleanor Farjeon describing it as 'The cream of the Downs'. They also filmed talking head footage of members of the U3A describing what the South Downs meant to them at the Weald and Downland Museum and reading the poems that they had been inspired to write as a result. The programme was transmitted on Sunday 16 October 2016

Radio 4 also picked up on the project through their Ramblings programme hosted by Clare Balding. As part of this series we recreated part of the walk from 'All the way to Alfriston' walking with Clare from Bo-Peep car park to Alfriston via Rathfinny. A detailed article appeared in Sussex Life on the project as well as numerous newspaper and online coverage. This was excellent media for the SDNP and its literary heritage, both historic and contemporary. The project also featured on the Radio 4 feedback programme which was aired on Sunday 11th October 2016.

The organisers of the Chichester Priory Park Festival heard about the project and invited us to run a session at the festival. This was a very different audience and helped to spread the learning to audiences within the town. These additional engagement opportunities were very valuable to the project outcomes and led to a slight re-profiling of the budget to accommodate the additional work this entailed.

Evaluation evidence was received at the field visits and from individual group members of the

U3As and this has been extremely positive with comments including:

“The children and all adults who came were agreed it was one of the best trips ever! Mostly due to the way you and Andy ran it- activities perfectly pitched - all so engaging and informative. The poems and art produced on Friday were wonderful as a result” Kate Heym, Class Teacher, West Blatchington School

“Thank you very much for the workshops in Midhurst. We enjoyed the first one but missed the excellent second! Carol said how good it was and how well the students worked with the adults, how seriously they took the project and how keen and able they were – so a big thank you for that. I think inter-generational learning is a very good relationship to explore. June Goodfield is right – without them and their enthusiasm we lose the future”. Pat Bryant, Midhurst U3A

“I love the idea of inspiring adults and children to think of the landscape that is familiar to them and find words to describe or allow it to spark their imagination in different ways. This is a fabulous project for helping to build a written social history of how people in the 21st century connect to the land and all that it holds”. Clare Balding

‘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)

‘Clear steps & format. Downs visit really helped to keep it in my head so I was able to make a poem, more learning outside and bringing it back in please.’ Josh, pupil

Value for money

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

The budget spend was adjusted to reflect the change in project activity away from archival visits and the additional staff time required through the promotional walk and wider media interest. The final budget can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

The SDNPA holds the copyright for all the material created in the South Downs Alphabet book as well as the learning materials created through the project.

This project represented good value for money for the SDNPA achieving very high levels of engagement across a wide audience that was new to the SDNP. It also generated new curriculum focused resources for the Learning Zone. The project has resulted in two beautifully printed books which are being retailed at outlets across the SDNP as well as online. It has been agreed that £1 from the sale of each book will be donated to the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service and contribute to ongoing conservation of the heritage in the SDNP. The sale and marketing of the books is being managed directly by Snake River Press.

Management Response

This report has been forwarded to the COVE Theme Programme Board for comment.
Feedback:

Vicky Lawrence, CPM

This has been an excellent project, creatively weaving a range of key SDNP themes and it has been very well-received by people from a range of different ages and backgrounds.

There were challenges in this creative project, due to some strong personalities. At critical points during the project there were differences of opinion. Testament must be paid to the SDNPA's Project Manager's diplomacy and negotiation skills, in keeping the project on track and ensuring the stakeholders kept working together, leading to the wonderful books, resources and lasting legacy that the project has created.

Appendix I

Date	Activity	What has been achieved?
January - March 2016: Project inspiration events	3 x inspiration events attracting total of 90 peoples from a range of ages. Inspire and enthuse participants about the project. A dramatic introduction will be followed by an introduction to the heritage of the SDNP and practical activities.	3 x inspiration events held at West Blatchington, Hove, Ditcham Park, Petersfield and the South Downs Centre, Midhurst. Total of 250 people attended these events ranging from 7yrs to 89 years.
November – December 2015: Research and discovery	6 x archival research visits to the County Record Offices with up to 30 people on each visit. This will give 180 people the opportunity to develop research skills and learn more about the heritage of the area.	These visits were promoted to participants but there was no interest in participation with groups preferring to visit the heritage in the SDNP instead. Record Office visits will take place from July to December to allow information to be gathered to support the research of the original text and associated creation of educational resources.
May – July 2016: Inter-generational workshops	3 x Inter-generational workshops including a session to identify potential areas of focus for the 21 st C A-Z South Downs Alphabet. We will engage a total of 90 people.	2 x workshops held. One at MRC for 32 people ranging from 14-93 years and including expert input from author Lynne Truss, another delivered at Chichester Priory Festival on 9 th July for 50 people. Total of 82 people engaged. 1 further workshop was planned for Alfriston Old Chapel Centre but this was unfortunately cancelled due to low attendance numbers.
July - December 2016: resource creation	We will use the information, knowledge and living histories collected through the research activities to develop learning resources about the current heritage assets in the SDNP. The research will be used to create interpretation of the content of the original Sussex Alphabet book allowing it to be accessible and relevant to today's audiences.	Page written and promoted on U3A website, project information and info on EF on SDNP learning zone. Learning resources uploaded onto SDNP Learning Zone
April – June 2016: Visiting the heritage	We will organise site visits to the heritage of the SDNP to provide real life opportunities for participants to understand, enjoy and explore the wildlife, landscape and heritage of the South Downs. 180 people will benefit from these visits.	6 x visits delivered with 177 people participating. Visits took place at Stedham Mill, Devil's Dyke, Seven Sisters Country Park, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Malling Down and Petersfield Heath.
May – July 2016: Creative response	Participating groups will receive support with drafting poetry for the 21 st C Alphabet. We aim to work with one class at each of 6 schools with an audience of 270 people	We have worked with 9 schools and 8 U3A groups on the project, providing information, resources and support for their poetry work. This is a total of 315 people.
August 2016	Individual entries will be assessed by the	Poems selected and forwarded to publisher

– March 2017: Publishing the books	project team and selected for inclusion in the South Downs Alphabet. There will be 26 poems in total selected for inclusion in the printed book.	for typesetting and compilation in September 2016. In total 27 poems were published from participants (2 selected for letter J as they were complimentary and related to key figures in South Downs history). An additional 2 poems featured in the Appendix, one from Dr June Goodfield and one from Clare Balding.
March 2017: Launch events	Three launch events to which the press and local dignitaries will be invited will be held at venues across the SDNP attracting over 100 people at each event.	Two launch events held on Tuesday 21 March 2017 at SDC, Midhurst (72 people) and Thursday 30 March 2017 at Dean's Place, Alfriston (62 people). We also held a launch event at West Blatchington School on 18 May for pupils, staff and parents with an audience of 250 people. Total of 384 people engaged.
April 2017 onwards: legacy work	Following the publication of the books we will continue to promote the engagement of people in this heritage through legacy work using learning resources, published books and the research and interpretation created through the project.	Interpretation displays were used at the South Downs Teachers' Conference on 29 March 2017. 180 delegates present and able to view these displays and hear about the project in a presentation by the SDNPA learning team. 11 colleagues from other UK National Parks viewed the displays as part of a Society of National parks Study Tour focused on literature in the SDNP. They all received copies of the final published books to take back to their own National Parks.

Appendix 2

Final budget breakdown

South Downs Alphabet Budget	Session rate	Units	Budget	Session rate	Units	Budget
	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Actual	Actual	Actual
Project Management	£350	50	17,500	£350	54 days	18,900.00
Expenses - project team			1,000			817.17
Project Coordinator/secretarial	£825 pcm	8 months	6,600	£825 pcm	9 months	7,425
Venue hire for inspiration events	£150	3	450	£150	0	0
Venue hire for intergenerational workshops	150	3	450	150	0	0
Expert input to workshops	250	6	1,500	250	0	0
Venue hire - launch event	250	2	750	250	0	0
Travel for participants to visit Heritage sites	250	6	1,500	250	5 coaches	955.65
Dramatic presentation development	150	1	150	150	1	150
Dramatic performances at inspiration events	450	2	1,350	450	2	1,350.00
Tailored archival research sessions	150	6	900	150	0	0
Contingency for workshops and visits			450		0	0
Catering for Launch Alfriston and Midhurst					2	254
Printing for exhibition panels					1	1,846
Alfriston walk development				150	5	750
			32,600			32,447.42
In kind contributions						
Lynne Truss - workshops, poem assessments	350	10	3,500		10 days	3,500.00
Dr Robinson - research and introduction	350	20	7,000		15 days	5,250.00
Dr Goodfield - proj management gratis	350	50	17,500		30 days	10,500.00
Debbie Greenfield	150	14	2,100		7 days	1,050.00
Snake River Press - design etc	n/a	n/a	10,000		n/a	10,000.00
SDNPA - staff time	350	28	9,800		29	10,150.00
Secretarial support - 6 months	£825pm	6 months	4,950		6 months	4,950.00
Venue hire inspiration events	150	2	300		2	300.00
Launch Venue (Deans Place gratis)			250		1	250.00
			55,400			45,950.00
					Total	78,397.42
					SDNPA	14,100
					Grant from HLF	18,500
					Total grant	32,600
					In-kind support	45950
					Total project income	78,550