

Case Study

The Full Harvest

Background

Inspired by the rivers of the South Downs, 'The Full Harvest' project worked with a small number of writers to create new storytelling across a range of genres, from monologues to horror. The stories reflected a range of lived experiences and perspectives of the South Downs landscape.

The project set out to achieve a number of objectives, including supporting a creative and cultural organisation to adapt their business outputs in response to the opportunities and threats that arose from the Covid-19 pandemic. South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) also trialed the use of podcasts for the first time.

Applause Rural Touring (ART) moved their entire delivery programme into the development of this digital content, and worked to not only develop podcasts, but deliver support for artists through the provision of a mentoring and development opportunity.

"This combination of place, people and poetry is one I love. I've worked in this way before and in a strange way, it was even more satisfying with the pressures and difficulties of the pandemic. Everyone was keen to engage and it felt a special time to be reflecting on our relationship to nature and the land."

Writer, The Full Harvest



The project

The project sought to attract writers from those at the earliest stage of their career and more experienced writers seeking a new challenge or the chance to work in a new medium. This was achieved through an 'open call' process. The seven selected writers represented a mixture of early career and established talent, with the studio recordings supported by voice-over artists aged between 20 and 85 years old.

The seven writers used the rivers of the South Downs as a focus, and wrote stories that drew from people's lived experiences, captured through engagement activities. The diversity of the communities in and around the South Downs and the common thread that natural landscapes can provide hope and new perspectives, ensured that collectively, the stories explore the connection between nature and the journey to recovery, using the varied experiences of the unpredictable, tranquil, wild and powerful nature of water to mirror personal journeys.

Applause Rural Touring (ART) led on the open call process, artist management and script development, including the coordination and delivery of studio recordings, working closely with the SDNPA). The project as a whole provided both ART and SDNPA with opportunities to learn more about podcast production, public appetites around digital content and measures of success for audio content of this kind.

SDNPA provided £1,500 of funding towards the project as well as additional staff support and technical expertise.

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“My creative practice was enhanced by this project. Previously I would draw primarily on my own experiences for inspiration in creating work, but this process required me to interact, exchange with and learn from a host of individuals, whose experiences formed the base for everything I was able to produce...”

Writer, The Full Harvest

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The outcome

- Ten new podcasts were produced for SDNPA – the first time we have trialled the use of audio only content as part of our digital communications and engagement offering
- 646 total plays of ‘The Full Harvest’ occurred up to 1 September 2021.
- The main audience for the podcasts so far has reflected the broad SDNPA social media audience – 2/3 female, with 77% aged between 45-59. A large proportion accessed the podcasts via URL links, suggesting listeners were not necessarily already engaged podcast users.
- Seven writers received mentoring support and an opportunity to work in a new medium, expanding their creative practice and experience.
- 34 applications were received as a result of the open call, and the success of how the open call was promoted is reflected in the diversity of applicants (including 12% who had an ethnicity other than White British, 14% identified as LGBTQ+ and 38% who had a disability).
- SDNPA developed technical skills and experience in the use of podcast platforms.
- The podcast launch coincided with lifting of national lockdown restrictions, which resulted in a move away from digital content by our digital audiences. Although initial downloads / listens did not meet our target, as ‘ever green’ content we have the opportunity to grow interest in this creative audio content into the future.

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP)

2020–25 The Partnership Management Plan 2020-2025 brings together and coordinates the aspirations of many different partners who help contribute towards the purposes for which it was designated.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 4: Cultural heritage of the National Park is enhanced and widely understood and enjoyed.

Outcome 5.1: Encourage everyone to experience the National Park and widen participation for under-represented groups through targeted activities and promotion.

southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/

The future

Overall, the project was an extremely positive experience. SDNPA and ART forged a close working relationship, and it provided support at a critical time for the participating artists and ART itself.

The project was not without its challenges. The lifting of national lock down restrictions had an impact on rates of engagement with new online / digital only content.

In hindsight, the launch might have been managed differently by creating a longer lead in time to generate a momentum around the launch, and to ‘drip feed’ content over time.

Working with emerging talent also presented challenges, particularly where artists may not have had to work to such critical deadlines before.

However, the project provided a new opportunity for writers, and also led to some discrete engagement work with a range of groups, including Arts on Prescription and A-Level English students.

“I really enjoyed being part of this project; I was equally inspired by the South Downs National Park and by my fellow writers.”

Writer, The Full Harvest

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