

Case Study

Towner Eastbourne Making Sense: Creative Kit Bags

Background

In 2020, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) set up a Recovery Fund of £375,000 to help support partner organisations and local communities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the beneficiaries of the grant was Towner Eastbourne, an internationally renowned art gallery in Eastbourne, East Sussex.

<https://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/>

The funding provided people facing higher levels of hardship and isolation as a result of the pandemic with high quality creative experiences and opportunities to engage with the natural world, to provide some much needed release, a sense of connection, and to support wellbeing and mental health.


The project also supported Towner's ambition to provide artists with commissioning opportunities as part of its commitment to support artists during the pandemic.

Somang Lee was commissioned to create 'kits' with materials and activity sheets, drawing on both Towner's collections and the landscape of the South Downs National Park.

<https://www.somanglee.co.uk/>


The project built on existing work by Towner Eastbourne to supply creative activities to the most vulnerable members of the community across East Sussex.

**MAKING
SENSE**



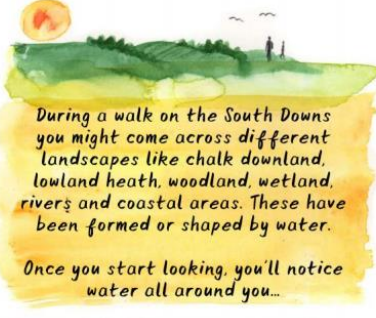
WATER

**TOWNER
Eastbourne**



Helen Mockford, Chalk Pit II, Undated © Artist's Estate, Towner Collection


In Mockford's painting you can see the many layers she observed in the landscape all around her.



During a walk on the South Downs you might come across different landscapes like chalk downland, lowland heath, woodland, wetland, rivers and coastal areas. These have been formed or shaped by water.

Once you start looking, you'll notice water all around you...

Let's get started with a nice cup of tea (get help if you need it)



RELAX
NOTICE THE
STEAM
RISE

This watercolour painting was created by artist Helen Mockford. It was inspired by the landscape of the South Downs.

Many artists are reliant on water as a raw material to create their artworks. Water is also a powerful source of inspiration.

The project

Suggested activities and materials were carefully selected to explore positive mental health and wellbeing indirectly and gently, encouraging acts such as reflection, noticing, grounding, self-awareness, recognising feelings, sensory stimulation, and accessing memory and imagination.

Activity sheets included an image of an artwork from the Towner collection, which explored thematic connections to the South Downs. However, the project never lost sight of the fact that some recipients would have little or no access to outside space.

Kits contained the 'raw materials' of the South Downs (water, chalk, clay, charcoal) and shared accessible and engaging information about aspects of the National Park including its diverse habitats, ecology, and cultural heritage, acting as a direct invitation to connect to nature through the process of making.

By using the activities to provide a sense of what to expect, see, discover and experience in the South Downs National Park, it is hoped that they will in turn inspire and encourage recipients to access this unique local resource.

.....
“It’s a sad world just now but every now and then there are moments of hope, such as your creative kits which say, ‘we care’.”
.....

Eastbourne NetworX

.....

The outcome

The project was awarded £9,820 from the SDNPA Covid-19 Recovery Fund.

In total, 951 packs were distributed during February and March to approximately 510 households across Eastbourne, Seaford, Hailsham and the East Sussex area.

The packs were distributed thanks to the support of 14 community partners: Enthum Foundation, Brighton Women's Centre (Eastbourne), Eastbourne NetworX, Holding Space, East Sussex Children's Services, Memory Lane, Eastbourne Foodbank, Community Stuff, Arts in Mind, Association of Carers, Seaford Waves, Amberstone Hospital (in patient mental health facility), Imago, and Willingdon Trees Community Centre.

More people will now be aware of Towner Eastbourne and the South Downs National Park as two local resources - potentially having not previously visited or engaged with these locations before.

Ongoing collaboration with the 14 community partners will enable Towner Eastbourne to create tailored engagement offers to take place at local community venues for participant groups over Summer 2021 and beyond, in the run up to Towner's Centenary.

<https://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/>

The future

“This project is an important feature of our long-term strategy to develop new audiences, particularly those who are less likely to participate in creative or cultural experiences, and to strengthen links between culture and environment through Towner's programme.”

Clare Dobson, Director of Development, Towner Eastbourne

Towner Eastbourne traversed the very real impacts of the pandemic on the culture sector with authenticity, never losing sight of the most vulnerable members of the community across East Sussex.

The creative kits emerged from a genuine wish to support people struggling the most as a result of health, social isolation and the economic impacts of the pandemic. This drive to connect with community has forged strong links to charities and networks across the region; a lasting legacy of the project.

The project also admirably reflected the strongly held belief that National Parks are landscapes for all, and we hope people were able to use the creative kits to feel connected to nature, and able to grow a stronger sense of ownership, belonging and connection to the special qualities of our landscape.

For further information, please contact:

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SDNPA Cultural Heritage Lead

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2020–25 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 10 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

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

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

Outcome 7: The South Downs National Park is a well-used and recognised asset for sustaining mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Outcome 10.2: To increase awareness and desirability of the South Downs as a special place to visit.

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

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