

Creativity. Community. Culture.



Celebrating the impact of UKSPF in Sunderland

Creative organisations across Sunderland are using investment from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver ambitious, community-led projects that are transforming neighbourhoods and inspiring pride of place

This quarterly round-up highlights just some of the creative activity supported during Spring 2026.

Since 2014, The Cultural Spring has worked across South Tyneside and Sunderland, collaborating with inspiring local, regional and national artists to deliver workshops, performances and subsidised cultural experiences, while building a legacy of communities engaged in the arts.

The final quarter saw community centres focus on the culmination of their activities: the curation of the A Space to Create exhibition. Working alongside Michaela Wetherall from Pink Collar Gallery, seven venues co-created a showcase of artwork produced by residents throughout the project.

The exhibition, held at Arts Centre Washington, launched with an opening night on 11th March, attracting over 100 participants and residents. As a celebration of Sunderland's collective creativity, the showcase brings together artwork created through workshops, wellbeing activities, performances, installations and shared experiences. Each piece reflects the unique ideas and stories of the communities involved, demonstrating the power of supported experimentation and collaboration.

A number of venues used remaining project funds to deliver final sessions and outreach activities:

Sunderland Headlight hosted a pop-up exhibition in The Bridges, where participants wore and displayed artwork created during the project. The stall served as a catalyst for public conversations around wellbeing and mental health, effectively bringing community art into a commercial space. They also facilitated a 'Go & See' trip to Woodhorn Museum, where participants engaged with a guided tour of the Pitman Painters exhibition.

Grace House successfully launched their film exploring the wellbeing of parents and carers of disabled children - the film captures the lived experiences of the group and can be [viewed here](#).

International Community Organisation of Sunderland continued their collaboration with artist Sabina Sallis to develop a performance piece for the exhibition's opening night. The women involved took significant ownership of the process and worked closely with the curator to install the artwork themselves.

Washington Millennium Centre sustained their popular dance workshops this quarter. To explore long-term sustainability, the centre introduced a small participation fee, testing a model that could allow these sessions to continue as a permanent fixture.



What's next?

As the UKSPF funding period draws to a close, we have facilitated discussions with the Space to Create partners to explore the project's legacy and transition toward independence from Cultural Spring. Partners worked with consultant Tina Redford to define their next steps. Key areas of focus included:

- **Collaborative & Individual Fundraising:** Exploring how venues might form a partnership to bid for collective community arts funding, alongside strategies for individual fundraising to ensure a steady stream of support for activities within each venue.
- **Sustainability:** Developing models to make existing workshops self-sustaining without the need for continuous grant funding.
- **Resource Sharing:** Investigating models where larger partners could lead on fundraising to deliver arts programming within volunteer-led venues.

Find out more: theculturalspring.org

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The Sunderland Heritage Partnership brings together more than 30 organisations, venues, societies and individuals to raise the profile of Sunderland as a heritage destination. Through collaborative working, the Partnership aims to engage new and younger audiences with Sunderland's rich history and to protect its heritage assets for future generations. The partnership programs regular meetings, workshops, events and festivals.

In February, the Sunderland Heritage Partnership collaborated with students from Sunderland College's Travel and Tourism and Business Marketing modules to present a special event. *Secrets and Shadows: Sunderland's Dark Past* was a co-created heritage fair 'takeover' event as part of the annual Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival in Sunderland. The fair featured partners stalls including Sunderland Maritime Heritage and Queen Street Heritage Trust, as well as craft activities including 'secret' wax sealings, badge making and a Victorian gaol photo booth.

The Heritage Partnership Officer has continued a rich programme of outreach workshops from January to March, including instruction sessions for heritage partner groups to access and use the sunderlandheritage.org website. Other activity highlights have included a regular series of workshops with the arts and heritage group at Bowes Railway, designing a commemorative banner for Bowes' 200th anniversary as well as a series of oral history workshops around the theme of 'Museum Memories' with members of the Friends of Sunderland Museums (FOSUMS).

Photo credit: Courtesy of Sunderland Heritage Partnership



The Sunderland Heritage website continued its 'Object of the Month' series with Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, featuring articles on Roman artefacts and Victorian magic lanterns. Other highlights have included a series of articles on the changing face of women's work in Sunderland, penned by Museum researcher Sophie Piper for International Women's Day.

Find out more and access the full programme at: sunderlandheritage.org



Culture House Sunderland is delivering an exciting programme of exhibitions, events and creative outreach across Sunderland's library network. With a focus on early years, older adults and young people, Culture House aims to build literacy, reduce isolation and grow community connection through creativity.

Between January and March, Culture House Sunderland delivered a vibrant mix of family learning, early years engagement and community wellbeing activity across the library network, from the city centre across to Washington and Houghton-le-Spring. Our February half-term programme brought hundreds of families into libraries for craft workshops, storytelling, digital making and playful drop-in sessions, helping families access high-quality cultural experiences close to home.

Early years activity remained a major strength, with strong attendance at Rhyme & Shine and the successful launch of our new Childminder Stay & Play sessions, designed to support local childminders and under-fives' development. Our weekly over-65s sessions also continued to provide a vital space for creativity, social connection and wellbeing, offering older residents regular opportunities to learn new skills and meet new people.



Coming up

Looking ahead to the next quarter, Culture House Sunderland will continue to offer a rich programme of free and low-cost cultural activity for families, early years groups, young people and older residents across the library network. April brings a vibrant Easter 2026 programme – and also a celebration of Washington Library's 50th birthday - followed by our regular set of weekly sessions and another busy half-term offer in late May.

As we move towards the opening of the new Culture House building, we will also continue piloting elements of our future programme – testing new formats, partnerships and community-led ideas that will shape the long-term cultural offer for the city.

Find out more and book: culturehousesunderland.co.uk/events

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Photo credit: Courtesy of Culture House



Minerva Arts & Wellbeing works to promote the benefits of arts and creativity for mental health and wellbeing, and to support individuals and communities in accessing these resources. A wide variety of programmes and services empower individuals to explore their artistic passions and improve their overall wellbeing.

Between January and March, Minerva Arts & Wellbeing delivered a strong programme of creative workshops from our Sunnyside venue. A total of 29 new learners from across Sunderland were engaged, alongside 16 returning participants who continued to build their skills and confidence.

Ceramics was the main area of activity, with participants developing practical skills such as hand-building, decorating and glazing. Sessions were accessible and relaxed, allowing people to work at their own pace and gain a sense of achievement from what they made. Returning participants tried more advanced techniques and developed their own ideas further, while those new to the sessions were introduced to ceramics in a way that felt approachable and enjoyable.

We continued to reach people from across the city, including Washington, Houghton-le-Spring, Hendon and Silksworth, reflecting Minerva's ongoing commitment to making creative opportunities accessible to those who may not otherwise engage. Through outreach and partnership working, we connected with individuals who may be experiencing isolation or low confidence and supported them to take part in a positive, structured activity.

Alongside the creative work, participants were also signposted to other opportunities and support, helping them to stay engaged with arts and community activity beyond the sessions.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Minerva Arts & Wellbeing



What's Next?

Over the coming quarter, as this marks the end of Minerva Arts & Wellbeing's involvement in the project, our focus will be on building on the progress already made and ensuring this work continues to have a lasting impact within the wider community. We will continue to deliver creative sessions from our venue, supporting both existing participants to develop further and welcoming new people into our provision.

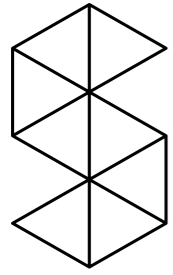
We are committed to maintaining the momentum built over recent months, ensuring that learners can continue to grow in confidence, develop their skills and remain connected to a supportive creative environment. Alongside this, we will continue to actively promote the work of our partners, helping more people across Sunderland to access a wider range of cultural and creative opportunities. Through this ongoing approach, we aim to ensure that the benefits of the project extend well beyond its formal end point, supporting sustained engagement and participation in the arts.

Find out more:

minervaartsandwellbeing.com

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SUNDERLAND CULTURE

Creativity. Community. Culture.

Sunderland Culture delivers a creative programme of events and participatory activities in communities across Sunderland, including Arts Centre Washington, National Glass Centre, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art and Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens.

This quarter saw a lively spring programme across our venues, bringing together exhibitions, events and hands-on activities for all ages. The season combined free and low-cost opportunities for families with a wider range of courses, screenings and workshops, creating more ways for people to get involved, learn new skills and experience culture.

At National Glass Centre, families enjoyed free glassmaking and flameworking demonstrations, hands-on glass experiences and an Easter trail, while adults explored new skills through ceramics, flameworking, chainmaille and glass courses.

At Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, children are invited to learn through Museum Tuesdays and Wild Thursdays, alongside museum exploration activities such as the Amazing Art Trail and an easter dinosaur egg hunt. Alongside this, adults enjoyed sessions across textiles, exercise and gardening all while connecting with community.

Over February half-term, the fifth edition of the Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival took place at Arts Centre Washington, celebrating young people's creativity through a dynamic programme of events, exhibitions and workshops. The festival featured the Bright Lights Youth Arts Exhibition, exploring the theme of Connections. Around 50 artworks by local young artists were showcased, with pieces specially selected by the Celebrate Different collective. Highlights included film screenings, live music from emerging regional talent, and a new theatre production. A series of free workshops also gave young people the opportunity to develop skills in creative areas such as photography, creative writing, music and animation.



Coming Up

Family glass painting and sandcasting sessions continue at the National Glass Centre, alongside adult courses including stained glass, fused glass and flameworked marbles. Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens offers a varied programme of family craft workshops, interactive storytelling, science clubs and art sessions, while adults can take part in community groups and seasonal craft activities.

At Arts Centre Washington, the Washington Folk Festival kicks off in April, bringing a weekend of live music and community celebration, alongside young musicians showcases, swing band performances and a concert celebrating Sunderland's musical heritage with Royal Northern Sinfonia. Washy Comedy Fest takes place in May, with three days of live comedy for all the family to enjoy!

Find out more: sunderlandculture.org.uk
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Celebrating Impact. Shaping Futures.

The Connecting and Catalysing Our Culture, Creativity & Engagement Project is made possible through funding from the UK Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund via Sunderland City Council.

This year the programme has supported hundreds of creative events and community-led activities that help Sunderland's people and places to thrive.

"I've discovered that I am actually quite a creative person! Thanks so much for a great session, I'll definitely be doing it again."

Workshop participant