

Undercurrents

Ribble Rivers Trust partnered with Burnley Council's Arts Development Team to inspire young people to connect with their rivers through an initiative that allowed them to work towards gaining a nationally recognised Arts Award qualification. The initiative was given the name *Undercurrents* by the young people themselves.

The workshops were predominantly held at Burnley Central Library and were attended by 230 13-19 year olds over 18 months, including 27 from Burnley's BME communities and 20 autistic young people. Six professional artists led the creative activities and encouraged the young people to discover and explore Burnley's hidden rivers through the use of photography, film, visual art and creative writing.

The workshops were open to all within the age group and could be attended as drop-in sessions, however a core group established itself, resulting in 14 young people completing their Arts Award – 7 of whom progressed onto the next level of the qualification.

Participant feedback from the workshops was collected. Some of the comments included;

"The rivers are lovely. I've loved learning new things about the place where I live."

"People don't appreciate the rivers in Burnley enough."

"It's important for young people in Burnley to learn about our rivers because they are beautiful things that flow through our home town."

"Burnley's rivers are really interesting!"

"More river walks please!"

A key outcome from the partnership project was that Arts Award delivery is now embedded at Burnley Central Library, with the library staff setting up and running their own Arts Award scheme for the first time as a direct result of the experience and mentoring gained through working with the council's Arts Development Team on the urban rivers project.

Some of the other highlights of the partnership project included;

- Increased confidence, opportunities and skills for young people, including trips out in nature.
- Accreditation gained through the national Arts Award scheme.
- Increased publicity for the URES project, helping to raise awareness of urban rivers.
- Engaged a further 800+ people from a range of communities at public events.
- Positive new partnership opportunities formed with a wide network of organisations in Burnley and beyond.
- Provided employment for 6 local freelance artists.
- Attracted new online audiences via the *Undercurrents* blog;

burnleyundercurrents.blogspot.co.uk

