

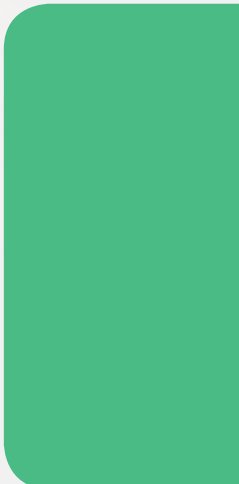
COHESION (+)



Evaluation Report: Gravesham Festival of Christmas Lights Evaluation Report 2016



Project Partners:



The Cohesion Plus Perspective

We are really pleased with what we were able to achieve with this year's Gravesham



Festival of Christmas Lights. It was a great showcase of how the arts can be used to bring communities together, young and old, urban or rural. It was so positive to see so many people out in Gravesend Town Centre carrying lanterns that they had themselves created working with our artistic partners **Same Sky Arts**.

We are grateful to our partners, the local community and all the 12 schools who came along and joined in with the celebrations. It is important to use celebrations like Christmas to bring all communities together and celebrate as one. The positive energy in the town centre made all the hard work worthwhile.

One of the highlights of the project was the new production we created called the '**Dancing Santas**' working with **Four by Four Bhangra Group** and **Saint George's C of E Secondary School**. The response we have had to this production has been overwhelming, both on the day of the festival and the weeks after. Since the festival this production has been viewed over 1.5 million times across different social media platforms including over a million video views on Facebook. This

production underlined the ethos of our organisation namely of using the arts to break down barriers and pushing artistic boundaries.

Gurvinder Sandher
(Artistic Director)

About the Festival

Thousands of people filled Gravesend Town Centre to enjoy a celebration of music, dance and light on Friday November 18 as the Christmas celebrations started in Gravesham. The Gravesham Festival of Christmas Lights was organised in partnership by **Cohesion Plus, Kent Equality Cohesion Council, Gravesham Borough Council** and supported by **Arts Council England**.

In the build up to the event some 550 young people from across the borough benefitted from free creative arts workshops working with **Same Sky Arts** on the Christmas Lanterns.



The Festival was divided into 3 distinct parts. In the first phase entertainment took place around the town centre with leading street artists including Electric Cabaret, Bloco Fogo Samba and the Crocodile Brass Band entertaining

the hundreds who were already in the Town Centre waiting for the parade.

The main element of the Festival was the Christmas lantern parade which featured 12 local schools from across the borough and over 1200 people. The parade also featured a number of exciting culturally diverse acts including the Black Knights, the Four by Four Dhol Drummers and Santa and his helpers on stilts. The parade was led by the Mayor of **Gravesham Cllr Greta Goatley** and there was a staggered Christmas Lights switch on as the parade went through the Town Centre. A particular highlight was the premiere of the Cohesion Plus produced 'Dancing Santa' performance.



The Festival culminated on Community Square where the Christmas tree lights were switched on after being addressed by the Artistic Director of Cohesion Plus Gurvinder Sandher who spoke about the positive impact the arts can have in bringing diverse communities together. This was followed by performances by the Gravesham Pantomime Cast of Jack and the Beanstalk.



Feedback

Evaluations were collected from the 12 schools participating in the event as well as from partners and artists participating in the Festival. The overwhelming feedback was that the Festival was a huge success with the majority of schools and artistic partners marking 'excellent' for the **organisation, artistic content** and **atmosphere**. All the responses also indicated that events like this help to promote community cohesion in the borough.

Comments on the evaluation forms included;

"This event plays a crucial part in planning for community cohesion"
(local school)

"Thank you for allowing us to participate in such a fantastic community arts festival"
(local school)

"Our pupils are still talking about it"
(local school)

"There was an amazing atmosphere in the Town Centre when we performed"
(artistic partner)



In addition to delivering the Festival another key output of the project was to create a new production which was then to be performed. The Cohesion Plus produced "Dancing Santa's" performance in the Town Centre was the result. This was a unique fusion of bhangra and contemporary dance to a special bhangra mix of popular Christmas hit "Merry Christmas Everyone" performed by Four by Four Bhangra and 30 pupils from Saint George's School. Feedback on social media for this massively successful performance has been really positive with comments being received both locally and nationally.

"This should be on TV to celebrate cohesion in these troubled times. Brilliant" **(Facebook)**

"Pure class...got to share this" **(Facebook)**

"Brilliant, totally love it!!!" **(Facebook)**

"This is fantastic, totally brightened up my day" **(Facebook)**

"This was great to watch, 2 cultures mixed together. This is what needs to happen around the world. Respect each other's cultures and the world will be such a better place" **(Facebook)**

