



ANNUAL RESEARCH REPORT 2023/24

END OF FIRST YEAR RESEARCH SUMMARY

**Sarah B. Davies (Research Lead) & Anna Cutler
(Research Consultant)**

The Mildred Fund builds young people's personal, social and creative confidence through art. It supports visual art institutions to work with schools and community groups to provide 13-19 year-olds with creative skills for them to thrive.

www.mildredfund.org

THE
MILDRED
FUND



Steve Tanner, Tate St Ives, Create Clarity 2014

"The teacher ... had mentioned in a previous conversation just how kind of small the worlds of the pupils were. So [we] took that as the impetus for the project."

(Project Lead)



Cover image: Tate St Ives YAY! (RESIDENT) 2024 © Ian Kingsnorth

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	5
About the Mildred Fund programme research	5
About the first cohort of organisations	5
1. ABOUT BEING A YOUNG PARTICIPANT	6
What challenges have young participants experienced prior to taking part?	6
What about the bigger picture?	6
How have these experiences manifested in the early stages of the project?	6
Why attentiveness?	6
Reflections on building trust in the early stages of a project	7
2. WHAT DID YOUNG PEOPLE DO IN THEIR PROJECTS?	8
About the projects	8
Reflections on getting the most out of the time you have	9
3. WHAT WAS THE JOURNEY FOR THE YOUNG PARTICIPANTS?	10
What is confidence, and how does it relate to wellbeing?	10
Personal confidence	10
Social confidence	10
Creative confidence	11
Reflections on how confidence works	11
4. PROCESSES: THREE LENSES OF ATTENTIVENESS	12
What key processes were adopted that enabled art to support confidence?	12
People	13
Space	14
Art	14
Reflections on attentive processes	15
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES	16
APPENDIX	17
Collaborative definitions of wellbeing	17
About the Project Teams	17
References	18

Executive Summary

ANNA CUTLER



This document is a summary of the first year of research activity funded by the Mildred Fund (2023/24). **The research asks: what are the vital ingredients within the Mildred Fund programme that can support young people in developing social, personal and creative wellbeing?** It explores the process of focused art programmes and the affordances they bring to young people.

The report includes insights from youth programmes with schools and communities created at Tate St Ives (Cornwall), Camden Art Centre (London) and Turner Contemporary (East Kent). It highlights the significance of trust-building, a specific form of attentiveness, the multi-dimensional factors of confidence, as well as the quality of processes themselves and their sustainability.

The following points indicate the key areas of research highlighted in this report:

- **Trust and relationships:** Building trust early in the art project and maintaining it through consistent support and engagement, even after the project ends.
- **Attentiveness:** Emphasizing individualized approaches that give a hyper-focus on the needs of young people, teachers, and youth workers, as well as the importance of creating supportive environments and using art as a medium for engagement.
- **Confidence and wellbeing:** Exploring the relationship between confidence and wellbeing, and how confidence in personal, social, and creative contexts can enhance overall wellbeing.
- **Artistic processes:** Highlighting the importance of slow, process-led, and judgment-free artistic activities that encourage collaboration, creativity, and personal expression.
- **Sustainability and continuity:** Considering ways to sustain the benefits of the programme by maintaining relationships and providing ongoing opportunities for engagement and development.

1. Trust and relationships

The Project Teams from the art institutions involved (see page 5) focused on understanding the backgrounds and lived experiences of the young people'. This awareness shaped a distinct and highly empathetic approach across all programmes. Trust was identified as a foundational ingredient for successful engagement and collaboration, requiring early development and maintenance throughout the project. Principles appeared to be emerging as the following elements (below) and led to what the research identified as a specific form of 'attentiveness':

- Nurture and care
- Listening and understanding the challenges
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Inclusivity
- Responsiveness

2. Attentiveness

Research found a specific form of 'attentiveness' that was given to participants. The detail of observation, care and understanding by the Project Teams, artists and other professionals involved was evident across all work and all sites and highlighted the importance of particular attention to the circumstances, needs and challenges of young people in new artistic environments. Finding ways to directly address these in the moment, from limited skills with materials, to managing vulnerability to literally feeding hunger, was crucial. Attending to the variety of participants' needs in this work was found to be significant, particular, and powerful. For young participants, and particularly those involved with multiple and complex needs, this hyper-focus and level of attentiveness was felt to be 'core'. Their needs were represented through their personal requirements, the nature of the spatial environment and the approach to artmaking:

Young People's Needs	Space Needs	Art Needs
Their friends	To feel comfortable	Slow pace
To trust and feel trusted	To have welcoming staff	Collaborative
Slower pace	To feel creatively different	Celebrated
To be seen	To include food	Representative of them
To be heard		Playful
To be remembered		Playful

3. Confidence and wellbeing

Confidence is often one of the first outcomes to be found from art programmes and was similarly found across all participants and projects involved in this research. Confidence was observed to develop across three main areas: personal, social, and creative. These were unexpectedly found to be the same in form as those in the wellbeing strands set out in the overarching research question. The strands are:

- **Personal confidence:** This includes greater self-esteem, self-assurance, and self-belief. Participants felt more comfortable, resilient, and had a greater sense of agency and confidence in their own stories.
- **Social confidence:** This involves feeling comfortable and accepted in group settings, the ability to work collaboratively, and having an increased voice and confidence in communicating with others.
- **Creative confidence:** This refers to confidence in sharing ideas, using materials and equipment, experimenting and taking creative risks, and feeling a sense of ownership and pride in their artwork and gallery spaces.

Evidence therefore suggested a strong link between confidence and overall wellbeing. This early-stage research raises questions about whether confidence can exist without wellbeing and vice versa, indicating that these concepts might be deeply and intrinsically interconnected and in need of further exploration to identify the constituent parts of confidence(s) and what they might yield for young people.

4. Artistic processes

The research found that artistic processes within the Mildred Fund programme are effective when slow, process-led, and iterative, focusing on the value of the process over outcomes to enhance confidence. These processes require a judgement-free environment, allowing for non-representational creative activities and collaborative efforts, that reduce anxiety. Processes are effective when responsive to individual preferences while also introducing challenges to encourage risk-taking. Celebrating the artistic process and ensuring it is representative of the participants' interests and backgrounds is crucial, but not without its own complications in terms of the participants' sense of vulnerability. Additionally, fostering a playful, non-hierarchical environment helps reshape young people's views of themselves and the world, promoting curiosity and creativity.

5. Sustainability and continuity

This research did not set out to cover the terrain of sustainability and continuity in the context of the projects. However, by fostering environments and conditions where young people feel safe, valued, and empowered, the projects do have potential for lasting impact on confidence and wellbeing. The young people and the organisations involved raised the need for a continued relationship with the participants and to maintain and support this as well as creating some longer-term tangible works in galleries or a sense that the young people had left their 'mark.'

The research from the Mildred Fund programme may offer insight and raise useful questions for the programme activity as well as prompt further research. This includes but is not limited to:

- **Trust as a catalyst:** How do trust, attentiveness and confidence work together? Is trust a catalyst for how art programmes operate?
- **Centrality of confidence to wellbeing:** Is confidence central to wellbeing, and can one exist without the other?
- **Impact of art on confidence:** Why is confidence often one of the first outcomes from art programmes, and how does it manifest across personal, social, and creative domains?
- **Prioritising attentiveness:** What are the most effective ways to maintain attentiveness and trust throughout the programme and beyond?
- **Sustainability of outcomes:** How can the confidence and wellbeing gains from the programme be sustained beyond its duration?

A note on methodology

Our programme research has been developed through interviews and reflection sessions with project teams and facilitators, as well as a range of enquiry research methods undertaken by individual organisations. These include observations; discussion and conversation; surveys and interviews; group reflections; learning journals; and creative responses to key questions.



Eva Jonas Documentation, Camden Art Centre,
18 December 2024 © Camden Art Centre

Introduction

This Annual Research Report is a summary of the learning following the first full year of project activity funded by the Mildred Fund in 2023/24. The title makes reference to observations made by the organisations' Project Leads¹ about the value and impact of this work for their young participants.

The report is peppered with reflections and thinking points for the existing organisations in cohort 1 and new Project Leads, facilitators and artists in other forthcoming cohorts. It is accompanied by two case studies that add depth to the learning in this report.

ABOUT THE MILDRED FUND PROGRAMME RESEARCH

The research approach has been developed following a pilot phase in 2022/23.² It seeks to understand the relationship between visual art and wellbeing and is underpinned by a focus question and three main research questions:

Research focus

What are the vital ingredients within the Mildred Fund programme that can support young people in developing social, personal and creative wellbeing?

Research questions

What is the journey for young people who participate in focused arts provision?

What learning do arts providers, artists and cultural institutions gain through working long term with/alongside young people?

What do those who are caring for and educating young people learn about the value of the arts?

The research is shaped by a wider literature review of evidence about the impact of art on wellbeing, interim and end-of-year reports developed by each organisation, as well as interviews and focus groups with the Project Teams. The research has not connected with individual participants in the first year. This is because the Project Teams have put considerable thought into the development of trust and building of relationships in order to work closely with their young participants. As it would not be appropriate to intervene in that process, the Project Leads manage their own enquiry research with their teams and feed back to the researcher at reporting stages.

ABOUT THE FIRST COHORT OF ORGANISATIONS

In the programme's inaugural year, four organisations were funded to develop a project that would support young people's development through art. Three organisations went on to deliver their projects in full, with the fourth organisation moving their activity into the next year. The three completed projects were quite different in scale, reach and ambition: two projects worked in depth with small groups across both schools and community settings, while the third worked at a larger scale across a further education setting. The features of each project are explored in more detail in Section 2 (About the projects). Meanwhile, the table below summarises the organisations' main aims, their project status and the number of young people they engaged in the first year.

Organisation	Project aims	Notes on progress at the end of 2023/24	Young participants in 2023/24	Total participants
Camden Art Centre, London	The project aims to nurture "creative confidence" and establish a voice among young people.	Camden Art Centre has completed its first of three years of project activity and is developing its second year of delivery.	A Gap in the Fence: 26 School students (13-14 years) Sidings Open Art Project: 15 young people (14-19 years)	41
Tate St Ives, Cornwall	The project aims to foster creativity, confidence, and collaboration among participants through peer-led and process-led methodologies.	Tate St Ives has completed its first of three years of project activity and is developing its second year of delivery.	Create Club: 22 School students (14-16 years) Resident: 6 young people (13-17 years)	28
Turner Contemporary, East Kent	The project aims to support the development of critical thinking, creativity and curiosity for young people.	Turner Contemporary's project for 2023/24 has evolved from the Mildred Fund's pilot project with the gallery in 2022/23. The number and regularity of sessions differ somewhat from the others this year. ³	Young Art Critics: 67 College students (16-17 years)	67
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge	The project aims to support young people to be "culturally confident", able to use art to connect with their own and others' emotions.	Kettle's Yard's project had a delayed start in the first year, and will progress its work into next year. ⁴	Bridges and Young Art Mentors: delayed engagement till Sept 2024	~
Total young people				136 aged 13-19⁵

1. About being a young participant

"... We're trying to understand ... and ... map out where they feel comfortable and where they belong ..."

(Project Lead)

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOUNG PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCED PRIOR TO TAKING PART?

Young people aged between 13 and 19 years arrived at their different programmes with a wide range of different experiences. The Project Teams were invited to outline some of the needs and challenges they had observed in the initial stages of the programme. The teams were very sensitive to the backgrounds and lived experiences of these young people and explained their worlds with great empathy and understanding.



Figure 1: Responses by Project Teams to the interview question: "What are the specific needs and challenges of the young people in your groups?"

WHAT ABOUT THE BIGGER PICTURE?

Figure 1 presents a sample of the challenges the organisations were attentive to, which helps build the picture as we start to look at the young participants' journey through the first year of their Mildred Fund project. But there are a wide range of contextual factors that may frame these challenges, including local issues and young people's experiences of place, their protected characteristics, and familial socio-economic status.

We know that their experiences of education, particularly arts and creative learning, may vary widely. We also know the lack of funding and the pressure on the curriculum mean schools struggle to work with artists and arts organisations.⁶ And we know there are inadequate resources to support inclusive learning and wellbeing in schools⁷ at a time where the rate and scale of neurodivergence and youth mental health challenges has been growing.⁸ Years 7, 9 and 11 are frequently cited as crucial ages where support for wellbeing and mental health are most important – these are the key age ranges of the Mildred Fund's participants.⁹ Research has found experience of schooling during the last four years since Covid has exacerbated those challenges further.¹⁰ There are also recent studies into education and absenteeism that make compelling background reading when understanding the wider needs of our young participants.¹¹

While it has been a deliberate decision in this research not to make an assessment of the young participants by the issues indicated

above – choosing instead to observe the important factors in their experience of the programme and draw out the process learning – it would be remiss not to acknowledge the systems framing their worlds, over which they have little or no control.

HOW HAVE THESE EXPERIENCES MANIFESTED IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE PROJECT?

Any one of these experiences listed might make coming together to work collaboratively in an art project feel challenging, but multiple experiences in combination would understandably cause a high degree of anxiety, which was evident in a number of ways in the early stages of the projects. The Project Teams, again with great empathy, shared a sample of ways this presented itself:

- Participants were often uncomfortable in gallery settings. Most had never visited the galleries before this project. They found that wall text "intimidating" and felt that gallery staff were unwelcoming: "Am I good enough to be here?"
- Many had already formed opinions of art, and their own abilities. This presented in some cases as resistance to taking part, or apathy in other cases. Inhibitions about drawing were recognised as a barrier to their engagement. "I just don't have the patience for art."
- There was at times some anxiety around an exhibition and expressing themselves in front of others. Some struggled to complete work in time; others were not comfortable with their work being on display and did not want to feel exposed and vulnerable to judgement amongst their peers.
- The "social cobwebs" were a distraction. At various points, friendships, relationships, bullying and disruptive social activity taking place outside of the project would seep into the workshop space and often affected the creative and collaborative energy.
- They were often fearful of meeting new people – new adults and/or new young people. This may be a common feeling at the start of anything new, but in some cases these feelings were very strong. In one case, this appeared to stem from a fear of being misunderstood. For example, a young person questioning their gender chose to wear a face covering as they felt concerned their identity would be mistaken. There were two other instances where different young people were non-speaking or using minimal speech and were clearly finding group situations challenging.

It is important to note that in many cases, those experiencing such challenges will also develop enormous strengths. Each organisation showed they were attentive to the needs and experiences of young people, whilst aiming to identify, highlight and build upon their strengths: drawing upon their deep resilience and behaviours that in school settings may seem to disrupt or challenge the norm for example, and giving the permission and opportunity to develop these strengths further as important creative qualities.

WHY ATTENTIVENESS?

Approaches that were individualised, hyper-focused on need, and centred on the people (young people, teachers, youth workers), space (gallery and workshop environment) and art (mediums, disciplines, processes, artists) came through prominently during the research so far.

We propose to describe this as attentiveness and seek to explain its value within this programme.

Reflections on building trust in the early stages of a project

Working meaningfully with young participants seems to require a significant level of attentiveness. One of the key phases of the Mildred Fund is research and development (R&D), which enables organisations to understand the needs of their young people. This has helped promote an attentive approach from the start; one that purposefully values, and is responsible to, the wellbeing and creativity of young people.

Building trust is often the first priority in projects that work in a meaningful way with young people, which comes from attentiveness and approaches that foster honesty and transparency.

Some important ways of building trust have emerged across the organisations. It may be interesting to propose these as principles for building trust:

- Nurture and care
- Listening and understanding the challenges
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Inclusivity at the core
- Responsibility and responsiveness, facilitated with honesty

THINKING POINT: In what ways is attentiveness built into your approach? What principles are embedded into your approach as you start to build trust with young people?

“Flexibility, responsiveness and listening [are] fundamental for serving communities effectively ...”

(Project Lead)



Ian Kingsnorth, Tate St Ives YAY! (RESIDENT) 202

2. What did young people do in their projects?

The young participants were introduced to a wide range of artistic disciplines. Some common themes across each of the projects, either explicitly or implicitly, were to develop collaborative work, increase confidence and develop/enhance their voice.



Figure 2: Project Teams' descriptions of their art activities

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

Camden Art Centre

A Gap in the Fence was a project with 26 Year 9 students (13-14 years) from Maria Fidelis School, a secondary Catholic school in Camden which is approximately 3 miles away from the gallery. The project ran for eight sessions with artist/photographer Eva Jonas, and it was based within the school and its art facilities for part of the project, where they worked with polaroid photography and drawing. The second part of the project was based at Camden Art Centre to develop large-scale collaborative and individual works. The project ended with students co-designing a display of their works that will be installed at their school in the autumn term 2024/25. The students are all studying art as part of their school curriculum.

The Sidings Open Art Project worked with 15 young people aged 14-19 years from the Sidings Youth Project at the nearby Sidings Community Centre, which is approximately 1.5 miles from the gallery. The project ran for 15 sessions, and was based at Sidings initially, before inviting the group to the gallery for the last half of the project. Together the young participants and artist and filmmaker Shepherd Manyika developed their own film, photography and sound pieces which culminated in a celebration event in September 2024 at Sidings.

Camden Art Centre developed an enquiry question across the two projects, which helped to explore the development of "creative confidence" and increase voice and agency. Additionally, the project sought to help create greater advocacy for the arts within the school.



Turner Contemporary

Young Art Critics was a project working with 67 students aged 16-17 years from East Kent College, which is approximately 4.5 miles from the gallery. They met six times at the gallery to explore its exhibitions and attend a themed workshop with artists to further develop ideas, techniques and personal responses.¹² The workshop artists were Alessandro Raho (oil painting); Leap then Look (Lucy Cran and Bill Leslie, cross-disciplinary and interactive play); and Harold Offeh (performance). Following these workshops, the students were invited back to the gallery to present critiques about the artforms/exhibitions from their experience and their further research. The students were all studying A-Level or diploma level in art or other creative subjects.

Turner Contemporary's enquiry question aimed to explore the conditions to support the development of three main 'artistic habits of mind': critical thinking, creativity and curiosity.

Tate St Ives

Create Club at Tate St Ives consisted of 22 students from three schools from the Truro and Penwith Academy Trust: Hayle Academy, St Ives School and Cape Cornwall School. They met a minimum of 10 times at the gallery, travelling around 30 miles/45 minutes each way, to explore a wide range of artistic materials, disciplines and skills with socially engaged artist Peach Doble. The group developed an installation for the gallery's lift and a set of 25 second challenges for visitors, based on the time the lift takes to go up and down. A second exhibition was installed in the schools in autumn 2024. Tate St Ives also led a staff training session for the Trust, and developed a Create Club Kit for teachers, to expand the reach of the project across the schools. These students were all studying art at GCSE.



Ian Kingsnorth, Tate St Ives Create Club 2024

The **Resident** project worked with six young people aged 13-17 years from YAY Youth Group in Truro, who travelled around 30 miles/45 minutes each way to the gallery, across eight monthly sessions. With socially engaged artist Tom Stockley, the group developed a mural inspired by Tate's collection and the coming together of their individuality as a group. The mural was exhibited at the gallery during summer 2024 before being permanently hung at the youth group's new centre.

Tate St Ives' enquiry question aimed to investigate ways to support young people to work collaboratively to create something new for the gallery space within a 'creative journey framework.'

Reflections on getting the most out of the time you have

If we look at the timings of the sessions across the projects, the sessions were neither long nor frequent in the context of a year of a young person's life – in most cases sessions lasted around two hoursⁱ and there were an average of 9.5 sessionsⁱⁱ between the autumn and summer terms. The Project Teams reflected on how short the session time felt compared with how much time was needed to work in a meaningful way. They talked of the importance of factoring in time to allow young people to arrive, settle and eat. They talked of the importance of pre- and post-session planning time and reflection with the artists. This is explored further in Section 4 (Processes), but it is widely recognised that in the context of education time is at a premium and while the time and frequency of these sessions may appear small, it may be as much as can be managed by schools.

What was clear throughout the research is that during these sessions, these young participants were attended to, and were deeply engaged in art in a wide range of forms.

This has enabled their experiences of the subject back at school to be enriched. But more importantly, these projects stand apart from any educational expectations for art, facilitating the opportunity for them to express themselves freely. As we will see in the following section, this has had a significant effect on a number of the young participants.

THINKING POINT: When you don't have the luxury of time or frequency with the groups, how can you ensure that the art on offer quickly connects with young participants, inspires them and allows them to express themselves?

Reference:

i. This is the mode average of the session length across both school and community projects for all participating organisations, i.e. most sessions ran for 120 minutes, although one project ran sessions that were longer at 240 minutes and one ran shorter sessions at 60 minutes.

ii. This is the mean average of sessions across both school and community projects for all participating organisations, i.e. session frequency ranged from six sessions in one project to 15 in another.

"What was clear throughout the research is that during these sessions, these young participants were attended to, and were deeply engaged in art in a wide range of forms."

3. What was the journey for the young participants?

Each organisation supported the young participants to achieve significant social and creative outcomes collectively, as well as observing examples of individual shifts and personal growth that tell the story of an incredibly powerful journey over the course of the year.

By far the most significant shift observed by each of the organisations was an increase in confidence. The organisations also recognised that young people's voice was greater and there was a larger amount of ownership of the gallery, the project and the artwork they developed.



Figure 3: Project Teams' responses to a collaborative activity exploring the main impacts for young people at the end of their project in Year 1.

WHAT IS CONFIDENCE, AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO WELLBEING?

At the beginning of the first year, before much activity had taken place, the cohort of organisations collaborated on a definition of wellbeing specific to the work they aimed to do with young people. The research used this to help build a picture of what wellbeing meant in the specific context of the Mildred Fund. Confidence was one of the highest scoring words collectively used, equal with self-worth, agency, enjoyment, connection and calm.¹³

At the end of the first year, we have seen that confidence was the highest scoring outcome. It seems clear that confidence is intricately related to wellbeing, but how?

When delving into the organisations' descriptions of confidence that they'd observed amongst their young participants, it was interesting to notice that confidence did not reside in one specific area of our wellbeing research themes (Social, Personal and Creative); instead it appeared to be developing across all three research themes. This throws up a number of interesting questions: is confidence central to wellbeing? Does confidence exist without wellbeing and can wellbeing exist without confidence? Are the terms in fact, interchangeable? Experience and past research tells us that confidence is usually one of the first outcomes from art programmes, but why?

In the absence of any concrete answers at this stage, it seems important to explore confidence further: the ways it manifests, and the reasons why it might be such a strong outcome.

PERSONAL CONFIDENCE

Specific to the individual, personal confidence may underpin all other areas of confidence. Personal confidence is likely to be directly impacted by individual lived experiences, including challenges and traumatic occurrences. Project teams observed personal confidence in a range of ways:

- Having greater self-esteem, feeling self-assured and having self-belief – knowing, accepting and valuing themselves more
- Confident to navigate changes and greater resilience
- Comfortable, opening up and "coming out of their shells" (Turner Contemporary)
- Greater agency
- Increased voice
- Confidence in their own story

SOCIAL CONFIDENCE

Social confidence is the confidence of interacting with others in social situations. Social confidence may be easily knocked by peers and social settings and it therefore shares an interdependence with personal confidence. Project Teams observed social confidence in a range of ways:

- Feeling comfortable in the group
- Feeling accepted by others for who they are
- The confidence to work with others, accept others' ideas and develop bonds and friendships. For Tate St Ives this was referred to as "collaborative confidence" and Turner Contemporary talked of social skills that supported teamwork
- Feeling their voice is valued by others and confidence communicating with others. For example, Turner Contemporary spoke of "oracy skills", Kettle's Yard talked of one young person "feeling allowed to talk", Camden Art Centre spoke of "amplified voices" whilst Tate St Ives talked of a young person who was unable to speak in social situations who made an incredible shift within the group. Increased decision making was also evident
- Able to seek help from others if needed. For example, one young person working with Tate St Ives sought help for their disability.



Steve Tanner, Tate St Ives Create Club 2024

CREATIVE CONFIDENCE

One definition of creative confidence in the context of the Mildred Fund might be the confidence acquired whilst developing creative skills and habits, and confidence developed for the cultural institutions with whom they worked. Project Teams observed creative confidence in a range of ways:

- Confidence with own ideas and sharing those ideas
- Confidence with materials and equipment
- Confident communicating through art
- Learning and mastery of artistic skills
- Comfortable to experiment and play
- Pushing the boundaries of ideas and skills and taking creative risks. For example, Camden Art Centre mentioned participants explored the creative experiences in “sophisticated ways”
- Ownership of/comfort in gallery spaces. For example, Turner Contemporary reflected that many of the young people felt they had developed a “relationship with the building” and felt confident to return to the galleries on their own. Participants at Tate St Ives also proudly stepped through a Staff Only door
- Pride in their artwork.



Steve Tanner, Tate St Ives Create Club 2024

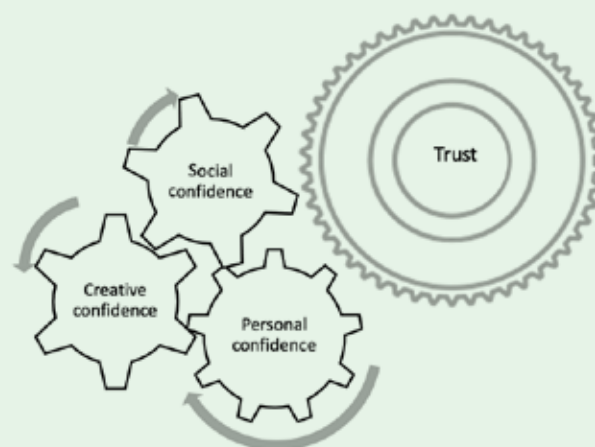
“Is personal confidence fed by a greater sense of wellbeing? Or is a sense of wellbeing served by a bedrock of confidence, worth and greater self-esteem?”

Reflections on how confidence works

There was an agreement across the organisations that with greater confidence will come greater engagement, teamwork, risk taking, curiosity and experimentation. Confidence seems to be well served by the organisations’ attentiveness and those important principles of building trust, identified earlier. Indeed, these reported increases in confidence appear to often be characterised by feelings of safety and trust: trusting others (the facilitators, artist and the group); trusting the environment (gallery, school, community centre); trusting that others value their contributions (their ideas, their own capacity to use their voices); trusting that they will be listened to and heard; and trusting the project. They also need to feel trusted by others in the group and inside the gallery space. Is trust the flywheel to confidence?

We feel confident that wellbeing and confidence are interlinked. Personal confidence seems to be interconnected with our definitions of personal wellbeing and there are apparent consistencies between social confidence and social wellbeing from our previous research. Additionally, there are connections with John Holden’s ‘cultural wellbeing’ which references “knowledge, confidence, mastery and creativity” that helped inform our early definitions of creative wellbeing, amongst other writings.ⁱⁱⁱ

Is personal confidence fed by a greater sense of wellbeing? Or is a sense of wellbeing served by a bedrock of confidence, worth and greater self-esteem? Is social confidence fed by greater trust in self and greater social interaction? Meanwhile, is creative confidence a vital cog in the machine, powered by artistic experiences? The model below may be one way of describing the shifting gears for the Mildred Fund participants, placing these confidences at the core of any increases in wellbeing.



THINKING POINT: What do you believe is the relationship with wellbeing, confidence and art? Does this model work for you?

References:

iii. Holden, J. 2016, “Organism not Mechanism: An Ecological Approach to Cultural Learning”, A New Direction: <https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/asset/2570/download>

4. Processes: three lenses of attentiveness

A success of the Mildred Fund programme in year one is the collective empathy, care and attentiveness to young people, as individuals and as groups. It is through paying attention to the needs and experiences of young people that significant shifts in confidence have emerged.

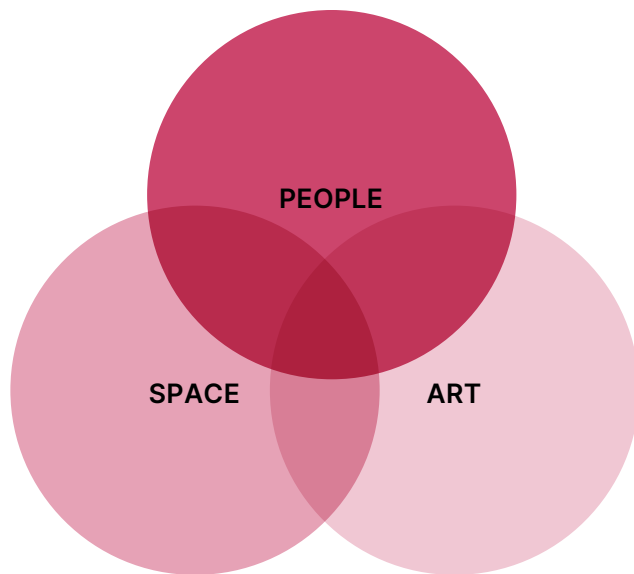


Figure 4: Three lenses of attentiveness

WHAT KEY PROCESSES WERE ADOPTED THAT ENABLED ART TO SUPPORT CONFIDENCE?

Despite how different each project is, there are rich insights and valuable learning points across the projects arising from the processes that have been developed: ingredients, conditions, methods and approaches that have had an effect on the development of the projects and have helped increase confidence. These have been grouped into three areas of learning:

- **People:** How do we pay attention to the needs of people? What processes are important for young people, teachers and youth workers?
- **Space:** How do we pay attention to the space we create? How do we create the right environment for it to be effective?
- **Art:** How does art attend to needs? What are the important artistic processes that support young people?



Ian Kingsnorth, Tate St Ives YAY! (RESIDENT) 2024

PEOPLE

What processes are important for young participants?

Young people need ...	Learning, observations and questions
A framework that maps the journey	Participants benefited from a framework that clearly communicated the project stages and simultaneously developed space for flexibility. Interestingly, Camden Art Centre and Tate St Ives learned about the importance of being non-linear, and the framework needs to adapt as the young people develop skills and confidence and create work. Tate St Ives developed the Creative Journey Framework and remarked that clarity is important for neurodivergent young people and artists in particular.
Their friends	Friendships came up in all projects, including Kettle's Yard's. Project Teams found that friendships were vital to ensuring attendance and engagement. Letting young people come with a friend is not always realistic for numbers, but is important for their confidence. One Project Team found that smaller groups worked better than whole group work to increase creative and collaborative confidence, while another team found that in groups with numbers of three or five someone would frequently feel left out. Where is the right balance?
To trust and feel trusted	Project Teams found that initiatives that seek to develop new work through new collaborations require trust: in the gallery space, in the adults and in the other participants. Tate St Ives reflected on the necessity of starting to build trust early and of a September workshop at school before the project activity began. The Project Teams also reflected on the importance of young people feeling trusted by the institutions.
A slower pace	Mirroring and respecting the approach of youth workers and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support workers, Tate St Ives reflected that a "kind pace" maintains trust and strengthens relationships with young participants.
To be seen	Project Teams observed the importance of young people being seen as individuals with skills and strengths that can be supported through art. What do they like or dislike? What do they want to work on? What materials do they like to use? <i>"Remember you are there to advocate for the young people internally, externally and throughout the project."</i> (Project Lead)
To be heard	Project Teams maintained that participants' voice needs to be valued and "amplified". All four galleries noted the importance of listening, building in opportunities for co-development and decision-making throughout the project, and trusting their decisions – important parts in the process of showing their voice is valued. It is also important to understand any barriers they may have to taking part.
To be remembered	Project Teams are conscious of the relationships that have developed between the young participants and the gallery and have carefully considered ways to support them after the project has ended, so that confidence and ownership in the venue can continue. Writing testimonials for young people utilising the gallery brand is useful. Inviting them back next year, on other programmes and/or as mentors are some other ways being explored. Once trust and confidence has been generated, how do we maintain this when the project ends?

What processes are important for teachers and youth workers?

Teachers and youth workers need ...	Learning, observations and questions
To know the process	Project Teams observed the importance of sharing the process with stakeholders "... even if we can't be sure what we will be making." Due to the process-led, co-creative nature of the projects, it isn't always possible to say what will happen or when, and the teams noted that this can lead to a lack of confidence from teachers who often work very differently to this. Once more, a framework such as Tate St Ives' was effective in increasing the confidence of staff/support workers/senior leaders and other stakeholders.
To feel confident they can do this too	This was supported through CPD, training and art resources. Two Project Leads remarked that the teachers and youth workers were not well resourced with art materials (Turner Contemporary and Tate St Ives). Additionally, one Project Lead reflected that some teachers, including art teachers, may not be used to working in the same ways/with the same methodologies as galleries and artists.
Facilitators to 'hold the energy'	Project Teams reflected that these projects have involved "stepping away from the curriculum" and require time and commitment for teachers and youth leaders although we know that in return they will benefit from new ideas, new perspectives, new processes. Supporting teachers to have reflection time whilst "holding" the energy of the group helped to build the practice of self-reflection and increase confidence in the value of the project as well as supporting bonds to develop further with their young people.
Advocacy for their subject (art teachers)	Two Project Leads noted that utilising the gallery brand was important for increasing the confidence of teachers of the value of their creative subject back at school. <i>"Their arts offer is quite limited and they don't have any artworks displayed in the school, for example, and the ... advocacy for creativity is diminished."</i> (Project Lead)

SPACE

How do you create the right environment?

What processes (approaches, ingredients and conditions) are important for the space to be effective?

The space needs ...	Learning, observations and questions
To feel comfortable	This was important for young people to feel safe and develop confidence. For Camden Art Centre, increasing the “comfortability” of the space was important for the young people to be put at ease, and for the relationship to be built with the gallery. For Tate St Ives this included comfortable seating, quiet spaces and pride flags to feel accepted within “open, positive environments.”
To have welcoming gallery staff	This was important in order for young people to feel trusted and ready to explore. Art spaces can be a barrier. Gallery staff can help create a safe space for young people. Tate St Ives ran training for gallery staff on their welcome, with the added outcomes that it increased their own confidence in having young people in the space.
To feel creatively different (if based in school/ community centre)	The importance of changing their usual environment to feel inviting and full of creative potential was a key learning for one project that was doing something quite different to what usually happens in that space. “Maximise what can be done in school. Prioritise what you can only do at the gallery.”
To include food and permission to eat	One Project Lead reflected that many young people (and their families) were going hungry. This impacted on their mood, engagement and concentration. Ensuring the space has snacks available and being mindful of the energy levels in the group is of key importance.

ART

What are the important artistic process that support young people’s confidence and wellbeing?

What are the important processes that support them to develop artistically?

Artistic processes need ...	Learning, observations and questions
To be slow	Project Teams reflected on the importance of slow processes, slow looking and slow learning. Kettle’s Yard, Turner Contemporary and Camden Art Centre all remarked on the importance of engaging with art slowly. Camden Art Centre found that artforms that required slower processes were important.
To be process-led and iterative	The value of process over outcomes was recognised by all and was found to be of key importance for young people to be able to develop their confidence. It supports moments of risk taking within the project, develops creative thinking and provides more opportunities for strengthening voice.
To be judgment-free	Camden Art Centre observed the importance of levelling the playing field by incorporating non-representational creative activities, ephemeral acts of creation and limited or “restrictive” materials. Tate St Ives and Camden Art Centre reflected that many young people are already conscious of their artistic skills and have perspectives shaped by their art lessons: judged and graded, often representational.
To be collaborative	Each project aimed to develop collaborative work, and the Project Teams found working collaboratively generated pride and problem solving together. Camden Art Centre noticed collaboration reduced “anxiety over authorship”, through the shared creative endeavour. “Working big” also demands physical acts of collaboration the Project Lead maintained – important for confidence building (but can also be challenging early on). Collaboration can also develop increased critical engagement and feedback amongst the peers (Turner Contemporary) and help resolve “creative differences” (Camden Art Centre).
To be responsive to individuals	There were times when building on individuals’ skills and preferences was an important step to make young people feel trusted, more at ease and increase their self-worth. How might you find the right balance between responding to their preferences and introducing challenge/pushing the boundaries to support greater risk taking? How might you find ways of working to bring them together as a group AND allow for individual strengths and interests?
To be celebrated	Programming a sharing or celebration overall was positive, however Tate St Ives and Camden Art Centre observed initial feelings of anxiety about developing a product or feeling on show/exposed. On the other hand though, the celebration “legitimised their creative endeavours” and showed value in their work.
To be representative of the young people	The teams recognised the importance of recruiting artists that represented the interests and/ or backgrounds of the young people. Artists that are representative bring a range of skills and relevance.
To be playful	Most organisations remarked on the importance of young people being given the opportunity to be playful and being around adults (artists, facilitators) who are not afraid to demonstrate playfulness. This helped remove any fears of being judged for skilfulness or quality and emphasises exploration, learning, expression and voice. Non-hierarchical environments, facilitated by adults who are not playing the role of teacher, can help “re-shape” young people’s views of their self and the world around them (Camden Art Centre).



Ian Kingsnorth, Tate St Ives Create Club 2024

Reflections on attentive processes

Much of the learning around effective, attentive processes focused on time: slow processes (Camden Art Centre), slow looking and slow learning (Turner Contemporary), slower and kinder paces of working (Tate St Ives) and process-based art that values time for experimentation over outcomes (all). Time is needed to grow trust, build relationships with young people, to increase the bond within the group as well as their bond with the gallery and the facilitators, and to break down a lack of confidence. In the sessions, time is needed for them to process their days/experiences and get comfortable in the space. Put simply, the young people are asking us, if not teaching us, to slow down, listen and respond.

What makes this learning more interesting is when time is placed alongside the learning about the importance of a

transparent framework that scaffolds the project's stages and simultaneously holds the capacity for flexibility and co-creation. Tate St Ives learned that their Creative Journey Framework supported young people to take ownership of the project and define their direction within the safety of it, in clearly articulated timeframes and stages. Far from being a linear process though, it allowed flex, creativity and even risk-taking to happen within the stability of the structure. It also valued and strengthened young people's voice, a strong outcome of slower paces. Paying attention to time is vital.

THINKING POINT: Which processes across the three lenses (people, space and art) are most valuable to your project? What other processes work for you?

Concluding thoughts: values, principles and processes

The shifts in confidence that have occurred during the first year of the Mildred Fund feel vastly significant. In the context of the experiences and challenges young participants have faced prior to joining the projects, and the modest scale and frequency of the sessions overall, it would be fair to say this is a considerable shift for these individuals.

A summary of the main shifts across personal, social and creative confidence:

Change / shifts	Examples
Confidence in their own story	Feeling more accepting of themselves and who they are. More able or empowered to share their experiences/perspectives. Knowing when they need help.
Confidence to connect and collaborate with others in a group	More at ease working with each other. Communication skills developed. Increased, amplified voice.
Confidence in the gallery	More trust, safety, comfort, ownership and assuredness for the gallery and the artist/facilitators/exhibition assistants and staff. Feeling trusted and welcomed.
Confidence in their abilities to create and be creative	Ideas are validated, art as a subject/practice being validated, more experimental and trial/error, more assured of their own skill.

Through this research we have observed that there was an implicit relationship between confidence and wellbeing, and it would be interesting to follow this up in the second year of programme delivery. We found that attentiveness was a vital ingredient for projects during their first year, which again would be interesting to observe further in year two. We put forward a model whereby the three areas of confidence (personal, social, creative) are powered by each other, driven by and supported by trust. This was one model – there may be others.

In any case, there was a set of conditions and ingredients that seemingly underpinned these powerful outcomes. To start, the Mildred Fund's values provide a clear and purposeful frame. Organisations held a position of attentiveness that the research argues has been fundamental. Attentiveness has supported the building of trust, the first key ingredient for the projects, with five key principles emerging across the organisations. With attentiveness and trust, the organisations have shaped the processes which attend to the needs of people, space and art that have supported the development of transformational shifts in confidence.

What is indisputable is the necessity of art for expanding young people's worlds and, we have found, of building their confidence.

You can see a summary of Key Findings from our first full year of programmes [here](#).

The Mildred Fund Programme Model, year one

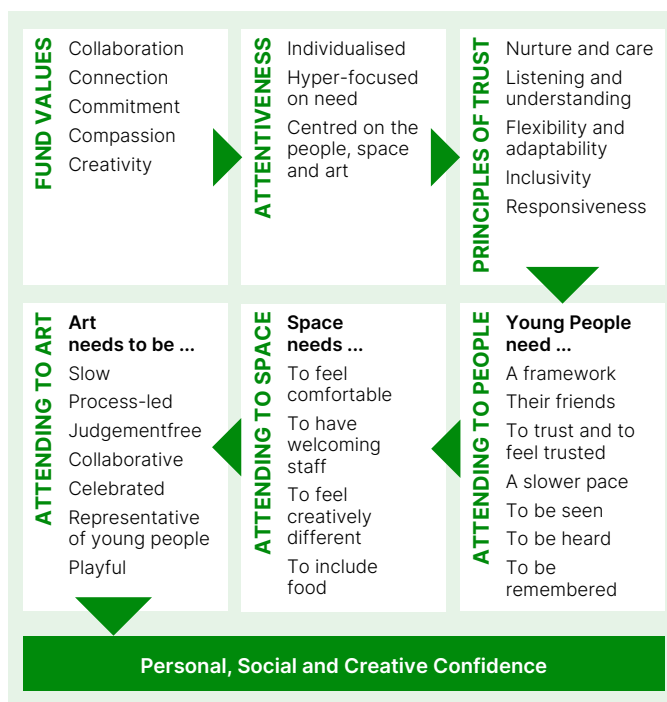


Figure 5: Values, approach, principles, processes

"What you start to find is bits of yourself."

(Young person)

Appendix

COLLABORATIVE DEFINITIONS OF WELLBEING

In November 2023 the first cohort were invited to collaboratively define wellbeing for the Mildred Fund before their delivery began. This helped shape the research and helped the development of their individual project enquiry questions.



Figure 6: Projects Teams' responses to the question: "What does wellbeing mean for your project?" in November 2023

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAMS

In the first year, the Project Lead for Tate St Ives was the Curator for Families, Schools and Young People's programmes. The Project Lead for Camden Art Centre was the Learning Curator. The Project Lead for Turner Contemporary was the Head of Learning and Participation. The Project Lead for Kettle's Yard was the Community Manager.

The Project Leads are often supported by a team member who supports the management, coordination and delivery of the project with an artist/s. This was the case for Tate St Ives and Turner Contemporary. Later in the year, Kettle's Yard employed a Programme Coordinator to manage the programme. For Camden Art Centre however, the Project Lead worked as the co-facilitator alongside the artists.

"Confidence did not reside in one specific area of our wellbeing research themes (Social, Personal and Creative); instead it appeared to be developing across all three research themes."

References

- 1.** The Project Lead role is allocated to a leader within the art institution who oversees the project and its evaluation. In this report, the wider team of staff working on and facilitating a Mildred Fund project are referred to as Project Teams. See Appendix: About the Project Teams for further information.
- 2.** The pilot phase was a programme led by Turner Contemporary in 2022/23. Evaluation reports were produced by evaluation consultant Anna Cutler – in this case commissioned by the gallery, and not by the Mildred Fund.
- 3.** The project developed this year took a different approach to their pilot project, which worked in-depth with a much smaller, discrete group. Regardless of these differences, Turner Contemporary's projects share many of the principles across the wider programme.
- 4.** Kettle's Yard was involved in the framing of this research, contributing reflections and the learning around methods and processes. They are not included in this year's data reporting.
- 5.** This figure (136) is taken from summary reports provided by the Project Teams. It may be that there were instances of inconsistent engagement and we know of at least one occurrence of someone leaving the programme.
- 6.** The Cultural Learning Alliance's 'Annual Report Card' explores these issues in depth in an overview of the current state of arts education. See the Report Card for 2025: <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/#annual>
- 7.** The Cultural Learning Alliance's 'Blueprint' addresses these issues: https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CLA005_One-pager_AW.pdf
- 8.** See for example, Support for neurodivergent children and young people – POST, 2024. <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0733/>
- 9.** These are the main age groups most likely to be referred to school counselling services for mental health and wellbeing support. See Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future Departmental advice for school leaders and counsellors. DFE, 2016. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74ba8640f0b619c8659f41/Counselling_in_schools.pdf See also, Provision of school-based counselling services, 2021. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2021-0178/> See also, School-based counselling in UK secondary schools: a review and critical evaluation 2013. https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/basw_114831-3_0.pdf Additionally, it is interesting – given the nature of the findings in this report – that in the world of school counselling, the most frequent goal set by young people for themselves is to increase self-confidence.
- 10.** See for example, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England – wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey, NHS England Digital, 2023. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up> and The impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health: A mixed methods survey, Bell et al. 2023. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178123000355?via%3Dihub>
- 11.** See for example Overview: The pandemic, pupil attendance and achievement, LSE 2024. [cep45.pdf](https://cep45.lse.ac.uk) (lse.ac.uk)
- 12.** The number and regularity of Young Art Critic's sessions differ from the other projects from a programme research perspective.
- 13.** The word cloud in the Appendix shows the weighting of words chosen by the organisations at the start of the programme to define wellbeing in the context of their Mildred Fund projects.