



## **Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2024-25**

### **Third-Year Projects Showcase**

Part of:

**North East North Cumbria  
Health & Care Partnership**



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# Introducing Heather Corlett

## Child Health and Wellbeing Network - Arts & Creativity Executive Lead



**Heather has always had a passion for arts** since she was a child. She joined the NHS in 1992 and as the Programme Lead for the Child Health and Wellbeing Network has encouraged progress, alongside Chris Drinkwater, of its founding commitment to Arts and Creativity as a cross-cutting theme.

**This has included establishing partnerships** with colleagues from Northern Ballet, attracting funding into Network arts initiatives, and the development of an Arts and Creativity Advisor role.

**Heather was delighted** to take on the Executive Lead role for Arts and Creativity when Chris Drinkwater stepped down – but admits that they are very big shoes to fill!

*“We are delighted to share this Creative Health project showcase for the third annual Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards.*

*Our Creative Health projects demonstrate the beneficial impact of arts on the wellbeing of primary-aged children, bringing creative expertise to the classroom, and to especially benefit those in the highest areas of deprivation.*

*The purpose of these awards is to grow interest and share examples of creative health in primary schools within the North East and North Cumbria, to the ultimate benefit of the children involved.”*

# The Child Health and Wellbeing Network

## Our shared vision and priorities

In the North East and North Cumbria we believe all children and young people should be given the opportunity to flourish and reach their potential, and be advantaged by organisations working together

## Network delivery and reach



To join the Network scan this QR code or [click here](#)

- Deliver on the NHS England CYP Transformation Programme
- Partnership bids to access new funding
- Network of Advisors to support broad system
- Cross-system membership of over 2100 – anyone working with children & young people
- Youth Board and Network groups to promote youth voice
- Events to share good practice to others in our area
- National and international speakers to North East & North Cumbria
- Produce newsletters and growing social media presence
- Weekly Child Health Tuesday email bulletin

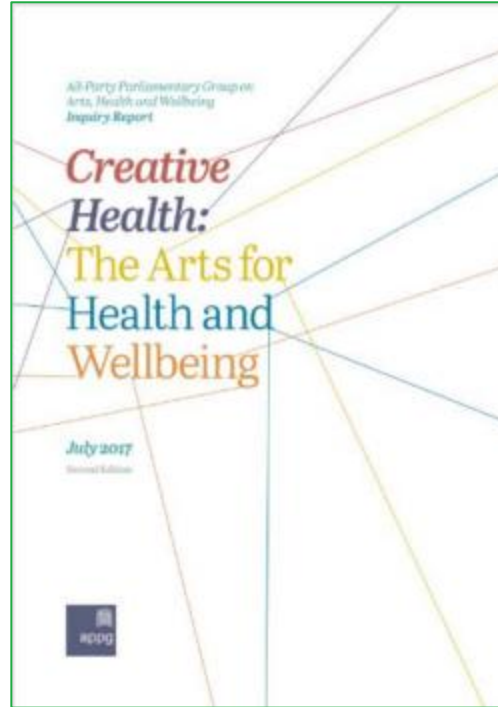


# What is Creative Health & why is it important?

**Creative Health put simply** is the connection between art and culture, with health and social care and how being creative can lead to healthier lives and communities. Active engagement with arts and culture, whether through our own creative practice or through our enjoyment of the creative practice of others, is beneficial for the health and wellbeing of us all.

**The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW)** was formed in 2014, with the aim to raise awareness of the benefits that the arts sector can bring to health and wellbeing, and to make national progress in the implementation of these benefits. They conducted a two-year inquiry to explore the relationship between the arts, health, and wellbeing.

**The report presents key findings** and recommendations based on extensive research and consultations with participants from various sectors, including service users, arts practitioners, healthcare professionals, commissioners, funders, and academics. These sessions facilitated open dialogue on challenges, aspirations, and strategies to push progress in creative health.



[\(Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report, July 2017, Second Edition\)](#)

## Key messages from the inquiry

**'The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer and better lives.'**

*'The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health.'*

**'The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.'**

# National Centre for Creative Health

In response to the report and its recommendations, the [National Centre for Creative Health](#) was formed with the aim of addressing health inequalities, advancing good practice and research, informing policy, and promoting collaboration.

***'Research shows that active engagement with the arts, culture and creativity is beneficial for the health and wellbeing of us all. The National Centre for Creative Health will play a pivotal role in promoting collaboration to enable creative health to become integral to health and social care and wider systems.'***

National Creative Health Associate Roles were developed; **Alice Thwaite** takes this role on for the North East & North Cumbria and Yorkshire.

**Alice is an experienced charity and arts leader** with a strong commitment to supporting communities in the North East. She has a wealth of experience advocating for and developing arts and health projects in the region and in arts and health policy development.

**Alice was an Advisor** to the Baring Foundation/Winston Churchill Memorial Trust partnership on creative ageing for 5 years and has presented at conferences at MoMA in New York and Tate Modern, and was part of a British Council/Baring Foundation delegation to Japan and South Korea to share good practice.



# Our Arts & Creativity Advisor

## Martin Wilson MBE

**Martin Wilson MBE is Executive Director at TIN Arts** in Durham and is the Arts & Creativity Advisor for the Child Health and Wellbeing Network.

**Martin has worked in arts and culture in North East England for over 25 years.** TIN Arts delivers activities across the North East and their vision is to create a world in which everybody has access to the arts. They hope to achieve this by removing barriers and increasing access to high-quality dance and performing arts.

**Martin started working with the Child Health and Wellbeing Network in 2019** as part of the South Tees Arts Project (STAR). He is now in his third year as Arts & Creativity Advisor to the Network.



# Our judging panel

## Professor Chris Drinkwater CBE

**Professor Chris Drinkwater CBE, FRCGP, FFPH(Hon), FRSA** was an inner-city GP in Newcastle for 23 years and he is now an emeritus Professor of Primary Care Development at Northumbria University.

**He led the establishment of HealthWORKS Newcastle** as a City Challenge project in the early 1990s. He chaired Ways to Wellness, a charitable foundation established to deliver social prescribing at scale through a social impact bond in Newcastle upon Tyne, and led on Well Newcastle Gateshead, a Well North pathfinder with a focus on arts and health for all. He was also a Director of the West End Schools Trust (8 inner city primary schools in Newcastle upon Tyne).

**Along the way he has been, variously,** President and Public Health lead for the NHS Alliance, Deputy Chair and Chair of the Philanthropy Committee for Northumberland, Tyne & Wear Community Foundation, and the Sir Roy Griffiths/Age Concern/RCGP Prince of Wales, Educational Fellow for Older People. Chris is also our previous Arts and Creativity Lead on the Child Health and Wellbeing Network, and when he stood down from the role, the Network established the Chris Drinkwater Awards to acknowledge his generous contribution to the Network and his passion for Creative Health, especially with primary school-aged children.



# Our judging panel

## Clare Smith

**Clare Smith is the Learning and Engagement Manager at North East Museums**, where she leads programmes that connect communities with cultural heritage. She leads on Learning programmes across the organisation and manages the Communities team, along with Volunteering for North East Museums (formerly Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums).

**Clare's career in museum learning** began with a broad interest in the impact of creative opportunities in learning. She began at the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead as a member of the North East Museums learning team. In 2006, Clare transitioned to managing the regional learning team as part of the Renaissance in the Regions program, working with museums, teachers, and educators across the region. From April 2009, she managed and delivered Creative Partnerships in Northumberland, Newcastle, and Gateshead, working with schools, artists, and teachers to develop creative ways to address key challenges in schools.

**Currently, as the Learning and Engagement Manager at North East Museums**, Clare ensures that the children, young people, and communities served by the museums have access to enriching and transformative experiences through advocating for access to creative and cultural learning opportunities throughout our lives.



# Our judging panel

## Kate Swaddle

**Kate Swaddle is the Executive Headteacher of two schools in Gateshead.** Prior to this appointment, she was Deputy Headteacher and SENCO at a school in North Tyneside, with a high percentage of SEND, Education Health Care Plans, and Pupil Premium. Having trained in an NHS profession, before moving into teaching - she is aware of the benefits that multi-disciplinary team working brings, across all sectors.

**She was seconded as Education Advisor to the Child Health and Wellbeing Network** throughout 2021-2022, supporting the Network to deliver on several projects including epilepsy – a strand of the NHS England Children and Young People’s Transformation Programme. She also worked in collaboration with the National Institute of Health and Care Research on the ‘Research into School’ project.

**In addition to this, Kate has supported the delivery of the early rollout Early Career Teaching programme,** for University College London, acting as a facilitator for the North East Teaching School Partnership. Having attained the NASENCO and NPQH awards, she is well placed to help children and young people to overcome their barriers to learning.



# Our judging panel

## Wendy Kelly

**Wendy Kelly is the lead for children and young people's emotional wellbeing for South Tees Public Health.** As well as having a system-wide remit she has responsibility for a front-line service delivering early help within educational settings to improve the resilience of children and young people.

**Wendy has had a varied and interesting career in local government** ranging from community development to policy and performance prior to a period of 20 years in children's services and 8 in public health. During this time, she has led many transformational programmes supporting education and health outcomes.

**She is passionate that all children and young people have the very best support, education, and opportunities** to enable them to enjoy their lives and be happy. She is a governor of a primary, secondary, and special school.

**Wendy has collaborated on many projects and initiatives** with the Child Health and Wellbeing Network and is Chair of the Network's System Engagement Group.



# The Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2025 - WINNER



**Life and Limb Puppets CIC** and their 'Curious Beasts' project, an early mental health intervention, in collaboration with **North East Wellbeing** and delivered at **Lemington Riverside Primary School** as one of 12 schools in Newcastle, four in Teesside, one in Sunderland and one in Durham.

## What the judges said....

*The panel commented on an **excellent approach to evaluation** and that the project moves effectively from the classroom into the home by the provision of **easily accessible resources**.*

'**Curious Beasts**' immerses vulnerable children in the magic of puppetry, storytelling, and nature to support self-regulation, resilience, peer relations, build confidence, and reduce anxiety. The programme supports children aged 7-10 years old who are at increased risk of social-emotional mental health (SEMH) difficulties due to socio-economic deprivation.



## Project summary

Children are immersed in an interactive workshop which introduces them to a world of storytelling and a cast of imaginative characters and their spirit animals (puppets) that embody these characters' social and emotional thoughts and feelings. The workshop acts as a screening tool as the children are asked a series of questions relating to their own social-emotional mental health. These data, coupled with standardised assessment using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire completed by teachers, inform the identification of 12 children most in need of therapeutic support for SEMH; these are children who currently receive no formal support, and are often those whose difficulties are at risk of going undetected. These children receive six nurture sessions tailored to meet individual need, focussing on one or a combination of anxiety, resilience, self-regulation and peer relations.

## Why Curious Beasts?

- Need for early and reliable identification of social-emotional mental health needs (SEMH) in children
- Way to amplify and hear the child's own voice
- Providing support for children living in 20% most deprived areas (greater risk of SEMH difficulties)



## Creative health benefits of the project

Our approach emerges from educational and psychology research and provides children with a toolkit of strategies to foster personal growth and emotional resilience. Learning is supported through 5 mechanisms:

1. Puppets are used to increase engagement, inspire imagination, and as a psychological and physical distancing tool for self-expression. As well as the puppet workshop, children create their own 'spirit animal' puppet used in nurture sessions.
2. A 'curious mindset' for learning supported by storytelling.
3. 'Curious language', avoiding medicalised language and equipping children with vocabulary to describe feelings.
4. Trust and understanding, cultivated to gain meaningful connections with peers, adults and content.
5. Outdoors - much of the nurture is delivered outdoors where children feel freer to express themselves and nature is used as a therapeutic aid.

**These mechanisms equip children with social and emotional security that provides a foundation for educational achievement.**

## Involving parents and families

Children create their own spirit animal puppet which is used in subsequent sessions to help them to explore emotions, develop coping strategies, and build self-esteem through role play, creative activities and outdoor learning.

Children take home a personalised pack of intervention strategies and a 'child passport' of their preferred mental health strategies to share with their parents/carers, as well as taking their 'spirit animal' puppet home.

Parents/carers can also attend Curious Beasts information sessions and receive an Activity Pack which includes key messages about Curious Beasts, and activities based around supportive strategies that parents/carers and children can carry out together at home.

## Addressing health inequalities

Each Curious Beasts programme delivered in a school is evaluated using quantitative and qualitative data collection to ensure that the programme is evidence-based and provides optimum outcomes for children's social-emotional mental health and learning. Since its launch in 2018, Curious Beasts has worked with 20 primary schools in the 20% most deprived localities of the North East region. Evaluation has indicated that the programme has statistically significant positive impact on children's SEMH, including improved emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties. The programme is working towards becoming more sustainable by providing teacher training to deliver Curious Beasts nurture sessions, and expanding its geographical reach, with the ultimate goal of embedding the programme into more schools to benefit more vulnerable children and reduce health inequalities.



## Feedback about Curious Beasts

**“The initial workshop was really useful to see how the children saw themselves...The children were really excited about their spirit animal puppets and each child engaged well in nurture sessions, talking about strategies learnt afterwards. We really feel that the children now have so many more [strategies] to support them with their mental health at home and in school.”**

***Teacher, Northwood Primary School Darlington***

**“My spirit animal helps me when I’m feeling sad and it helped me feel a bit safer when I’m with it”**  
***Child***



**‘He can share his emotions more, his normal behaviour he would go into a “huff”, instead he says “its ok mum I just needed time to feel disappointed’**  
***Parent***

**“My daughter loved her puppet she brought home and used it to tell me all about how it helped her with her worrying. She really likes doing the shape breathing that she came home with too”**  
***Parent***

**“These sessions have made me feel confident to go to school now”**  
***Child***

# The Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2025 – RUNNER-UP



Tees Valley Music Service and The Royal Ballet and Opera present, SNAPPY Opera Project 2024: The Magic Flute. Also, in collaboration with Durham Music Service.

## What the judges said....

*The panel commented on a **wonderful opportunity** to allow children from a wide range of backgrounds and ability to **access the world of opera** and give the opportunity to engage with an art form **not widely accessible.***

**A programme of teacher training** with the Royal Opera House (ROH); followed by **in-school workshops** with ROH directors; followed by a series of **'Big Sing' events** featuring thousands of children and ROH singers and orchestral players.



## Project summary

The collaboration between the Tees Valley Music Service (TVMS) and the Royal Opera House (ROH) - since rebranded, the Royal Ballet and Opera - to produce **Mozart's The Magic Flute** has been a remarkable achievement, marking one of the ROH's **largest outreach projects to date** made in collaboration with a Music Hub.

Bringing together **around 1300 children from across Teesside** alongside professional ROH musicians and singers, this project showcased the **exceptional talents of local children and teachers**, culminating in a series of five performances. The initiative provided an invaluable opportunity for children to engage with professional musicians and singers, **fostering a lifelong appreciation for the arts.**

**Feedback from teachers** underscores the significant impact of the project on the children. One teacher remarked, "The day was an incredible opportunity for the children to sing with live musicians and ROH performers. It showed them what is possible and where music can take them in life. It really strengthened their aspirations for the future."

Teachers also highlighted the project's effectiveness in engaging students and enhancing their understanding of opera. One noted, "It was such a privilege for the children to be a part of these sessions and sing alongside amazing opera singers and an amazing orchestra. For the children to hear opera singers was so enriching and definitely broadened their horizons to the different genres of music."





The Tees Valley Music Service collaboration with the Royal Opera House on The Magic Flute has been an outstanding success, demonstrating the **profound impact of inclusive arts education.**

Through comprehensive teacher training, engaging workshops, and inspirational performances, the project has **made a lasting impact** on all participants, showcasing local talent and fostering a lifelong appreciation for the arts.

The project's success was further bolstered by **strong partnerships and community involvement**, underscoring the value of collaboration in achieving educational and artistic excellence.



# The Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2025 – HIGHLY COMMENDED



**South Tyneside Local Cultural Education Partnership** working with **Mee Mee Theatre** and **Hadrian Primary School** in South Shields, for their project using mask work with an artist to creatively enhance literacy, oracy, and self-confidence among Key Stage 2 pupils, empowering underperforming students and those at risk to express themselves and thrive.

## What the judges said....

The panel commented on a very good qualitative evaluation and well-developed sustainability plans including CPD, peer mentors and resource development.

By engaging students in expressive, non-verbal activities, the project creates a **safe space** where all pupils can experiment with **language and emotions**, promoting inclusion and confidence.

Through storytelling, role-play, and guided discussions, students enhance their verbal skills and develop **empathy, resilience, and self-confidence**. Teachers report significant improvements in students' willingness to communicate, emotional regulation, and classroom engagement.

The project's success has inspired ongoing creative health initiatives in the school, offering a sustainable model that bridges educational and wellbeing goals and fosters an **inclusive environment for learning**. This initiative reflects the transformative potential of creative health approaches to empower students, reduce inequalities, and create meaningful learning experiences.



# The Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2025 – HIGHLY COMMENDED



**St James Primary School** in Hebburn and **Creative Spaces** for delivery of an art curriculum packed with diverse artists and a range of skills, ensuring children show progression and make links as they move through school.

## What the judges said....

The panel commented on the commitment to respond to issues within the school creatively with very little funding to support.

South Tyneside is one of the **most deprived** local authorities. Of the 316 local authorities in England, South Tyneside is ranked 12th most income-deprived. By continuing to work with other organisations and artists we want to offer our school community **the opportunity to build pride**, community connection and fuel wellbeing.

We have previously selected a group of children and their parents/carers to work alongside a local artist to create a **collaborative sculpture** inspired by nature and the beach.

The families at our school were chosen to take part as we felt this project would support their wellbeing. **They were so proud of the outcome** and felt uplifted during and after the collaboration. The impact was a rise in the feeling of community spirit, as well as self-esteem and **a sense of pride in our children**. We also recorded an increase in attendance for the children that participated.



# Other third-year innovations



## TimbaDash Theatre with Hadrian School

The Just For Joy programme uses clowning to enhance communication, creativity, and play for young people with learning disabilities. Through interactive workshops, training, and performances, it fosters joy, confidence, and engagement for both students and educators in inclusive settings.

## Eliot Smith Dance with St Teresa's RC Primary School and St Catherine's RC Primary School

Eliot Smith Dance hosted a dance project at two primary schools in East Newcastle, where pupils explored the planets and universe, created their own dance pieces, and boosted confidence, fitness, and well-being, culminating in a trip to the Life Centre Museum and a final performance.

## Cap-a-Pie with Hotspur Primary School and Christ Church CE Primary School

Our project, The Vanishing Act, uses creative arts and science collaboration to engage primary school children in exploring insect decline and biodiversity loss through co-creation, performance and teamwork.

## Mortal Fools with High Spen Primary School and Hawthorn Primary School

MELVA is a creative, digital media wellbeing intervention, improving KS2 children's understanding of mental health and teaches practical self-management techniques. We collaborated with both schools & 174 children to develop the programme, write the MELVA book & to embed evaluation.

## Changing Relations, Sarah Stamp, Tamsin Rees, Vida Creative with Copeland Road Primary School, Walworth Primary School and Vane Road Primary School

Sometimes it Hurts provides teachers with creative materials, including illustrated fictionalised stories, to support them to engage in sensitive conversations with primary school children affected by domestic abuse. It empowers pupils to articulate experiences, reducing feelings of isolation and improving mental health outcomes.



# Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2025-26

The Chris Drinkwater Awards for the academic year 2025-26 is open for entries from **15<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

If you are a **primary school** that has created or is planning a creative health project to enhance pupils' Relationships and Health Education (RHE) curriculum and personal development, or a **creative arts practitioner or organisation** already working within schools then we want to hear from you for our 2025-26 awards.

**The link to the online form will be shared via:**

- the Child Health and Wellbeing Network email bulletin ([join the Network](#) so you don't miss communications from us)
- North East Museum's Creative Classrooms newsletter: sign up at [www.twamschools.org.uk/newsletter](http://www.twamschools.org.uk/newsletter)
- the [Arts & Creativity section](#) of the Healthier Together website

Information will also be shared via our Creative Health Champions.

**The Ofsted framework for personal development states:** The curriculum provided by schools should extend beyond the academic, technical or vocational. Schools support pupils to develop in many diverse aspects of life. The personal development judgement is used by inspectors to evaluate the school's intent to provide for the personal development of all pupils, and the quality with which the school implements this work.



# Get in touch...



Please follow us and share relevant work so that we can continue to share good practice across the region via the Child Health and Wellbeing Network [LinkedIn](#) and Bluesky [@EveryChildNENC.bsky.social](#)

**Find us online:** [NENC ICB website](#) and [Healthier Together](#)

Please encourage colleagues from all areas of Child Health and Wellbeing to [register to join the Network](#) so they are included in our communications



Join our Network



If you would like more information about any of the Creative Health projects detailed in this document, please email [nencicb.northernchildnetwork@nhs.net](mailto:nencicb.northernchildnetwork@nhs.net)