

Ark T Centre Impact Report 2025



ARK·T
Creativity Changes Lives

From our CEO



At Ark T, we see time and time again that creativity has the power to change lives. Through welcoming creative spaces, trusted relationships and opportunities for creative expression, we support young people and adults to build resilience, self-belief and community. The ripple effect of this is powerful.

This report tells the story of our work in 2025. It is a story of over 3,000 people engaging with Ark-T's programmes, 601 creative sessions delivered, and 92% of young people showing improved or maintained wellbeing through our monitored programmes.

Yet behind every statistic is a person: a child who feels safer at school, a parent who feels less alone, a volunteer who finds purpose, or a community member who discovers a place where they truly belong.

The challenges facing our communities continue to grow. Many of those we support experience poverty, social isolation, neurodiversity, mental health difficulties, or barriers to accessing traditional forms of support. The need for compassionate, preventative, community-based approaches has never been greater.

I am incredibly proud of what our staff, volunteers, freelancers and partners have achieved this year. Their creativity, expertise and kindness have helped Ark-T remain a place of hope and possibility for people across East Oxford.

To everyone who has volunteered, partnered with us, donated, funded our work, or championed what we do – thank you. Your support makes this impact possible. I hope this report shows not only what we have achieved together, but what is possible when communities invest in creativity, connection and human potential.

Warm wishes



Catherine Flutsch
CEO, Ark T

Who We Are

Ark-T is an Oxford-based charity using creativity and the arts to support mental health, wellbeing and building community in some of the most deprived communities in the country. For more than 25 years we have created safe, inclusive spaces where people of all ages use creativity to build confidence, resilience and meaningful connections.

We work primarily in East Oxford, including Cowley and Blackbird Leys, where many families face significant disadvantage and where several neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived areas in England.

Our Values

01.

Inclusive and non-religious

Ark-T welcomes people of all backgrounds, identities, citizenship status and beliefs.

02.

Community-rooted

Deeply embedded in East Oxford, we co-create high-quality programmes that respond to real local needs.

03.

Creative and responsive

We use creativity and the arts to foster confidence, resilience and belonging — particularly in communities facing poverty, isolation and disconnection.

04.

Evidence-informed

Our work is grounded in research, including partnerships with the University of Oxford and frameworks such as the Wellcome Trust's evidence base for effective mental health interventions.

05.

Collaborative

We work with schools, health professionals, researchers, cultural organisations, charities, civic leaders and local artists to create lasting change, amplify impact and share learning.

Our Impact in Numbers

3,085

People engaged across Ark-T programmes

601

Creative sessions delivered

92%

Young people showed improved or maintained wellbeing

755

Hours of volunteer support

5

Art Community Art Exhibitions

2,147

Visitors welcomed to our Welcome Space

399

People attended our Community Lunches

329

Children supported through Art Nest

43

Children attended Creativity Camps

72

Community groups and charities used our spaces

18

New volunteers joined Ark-T

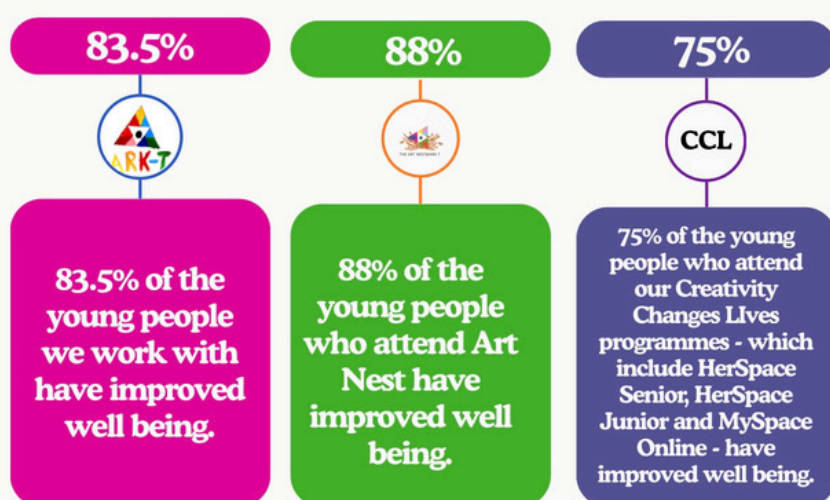
From creative wellbeing groups and school-based interventions to community lunches and volunteering opportunities, Ark-T creates spaces where people can connect, belong and flourish.

Understanding our Impact

To help us understand the difference our programmes make, we use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)– a widely used, evidence-based tool that measures children's emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

The SDQ explores areas such as emotional symptoms, peer relationships, conduct, hyperactivity and prosocial behaviours, providing a snapshot of a young person's strengths and the challenges they may be experiencing.

By comparing SDQ scores over time, we can assess whether a child's wellbeing has improved, remained stable or declined during their involvement with Ark-T. The results below provide an overview of our 2025 findings across the organisation, with further detail and case studies from individual programmes shared in the following pages.



Participants' wellbeing is measured using the nationally recognised Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), completed before and after the programme to assess changes in wellbeing.

Our 2025 findings were encouraging. Of the 85 young people who completed both pre- and post-programme SDQs, 92% showed improved or maintained wellbeing. This included 88% of Art Nest participants and 92% of young people across our Creativity Changes Lives programmes.

For many of the children and young people we support, life can be challenging. In this context, maintaining wellbeing can be just as significant as improvement, reflecting the value of having safe, consistent spaces where young people feel seen, supported and able to express themselves.

The Art Nest

The Art Nest is a therapeutic creative programme delivered at Orchard Meadow Primary School in Blackbird Leys. Children aged 5–11 (referred by a number of different local schools) for additional needs, including trauma, attend small group weekly sessions during term time. Children taking part in Art Nest are referred to us by the school.

88% of Art Nest participants showed improved wellbeing. *

Every day, for two hours, 2 small groups of young people join us at the Art Nest. Each group - one in the morning and one in the afternoon, participates in our carefully curated, trauma-informed programme using story telling, creativity, and art-making to help them rebuild confidence, open up about their challenges and re-engage with school life.

Sessions operate with a 1:3 staff-to-pupil ratio, and Ark-T fundraises for the programme entirely so the school and families do not pay.

270

We ran 270 creative wellbeing sessions for children aged 6 to 11 years old

30

We ran 30 creative wellbeing sessions at the Art Nest After School Club

329

We worked with 329 children from Orchard Meadow and Pegasus primary schools

"It's a safe place here, so you can say anything"
J, Year 5, 2025

"I thought about not coming in [to school] today, but then I remembered it was Art Nest."
M, Year 5, May 2025

The Art Nest



Clare Keep, Art Nest Manager, reflects on the year:

This year, The Art Nest has been full of creativity, confidence and connection. Children designed their own board games, created wet-felted artworks and celebrated their achievements through a public exhibition. One child proudly shared, "My family played my game – we haven't done that for a long time."

The launch of our After School Club has enabled even more children to experience Art Nest, helping them build confidence, friendships and a sense of belonging through creativity.

Our work at the Art Nest shows that when children are given the time and attention, and feel safe enough to be themselves, they can truly flourish.



"The Art Nest team has become an indispensable part of the Orchard Meadow School community, delivering a therapeutic provision that has had a transformative impact on the lives of children and families."

**Claire Ferens, Regional Director and Executive Principal,
Orchard Meadow Primary School**

Meet G, 10 years old

Young Carer & Art Nest Participant

G has attended Art Nest since 2022. As a young carer with three siblings who have additional needs, she often takes on caring responsibilities at home and can find school attendance and friendships challenging.

Art Nest provides G with a safe space where she can relax, build friendships and focus on her own wellbeing. At first, G often wanted to care for others and needed reassurance that this was her space to be supported and cared for herself.



Through creative activities and trusted relationships with practitioners and peers, G has grown in confidence and become more willing to share her thoughts and feelings. Creative projects have helped her explore her own ideas and take pride in her achievements.

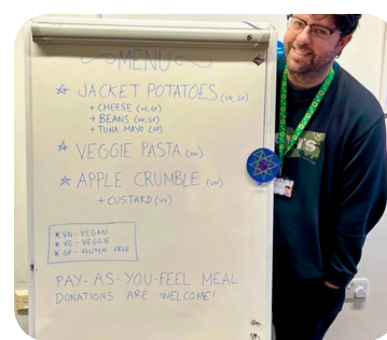


Since joining Art Nest, G's school attendance has increased from 60% to 87%. She is now more confident in seeking help when she needs it, has developed stronger friendships and has recently joined a boxing club, helping her build confidence and independence beyond the programme.

Community Lunches

Our monthly Community Lunches bring people together around something simple but powerful: a shared meal. Over good food, music, conversation and creative activities, people who may otherwise experience isolation find connection, friendship and a community where they belong.

Each pay-as-you-feel lunch combines nourishing meals with opportunities for creativity and access to practical support, including light touch sign posting on benefits, debt, housing and dementia. Families, older adults, people experiencing homelessness, volunteers and local residents sit side by side, creating a space where everyone belongs.



Working closely with partners such as Dementia UK and Age UK, we have helped create a safe and inclusive environment for people affected by dementia and their families, enabling them to build relationships within the wider community. Local artists, community groups and organisations also play an important role, contributing everything from hot meals to creative workshops.

Month after month, these lunches have become much more than a meal. They are a place of welcome, dignity and human connection – a reminder that communities are strongest when people have opportunities to come together, support one another and be seen.

399
People
attended
our
community
lunches

146
People
participated
in our lunch
time creative
activity

54
Volunteers
helped us

The Welcome Space

The Welcome Space in Templars Square is a free, non-religious drop-in community space located in the heart of the busy shopping centre. Open Monday to Thursday from 10am to 3pm, it offers opportunities for creativity, connection and quiet reflection. Serving people from across East Oxford and further afield – it has become a place where people of all ages feel welcome and accepted.

**2,147
visitors
welcomed**

**151 days
open**

**200+ visitors
per month**

Creativity is at the heart of the Welcome Space. Visitors have access to a wide range of professional-quality art materials, including paints, drawing supplies, scrapbooking and journalling resources, and we will always do our best to source materials for new creative interests. All Creativity Changes Lives sessions for young people are based here, giving participants access to these rich creative resources.



The Welcome Space is also home to a mini gallery showcasing artwork created by visitors, alongside regular exhibitions exploring community, identity and shared experiences, celebrating the creativity and stories of our community. A dedicated team of volunteers helps ensure the Welcome Space remains open, welcoming and accessible to all.

**Visitors
doubled
since 2024**

***“it’s a calm
oasis.”***
Visitor 2025

Free to All

The Welcome Space Exhibitions

In 2025, the Welcome Space hosted five major exhibitions alongside our permanent Welcome Space Gallery, showcasing the creativity, stories and lived experiences of local people.



The exhibitions included **Everyday Oxford**, developed with the Museum of Oxford and Oxford University; **Young People's Exhibitions**, featuring work from our Creativity Changes Lives and Art Nest programmes; **Imagination and Exploration**, celebrating the achievements of regular Welcome Space attendees; a collaborative **Textiles Exhibition**; and **Pieces of Us**, an interactive exhibition exploring identity, memory and belonging.



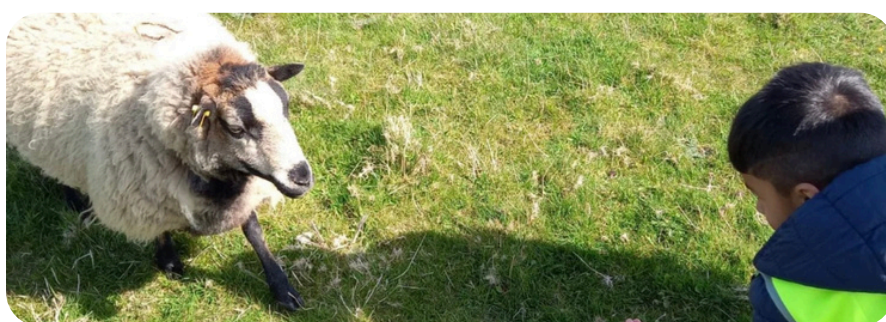
Together, these exhibitions helped local people feel seen, valued and connected, while bringing the wider community together through creativity and shared experience.

Creativity Camps

Through Oxfordshire County Council's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, we were able to offer five free Creativity Camps for children aged 6–11 who are eligible for free school meals. Held during the Easter and Summer holidays, the camps combined creative activities, outdoor adventures and nutritious food, helping children to build confidence, strengthen social connections and support their wellbeing during the school break.



Our camps are designed to be inclusive, with specialist supported spaces available for children with special educational needs. Activities include arts and crafts, yoga, sports and trips to local organisations such as the Arboretum and Earth Trust, giving children the chance to try new things, make friends and have fun.



Creativity Camps

In 2025, an Oxfordshire County Council quality review praised the camps as a "warm, organised and safe" environment where "safeguarding is embedded" and "inclusion is a real strength." The reviewer also highlighted the quality of the activities on offer, the commitment of staff and the programme's strong approach to healthy eating and nutrition.

Council's Scores

Accessibility and Inclusion	5/5
Enriching Activities	5/5
Physical Activity	5/5
Sign posting and referrals	5/5
Healthy Eating Awareness	5/5
Food and Nutritional Standards	5/5



HerSpace Senior and HerSpace Junior

HerSpace Junior (6-11) and HerSpace Senior (12-17) continued to provide free creative wellbeing groups for girls and young people, including trans and non-binary participants. Through weekly after-school sessions, young people were offered a safe and welcoming space to explore creativity, build friendships and develop confidence.



During the year, the programmes provided 232 hours of free support, delivering 116 creative wellbeing sessions and supporting 35 young people. Creative activities including painting, clay, textiles, mask-making and recycled-material projects encouraged self-expression, confidence and belonging.



Alongside creative activities, young people explored issues affecting their lives, including emotional wellbeing, identity, relationships, body image, education and social connections. These conversations enabled staff to identify emerging concerns, provide early support and make referrals where needed.

One young person simply described Monday as their favourite day of the week: "Because of Ark-T of course!"

Meet M, 12 years old HerSpace Senior Participant

M, a young person with autism, sensory processing differences and anxiety, joined HerSpace Senior to explore creativity in a safe and accepting environment. Initially very shy, they communicated mainly through the chat function and engaged with activities at their own pace.

Over time, M grew in confidence, beginning independent creative projects, sharing their work with the group and participating in discussions about school, identity and personal experiences. They later attended face-to-face sessions and a summer meet-up, building connections with other young people. M particularly valued the accepting nature of the group.

“The importance of other people being comfortable in a safe space where they can all be weird is what I like.”

Through HerSpace Senior, M has developed greater confidence, independence and self-expression, and continues to explore new creative opportunities, including exhibitions and other Ark-T programmes.



MySpace Online

MySpace Online is a weekly online creative wellbeing group for young people experiencing emotionally based school avoidance and difficulties attending mainstream education. The programme provides a safe and accessible space where participants can connect with peers, explore creative activities and maintain social contact during periods of isolation.

“You should be able to express yourself in the way you want to, and Ark-T’s MySpace allows you to do this.” Young Person 2025

Through creative activities and gentle peer support, young people build confidence, express themselves and sustain a sense of connection during challenging times. The programme also provides families with an additional source of support and a valuable pathway back into wider social and creative engagement.

Creativity Connect

Creativity Connect offers welcoming creative sessions for children and young people with special educational needs and their families. In 2025, we welcomed 52 participants across two sessions, providing opportunities to explore our spaces, meet staff and take part in creative wellbeing activities.

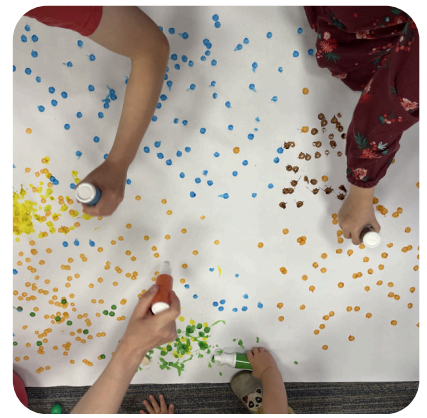
These sessions help ease transitions into Ark-T programmes by offering gentle introductions, wellbeing check-ins and creative activities in a safe and supportive environment. We also delivered three free community workshops, including Family Power Hours and a Gelli Printing workshop, helping to strengthen confidence, connection and a sense of belonging within our community.



The Ark T Collective

In 2025, Ark-T launched the Ark-T Collective, bringing together freelance artists, makers and creative practitioners from a range of disciplines who share a commitment to creativity, wellbeing and community participation.

Collective artists contributed to workshops, exhibitions and creative activities across Ark-T's programmes, helping to broaden the range of artistic experiences available to participants. Working across disciplines including visual arts, textiles, printmaking and mixed media, they brought new skills, perspectives and creative approaches to our work.



Alongside opportunities to deliver workshops, members of the Collective were supported through networking events, social meet-ups, opportunities to exhibit their work and increased visibility through Ark-T's website and communications.



The Collective represents an important investment in Oxford's creative community, supporting local artists while enabling Ark-T to draw on a diverse range of skills and experiences. As the network develops, it will help increase the organisation's reach, strengthen partnerships and support the delivery of creative programmes across the city.

Creative Wellbeing Workshops

Creativity is a powerful tool for improving mental health, strengthening relationships and helping people to thrive. Alongside our community programmes, Ark T delivers creative wellbeing workshops for organisations, workplaces and families, helping more people experience the benefits of creativity while generating vital unrestricted income to support our free community work.



In 2025, we delivered a bespoke workshop for 41 staff from the University of Oxford's Gardens, Libraries and Museums division, using collaborative art-making to explore mindfulness, creative confidence and practical approaches to managing stress and burnout. We also continued to support local families through creative wellbeing sessions, including Family Power Hours and specialist workshops for PDA and SEND families.

As demand for preventative, community-based wellbeing grows, we are excited to expand this work, reaching more organisations while helping to sustain our programmes for the East Oxford community.

Volunteering at Ark T

Volunteers are at the heart of Ark T. They bring energy, creativity and compassion to our work, helping to make our spaces welcoming, inclusive and vibrant. Across our programmes, volunteers support community lunches, creative workshops, exhibitions and events, welcome visitors into our spaces and share their own skills and interests with others.



“[Volunteering] has boosted my mental health and wellbeing.”
G, Volunteer, 2025

We believe that volunteering should be meaningful and rewarding for the individual as well as beneficial to the community. Many of our volunteers tell us that being part of Ark T has improved their wellbeing, helped them build confidence and created opportunities for friendship and connection.

At least 2 volunteers supported back to employment after ill health

We had 28 volunteers who volunteered for 755 hours in 2025

For some, volunteering has also provided a pathway back into employment, offering a supportive environment in which to develop professional skills, gain recent experience, receive references and, where possible, access paid opportunities within the organisation.

At Ark T, we recognise and value the unique strengths that every volunteer brings. Whether someone contributes artistic talents, practical skills, organisational expertise or simply a willingness to help others, we strive to ensure that everyone feels seen, supported and able to make a meaningful contribution.

Venue Hire and Community Use

Ark-T's spaces continued to play an important role as welcoming and affordable venues for community groups, charities and local organisations. During 2025, 72 organisations and community groups used our spaces, accounting for 5,099 hours of hire.

"Ark-T is giving our community a space for people in isolation to meet – it's like having another room at home."

Community Organisation

Our buildings hosted a diverse range of activities, including cultural groups, wellbeing sessions, exercise classes, social groups for older adults, and organisations supporting communities from a wide range of backgrounds.

By providing accessible, affordable and flexible spaces, Ark-T helps reduce isolation, strengthen community connections and support local organisations to thrive. For many groups, the welcoming environment and central location are particularly important.

"Very good bus links, this help us a lot to be able to bring to Ark-T people with moving disabilities."

Community Organisation

Alongside regular community use, Ark-T also supported the city's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), opening our doors for 19 nights during the winter to provide a safe and welcoming space for people experiencing homelessness.

Get Involved

There are many ways to become part of the Ark-T community. You can attend our events, take part in our programmes, volunteer your time, share your skills, support our fundraising, partner with us, or help spread the word about our work.

The charity sector is currently facing one of the most challenging funding environments in recent decades, with increasing demand for services alongside growing pressure on funding. As a small charity, every contribution makes a difference. While volunteering, advocacy and community support are all invaluable, unrestricted donations are particularly important. Flexible funding allows us to maintain our spaces, support our staff and artists, respond to changing community needs and sustain the creative programmes that local people rely upon.

The impact described throughout this report is only possible because of the generosity, time and commitment of our funders, supporters, volunteers, artists and partners. Thank you for helping us ensure that creativity, connection and belonging remain accessible to everyone in our community.



The Ark T Team