





**WE ARE
DREAMERS**



An Arc Project



Commissioned by
Stockport Metropolitan
Borough Council



Summary

We are Dreamers was an immersive installation of artworks made by the people of Stockport, inspired by their unique hopes and dreams – and by the remembrance of the Stockport soldiers whose dreams and lives were cut short by WW1.

An inclusive art project and installation to mark 100 years since the end of the First World War, it was designed and delivered by Arc, a leading arts and mental health organisation which explores the relationship between creativity, culture and wellbeing.

Commissioned by Stockport Council, the project culminated in an exhibition at the Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery between the 11th November 2018 and 9th February 2019, and formed part of the 'Stockport Remembers' celebrations.

Hundreds of Stockport residents created artworks which represented their unique memories, hopes and dreams, all contained in a box – a DreamBox. These were presented together as an act of remembrance at Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery, interspersed with boxes which gave an insight into the lives of ten soldiers from Stockport who also dreamt of home and of a future – but never returned.



Stockport Art Gallery, created originally as a space to reflect and to counter the horrors of the war, became a box of dreams – filled with hopes for the future as the most powerful tribute to the past.

“Stockport Council wished to involve members of the local community and encourage them to showcase their creativity. From this idea, ‘We Are Dreamers’ evolved into the largest immersive community installation ever to be staged at Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery.”

Alison Farthing, Team Manager, Strategic Projects, SMBC



The Project Concept and Background

Inspiration for the **We Are Dreamers** project came from the words of First World War poet Siegfried Sassoon:

*“Soldiers are dreamers;
when the guns begin.
They think of firelit homes,
clean beds and wives”*

The poem reminds us that those who gave their lives were people before they were soldiers; they had dreams, hopes and aspirations. Their sacrifice enabled us to dream up our own futures.

“Life is short. Live your Dream”

Participant

In response to this poignant truth, Arc asked Stockport residents to create a DreamBox to represent their own dreams and aspirations.

“My box represents what lights up my life. It displays my current passions and future ambitions”

Participant, Box 142

As well as representing the dreams of these Stockport residents, this project set out to honour Stockport soldiers who lost their lives during the war. The lives and dreams of 10 fallen Stockport soldiers were represented by Soldier Boxes which were researched and created by a team of Arc volunteers.

Engaging the Stockport Community

Arc has a 20-year track record of producing transformational art projects which engage and include marginalised groups, promote wellbeing and recovery from mental ill-health, reaching audiences across the North West.

Our team of producers and network of nationally respected artists enables us to design projects which have relevance, depth, reach and impact.

This project aimed to creatively and meaningfully engage with Stockport residents of all ages, uniting them in their remembrance.

In total Arc engaged with over 700 people:

- ◇ More than **330** primary and secondary school children, from 5 schools.
- ◇ **181** participants from **9** Arc-led arts and wellbeing projects, who have experienced mental ill health or have come from challenging circumstances. These groups ranged from drop-in family workshops run at Arc, to groups of Arc participants who met on a regular basis at Arc to engage with artistic projects.
- ◇ Over **40** Stockport residents who attended independently led community projects, including Voice for the Voiceless, Brinnington Community Arts Group & Family Art Attack, Stockport for Peace and Pure Studios.

- ◇ Over **150** individuals, contributed to the project using the ‘Creative Pack’ which was developed for this project and distributed to local libraries and Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery.
- ◇ **12** Arc volunteer artists, who were recruited to work closely with the project and create the Soldier Boxes included in the final installation.
- ◇ Over **1,800** people who connected with the project via the online presence and social media.





The Process

The scale of the proposed installation, with a large number of artists and community participants, required an overall curator who could create a cohesive and professionally designed space.

For this Arc brought in acclaimed theatre designer Richard Foxton to design, curate and install the **We Are Dreamers** installation.

Richard created a design which took inspiration from other war memorials, using a repetitive and uniform grid layout, allowing each contribution to have a place of its own, while still creating a cohesive installation.

He took on an active role throughout the creative process – lending support to the artists and community groups, and offering guidance to participants to enable them to develop their own unique DreamBox designs and ideas.

“Help and guidance were available and all things made possible”

Yvonne Noworyta, Volunteer and Artist of one of the Soldier Boxes

The DreamBoxes

Making a DreamBox resonated with people of all ages. It was an accessible, easy and creative way to engage with a difficult history, and inspired a wide range of responses.

“My box is designed to encourage others to go out and achieve their dreams. Life is about the people you meet and the things you create with them, so go out and start creating.”

Participant

Arc deliberately gave minimal guidelines to participants regarding their DreamBox, encouraging them to use their imagination and respond in whatever form they saw fit - textiles, mixed media, sculpture, painting, animation, ceramics, and mosaic.

What does Stockport Dream of?

Dreams ranged from those as simple as a child wishing to live under a rainbow, to those which outlined larger aims of world peace, prosperity and sustainability.

“Our box explores the imagination of a little boy and his aspirations – astronaut boy, fantasy boy and artist boy – each dream just as plausible as the next... We used a range of mediums to express the abstract wonder of a child’s imagination”

Bethany Davenport, Miriam Irwin and Emily Parker, Students at Cheadle Hulme High School

The eclectic mix of styles, artforms and themes in the final installation express the highly inclusive nature of this project. Children as young as 4 contributed and groups such as Brinnington Family Art Attack made inter-generational pieces, where children worked with parents and grandparents to create their DreamBox.

“Really beautiful idea, and to see all the creations from children and adults, some unique and some the same. Very inspirational”

Installation Visitor



The Soldier Boxes

Alongside the DreamBoxes, the creation of the Soldier Boxes was an integral part of the project, as it formed the vital link to the town's remembrance. A team of Arc volunteer artists were tasked to research and create boxes to represent 10 soldiers.

Artists chose from a large database of Stockport soldiers, many of them drawing on personal inspiration to choose their subject, such as soldiers that lived close to them, or a soldier who had similar passions.

"I went down the route of finding someone who interested me and concentrated on his life, not so much his war experience. So I enjoyed learning more about Compstall village, a place I often visit because of Etherow Park and used the fact that he was a weaver in my display as I am enjoying learning to weave."

Kath Walls, Volunteer Artist

Some reached out to living relatives of their soldier, other visited Stockport sites connected to them

"Researching my particular soldier, Robert Leigh Redfern, gave me a much deeper appreciation of the reality of the situation that young men found themselves in, in 1914. It gave me a huge amount of respect for their sense of honour and duty to their country and of the sacrifice they made. Spending so much time considering what Robert Leigh's hopes, dreams and aspirations might have

been has left me with a long lasting feeling of connection with him and I feel myself still thinking of him all these months later."

Jane Kocar, Volunteer Artist

Working individually or in pairs, each was then encouraged to imagine the life that their soldier may have dreamt of on their return from conflict, and create a box which was a fitting tribute to that person.

"I was interested in the notion of representing the people behind the names on a memorial, to show that they were not just faceless soldiers but were living, breathing people with dreams and aspirations too."

Mandy, Volunteer Artist



The Launch

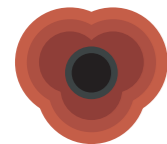
Sunday November 11th 2018 was filled with 'Stockport Remembers' events, including a memorial service, lantern parade, and beacon lighting on the steps of the War Memorial Art Gallery. Following these, visitors entered the Gallery for the opening of the **We Are Dreamers** installation, along with two other exhibitions which explored the connection between Stockport and the First World War.

"There were 6,000 people in the Lantern Parade on the night and over 2000 who came into the gallery on Sunday. Both unprecedented."

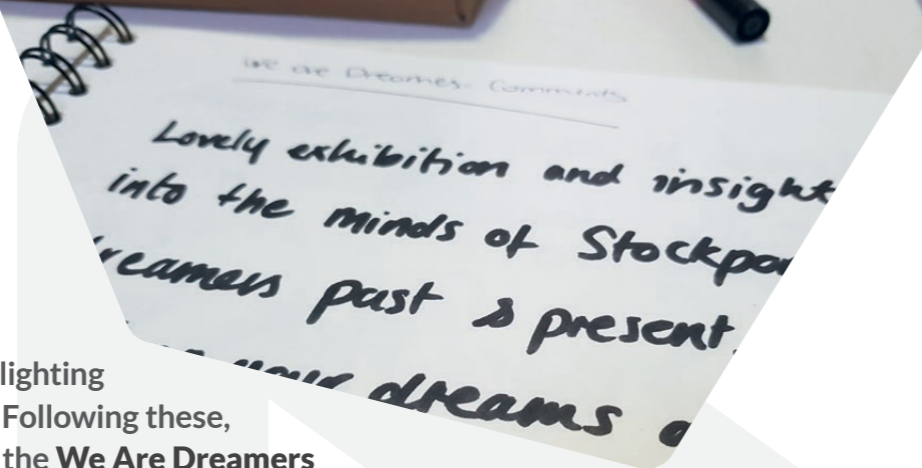
Alison Farthing, Team Manager,
Strategic Projects, SMBC

"Very poignant for me. My Grandfather was killed in the same battle that several of the men remembered here lost their lives in. How strange that 100 years later, the great, great Granddaughter he never knew, has a dream box in the same exhibition"

Exhibition Visitor



STOCKPORT REMEMBERS
1918 - 2018



Over 2,000 people came into the gallery for the launch event that evening. Many of those who attended had contributed their own DreamBox, which gave the launch event a great buzz as people looked out for their box amongst many, and showed them to friends and family.

"Very moving and insightful exhibition. I came to see my own entry but have been truly humbled by the Soldier Boxes. Thank You"

Participant and Visitor

As well as many participants, members of Stockport Council who commissioned the project, and the Mayor of Stockport, Cllr. Walter Brett, also attended.



Responses to the Exhibition

We Are Dreamers was on display at Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery between the 11th November 2018 and 9th February 2019, drawing a total audience of over 5,600 people.

The exhibition had a profound and immediate impact on visitors of all ages.

"Out of all the exhibitions, this has probably been the biggest draw... I think it was a really nice concept – We Are Dreamers – it's the hope for the future"

Katherine Rosati,
Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery

"Every single one of the dream boxes is spectacular. After the sadness of the war memories, it is so uplifting to see the creativity and hopes for the future depicted so thoughtfully here."

Exhibition Visitor

With so many DreamBoxes to see, visitors returned to the exhibition on more than one occasion; a sense of discovery also shared by the staff at the gallery.

"A very moving exhibition: both because of the stories about the fallen, and the enormous community effort which had led to such a vivid exhibit."

Exhibition Visitor

The interactive elements of the exhibition were popular, including the use of torches to explore the boxes, and a creative making station at the end of the gallery which enabled visitors to create their own DreamBox to add to the installation.

We Are Dreamers connected the past, present and future. It captured the imagination of visitors, creating a moving and emotional tribute to a significant time in history.

"People would spend a long time up here... The average look around the gallery used to be 20 minutes, so to spend maybe 40 minutes to an hour in one gallery alone is amazing"

Katherine Rosati,
Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery

"The exhibition was outstanding, the perfect mix of remembrance and respect combined with hopefulness, creativity and dreams."

Jane Hughes, Volunteer Artist

Project Legacies

Positive relationships for Arc

We Are Dreamers was an ambitious project which gave Arc the opportunity to work with more people in Stockport than ever before. Delivering in schools, neighbourhood settings and town centre spaces such as Hatworks, we gained a wider profile and reach. We employed a range of artists and developed new partnerships with community and cultural groups across the Borough. Arc consolidated its working relationship with SMBC, establishing itself as a respected and trustworthy partner in the design and delivery of high impact, high quality arts projects.

Connections to the Cultural offer in Stockport

Arc is passionate about developing pathways for vulnerable, isolated and excluded people to access the mainstream, to use creativity and culture as a means to reconnect with their community and place. This project enabled people of all ages and experiences to participate in a Borough-wide celebration and shared commemorative event in a public gallery space.

Increased Engagement and Audiences

Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery was built for the people of Stockport. **We Are Dreamers** was the first introduction to the space for many of the participants and visitors. Friends and families, schools and voluntary groups all came and felt

a sense of community and of belonging through contributing to the Gallery's largest ever event, and building a potential audience for the future.

A Future for the Artwork

The Soldier Boxes are now on view in local Stockport libraries where those soldiers lived or worked. Some of those who contributed to the project have been encouraged to develop their own DreamBox displays.

"I've displayed our boxes in the Women's Centre Foyer so they are having a second viewing, they really are splendid and bring a smile to everybody's face"

Gail Gordon,
Group Leader, Stockport Women's Centre

Pride in Stockport

We Are Dreamers inspired not only a massive number of Stockport residents but also Stockport creatives. It promoted cultural networking, brought Stockport to the attention of organisations and individuals outside the town, and firmly established Stockport as a place that is capable of commissioning and designing unique events which are widely admired; a great place to make art, to make a powerful statement and to make something beautiful.

"We were delighted to work with Arc as a partner on one of our landmark projects to mark the centenary of the end of World War One in 2018. We Are Dreamers captured the imagination of many different individuals and organisations throughout Stockport Borough, reached far into all our communities and attracted lots of new people to our Art Gallery.

Most of the participants had not engaged with arts projects before and many of the visitors to the exhibition were making their first visit to the Gallery. We've worked with Arc on many successful projects across Stockport's communities, but this one surpassed our expectations with its creativity and community reach."

Peter Ashworth,
Head of Culture & Leisure, Stockport MBC





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 Just for Mums Creative Writing @ Arc
 Stockport Women's Centre
 Stockport for Peace Pure Studios
 Brinnington Community Arts Group
 Family Art Attack Stockport for Peace
 Voice for the Voiceless

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 Cheadle Hulme High School
 Hursthead Primary School
 Didsbury Road Primary School

Thanks to the Staff of Stockport War Memorial Art Gallery.

And a huge thank you to those members of the public who came to **We Are Dreamers** workshops at Arc and Hatworks, and to all the community groups, schools, colleges and individuals who contributed DreamBoxes to the exhibition.



“I just wanted to say a huge thank you for the wonderful We Are Dreamers installation. It has delivered on all aspects of our original brief – and much more besides”

Alison Farthing

Team Manager, Strategic Projects, SMBC



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