



## Rachel's Appetite Story

### Stoke-on-Trent City Council

#### Introduction

Rachel from Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Culture Team has been involved in the Appetite programme from the outset. She has seen first-hand how Appetite positively impacts local residents, engaging families with arts events and improving people's perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent, especially the City Centre. Collaborating with Appetite on events such as the Christmas Lights Switch On and as a member of Appetite's the Supper Club has influenced how Rachel now approaches projects, viewing community engagement as an important part of her role and future partnerships.

#### Rachel's story

Rachel works in Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Culture Team. Her role has included working on events such as the Tour of Britain, the Sports Awards, and Stoke-on-Trent City Centre's annual Christmas Lights Switch On. She is also involved in heritage and arts projects, and is a member of the City Centre Partnership.

Though not official partners or consortium members, the Culture Team has been involved with Appetite from the beginning of the programme. Rachel became more involved during the second year of Appetite, becoming an Appetite Builder for the City Centre Partnership and also bringing more Appetite events into the City Centre, including the Christmas Lights Switch On 2014.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council provides support to the Appetite programme in a number of ways, from financial (including Appetite running the Community Fund on the Council's behalf), and helping with the organising and hosting of events,

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(01782) 294793

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such as The Big Feast which is held over August Bank Holiday weekend and sees performances take place across the City Centre.

The Culture Team meet regularly with Appetite, finding that there's always a flow of communication. Rachel often goes to events with Gemma (Appetite's Creative Producer) to watch artists and then discuss it.

"It works really well where we're seen as equal partners," says Rachel, who feels that her opinions being valued has been an important part of the partnership, and that the Appetite team really encourage the Culture Team to come up with ideas.

The main challenges have cropped up during events. There have been occasional issues with people who have been commissioned by Appetite where Stoke-on-Trent City Council has to deal with the situation on the day. Rachel is aware that the public's perception may be that any problems that arise during events are automatically seen as the fault of the Council. She has found the post-event debriefs very useful for addressing these concerns in a constructive way so that the teams can learn from any problems, leaving Rachel feeling that issues are unlikely to repeat.

Even on non-Appetite events Rachel feels she has a relationship with the Appetite team, being able to link into relevant contacts, something that the City Council reciprocate.



## Christmas Lights - Winterfest and #LoveChristmas

Before 2013, Stoke-on-Trent City Centre's Christmas Lights Switch On was a stage show with a celebrity switching on the lights. Rachel noticed that not many families came

along to the Christmas Lights events when they took this format. In 2013, the event was developed into more of an arts event, attracting more of a family audience. Walkabout acts, camel rides, local buskers and stallholders were a part of this new style. "It was quite low key but it was gearing up for a more community, artistic event," Rachel says. For Christmas Lights 2014, the City Council, City Centre Partnership and Appetite delivered Winterfest, with Appetite

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commissioning a performance delivered by Emergency Exit Arts, fire dancers Flame Oz, and stilt walkers Calvos.

They collaborated again for the 2015 Christmas Lights Switch On, #LoveChristmas. The event reached capacity and Rachel is now thinking ahead for the 2016 event, which will also be delivered with Appetite. “Generally people who come to watch respond well, though the media less so,” Rachel says, reflecting on the response to both Winterfest and #LoveChristmas.

## Impact on Stoke-on-Trent

Rachel feels that people in and around Stoke-on-Trent are beginning to know the Appetite brand and associate it with quality. “If you brand something as Appetite people are more likely to come. They know it’s going to be really creative,” she explains.

Before Appetite, most arts events in Stoke-on-Trent took place in the City Centre, but Rachel has now seen an increase in events in the smaller towns, with more of a community focus. Rachel tries to go to many of the events across the City. She feels that these events have been really well received, and that residents like the fact that it is people from their local area that have worked on the events and commissioned the artists.

One such event Rachel went to was the Three Greens Event in Bentilee, organised by Appetite and Bentilee Community Partnership. While there, she spoke to local residents who had never thought they would have this kind of arts event taking place in Bentilee. They noticed too how it attracted a wide audience and felt inspired to see events could bring local people together.

She has seen how community participation through Appetite has encouraged more people to come to the events and creates a level of heightened esteem. “For Diwali we had a lantern parade with over a thousand people taking part. It was a really nice atmosphere and you could tell that for that moment people were really proud to be in Stoke-on-Trent. People had come together who wouldn’t necessarily have come together for an event,” Rachel says. “When people have participated they get so much more out of it.”

Rachel feels that Appetite events definitely change the perception people have of the City Centre in a positive way. “Straight away people perceive it to be a safer place, they’ll chat to people where they’d normally keep themselves to themselves, and they’re happy to sit around and take their time. It changes the dynamic of the City Centre.”

Rachel has also noticed a change in how businesses in the City Centre respond to Appetite.

“They are starting to understand how art is important, that a city centre isn’t



just about the shops, it’s about creating an experience.” At the beginning of the programme she felt that businesses were, understandably, only interested in the potential for increased footfall on the day of the events, whereas Rachel feels they now see the wider importance of changing people’s perceptions of the City Centre, leading to people being more likely to spend time there.

## Impact on the City Council

Working with Appetite has influenced the way that the Culture Team approaches arts events and projects. “We’re definitely more community-focused, and we aim higher,” says Rachel. “We go out for the bigger pots of money, and we go for the pots that we wouldn’t have gone for before”

It has changed how they look at events, community working and arts projects, with a focus on the importance of collaboration and partnership. As an Appetite Builder for the City Centre Partnership, Rachel goes to most of Appetite’s the Supper Club sessions. She has been inspired by the Supper Club approach of teaming up with community groups and going through their vision in meetings, so that the focus is on working with groups on what they want to see. “All the projects I work on now have a community group involved and a really community led way of doing things,” says Rachel. This community approach came through in the Opening Ceremony for Stoke-on-Trent being awarded European City of Sport 2016. The February Opening Ceremony saw seven hundred volunteers - six hundred of whom were under 16 - take part. “One of the kids came up to us

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afterwards and was so excited. She said it was the best thing she's ever done in her life. It all makes it worthwhile," says Rachel.

Rachel has seen how the Appetite programme has raised aspirations for the arts for both the City Council and Stoke-on-Trent residents. "The groups that we work with are more demanding as they've been to Appetite events and seen high quality art, and they want their art to be on that level. We've definitely moved up a few levels because of the Appetite programme - in terms of what people want and expect to see. We're more daring in what we can deliver now."

## **What themes would you use to categorise this case study?**

Engaging communities, working with local people, family arts, partnership working



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