

DANCE

AT THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES

KEY LEARNINGS FROM **DANCE WORK IN LIBRARIES** 2025-26

Made By Katie Green

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

PROJECT OVERVIEW

From 19 February 2025 – 1 April 2026 Made by Katie Green (MBKG) toured well-established library performance work The Story Detectives and expanded the reach of our new piece SEED to a total of 44 libraries and 3 schools across England. Our tour was supported with funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England and investment from our library partners.

This significant tour included **58 performances engaging 3117 audience members, 2357 participants** in **70 workshops**, and distribution of **1000 Story Detectives activity packs**, also reaching **226,068 people digitally**, building on the company's strong track record of touring successfully to 19 libraries in 2022/23.

The overarching ambition of the project was to **deepen and expand the number of relationships MBKG has with a growing network of libraries and library services**, enabling us to continue reaching more beneficiaries, increasing our impact nationwide. This included revisiting communities with which we had already established a connection, and forging new relationships specifically with libraries who had not already been involved in programming dance performance.

The project delivered the 'Culture and Creativity' strand of Libraries Connected's **Universal Libraries Offers**, as well as connecting with: **Great Big Green Week, World Book Day, Libraries Week, the Summer Reading Challenge and Empathy Day**.

Alongside the tour, we also developed our expertise in inclusive practice, investing in neurodivergence training with consultant and artist Lily Norton for example, and continued to explore our environmental responsibility, including through touring the environmentally themed work **SEED** and with ongoing support from our sustainability mentor, Danielle Pipe.



CLICK LOGOS
TO FIND OUT MORE

Made By Katie Green

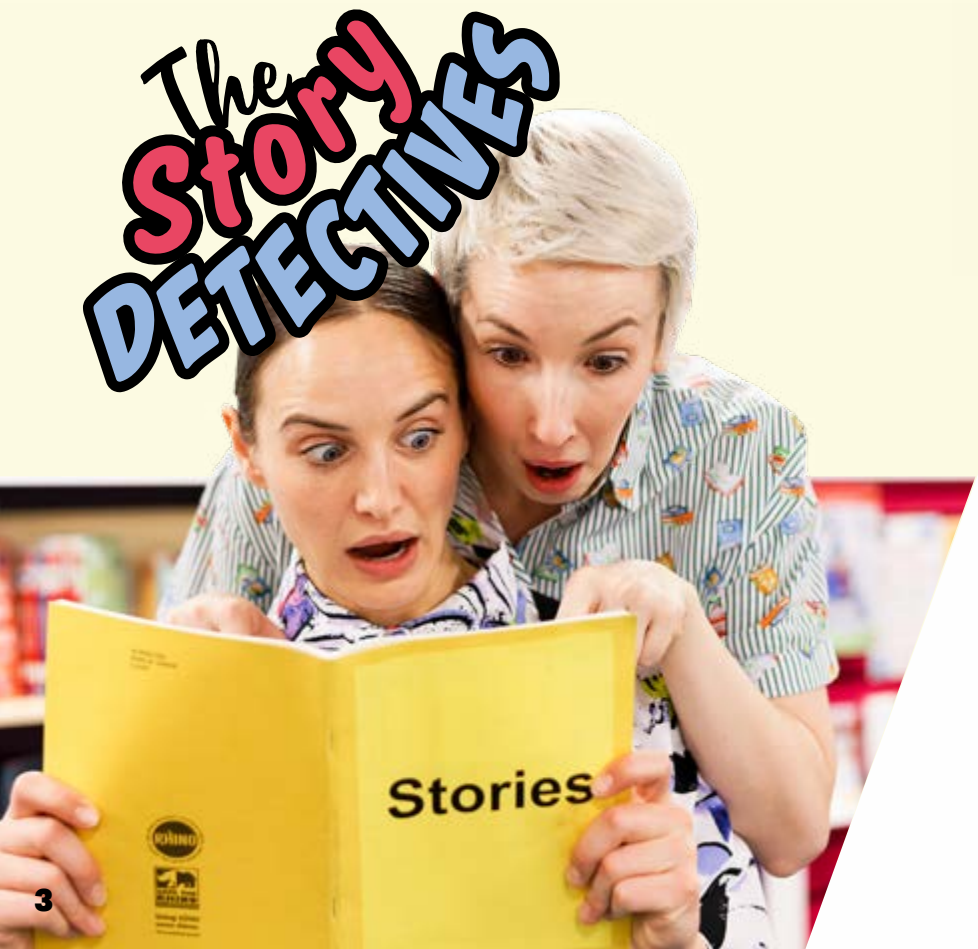
The Story DETECTIVES

SEED

THE STORY DETECTIVES is a highly interactive promenade dance performance that takes place using several different locations within a library. Two characters, Particular and Playful, invite the audience on an imaginative journey through different kinds of books – a detective book, an adventure book, a dictionary, a fairy tale for example – and collect clues together that help them find the name of the Most Important Story. It is aimed primarily at children aged 3-8 and their families, but all are welcome.

Our previous evaluation of **The Story Detectives** touring from 2022-23 is available **HERE**

You can watch the trailer for **The Story Detectives** by Dan Martin, filmed at Devonport Library in Plymouth **HERE**





SEED is an interactive dance performance designed for libraries and schools, inspired by nature and the world around us. The piece is aimed at children aged 18 months – 5 years and their grown-ups, but as with **The Story Detectives**, all are welcome to enjoy the piece with us. It is about two 'Seedologists' called Kid and Pinto, who are on the look-out for new specimens. Together they follow the journey of a mysterious new seed that has appeared in the library, watching it transform as it travels through the four seasons.

Some of the findings from our **SEED** pilot evaluation are online **HERE**

You can watch the trailer for **SEED** by Dan Martin **HERE**

THE DATA HEADLINES

2025/26

2357 children and young people attending workshops

70 workshops

2087 live audience attenders at performances

58 live dance performances

3117 **total live audiences**

1030 incidental audiences watching rehearsals

44 libraries

24 new library relationships for MBKG

15 of our library partners for 25/26 were in areas that have been identified as potentially underserved for culture, including 7 libraries in Priority Places Brent and Medway, and 8 libraries in Levelling Up for Culture places.
30 were in areas scoring 1-6 on the Indicators of Social Deprivation Scale and 13 in areas scoring 1-3.

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS from survey respondents*

78% had not seen or rarely seen live dance before

86% were attending the library because of our performances (including new and regular library attendees)

14% incidental audiences (joining in because they happened to be in the library on the day of the performance)

15% first time attendees at the library

100% gave the show 4 or 5 out of 5 for enjoyment

97% who scored the performance 4 or 5 out of 5 when asked how much their children were engaged in the show

94% of audience that would definitely attend the library again because a performance was taking place

100% would recommend our shows to other families

99% noted an increase in their children's engagement through the show

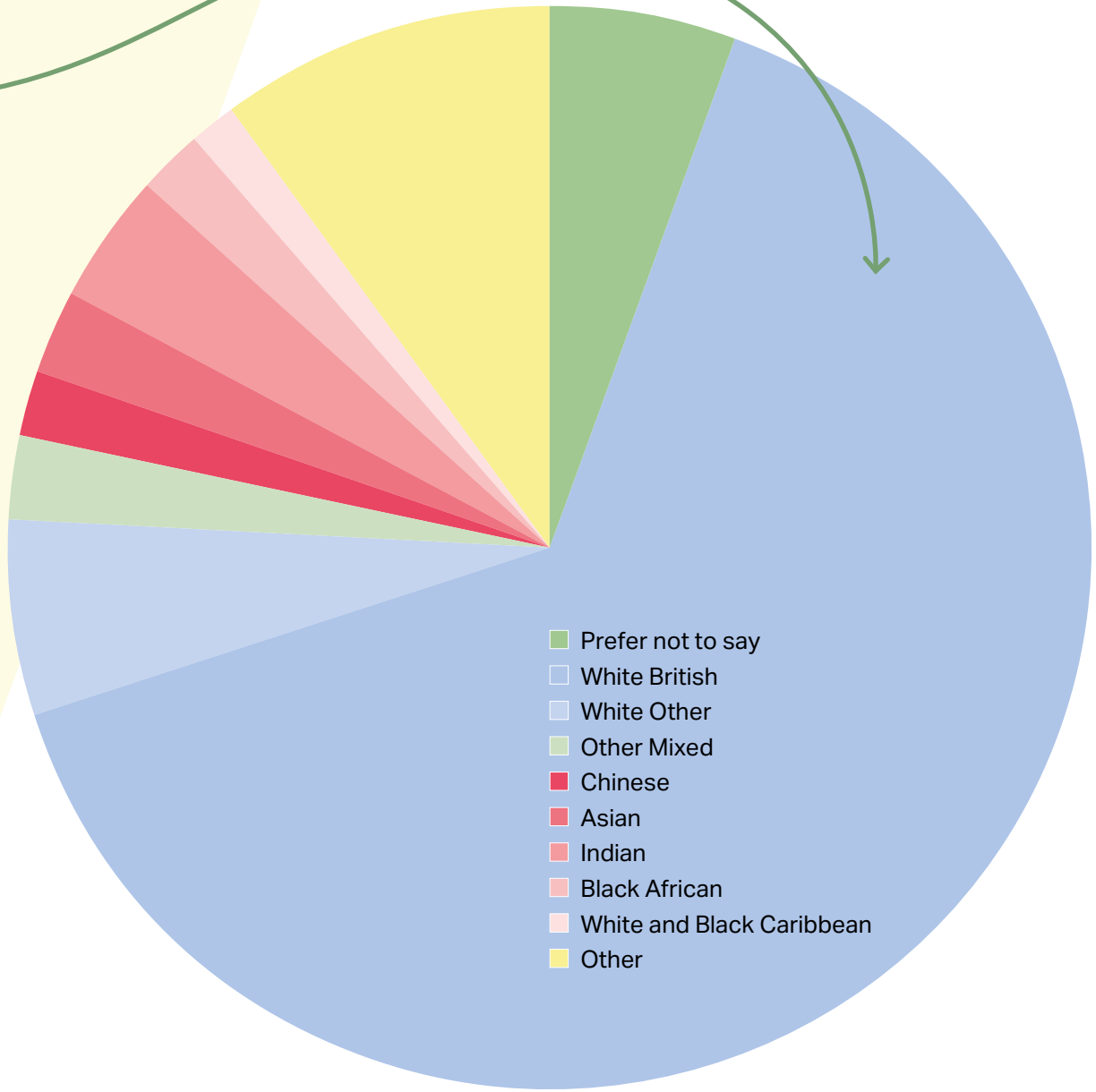
*There were 239 respondents to the MBKG audience surveys across 43 libraries. Staines Library used their own evaluation form with different questions so the data is referenced but not included in our data analysis.

TOTAL ETHNICITY OR RESPONDENTS

The predominant ethnicity given for our audiences across all the survey respondents in all areas was White British (65.7%).

However, our survey respondents described themselves as 21 different ethnicities showing the work in libraries reaches a wide demographic, and in some areas it was noted that the audience was hugely more diverse than others, in line with national representative statistics.

For example, in some of our partner library services in London, the majority of survey respondents described themselves as having global majority heritage – in Barnet 78%, Brent 67% and Hillingdon 60%. This emphasises the importance of continuing to tour broadly to different areas in order to reach families from the broadest range of backgrounds.



WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

Much of the audience data we gathered during our most recent touring 2025-26 has reinforced findings we made when evaluating previous touring of **The Story Detectives** from 2022-23, also enabling us to develop our understanding of these further.

Here are some of the key discoveries we have made about the power of dancing in libraries:

CLICK TO READ THE FULL 2022/23 REPORT



BUILDING NEW AUDIENCES

Working with dance in libraries engages new attendees for libraries (15% brand new visitors for 2025-26) and a new audience for dance, with the new/rare dance attendee percentage holding steady for 2025-26 at 78% (79% for 2022-23).

"It's a great way to introduce children to dance and performance, watching and participating"
SEED Audience member

Feedback indicates that our work is considered by many to be a good introduction to dance:

The shows also bring something surprising and different for regular library/dance attendees.

Data shows the **majority of attendees are drawn to the libraries on the day of the performances because of the event** (86%), but continues to evidence a **percentage of incidental audiences** (14%) who don't know the performance is happening but stay longer than they had intended because they enjoy engaging with the activity.

"We never visited show like this before. I wasn't sure how she'd react, it was really nice to see her enjoying it, laughing and taking part."

The performances build appetite for further engagement,

with 94% saying they would definitely attend the library again because a performance is taking place, with some repeat attendance happening within the timeline of the tour itself.

"This is our third time watching the show, the children were as enthralled as they were the first time."

"The show and activity was fantastic and we are thinking to travel to another library to join the same performance again next week as we really loved it"



‘IN REACH’ PERFORMANCES AT THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES

Although there are instances of people travelling away from their local library, evidencing audiences’ willingness to travel further than usual for a special event, on the whole the primary audience for our work in libraries continues to be hyper-local, with 71% travelling within 5 miles of the libraries and the majority of those travelling considerably less (62% less than 3 miles).

This indicates once again that working with dance in libraries has **excellent environmental sustainability credentials** because of the lower carbon footprint of those attending and the fact it’s more possible for them to access the library in more environmentally friendly ways such as using public transport or on foot. It also shows the unique potential – if offering the right kind of experience that is welcoming, and conducive to people trying something out for the first time – **for developing connected, loyal audiences**, especially where the work being offered can:

- reflect and draw on the experiences of those communities
- contribute something different to the library’s regularly scheduled activity
- connect with other kinds of activities to create a more holistic, social experience e.g. where people can also borrow and buy books; make connections with other families; attend other events happening in the library or find out about other opportunities in the local area.

“I’m just astonished by the intelligence of the performance and the professionalism of the actors. We feel very lucky that such a performance came to our library.”

“Everything was well organised by lovely Katie, really impressive! The lovely dancers were amazing! We also ended up borrowing and even buying few books.”



A 'GATEWAY EXPERIENCE' TO THE ARTS

Breaking down audience data for each of our pieces separately, we noted that our show SEED, which targeted younger children and their families, was bringing in an audience with a greater percentage of new/rare library attendees than The Story Detectives (28% rather than 19%).

This indicates **the importance of activities for under 5s and families in libraries in starting to build relationships and making families aware of a range of cultural opportunities and experiences, with potential to develop loyal audiences** (95% of **SEED** audiences said they would definitely attend more events in the library as a result of attending the performance).

Similarly, we discovered that 90% of **SEED** audiences had never or rarely seen live dance (compared to 75% of **Story Detectives** audiences), which evidenced the fact that **the show targeting young children brought in a higher percentage of new audiences for dance, again indicating the importance of providing these kinds of opportunities from an early age.**

"At the age of ten months he was amazingly engaged at such a young age, both with the performance, with other children and the whole experience of coming to the library."



A 'GATEWAY EXPERIENCE' TO THE ARTS

Building on the importance of engaging with younger audiences aged 5 and under, we also tested a programme of linked activity with Reception children in three schools in partnership with Delight Charity as part of our 2025-26 touring.

Since piloting this work in schools, we have worked with Delight and Paintbox to develop the offer for Reception children and rolled it out for a second time in the 2025/26 academic year as the 'Delight in Dance: Grow' project.

Given the opportunity to explore the themes of the work more deeply through dance and visual arts activities also linked to the 'Understanding the World' Early Learning Goals, **the young participants:**

- Found ease and enjoyment in the activities
- Grew in courage
- Developed their creative, communication and cooperation skills
- Brought their learning and new enthusiasm for the world around them into their homes
- Thrived where they didn't necessarily do so in other parts of their learning

"It was very moving to see the children respond so beautifully"

"There was so much joy in all of their faces joining in, especially with all the props and dancing."

"He seemed happy and relaxed. At home we've noticed him become more interested in the garden and creatures like butterflies and he loves seeds!"

"I was very pleased that ALL the children contributed to the dance workshops at least some of the time, which for one child in particular was unusual."

FOR ALL THE FAMILY

The largest proportion of our young audiences were from the 2-7 age range, which is consistent with the target audiences of the performances but also a good indicator of the primary age range of children using the libraries with their families.

Interestingly, of the 239 survey respondents, 91 (38%) attended with children in more than one age group, which is useful for us to take into account when considering the content and format of future projects. It indicates the **importance of arts organisations working in libraries to develop opportunities for the whole family to participate together**, perhaps including different opportunities for participation, with options for young people of different ages to engage with the activities on their own terms.

"I attended with 3 children today and I could see they were all enjoying watching the performance and getting involved in this"

"All 4 of my children aged 10, 9, 7 and 5 thoroughly enjoyed it and got very involved."



"We were all really captivated, including children and adults."

DEVELOPING AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

As well as building new audiences, providing an experience which 100% of survey respondents rated 4 or 5 out of 5 for enjoyment, with 100% saying they would recommend it to other families, the style and content of the performances and follow-up activities...

...**developed audience's imaginative engagement with the world of work**, with parents using words like 'captivated', 'enthralled' and 'mesmerised' regularly to describe their child/ren's response. **97% of audiences scored the works 4 or 5/5 when asked to comment on the level of their children's engagement.**

"My son isn't normally one for reading and stories, but he got stuck right in, making suggestions"

"They were completely taken away into the story world"

...were highly effective in **capturing and sustaining young people's interest even the youngest audience members, and over a longer than expected time period**. 99% of parents noticed their child's engagement increase through the performance.

"She loved it and managed to sit through the whole thing. Lily can get easily distracted but loved this performance thank you."

"She is just over 2 years old and she was captivated throughout, which is hard to achieve!"



Participants' engagement also continued beyond the performance itself. Audience members for **SEED** sent us pictures of the seeds they planted with us after the show as they grew at home, and **Story Detectives** audiences designed their own heroes and villains in Activity Packs.

INCLUSION IS ESSENTIAL

We observed that there were some children in every audience who needed some additional support to access the performance, including those whose needs were diagnosed and undiagnosed, visible and invisible.

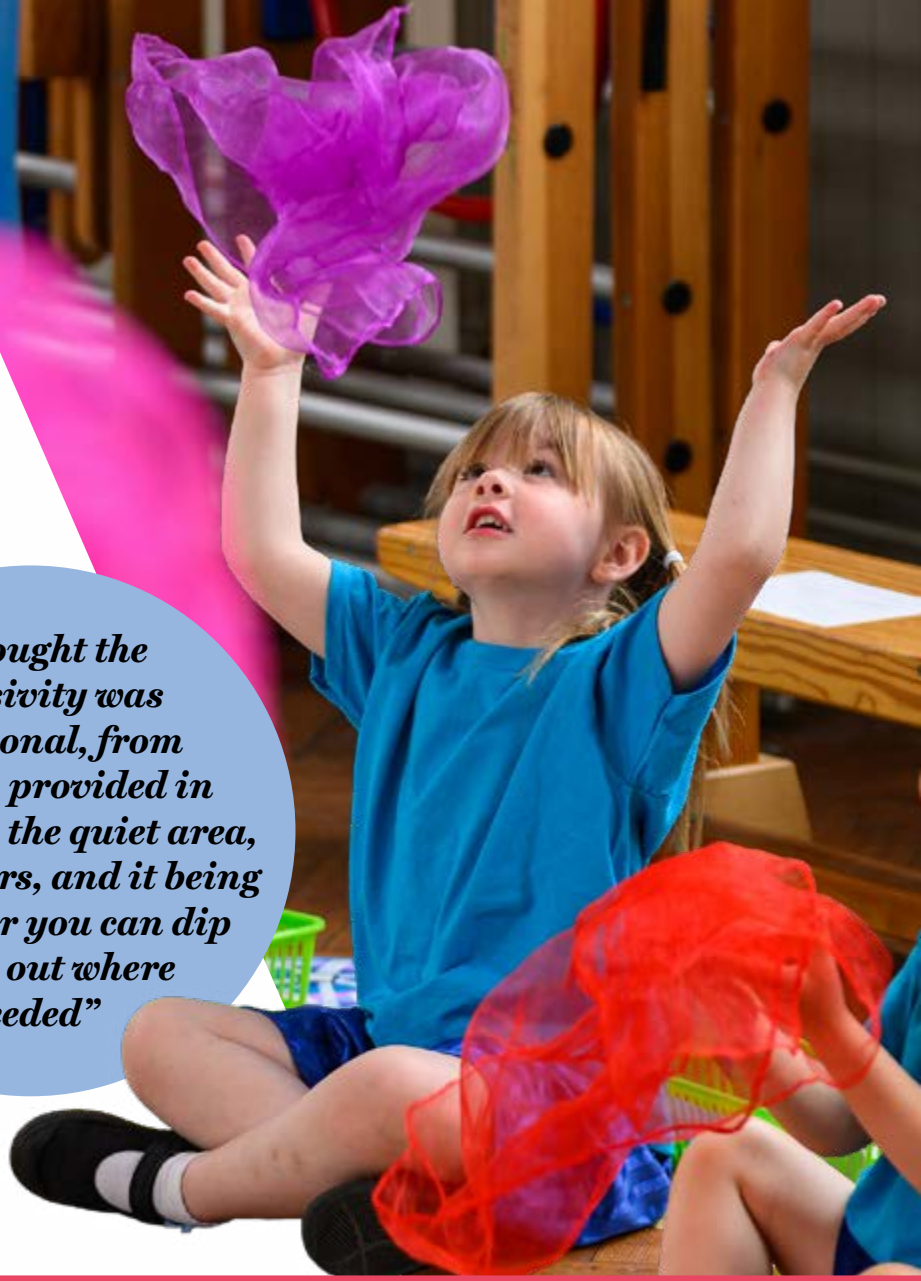
Accommodating additional needs is not something we only need to be planning for given 'special' circumstances, but **all of the time** – ensuring our work can always try to include as many of the audience, as much of the time as possible.

Feedback from parents indicated the style and content of the performances and our attention to inclusion supported everyone to have a great experience.

"Inclusion was impeccable"

"She was able to access and enjoy as much as anyone else"

"I thought the inclusivity was exceptional, from the video provided in advance, to the quiet area, ear defenders, and it being made clear you can dip in and out where needed"



WATCH OUR SOCIAL STORY VIDEOS, EXPLAINING WHAT TO EXPECT IN EACH PERFORMANCE:

BUILDING COURAGE AND NURTURING BELONGING

Parents regularly comment on their children seeming to grow in confidence during the show, or "coming out of their shell", having initially seemed nervous.

We have learned from our audiences that by building an experience in which

- the story and the props are enticing
- the characters are friendly and have explained who they are
- the children are with their families in a place where they feel comfortable and where they can see other children also joining in and having fun

we can support children to feel safe, and to have **courage** to join in with something out of the ordinary.

We know that for some children this is a bigger step than others, but the fact that so many parents remark on their children feeling "safe" or "comfortable" to participate tells us that **our work is particularly conducive to supporting all young people to feel they can join in, even where it might initially feel a bit scary**.

There's real potential here to continue creating empowering work that can contribute to building audience members' self-esteem and their feeling of belonging to something bigger than themselves.

"She can get scared by villains but there was also a really helpful message about being brave and having confidence! I'm so glad we came – she got a lot from it, thank you!"

"I'm really grateful for this event. My daughter starts reception in September and this was a great experience for her to mix with other children. I am a teacher and I thought it was exceptional."

"I love the strong messages in the performance about being your own super hero. I found it very encouraging for the children. Definitely a confidence builder."



DEVELOPING LIBRARY PARTNERSHIPS

Feedback shows that libraries have universally appreciated the performance and experience of working with us, **with 100% of library staff completing our partner survey saying they would programme dance again as a result of hosting Made By Katie Green**, and many commenting on how well-organised the project was, and their appreciation of the measures put in place in advance of the performances to make sure things ran smoothly.

"Totally exceeded expectations – it was so fantastic to see both of the performances in the library, to see the responses from the audiences, to be able to read the feedback on surveys and also from the drawings and comments from the children. The organisation of the day was superb."

A number of staff reflected on the ways in which working with dance made a positive contribution to the library service, both in terms of the impact for audience members, but also describing the new knowledge and skills they developed around hosting performance and other activities, and in MBKG's approach to inclusive practice.

"The thought given to providing for an inclusive audience was a huge learning experience for us. We will definitely be adopting some of the simple yet powerful sensory support methods used."

"Introduced something different into the library which inspired me to think about other activities I could run. It has helped us to develop ideas about our access and inclusion."



BUILDING TRUST

More extensive and consistent touring has enabled us to hone our project management and delivery model, making it easier to initiate relationships with new partners, minimising workload for those partners, and refining our approach to adapting our pieces to each new environment, so we can do this quickly and with minimal disruption.

Practical refinements such as these make touring more sustainable for us, enabling us to deliver a high quality encounter for every community, in all contexts.

We are proud that our library partners are willing to vouch for what we do and its professionalism, with their recommendations enabling us to access a greater range of partner venues, including many who have never done something like this before

"Working with Made By Katie Green was a true pleasure. We would be delighted to welcome them back in the future. They are exceptionally organised, professional, and bring a deep understanding of what engages and educates children of all ages. Katie, her amazing team, and their performances are always warmly welcomed here."



TAKING CARE

Libraries are essential community hubs, run by extraordinary people who want to make things better for others.

Nevertheless, they are under constant and increasing pressure, which can impact on their capacity to successfully navigate an initial idea to completion. With the best will in the world, sometimes we can put everything in place, but external factors (budget cuts, local government restructuring, redundancies, being short-staffed) will mean that partners have to withdraw.

Given this often precarious position, the respect and understanding with which we try to hold each relationship cannot be understated, and we take every care to support our partners wherever we can – e.g. supporting fundraising, creating template artwork, providing all necessary documentation such as risk assessments and facilitating the evaluation process. This doesn't only impact positively on the success of our collaboration, but, we hope, will pave the way for professional development amongst our and the library team, building a strong foundation for more opportunities in the future.

"Katie and the performers were incredibly patient with us, as we are extremely short staffed due to vacancies, team long-term sickness, and a busy time of year heading out of the World Book Day Festival and into the Summer Reading Challenge. Katie's patience and kindness was way more than we could reasonably expect. In person Katie and the performers were all very professional and calm - everything was kept tidy and safe for the children (and adults!) to attend. The performances were pure magic – imaginative, immersive, important –and I know they have impressed our staff and the school staff. They have truly been a pleasure to work with."

"I had tears in my eyes when the event started. Was thinking how great our libraries are at working in partnership with such a great team as yours, and delivering free beautiful events for our community."

Library partner feedback





The Story Detectives

SEED

Our tour from 2025-26 was supported financially using public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, Delight, and our partners Surrey Libraries, Telford and Wrekin Libraries, Northamptonshire Libraries, Hillingdon Libraries, Dorset Council Libraries, Applause Rural Touring and Medway Libraries, Barnet Libraries, Nottingham Inspire: Culture, Learning and Libraries,Trafford Libraries, Bexley Libraries, Creative Burntwood and Brent Libraries.

PHOTOS THROUGHOUT
Roswitha Chesher, Floyd C Konde, Dan Martin, David Monteith-Hodge (for Delight in Dance)

PERFORMERS Megan Griffiths, Becky Horne, Rachel Laird, Chloe Mead, Deepraj Singh

REPORT CONTENT Vicky Thornton (Clearcut) and Katie Green

PROJECT MANAGEMENT Charlotte Mackie

DESIGN Jo Ogilvie, Sharp Pencil Design

Made By Katie Green

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