

EEA

EMERGENCY  
EXIT ARTS

Stitching Light: Evaluation Report



Worcester, Bridges of Light Festival

## 1. Foreword and key findings summary by Santra Consulting

As the independent evaluator of the project, Santra Consulting supported Emergency Exit Arts (EEA) in developing evaluation tools for the project, as well as conducting stakeholder interviews and a focus group with partners at the end of the project. The main evaluation report, drafted by EEA, presents and discusses the evidence and findings from this evaluation process. Having reviewed the evidence, we highlight the key findings and impact of the Stitching Light project in this foreword.

Stitching Light was a participatory light and textile project led by EEA, developed in partnership with Paraa (Bangladesh), Oitij-Jo and five light festivals across England. The project presented Bangladeshi migration stories through co-created, large-scale illuminated textile panels, combining oral history, traditional Kantha stitching and contemporary light art.

The evaluation demonstrates the artistic, social and organisational impact of the project, with significant reach across the partner locations:

- 52 core women participants across six locations, accounting for 331 workshop attendances
- 50 hours of oral history collection
- 26 large-scale stitched panels, 16 of which were toured nationally at six major light festivals, reaching approximately 530,000 audience members
- 28 staff and artists trained in oral history practice and 24 professional artists and freelancers involved.

Most significantly, the project delivered transformational outcomes for the predominantly first-generation Bangladeshi women, many of whom had never previously shared their migration stories publicly. Their participation increased their creative confidence and sense of wellbeing, with participants reporting that the project enabled them to express themselves, they felt safe sharing their experiences and proud of their creative achievements. The evaluation demonstrates the impact on the women's feelings of cultural pride and connection to their cultural identity, with most feeling encouraged to engage more in community life in the future. The project further reduced isolation, built friendships, strengthened intergenerational dialogue and, in some locations, led to the creation of new Bangladeshi women's groups that continue beyond the project.

Stitching Light was also reported to have very positive outcomes for the partner festivals. Festival partners reported that the project exceeded their expectations and delivered strategic benefits to their organisations, in terms of reaching out to community groups they had not previously worked with, especially Bangladeshi women, and developing skills in co-creation and culturally-sensitive facilitation – an approach that will likely influence future commissioning models. Festivals also reported enhancing their profile through participation in a national touring programme and contributing to the diversification of the artists and narratives represented within their light festivals – a sector considered to be lacking diversity.

For EEA, the project strengthened their expertise in heritage-led, participatory public art project delivery and facilitation of projects across multiple project locations. It also

reinforced its strategic commitment to representation and co-creation, and enhanced its national profile as a leader in socially-engaged light art.

The success of the project was facilitated by:

- A clear project structure, phasing and timelines
- High-quality artwork rooted in local stories
- Sensitive, culturally informed facilitation
- Equal and supportive partnerships
- The added value and visibility of the national touring model

Key areas for development include improving the clarity and flexibility around local budgets, allowing more time for recruitment and trust-building – especially where new community groups had to be established, strengthening public interpretation of the work, and establishing clearer long-term legacy plans for the panel displays.

Overall, Stitching Light successfully combined artistic excellence with deep community engagement. It enabled underrepresented women to see their stories illuminated at scale, increased their confidence, wellbeing and cultural pride, and provides a powerful, replicable model for inclusive, community-centred public art.

## 2. Introduction

This report presents the evaluation of *Stitching Light*, a multi-site participatory arts project led by Emergency Exit Arts (EEA) and delivered in partnership with community organisations and light festivals across England. The project centred on creative engagement, oral history and collaborative making, bringing together participants from predominately Bangladeshi backgrounds to explore identity, memory and belonging through a large-scale light-based artwork.

The evaluation was prepared by Emergency Exit Art, in collaboration with independent Evaluator Santra Consulting, and assesses the extent to which [Stitching Light](#) achieved its intended aims and objectives, with a particular focus on outcomes for participants, communities, audiences, partner light festivals and EEA as the lead organisation. It combines quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a robust account of impact, learning and legacy.

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traditional Kantha techniques – a craft practice increasingly at risk of being lost in Bangladesh. The stitching used luminescent thread, enabling the work to function as a light artwork within light festival settings.



*Bradford Oral History workshops*

Participants worked closely with lead artist Shama Kun, a bilingual facilitator whose sensitive and culturally informed approach was central to the project's success. Feedback highlighted that this was the first time many participants had been invited to reflect on and share their own stories beyond their roles as wives and mothers. Alongside the stitching process, EEA and Oitij-Jo collected audio recordings, drawings and photographs of personal objects, enriching the project's oral history archive.

***“This project has helped me understand the struggles and journey my own family have made, it has helped me understand my mother more.”*** – Shama Kun, Project Facilitator.

The work was first presented at Canary Wharf Winter Lights Festival commissioned for £29,950. It reached a large public audience and successfully demonstrated the artistic and participatory potential of the project. This presentation also functioned as a learning phase, identifying technical challenges related to weather resilience, power supply and ambient light levels, which informed the next stage of development.



Canary Wharf Winter Lights 2025 – photo credit Sean Pollock

Following this, EEA secured further funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund of £128,500, supported by the Migration Museum and five partner light festivals, each festival contributing £10,000 in match funding:

- Salford Quays – *Lightwaves*
- Middlesbrough – *Shine On, Boro*
- Leeds – *Light Night Leeds*
- Bradford – *BD: is LIT*
- Worcester – *Bridges of Light*

Additional partner support covered touring costs, including crew accommodation. The Migration Museum also delivered specialist training on ethical oral history collection and storage, strengthening the project's legacy and shared learning.

## 4. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data.

There were two rounds of participants surveys that were collected at the time of the workshops. The first was collected when the first oral history workshop was being delivered and the second was at the end of the project when the stitching had been completed. The first one was gathered by Shama and the local facilitator, the form was translated and filled out in either English or Bangla depending on language barriers, by the participants with support of the facilitators where needed.

All groups filled out the forms and gave oral feedback. Salford had the majority of feedback reflections for the evaluation. The main feedback was directly from the participants to ensure that the feedback was reflective of their experience of the project.

EEA held a feedback session in Salford Quays at the last Light Festival which was an opportunity for the groups to come together and a valuable session for whole group feedback. It was harder for the Salford group to reflect on how they felt after seeing the piece as the session was scheduled before the festival so they hadn't had a chance to see the work in person. The Salford group Her Story were then asked how they felt in the regular session after the event and the group leader Tandrima sent over the response. Bradford and Leeds could not make the final session so again they were asked to send final feedback over. Bradford sent the information, but Leeds didn't due to staff shortage and illness.

Santra Consulting conducted one to one interviews and a focus group with some of the areas. This enabled them to reflect without EEA being a part of the conversation, so it allowed them to honestly feedback about the project.

Partner festivals then collected audience feedback from the event. These were not specifically around Stitching Light but about the festival experience as a whole. The partners gathered on the ground audience feedback through using iPads and asked people whilst at the festival questions such as age, gender, disabilities, travel, money spent over the evening, their cultural experience and do they visit events often.

## 5. Project outputs



Final designs for *Stitching Light* based on Oral History collection

Across the six locations, EEA delivered Oral History training to 28 staff and artists, there were 24 professional artists and freelancers employed.

EEA engaged with 52 women and gathered their oral history stories about migrating to the UK. This equated to 331 attendances for the workshops which was made up by 15 oral history sessions (50 hours), 32 Kantha sewing workshops (119 hours), 26 unique panels were created and 16 of these were toured as part of the festival programme. There were 18,275m of thread used to highlight the stories stitched into the artwork.

The piece was shown at 6 light festivals, with an audience reach of around 530,000 audience members. This was something that the groups were incredibly proud of and overwhelmed by.

The oral history is being stored digitally and is accessible to listen to the stories online via Emergency Exit Arts website where the panels have been digitally scanned and the stories have been recorded and can be listened to in both Bangla and English.



Drawings from workshops exploring life in Bangladesh before migrating to the UK.

Participants included predominantly first-generation Bangladeshi women, with additional refugee participants in Salford. English was not the first language for participants; facilitation and feedback collection were fully supported.

প্রিয় লায়লা, আজ ত্রিশ বছর হয় আমি বাংলাদেশে ছেড়ে লন্ডন চলে এসেছি কিন্তু আজ পর্যন্ত আমি আমার প্রিয় মাতৃভূমি বাংলাদেশকে ভুলতে পারিনি। আমার মাকে আর বোনকে খুব মনে পড়ে। মনে পড়ে গাছের নিচে কভাবে আম কুড়াতাম। মনে পড়ে স্কুল জীবনের কথা, কী করে পুকুরে সাঁতার কাটতাম। ইতি লায়লা।

***“Laila, it has been thirty years since I left Bangladesh and moved to London, but even today, I haven’t been able to forget my beloved motherland, Bangladesh. I miss my mother and my sister very much. I remember how I used to gather/collect mangoes under the trees. I remember my school life, and how I used to swim in the pond. Regards, Laila.”***

*A letter that was written by a participant back to Bangladesh.*



*Sharing photos of life in Bangladesh, family and wedding day.*

## 6. Outcomes for Participants

The evaluation demonstrates that *Stitching Light* delivered strong and sustained positive outcomes for participants, particularly in relation to creative confidence, wellbeing, cultural identity and community connection.

***"I am truly delighted to have participated in this program with my child. Throughout this journey, I have learned so much and really enjoyed adapting to a new environment. Being a part of such a program has given me a deep sense of happiness and fulfilment."*** - R, Salford participant

The participants shared one word each to describe the how the project made them feel:

**Proud – Excited – Valued – Inspirational – United – Uplifting – Happy – Honoured – Heart-warming – Grateful – Joyful – Unifying – Life affirming – Beautiful – New friends – Connected – Amazing – Empowered – Nostalgia – Represented – Visible – Freedom – Fantastic.**

Participants were women with lived experience of migration, many of whom had not previously shared their personal stories in public or creative settings.

***"My son asked which story was mine and wanted to know what the story was about. My child learnt more about me, the naughty childhood stories, and the things that we got up to when I was a child. I told him in depth about my life, something that I had never done before."*** – *Stitching Light Participant, Middlesbrough.*

***"The story about the fruit dropping into the water was my story and my cousins' story. I sent it to them in Bangladesh and they were so proud that it was shared in the UK."*** *Stitching Light Participant, Middlesbrough.*

### 6.1 Participants have been enabled to be creative and confident

Participants reported very high levels of creative engagement and confidence, as survey results show:

- 89% felt that *Stitching Light* was thought provoking
- 100% felt that the project increased confidence

All participants felt able to express themselves freely and felt safe to talk about their experiences. 96% also thought that their opinions and ideas were valued:

***"No one has asked me these questions before - I feel listened to."*** *Stitching Light Participant*

***"Nobody listens to you, but here someone is listening to our voices and our stories are heard."*** *Stitching Light Participant*

They also tried new creative approaches and develop new skills: 87% felt that they were encouraged to try new things and 82% reported learning new skills.

Participants consistently reported pride in their creative achievements (88% of survey respondents agreed) and a strong desire to continue engaging in creative activity in the future, with 100% of participants indicating that they would like to engage in more creative projects in the future (*“Art overcomes the language barrier.”*). The safe, supportive and culturally sensitive facilitation was critical in enabling participants to try new things and share personal narratives (*“For a few minutes I went back to my childhood.”*)

This also had a positive impact on participants’ overall sense of wellbeing. 9 out of 10 said that they more positive about life in general:

***“I took a step back to listen to their experiences, for them to connect was such a special opportunity. My mum and so many of the older ladies were like girls again in the space, and they were so naughty, some bits of the stories they were telling they wouldn’t even translate!”*** Participant’s daughter

## 6.2 Participants have enhanced their sense of community, pride and identity

*Stitching Light* strengthened participants’ sense of belonging and social connection. Participants reported meeting new people (84% agreed), forming friendships (84% agreed) and building trust within their local communities (*“I am happy to meet a new friend.”*):

- 86% felt that the project was welcoming for the whole community
- 74% met people that were different to them
- 73% better understand other cultures.

***“Hearing people’s stories was very moving.”*** *Stitching Light* Participant

***“This was my first project and first time at Mosum. I didn’t know anyone to start with and felt very lonely. Because of this project I have made friends, they are family to me now. I would like to do more projects to build relationships with other people. I feel lonely usually but doing this makes me feel like I belong. I would like to do more singing and dancing.”*** – Middlesbrough participant.

Collective activities, such as storytelling, stitching, walking and sharing food, played an important role in reducing isolation and building relationships, as well as connecting with their own cultural identity:

- 98% feel more connected to their own cultural identity
- 96% feel prouder of their cultural identity
- 98% now have more trust in their local community

***“People from the outside don’t know how welcoming we are, we just need to invite them to do things with us and find out how open and honest we are. We like meeting new people, we like them knowing more about who we are and what our stories are”*** Worcester participant

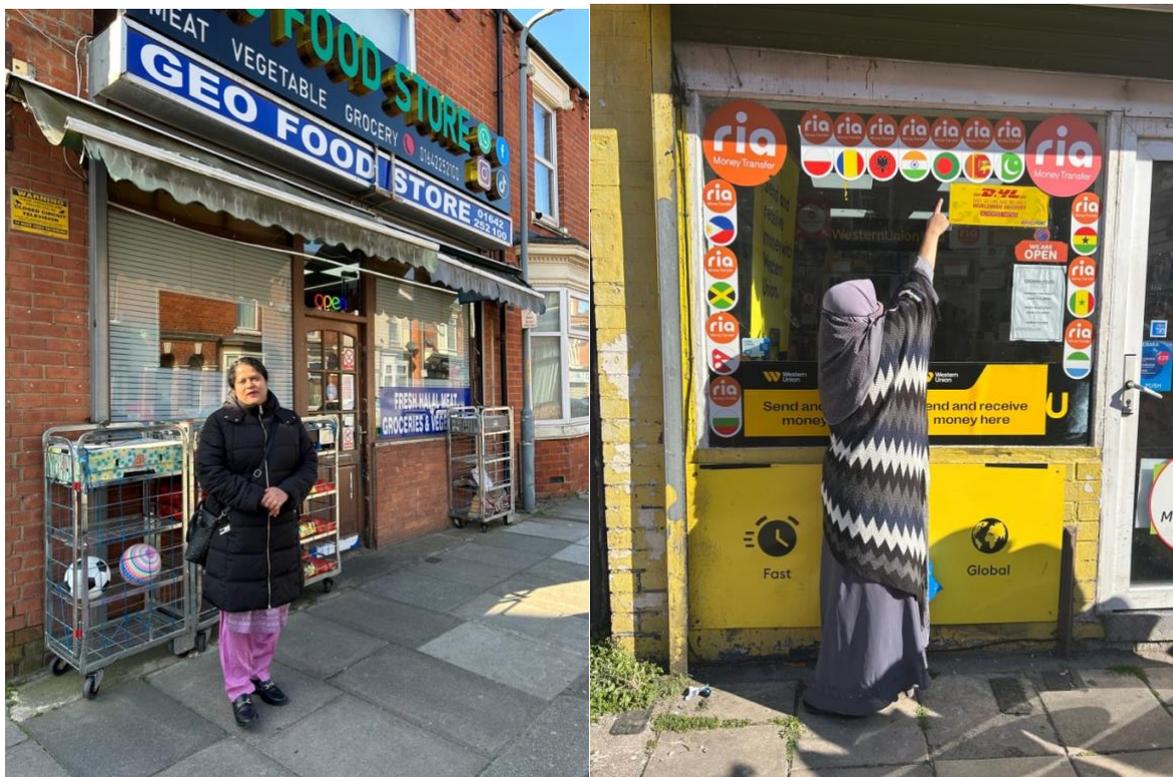
***“It was an amazing experience; we were so proud of the piece we had created that told our stories. It made us very happy when other people came to see our panels and asked us about our stories.”*** Bradford participant, response to seeing Stitching Light at BD: is LIT.

Many also felt more encouraged to take part in community life:

- 96% would love to be involved in any further developments of Stitching Light
- 100% would like to be involved in another EEA project in the future
- 84% reported feeling more confident to attend public events,
- and 79% feeling safer to attend public events.

They had a cinema visit as it was discovered from the workshop that a lot of the group hadn't been before. Middlesbrough booked a private cinema experience for the group and the film was very emotional. They had fun doing it, this was something that had come from the workshops that most of the group longed to do as children and had never had the opportunity to do so.

***“I would like to sincerely thank you and the entire team who organised and managed this workshop. Everything was truly outstanding. Every time I participate in such sessions, I am reminded that I am not alone in facing challenges, every human being has their own struggles. What matters is learning how to live with these difficulties and continue moving forward with hope. Wishing you and your team continued success!”***- Stitching Light participant



Group sharing places in that they shop to buy traditional ingredients



*BEAP (Bradford) stitching thread into the painted panels.*

## 7. Outcomes for Audiences

Leeds Night Lights and Bridges of Light Festival in Worcester shared audience survey data from their festival evaluations. This data provides a snapshot of the audience experience at these Light Festivals, however, it is important to note that the figures below are representing the whole festival audiences and not exclusively the audiences who would have seen Stitching Light as part of the wider festival.

### Light Night Leeds 2025 event summary

Light Night Leeds 2025 attracted an estimated 200,000 visitors over two evenings and continued to demonstrate strong audience engagement, high levels of enjoyment, and growing cultural and economic impact for the city. The dates of the festival were changed from Thursday/Friday night to Wednesday/Thursday as there had been a large football match that had been booked. The event organisers decided to change the dates for safety within the city. For this audience report 298 people were surveyed, and the percentages are references the difference between 2025 and 2026.

The data showed that Light Night Leeds audience has become more diverse over the last few years of delivery, rising from 9% of respondents from global majority ethnic backgrounds in 2021 to 28% in 2025.

6% of the Light Night Leeds audience claim they never attend or participate in arts events or activities. Another 27% participate in arts events or activities just 1-3 times a year – suggesting that Light Night Leeds is doing a good job in encouraging new audiences to participate in cultural activity.

79% said they came to see the artworks/have a cultural experience. Three quarters were motivated because it was a free, city-wide event (75%) and 62% wanted to spend time with friends and family. 61% said they wanted to be inspired/see something out of the ordinary.

65% rated the quality of the artworks/installations/projections as 'very good', similar to 2024. 87% rated their overall experience of the event as either 'very good' or 'good', up from 82% last year.

Light Night Leeds is described as a highly regarded and well-established event with a strong reputation and repeat audiences. 64% of visitors said in their feedback that the event was the reason that they travelled into the city centre. The event had strong economic impact on £6.97m being spent in the city over the festival.

Audience feedback also suggests Light Night Leeds played a meaningful role in fostering community connection:

- **62%** of attendees cited spending time with friends and family as a key motivation.
- **31%** attended on both nights, suggesting deeper engagement.

- Word of mouth remains a major driver (38%), indicating strong social sharing and community advocacy.
- The festival's ability to attract both regular and infrequent arts audiences supports its role as an inclusive, accessible cultural event that brings diverse communities together in shared public spaces.

Overall, the audience feedback indicates that Light Night Leeds delivered high-quality cultural experiences, attracted diverse and new audiences, and contributed positively to the city's social, cultural, and economic life. The event offered meaningful opportunities for people to connect with each other and with their city.



*Shantona, Leeds with their Leeds panel depicting the story of Grandparents arriving in the UK on a voucher system to work in the local coal mines.*

## **Bridges of Light Festival, Worcester 2025 event summary**

Bridges of Light 2025 attracted an estimated 20,000+ people and successfully delivered a large-scale, inclusive cultural festival rooted in Worcester's local communities. Evaluation data demonstrates strong audience engagement, positive wellbeing outcomes, and growing pride in the city's creative and cultural offer.

The festival appealed to all age ranges and a wide cross-section of the community. Survey responses and postcode data show a strong local footprint, with **88%** of postcodes from Worcestershire. Audience ethnicity broadly reflected the local population, and **11%** identified as D/deaf or disabled, with **10%** identifying as neurodivergent, supported through quiet sessions and accessible design.

Audience enjoyment was consistently high:

- **94%** felt the festival was well managed
- **89%** rated the quality as good or very good
- **93%** reported feeling positive emotions, including happiness, calmness, excitement, and inspiration

Quiet sessions were particularly valued, with visitors highlighting feelings of welcome, relaxation, sensory enjoyment, and wheelchair accessibility.

Feedback strongly indicates an increased sense of pride in Worcester. Audiences described the city as “full of life” and expressed pride in hosting a high-quality cultural event. Many respondents stated they would like to attend future festivals, showing strong appetite for continuation and growth.

Overall, Bridges of Light 2025 delivered strong outcomes across audience enjoyment, wellbeing, community pride, participation, and local engagement.



*Bridges of Light, Worcester*

## 8. Outcomes for Light Festivals

Evidence from the qualitative research with representatives of the Light Festivals suggests that the Stitching Light project had a significant impact on the organisations. Partners consistently reported that the project exceeded expectations in terms of its impact, depth and value. As one stakeholder noted, *“we all got more out of it than we bargained for.”*

Key impacts include (1) the achievement of strategic outcomes, (2) development of skills and expertise within the organisations, (3) organisational learning and changes in practice, (4) increased organisational profile and (5) expanded delivery capacity.

### 8.1 Achievement of strategic objectives

Stakeholders from all Light Festival noted that the project had helped them deliver against key strategic aims. In particular, several organisations mentioned their aim to engage and empower South Asian and Bangladeshi Women, by creating meaningful opportunities for them to be heard, feel included, and participate in creative activity, often for the first time. For instance, in one location, there was no pre-existing group for Bangladeshi Women and a group was set up at the start of this project: *“We are a bit different from the other groups – we didn’t have a ladies’ group, we had to create this initial group... it’s grown from 4 people to 24 people.”* Some organisers also noted that within the South Asian community, working with Bangladeshi women presented a first for them:

***“It helped us broadening out to the Bangladeshi community rather than the Pakistani community (who were mainly engaged through previous projects).”***

One stakeholder noted that they were keen to *“give them a voice”*. Another one reported that the project had been *“a perfect opportunity to showcase the work of the South Asian culture and engage a community that had not previously been engaged.”* Importantly for some organisations, the project was set up to facilitate genuine, deep engagement:

***“The involvement of the [Migration] Museum showed that this was a serious project, that we are interested in the deeper meaning, it is not just tokenistic. This installed confidence and we recognised that there is a place for us.”***

By reaching out to this community, Festivals and commissioning organisations also aimed to diversify both who makes the work (the artists) and whose stories are represented (the narratives), ensuring a festival programme that better reflects local populations. One stakeholder stated that *“a big consideration was the diversification of the artists”*, while another expressed their organisation’s desire to *“diversify[...] the artists on show but also being more representative of the populations we serve.”* This was considered particularly important as such artists and narratives are commonly underrepresented in the context of light festivals: *“The light art world is very white and very male.”*

Finally, one stakeholder noted that there was a close strategic fit of the project with other work supported by Place Partnership funding: *“This was a perfect fit with our place partnership focus on community-led work.”*

## 8.2 Development of skills and expertise

The project enabled the development of skills, knowledge and expertise among the delivery organisations. Firstly, the project facilitated skills growth through practical training and knowledge exchange. The project started with a meeting of all the partners, structured around a training session at Lewisham's Migration Museum and a visit to the original pilot project, with lights panels displayed during the Canary Wharf Light Festival. The training session provided skills in oral history recording, as well as practical aspects such as trials in the stitching technique used for the light panels. Visiting the Canary Wharf Festival helped organisers to better understand the requirements and potential challenges for this project (e.g. displaying light pieces in a brightly lit environment, or ensuring that itinerant audiences absorb the stories behind the light panels).

As one stakeholder noted, this was very valuable:

***“It was brilliant: there was some money set aside to cover that coming together; there were some fun bits where we did some stitching ourselves, and we heard from the artist. Because it was quite a complex project, it helped me to understand the logistics and what we needed to do.”***

However, since most light festivals had not yet started on the recruitment of their community groups, the latter did not benefit from this training.

Secondly, event organisers reported learning and skills development through more informal capacity-building by delivering the project ‘on the ground’ alongside facilitators and staff from EEA. This enabled them to gain experience in delivering high-quality, socially engaged practice. One learning was around how to create safe, culturally sensitive environments, where women could share personal stories, take time for themselves and build meaningful relationships. One stakeholder noted that:

***“They had a safe space for conversations, to have time for themselves.”*** Others added that, ***“We don’t often get to chill out and talk about our personal journeys as a lot,”*** and ***“It gave a really beautiful sense of community and we felt well supported by the whole team.”***

Stakeholders also talked about gaining a better understanding of how to deliver community engagement and consultation ‘well’. One festival favourably compared the Stitching Light project with another project that had similar aims but struggled to engage South Asian communities: ***“Stitching Light has shown why consultation works – there needs to be a reason why people come, a purpose, an anchor.”***

According to several stakeholders, the project also helped to increase understanding of how to work with communities at the highest quality and how to integrate socially engaged practice into a large-scale festival:

***“Showing something that is socially engaged practice – you don’t see this as much in the large-scale arena.”***

***“It shows the power of working with communities to create really high-quality work.”***

### 8.3 Organisational learning and change in practice

The positive experience of working in this way has also influenced how organisations want to work in the future, with several stakeholders reporting that the project has encouraged them rethink their commissioning practice, with greater emphasis on co-creation and community-led work:

***“It’s helping us understand a shift of the way that we want to work more in the future [...] to have one commission that is focused specifically on artists working directly with communities to produce a light outcome. I think it’s had a massive impact on the way we think.”***

One stakeholder also felt that the project had encouraged them to reconsider their broader light festival concept and their approach to integrating co-curated pieces into the overall festival.

Others noted their intention to keep working with the South Asian community, in particular. One stakeholder reported that they had made connections with another Bangladeshi women’s group in another part of their town, while the newly formed group will continue to meet. Many stakeholders also reported developing new ideas for other activities or projects to be delivered with the Bangladeshi Women’s groups – from going to the cinema or theatre, to learning to crochet, or going on a fishing trip: *“For me, it really solidified the importance of integrating the South Asian community.”*

### 8.4 Organisational profile

Several festival organisations also reported benefits from raising their organisational profile as a result of the project. One festival organisation explained that they were established only a few years ago and, while they had ambitions to extend their work beyond their local area, they initially had some hesitation:

***“We were looking to extend on a regional/national perspective, so it was the perfect opportunity, but the organisation’s evolution had happened really quickly, so there was some hesitation about how we fit into this ‘national project’?”***

Stakeholders felt that the project had given their organisations “exposure on a national level”. This was also enhanced by the ‘tour’ of the Stitching Light panels to 6 locations within England, ensuring that the project works, as well as the organisations behind the project, benefitted from being showcased at multiple events, sometimes to festival audiences that were larger than their own. Thus, being part of a national programme enhanced credibility, scale and pride of the organisations.

### 8.5 Delivery capacity

Finally, festival organisers highlighted the welcome support of their organisational delivery capacity through this project. On the one hand, the project provided financial resources to deliver the project in each location – which were well appreciated and were felt to be adequate for the requirements. As one stakeholder pointed out, *“The 50k budget was fine: it was a really good value for money project.”* Another

stakeholder highlighted the benefit of reduced administrative burden for individual partner organisations:

***“The fact that [EEA] had written the funding application and were leading on it, that we could be part of this amazingly ambitious project without having to commit too many of our own resources, was brilliant.”***

In addition to financial support, festival organisations also appreciated the fact that being part of a national project significantly increased the scale of the project: *“Eight pieces of work instead of two – the added value of scale.”*; and *“This was a really large-scale piece – really cleverly done, but with integrity.”* Stakeholders acknowledged that they would not have been able to deliver a project of similar scale on their own, without being part of a network of light festivals: *“We wouldn’t have had the capacity to do this on our own.”*

## 9. Outcomes for EEA

### 9.1 Skills Development / Expertise

Stitching Light continued to strengthen Emergency Exit Arts' skills and expertise in the delivery of heritage-led, participatory public art. The project benefitted from specialist training with the Migration Museum which enabled EEA to develop skills in oral history collection, ethical storytelling and culturally sensitive facilitation. Staff, artists and freelancers gained experience in translating oral histories and textile traditions into large-scale public artworks, as well as managing complex heritage projects across multiple locations. The project also deepened skills in co-creation, working bilingually and collaboratively with community partners to ensure participants' voices were central to the creative process.

### 9.2 Organisational Learning / Change in Practice

Stitching Light built on the strong reputation of Emergency Exit Arts and the co-creation that we implement throughout many of the projects that are delivered within the organisation. The strength of the project was delivering with equal partnerships between organisations and being informed by participatory content from the oral history gathering to create the authentically and culturally sensitive work. EEA has refined a delivery model which will be developed and applied to future commissions.

***“From our outcomes and delivery structure, we will be developing future projects implementing findings from Stitching Light. It has truly been one of the most fulfilling projects that I have delivered in my career to date.”*** – Hannah Rushforth, Stitching Light Project Manager

### 9.3 Strategic Commitment

Stitching Light strongly delivered against EEA's strategic objectives, including widening access to cultural participation, advancing equity and representation, and achieving artistic excellence through socially engaged practice. The project reinforced EEA's organisational commitment to inclusive public art and heritage work, with learning feeding into strategic planning and future programme development. Board and leadership oversight supported the project's ambitions, recognising its value in shaping EEA's long-term direction and commitment to participatory, community-led practice.

***“In Stitching Light, the creative exchange between partners was inseparable from the amplification of underheard voices. That combination is rarer than it should be. It confirmed what we sensed but had not yet evidenced: that community partners are not supporting players in our consortium model, they are central to it, and that touring work only resonates when it is genuinely rooted in place. These are not abstract lessons. They are already reshaping EEA's artistic strategy and how we approach collaborative practice going forward.”*** Chloe Osbourne, EEA board member

## 9.4 Organisational Profile

By touring nationally across high-profile light festivals, Stitching Light enhanced EEA's organisational profile and visibility within the cultural sector. The project demonstrated EEA's ability to deliver complex, multi-partner, heritage-based public artworks at scale, strengthening its reputation with funders, commissioners and festival partners. Stitching Light has been a project that will develop how EEA works in the Heritage sector and with participants. There were a lot of positive learnings from the project that EEA want to take further in implementing the delivery of such projects. The aim is to develop ideas from Stitching Light and the project has reinforced the confidence that the organisation has to deliver ambitious, meaningful prominent art pieces for the public realm.

***“Stitching Light has been a fantastic success for EEA and the partner organisations, participants and for audiences. This wasn't by chance! It has come about from years of developing high quality, co-created, heritage inspired, large scale national outdoor touring work with partners from around the country. It follows in the footsteps of Paper Peace (2018-2020) and Hi! Street Fest! (2022-23) and everyone involved with the project feels really proud of it.” – Daniel Bernstein, CEO EEA***

## 10. Success factors and lessons learnt

The evaluation highlighted a number of good practice and enabling factors, that promoted the success of the project, as outlined below:

- **Clear Project Structure, Phasing and Timelines:** Stakeholders felt that the clear layout of stages, early start and well-managed deadlines were critical in enabling partners to deliver the project alongside other commitments and reduced pressure during delivery (*“The layout of stages and the clarity around the different stages really helped.”*). The initial meeting of all partners with EEA helped to establish trust, clarity and confidence in what initially felt to some like an ambitious project (*“The initial meeting at the Migration Museum helped to calm down nerves.”*)
- **Sensitive and Skilled Facilitation of Workshops:** Partners highlighted the care and professionalism with which personal storytelling was facilitated, recognising the emotional toll this can have on participants. (*“Talking about our personal journeys can be a burden for people, but it was handled really sensitively.”*; *“There was a lot about trust – women felt really seen and heard.”*)
- **High-Quality Artwork with Strong Local Relevance:** The artistic quality of the work, combined with its grounding in local stories, was felt to be central to audience engagement and partner confidence in the project's value. (*“The quality of the artwork was really engaging.”*; *“The fact that it had a local connection and was telling the stories from people from the local area.”*)
- **Equal and Supportive Partnerships:** Stakeholders emphasised the strong relationships and a sense of equality between partners and EEA, which

underpinned effective delivery and problem-solving. (*“It was a completely equal partnership – that was really important for us.”*; *“Your success is our success – we all got more out of it than we bargained for.”*)

- **Added Value of a National Programme:** the project design, as a ‘national’ collaboration, increased the scale, visibility and shared identity of the project, thus significantly strengthening outcomes for both organisations and participants. (*“It gave kudos to the group to be part of a national project.”*, *“Being part of a larger family.”*)

The evaluation also identified some limitations, that can provide lessons for future projects:

- **Budget Clarity and Local Flexibility:** While overall value for money was considered strong, some partners felt clearer guidance and flexibility around local budgets (e.g. food and travel) would have improved participation and reach. (*“Having a clearer understanding around the budget for food and travel would have helped.”*; *“The budget could have been managed a bit better – we could have got out a bit more.”*)
- **Recruitment challenges and time pressures:** The project was delivered within a relatively short timescale (from confirmation of funding to delivery). While clear phasing helped, some organisations experienced pressure from the timescale. Recruiting participants – especially where no pre-existing group could be involved – was challenging, further complicated by cultural and religious calendars. (*“Ramadan and Eid were in the middle of it – there was a lot of pressure.”*). Building trust with groups under time constraints also provided some challenge (*“We were the only ones who didn’t have an established group – how do you form trust quickly?”*; *“It’s hard to go in cold into a community organisation.”*)
- **Production and Material constraints:** Delays in returning artworks to the community groups limited the depth of participation and consistency across different locations, as it meant that participants were in some cases not able to finish the artwork or not themselves. (*“It would have been better having both pieces back at the same time.”*; *“It would have been better if the community had finished the piece rather than a professional.”*). The physical difficulty of stitching the waterproof materials also provided some frustration (*“The waterproof material was really hard to work with – it made it difficult for participants.”*)
- **Interpreting the Work for Public Audiences:** Some stakeholders noted that not all audiences fully engaged with the contextual information, limiting understanding of the depth and effort behind the work. (*“Not everyone clicks on the QR code to understand the stories from the panels.”*; *“How do we impress on people how much effort has gone into this and what it all means?”*)
- **Legacy and Sustainability of the Panels:** Partners identified some lack of clarity around the long-term future of the panels and how the work could continue to be shown. (*“How do we show the panels going forward?”*; *“I*

*really want our panels to go into the Leeds Museum and become a permanent piece.”)*

## 11. Links

EEA project page - <https://eea.org.uk/projects/stitching-light>

EEA digital experience - <https://stitchinglight.com>

Migration Museum - <https://www.migrationmuseum.org>

Paraa - <https://www.paraa.org>

Oitij-Jo - <https://oitij-jo.org/whatson>

## 12. Acknowledgment and credits

### Emergency Exit Arts

CEO – Daniel Berstein

Executive Director – Jules Hodgeson

Project and Event Manager – Hannah Rushforth

Head of Production – Ben Raine

Event and Production Co-ordinator – Issy Shortt

### Workshop facilitators

Lead Artist and Facilitator: Shama Kun

Local facilitators:

Tandrima Mazumdar

Rahela Khan

Rumana Yasmin

Shanaz Ali

Katy Rooke

Charanjit Soor

### Production Team

Lighting Design: Craig West

Steel Fabrication: Roy Gurvitz

Technical Consultant: Kenji Takahashi

Sound recording: Martin Jenkins

### Technical Crew

Kat Currie

James Corner

Matt Alston

Paul Bryce

Aimee Bannister

### Artist Team

Danielle Williams

Melissa Dawkins

Kim Dawkins

Jessica Ormerod

Della Lawrence

Alison Sau Wai Hui

Debz Eastlake

Tania Hills

### Paraa, Bangladesh

Artistic Director: Ruhul Abdin

3D design and Graphics: Farhin Iqbal

Tailoring: Habibur Rahman

Translation: Fahim Bin Hamid, Ayesha Chowdhury, Nasib Ahsan

Logistics: Robindranath Sarkar Robi, Mahbub Ratan

3D design: Abdul Kadir

Sound Artist: Aditty Arzu (Siaminium)

### Artist Team, Bangladesh

Lead artist and designer: Md Shihab Mahmud Baten

Assisted by: Yasin Rahman Sayem, Md Sujan

## Textile Team

Monika Akter, Badhon Khan

## Participating Groups

Oitij-Jo (London)

Mosum (Middlesbrough)

Shantona (Leeds)

Worcester Bangladeshi Group

Her Story (Salford)

BEAP (Bradford)