

# Whale Arts Case Study



Developing  
Practice in  
Participatory  
Settings

Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
Special Initiative



## About the Project

Westburn CAN is a Climate Change Network-funded program of events, activities and workshops centred around a Horticultural Hub at Whale Arts in Edinburgh. It's a community gardening and growing project which seeks to inspire behavioural changes around carbon reduction as well as recycling and reuse of materials.

Dr Michael Bowdidge led this project as one of three artists commissioned to produce artwork using predominantly recycled materials in and around the community garden in collaboration with volunteers and staff members. Youthwork organisation About Youth sought to engage young people in these activities in order to foster a sense of their belonging to a wider community and build their ownership of the garden space.

## Using the Toolkit

The partners decided to make use of the 'Is this the best it can be?' toolkit from the very beginning of the project. They started by familiarising themselves with its structure and ethos. Next, they introduced Tool 2 as a means of helping participants focus on the specific areas of the project they wanted to discuss and reflect on.

This resulted in the creation of three distinct compasses made by three separate groups. Contemplating the compasses' differences added to the participants' understanding of the overall project and the personalities involved. Discussion followed on how to best address the concerns and insights raised through the process. In some ways, this process resembled Tool 5, with the group striving to understand 'what worked well?' and 'what would make it better?' The compasses were then used as 'aides-memoires' for two subsequent planning meetings in order to ensure any insights gained were fully reflected in the strategy for the remainder of the project delivery.

Dr Bowdidge's advice to anyone using the toolkit is to be creative with it, adapting it to suit your needs. The partners involved in Westburn CAN did this by using the compasses as a means of reflecting upon what had worked well earlier in the project rather than as a way of focusing on what results they hoped to see in the future.

## Evaluation

When asked what value he gained from the toolkit Dr Bowdidge said: ***"Using the toolkit provided us with a set of tools that allowed us to capture and make visible the insights of participants and partners so they could be fed into planning the project's next phase."*** He goes on, ***"That sounds really simple and straight-forward when summarised, but its benefits have been absolutely invaluable. Put simply, using the toolkit allowed us to capture a wider range of perspectives than we might have done otherwise, and created a space where all voices could be heard equally. It helped us become aware of things we didn't know we didn't know. Even the act of just bringing people together to take part in using the toolkit created opportunities for dialogue that had not existed before. Its value was incalculable for us."***

## Conclusions

Using the toolkit was a very positive experience for all the partners, allowing them to ensure feedback was properly captured for future use. Additionally, though staffing changes occurred within partner organisations throughout the project's delivery, capturing insights in an easily digestible visual format meant new members of staff could maintain continuity with the process, despite not being in post when the initial evaluation sessions took place.