

## **Meet Me at the Station**

### **Summary**

Meet Me at the Station was an art project with a difference. Based on a train journey to Clitheroe and using the medium of plasticine, children from a variety of local schools created models of themselves (mini me) and the stations. A DVD showing a train travelling along the line collecting the mini me models was also made, enhanced with a soundtrack of children's poetry. The project was aimed at key stage 2 pupils and sparked lots of enthusiasm and creativity. The project also got children and parents onto the train many for the first time – new customers in the making!

### **The Project**

For the past three years the Clitheroe Line Community Rail Partnership (CLCRP) has worked with the staff at the Platform Gallery in Clitheroe, which is the Arts Centre for the Ribble Valley, to create a two-day exhibition to celebrate community rail. We began to plan for our 2010 event, which this year would cover a three-week period, at the end of November 2009. From our discussions we decided to try to fund an 'Artist in Residence' to work with primary school children for a period of fifteen days. The results would then form the basis of our exhibition.

Initially we considered two artists each with different talents and using different materials. One of the artists worked with willow and was looking to create a large willow object to be placed on the station. The issue here was whether all the children would be able to contribute. The second wanted to use plasticine to create mini-me characters and create stations with platforms on which to display the finished models. Alistair also suggested that the figures could be used to create a simple animation, which would be given to each of the schools involved. The cost of both projects being estimated at around £4,000.

After selecting Alistair Nicholson, the artist who worked with plasticine our next problem was how do we secure the funding? Kathryn, who worked at the Platform Gallery, suggested an application to the Ribble Valley Arts and Recreational Grant fund and because Clitheroe is close to a quarry we were able to apply for Lancashire County Council's Aggregates Levy. As the CRP is hosted by Lancashire County Council it was not able to make a direct application for these grants so Ribble Valley Rail (RVR) stepped into the breach and agreed to apply for the funding on behalf of the CRP. RVR is a very active member of the CRP and is represented on the CRP by both its Chair and Vice Chair. As a result of this we were successful in securing £4,100.

It was agreed to involve some of the schools that had been involved with the 'Brian the Bull' project and to include the only school in Ribble Valley who worked with children with special needs. The school was Hillside who works with children and young people with autism. This activity was chosen because every child would be successful, there was no right or wrong way to make the figures or the stations and the exhibition would be a celebration of their success.

There were three people leading the project and working in the schools these were the artist Alistair, the Clitheroe Line CRDO, Brian Haworth and Marjorie Birch the Clitheroe Line CRP Vice-Chairman. As worked progressed and additions made to the project

other people became involved including the Children and Young Person's Champion for the Ribble Valley Children's Trust Johanna Ferguson.

Five schools were involved in creating the stations along the line. Initially our idea was to have a large photograph of the station and for the children to recreate that on a 4ft x 2ft piece of hardboard. At each of the schools Alistair explained the process he would use to make the animation and how the figures would walk onto the platform, turn and wave and then get onto the train.

Our first school was Daisyfield, who have been involved in many of our projects and we knew that they would guide us if we weren't on the right track. Alistair showed them how to make the plasticine pliable by rolling into a ball and then a cylinder shape before using it to make their 'mini me'. This went very well and all the children were proud of what they had created. The next step was to make the station and this is where we initially got it wrong. By dividing the picture of the station into sections, and for each child to recreate that section in plasticine did not work. The children made their section with some difficulty but at the end of the session they could not see the finished product. This was remedied the following day when the background was divided into areas of sky, trees and hills, fencing and flowers. This formula worked as the children built up the station picture as they went along.

For our morning at Hillside school we had five volunteers working with the children who were aged between three and sixteen years. This school was working on the background scenery, which would be used in the animation when the train was travelling along the line. All of the children were involved and in some small way contributed to the finished production. The length of their involvement depended on their concentration span. Three sixteen-year-old boys spent an hour spreading blue plasticine to make the sky another girl stayed for ten minutes. It was entirely up to them and their individual workers as to how long they stayed. This was the first time that the school had been involved in a community arts project alongside mainstream schools.

What did the children get out of it? The opportunity to work with a professional artist and to work with a medium that most of them had never used and many of the teachers had forgotten how versatile it was. The chance to create something, of which, they were all very proud. At the end of the afternoon sessions the children would go out into the playground and bring their parents in to show them what they had made. I could not get any of the children to give me their mini-me so the one made by the Mayor of Ribble Valley will have to suffice. Children are given many learning experiences but it is this type of activity they will remember for a long time.

Below are some of the comments from the staff that we worked with on the project:

'A few children went to the Platform Gallery, with their parents, and really enjoyed looking at the other school's projects as well as our own. They liked to compare the backgrounds and people - so all in all I think it was very successful. Plus the fact they all enjoyed actually producing the 'mini-me' characters and the train background and platform, they thoroughly enjoyed producing your project. Keep us in mind for any further work.'

Thanks for everything.

Carrie Cooper  
St Michael & St John's RC Primary School, Clitheroe

The 'Meet Me at The Station' project was an excellent opportunity for the children to work with a professional artist and develop their own creativity with experienced advice on hand to show them how to work with the medium provided. It provided a chance for children to approach their artwork from a different direction and see immediate results as well as being involved in a longer term project. The learning outcomes set by the project were challenging yet achievable for every child to have some input into the finished piece. We are definitely hoping to expand on this work within the class.

Many thanks for all the hard work of the Project Team members and for allowing Whalley CE Primary to be part of such a wonderful interactive community project.

Mrs Vikki Hall Year 5 Teacher  
Whalley CE Primary School, Whalley