

Telling our story

What people in Doncaster say about Arts and Culture

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Well Doncaster

Community Led Health and Wealth

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Background

The Telling our Story project is led by Team Doncaster's Culture Partnership, who are developing a narrative and brand that will represent arts and culture in Doncaster.

Arts, creativity and culture should always reflect local people's needs and aspirations, the partnership wants the narrative and brand to be collaboratively developed with local groups, key partners, and the collective voice of the people of Doncaster.

Introduction

This report outlines the community engagement that took place with residents in Doncaster from January - April 2025, to inform and shape the council's cultural strategy.

This engagement was led by Well Doncaster who have been conducting evidence-based community engagement activities across Doncaster since 2015. The Well Doncaster team are embedded within communities across Doncaster and have already conducted over 5,000 community conversations, facilitated over 90 community co-produced workshops and supported 14 community led leadership forums across the city. They were able to utilise this existing knowledge and expertise to mobilise quickly and ensure there is sufficient depth and breadth to the approach and delivery.

Well Doncaster facilitated a total of 939 community conversations across the city of all ages and demographics, attending 129 community groups and events between January - April 2025. The aim of the conversations was to gain a deep understanding of what arts and culture mean to the people of Doncaster and what role it plays in the city, streets and communities where people live, work and play.

This report is a collective summary of all the findings, a more detailed analysis of the diverse perspectives and cultural aspirations of Doncaster residents can be made available upon request.





Methodology

Deductive Thematic Analysis (Richie and Spencer 1980).

The three concepts that were created as part of 'Doncaster Story' culture partnership: **'City of Cultural Connections', 'Grit and Greatness'** and **'Trailblazers and Ground Breakers'** were first mapped against Well Doncaster's existing community insight that asks residents *'what is good about your community'*, to look for correlations.

A deductive thematic analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 1980) was conducted on 3,795 conversations from Well Doncaster's engagement activities, spanning January to December 2024. The findings for each locality of Doncaster (Central/City Centre, South, East, and North) are comprehensively detailed in the appendix."

The data correlated strongly with **'Grit and Greatness'** with residents overwhelmingly commenting on the resilience and good nature of people in their communities. It's evident that Doncaster is characterised by its overwhelming community spirit and the grit and resilience of local people in tough times. Long term residents, many who have lived in Doncaster for decades emphasise the importance of having neighbours who look out for each other. Community spirit is also reflected in people's comments about numerous local groups and activities that bring people together in a collective effort to tackle isolation and foster a sense of belonging. Doncaster's mining heritage has significantly shaped the communities grit and greatness fostering resilience, pride and a strong cultural legacy. There is profound pride in Doncaster's mining heritage in communities such as Stainforth, Conisbrough, Dunscroft and Armthorpe.

"People are friendly and sociable and look after each other, it's good to feel part of a community and have people look out for you". - ET3388

"It's a sense of belonging, builds community spirit, being northern you get things done together" - N2514

"There's been lots of support in the community since the floods and the community has really grown. We are gradually getting the sense of community back" - N5393



Conversations were also strongly associated with **‘City of Cultural Connections’**. People shared that Doncaster’s cultural connections are deeply rooted in its historical legacy, vibrant multicultural community and central geographical location. Doncaster’s excellent transport links make it a hub for connectivity. People shared the importance of having parks and recreational areas providing space for outdoor activities and community gatherings. In the central/city centre and south locality people talk about places of worship as community anchors, providing space for people to connect and share their faith. Residents in the city centre/central locality also appreciate the variety of languages cultures and traditions, and how diversity is celebrated through various cultural events and festivals. Many surrounding communities that make up Doncaster feel they have ‘everything on their doorstep’ and so stay local when it comes to shopping and activities.

“Really friendly community - multicultural - I love to learn from other cultures and the area has a really nice cosmopolitan feel.” - C3169

“Church community makes me feel good to meet people and make friends as has no family. Gives me an interest in life.” - C3801

“I think it’s really important that we continue to show residents the history of their city in the city centre with things like events and focuses on buildings like the Minster etc” - N3732

The data was less prominently reflected the **‘Trailblazers and Ground breakers’** concept. People spoke about their appreciation for their local community, volunteer initiatives and community diamonds. This commitment to helping others reflects the trailblazing spirit of Doncaster people. There was no mention of celebrity influential figures that have come from Doncaster communities. The mining heritage is seen as a foundation for ongoing innovation and development. Residents perceive Doncaster as a rapidly developing city with opportunities for work, productivity and connection to other cities.





“Volunteer as a peer and support worker and a community warden. Gives me focus and purpose.” -C4345

“There's a lot to like about the city centre, we have great infrastructure with the rail links and bus station” - B3649

“Everyone there is so giving and gives help and support for growth” - C4357

The deductive thematic analysis approach is an effective way of testing the existing cultural concepts, ensuring that the current themes are grounded in Doncaster residents voice. However, the reliance on pre-existing theories can limit the ability to discover new or unexpected themes.

Insight gathering – Appreciative Inquiry

The Cooperrider (1987) 4D Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model was used to gather new community insight of residents' views about arts and culture in Doncaster. This model creates change by focusing on identifying and doing more of what is already working, rather than looking for problems and trying to fix them. The first 'Discovery' stage of gathering insight has been completed:



Discovery: Deliberately 'let go' of focusing on deficits and systematically seek to isolate and learn from even the smallest wins.

Dream: Visions of the future emerge out of priorities and lived experience

Design: Creating the ideal community to achieve its vision

Deliver: Turning the new vision of the future into reality together

This approach encourages trust, reduces defensiveness and suspicion, and helps to establish strong working relationships quickly. This approach ensures empathic listening and recognises not all experiences will be positive. However, a foundational consistent positive approach influences perceptions and attitudes, leading to lasting positive change.



Insight was gathered through community conversations across the city from January - April 2025. Mapping of each locality was undertaken to identify key locations and opportunities to talk to residents, ensuring minority groups and residents with protected characteristics were heard. 939 conversations took place either as 1:1 or in an informal focus group style. The Well Doncaster team utilised their knowledge and connections across communities and had conversations at 129 community groups and events including libraries, schools, festivals, community centres, workplaces and galas. Focus groups and conversations were held with adults with additional learning needs, LGBTQ+ groups, ex-army veterans and people from different counties and culture. Conversations were mapped out regularly to ensure the team had spoken with people from all over the city of Doncaster. See Image 1 on p11 for map of postcodes where community conversations have occurred.

The questions asked were:


What do Arts and Culture mean to you?

Culture can mean things to different people to some people culture means creativity, visual arts or a performance at the theatre, or crafts. To others it means physical activity, sport events or heritage.

What do you like about Arts and Culture in Doncaster?

Think about what makes the most positive impact in your daily life, or what would you miss if you moved away- what people, places organisations and activities





The team engaged with children and young people in creative ways to find out what they



In some schools, the team split children into focus groups of ten and asked them a series of questions: “What do you like about where you live?” (white leaves), “What is important to your Health and Wellbeing?” (green leaves), and “What does Arts and Culture mean to you?” (brown leaves). The children were able to write on as many leaves as they wanted and attach them to the tree. This activity engaged the children and brought about lots of discussion around the hobbies they enjoy and places they enjoy visiting.





Thematic Analysis

To understand the key themes and priorities of residents regarding arts and culture a Thematic Analysis (Ritchie, 1994) has been undertaken for each locality, bringing together the new insight from all the community conversations, focus groups and children and young people insight. A thematic analysis methodology does not start with a fixed answer or perspective, it allows the data to decide the outcomes and findings. The thematic analysis framework includes key themes, sub themes, quotes and a narrative of insight gathered for all ages in each locality and a separate framework for Children and Young people in each locality.

The Findings

The priorities identified from the thematic analysis of conversations and engagement (from January-April 2025) across all age groups have been detailed by locality in the appendix. Additionally, a thematic analysis focusing specifically on children and young people, broken down by locality, is also included in the appendix.

Table 1 presents an overview of the 5 themes and sub-themes derived from the 939 conversations and engagement across all localities in Doncaster.

Theme	Sub Theme	Overview
Cultural Connection and Heritage <i>(City of Cultural Connections)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural Connection• History and Heritage• Cultural Assets• Learning• Diversity• Inclusive	Residents speak of the importance of understanding, preserving, and engaging with Doncaster’s local cultural heritage and history. From historical sites, railway/racing heritage, museums and halls and multicultural events. Residents highlight how important it is for individuals and communities to connect with their past cultural identity.
Community and Social Engagement <i>(Grit and Greatness)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community connections and Engagement• Connections to other Cities• Wellbeing	Residents speak highly about the social aspects of culture, including how they interact with their communities, the connections between the different areas in Doncaster, and the overall wellbeing that comes from strong community ties. Residents appreciate the strong community bonds and the determination to improve their local area.

Arts and Recreation

- Entertainment
- Venues
- Cultural Activities
- Music and Dance
- Sport
- Arts and Experiences

Residents appreciate the various forms of artistic and recreational activities that provide enjoyment, cultural expression, and physical activity. They want to celebrate Doncaster's history through culture and arts and highlight the role of arts and sports in enriching people's lives.

Personal Interests and Leisure Time

- Individual Interest
- Leisure Time
- Being Outdoors

Residents shared their personal hobbies and activities that they pursued in their free time. They appreciate the local community groups and activities available to them. Access to outdoor activities and green space is important for relaxation and personal fulfilment.

Integration of Culture and Wellbeing

- Culture and Connection
- Wellbeing
- Creative expression
- Community building

Residents recognised the importance of arts and culture in overall wellbeing, emphasising how cultural engagement can enhance quality of life. People shared how cultural events and activities bring people together, fostering a sense of community and belonging but also providing a platform for people to express themselves.



Table 2 presents an overview of the 5 themes and sub – themes derived from the 229 conversations and engagement with Children and Young people across all localities in Doncaster.

Theme	Sub Theme	Overview
Creative Expression and Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity • Entertainment • Arts and Experience • Creative Activities • Sports and Music 	<p>The Children and Young People (CYP) of Doncaster identify strongly with their engagement in art and culture through creative outlets. They expressed their love for engaging in creative activities like painting, crafting, and music lessons, as well as enjoying entertainment such as movies, concerts, and festivals. They also highlighted the importance of sports and community events in fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing their overall wellbeing.</p>
Recreation and Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation • Interest and Leisure • Places for Leisure • Places to Socialise • Green Space • Outdoors 	<p>CYP talk about their hobbies, leisure time and activities they enjoyed doing outside. They value being outdoors in parks and green spaces and being connected to nature. Local assets such as the Cast, the Savoy Cinema and the Dome were shared as popular places to spend time with friends and family.</p>
Learning and Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Lifestyle • Reading • Museums 	<p>The CYP engage with learning through a wide range of cultural activities. They share how they enjoy visiting museums and heritage sites and learning about local history, which begins to develop their own cultural identity. Some of this learning takes places in libraries and community setting and some in the home. The CYP shared their personal talents within arts and culture which included acting, painting and playing musical instruments.</p>

Community and Social Engagement

- People and Community
- Places to Socialise
- Community Assets
- Amenities

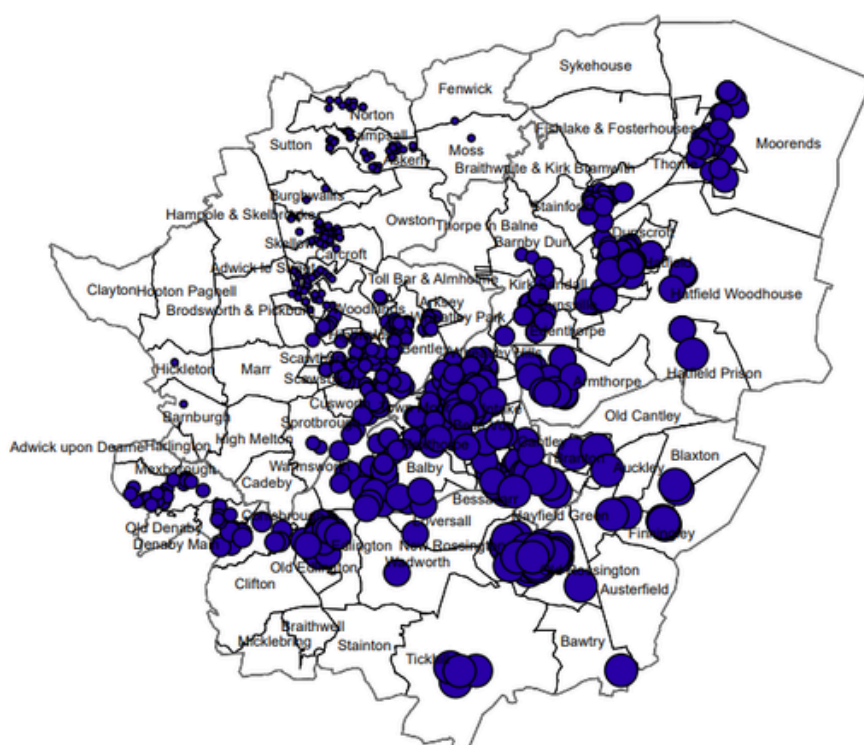
The CYP spoke about the different activities and events that bring them together. Many of the drawings from the engagement included the places they enjoyed going for dinner with their family and friends and the shops they enjoyed visiting. CYP shared that local community places and spaces play a vital role in providing spaces for socialising.

Heritage and Culture

- Heritage and Culture
- Places of Worship

CYP speak about Doncaster's history and culture and the places like to visit such as Broadworth hall, Cusworth hall and mining memorial gardens. Places of worship were part of some children's culture - they emphasised their enjoyment of church activities including making bracelets and participating in messy church.

Image 1 Provides a map of Doncaster postcode districts, highlighting where community conversations have occurred.





Central/City Centre locality

Themes: Entertainment, Cultural Connection, History and Heritage, Recreation and Provision

Significant findings and learnings

In the Central/City Centre locality, residents speak about their appreciation for the Doncaster's diverse cultural landscape and how it fosters community togetherness and mutual respect. Residents highly value festivals, events, and venues like CAST, DGLAM, and The Point for their contributions to arts and culture. Residents see culture as a means of expressing their identity and values, emphasising inclusivity and diversity. Places of worship and community groups play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging.

Doncaster's rich history, including mining heritage and historical buildings, is highly valued by residents. People speak about the importance of Museums and Libraries in preserving local history and heritage. Physical activity and access to outdoor spaces are vital for residents, with a strong emphasis on leading a healthy lifestyle. Residents appreciate the city's sports events such as the racers and leisure facilities such as the Dome.


There is a strong appetite for arts and cultural activities, but residents feel these offerings need better promotion and support. Residents desire more opportunities for children and young people to engage with arts and culture. The connectivity and good transport links enhance residents quality of life by providing access to essential services, other cities and employment opportunities.

Recommendations

Enhance Multicultural Initiatives: Promote and support multicultural events and activities to strengthen community bonds and cultural understanding.

Promote Arts and Culture: Increase funding and support for arts and cultural venues to enrich residents' lives and foster community engagement.

Expand Opportunities for Youth: Create more opportunities for children and young people to engage with arts and cultural activities, ensuring these offerings are well-promoted and accessible.





Quotes

“Cast is good, I’ve seen lots of theatre and cast is a high standard. I’ve been to the museum and used the library a lot as well. I’ve done the minster by candlelight which is good, they had something at xmas. in Doncaster, if you look, you will find it.” - C114

“The culture in Doncaster is really inclusive and really makes us feel involved and part of the community.” - C189

“.....Art should lift people. Culture is the by-product of people living side by side, with mutual respect, and autonomy.” - C346

“There’s some great history in Doncaster which goes back to the Roman times and I’ve visited the Roman fort near the minster...” - C177

North locality




Themes: Connections to other cities, Wellbeing, History and Heritage, Cultural Connection, Community Connections & Engagement, Music and Dance, Sport

Significant findings and learnings

In the North locality residents speak about Doncaster's identity is closely tied to its transportation history, particularly aviation and railways. This connection is seen as a key part of the city's cultural significance. People highlight the importance of arts and culture for improving health and wellbeing. Doncaster's rich history, including its mining heritage and historical sites, are highly valued. There is a strong desire for more promotion and celebration of these historical aspects.

Sports are shared as an integral part of the culture, with many local clubs offering opportunities for residents of all ages to participate. Community events like local fetes and seasonal fairs are also shared as important for bringing people together and celebrating local culture. There is a strong emphasis on understanding and appreciating different cultures, particularly the Afro- Caribbean community. A strong sense of community is important for residents, contributing to their feeling of belonging and engagement in local activities. Residents in the North enjoy visiting venues like the CAST and The Savoy Cinema, local parks are seen as an important part of Doncaster’s cultural landscape.



Recommendations

Promote Historical Heritage: Increase promotion and celebration of Doncaster's historical sites and events, including its mining heritage and local history groups.

Support Mental Health Initiatives: Develop and Support arts and culture programmes that focus on mental health and wellbeing

Enhance Community Engagement: Encourage and support local art clubs, community projects and family friendly events to foster a sense of belonging.

Quotes

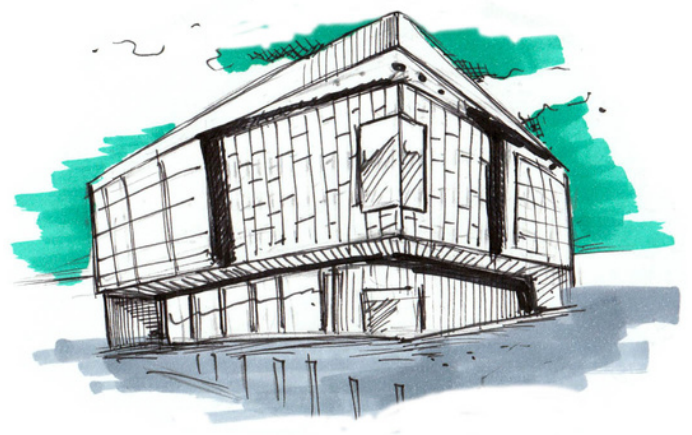
"Doncaster is a great central location in the country and is a hub for cultural movement throughout the UK"

"In terms of culture I feel an affinity to the local mining heritage and I am interested in local history."

"There are lots of different cultures around Doncaster, the newer cultures coming in are more vibrant and exciting,"

"Find out your hobby and interest, this is culture to me, who we are as a city and what we stand for"

"The point means a lot it saved me, I could leave my problems at the door, the groups have helped me through life's problem. It's a sanctuary for body mind and soul"



East locality

Themes: Cultural Assets, Cultural Activities and History and Heritage

Significant findings and learnings

The heritage of coal mining is a significant cultural touchstone with residents in the east locality. There is a strong sense of pride and a desire to preserve and celebrate this aspect of Doncaster's history. Historical sites and local heritage are important for maintaining a sense of community identity and continuity.

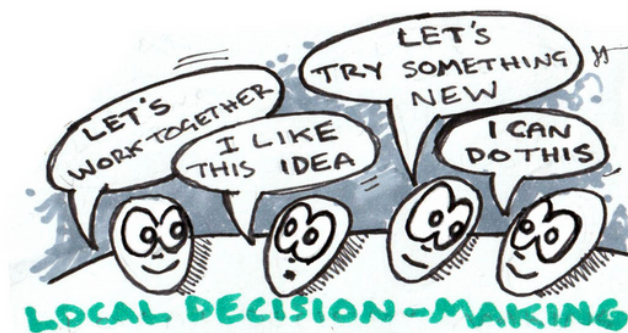
Activities such as street art, arts and crafts and community groups are highly valued. Residents enjoy accessible events and activities that cater to all ages and abilities. There are concerns about the accessibility and affordability of cultural events, particularly for older residents and those with mobility issues. Residents in the East of Doncaster highly value cultural assets such as museums, art galleries, and theatres. These spaces are seen as essential for reducing social isolation, improving wellbeing and fostering community engagement.

Recommendations

Improve Accessibility: Address accessibility barriers by providing affordable transit options, outreach programs, and physical adaptations for mobility. Consider offering more free and accessible events.

Promote heritage: Develop initiatives such as local history festivals, storytelling events, and museums dedicated to coal mining to engage younger generations and honour the community's legacy.

Support local artists: Amplify local artists and support creative urban expressions like street art, which resonate strongly with residents and reflect the community's unique stories.



Quotes

"It means everything - it's the big things but also the little things. It makes people who they are - values and identity. Street art and museums, and smaller local street art like memorials."

"People from museum come to group on a Thursday and bring artefacts into group and we get a unique experience here than we wouldn't get otherwise"

"Near the Mallard pub in the Frenchgate Centre, there's poetry on walls, it's lovely to see, it makes the space feel more welcoming and warmer, but we enjoy seeing them on the walls because the poetry is inspiring and opens your thoughts up, the visuals alongside it are really complementary and eye catching"

"The heritage of Doncaster is really important to us and having the heritage of the mining community which really gives Doncaster a great identity."





South locality

Themes: Culture and Connection, Individual Interest and Leisure Time, Learning and History, Arts and Experiences, Being Outdoors

Significant findings and learnings

Residents in the South of Doncaster emphasise the importance of community spaces and local clubs for socialising and learning about diversity. Activities like craft groups, music groups, and community events are highly valued for fostering connections and celebrating different cultures. Arts and crafts are a strong theme, with residents engaging in activities like quilting, knitting, sewing, photography, poetry writing, and various forms of dance. These hobbies are seen as a way to express individuality and bring joy.

Residents are passionate about Doncaster's heritage, including mining history, railway history, and historical buildings. Libraries, museums, and galleries are valued as resources for learning and engaging with local history. Green spaces and nature reserves are important to residents in the south locality for both mental and physical health. Places like Potteric Carr and Denaby Ing Nature Reserve are appreciated for their natural beauty and the opportunities they provide for outdoor activities. Residents in the south have diverse interests in arts and culture, with a particular emphasis on creative hobbies and live performances.

Recommendations


Enhance Community Engagement: Support and expand community spaces and local clubs to foster social connections and cultural engagement.

Promote Heritage: Develop initiatives to celebrate and preserve Doncaster's rich history and heritage, such as local history festivals and storytelling events.

Support Creative Hobbies: Provide resources and opportunities for residents to engage in creative hobbies, such as arts and crafts workshops and photography clubs.

Quotes

"The University of the Third Age Organisation is really good in Doncaster, they put on all sorts of different activities, Cast is great and I go multiple times a week. There is an amateur dramatics group at CAST which I see quite often."



"Arts can connect & educate people. Making them feel better. You want to know what cultures are around you. Culture is history and tradition reflected in daily life. I'd like to see it inclusive and multicultural. Festivals and traditions. Mixing different cultures."

"Anything that is positive & interesting. Something that give me joy and inspires me or others"

"I also used to work in the pits, the comradeship down there was more than in any other job I worked, you would do anything for your colleagues, they were like a family."

"Having access to cinemas, theatres, art gallery & museum. Having access to these things is great, especially on the doorstep! The variety and ease of access. I also love the variety of the events, food festival, balloon festival! Doncaster pride to name just a few"

"Local people are very passionate about Doncaster's heritage."





Children and Young People

Themes: Creative Expression and Entertainment, Recreation and Leisure, Learning and Personal Development, Community and Social Engagement, Heritage and Culture

Significant findings and learnings

CYP in Doncaster see arts and culture as a means of creative expression and entertainment. Many shared that they are highly engaged in creative activities like painting, crafting, and music lessons, and enjoy entertainment such as movies, concerts, and festivals.

They value outdoor activities in parks and green spaces, and popular local assets like the Cast, the Savoy Cinema, and the Dome. CYP shared that learning through visits to museums and heritage sites helps develop their cultural identity, and many have personal talents in arts and culture. Community places and spaces are vital for socialising, with CYP participating in various activities and events that bring them together. They appreciate Doncaster's history and culture, enjoying visits to historical sites and places of worship.

Recommendations

Support Creative Activities: Provide more opportunities for CYP to engage in creative activities, such as arts and crafts workshops and music lessons.

Enhance outdoor Space: Maintain and improve parks and green spaces to ensure they remain accessible and enjoyable for CYP.


Foster Community Engagement: Support community events and activities that bring CYP together and provide spaces for socializing.

Key Quotes

“Learning about history. Expressing myself and making connections through art, music and visuals. Words aren’t needed to identify culture.”

“Everything, it's a major source of happiness for me. Music specifically makes me feel happy and means a lot for me and there's a lot on offer in Doncaster.”

“Culture means a lot because art gives you creativity and lets you learn about other people.”



I do art and crafting at home. I like to make sculptures at home made from cardboard, I like to make cardboard castles”

"The best place is a new library. I visit there every month to read, It's a great place with very friendly people."

Closing statement

The ‘Telling Our Story’ report captures the voice and aspirations of Doncaster residents highlighting the importance of arts and culture in their lives. The engagement findings strongly correlate with the cultural concepts of ‘Grit and Greatness’ - emphasising the strong community spirit and resilience of Doncaster residents, particularly in areas with a mining heritage. ‘City of Cultural connections’ also aligns with residents, they appreciate the city's diverse cultural landscape and its role in fostering community togetherness. While less prominently reflected, the concept of ‘Trailblazers and Ground breakers’ is evident in the appreciation for local community initiatives and volunteer efforts. It is essential to build on these insights, promoting and supporting arts and culture initiatives that reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of Doncaster.

Reflections

We would like to thank everyone who has shared their time, expertise and energy with us. From residents and groups who have shared their options and views on arts and culture in Doncaster, the Policy and Insight team who have supported with contacting groups and the members of the Cultural Partnership board who have offered advice and guidance.

