



## WE ALL DO GOOD THINGS: HERNE BAY



*A unique arts project celebrating the good that people do;  
involving thousands of local residents and inspiring new community initiatives*

# We All Do Good Things

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Bad news stories fill the media. But we're surrounded by good news too. Stories of kindness. Generosity. Courage. Dedication. Love.

**We All Do Good Things** brought a town together by sharing and celebrating these stories through the arts. Nearly 6,000 people of all ages and backgrounds in Herne Bay got involved – one sixth of the population. As a direct result, new community initiatives and arts groups have sprung up, and research suggests that people feel more positive towards their community.

## Highlights:

- 5,702 people actively participated in the project
- 92 free public workshops and events took place
- 32 local organisations were involved
- 8 new community-led initiatives were set up as a direct result

## The aims:

*The project aimed to increase:*

- participation in the arts
- trust/neighbourliness
- volunteering
- community connections

*"I had the pleasure of working with People United as part of the We All Do Good Things community kindness project in Herne Bay last year. I cannot think of another organisation I have worked with over the past 20 years which has made such a positive impact, through its use of inspirational artists, to the wellbeing and cohesiveness of a local community."*

**Martin Crowther,**  
Educational Development Manager,  
Canterbury City Council Museums and  
Galleries Service



# The Background

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People United aims to make the world a better place through getting people involved in the arts. Our projects promote kindness, creativity and a sense of community. We plan and evaluate what we do rigorously to make sure that it's as effective as possible, and that others will be able to continue, copy and adapt it.

We'd recently run a hugely successful project with primary schools. Research by the University of Kent found that, after taking part, children were significantly more willing to care for and help members of their community and felt more positive about other groups. We wanted to see if it was possible to achieve this impact across a whole town.

We chose Herne Bay, a town of 35,000 people in East Kent. Compared to other local towns, Herne Bay had lower levels of volunteering and participation in the arts. It also has areas of significant deprivation. **We All Do Good Things: Herne Bay**, which took place during 2009 and 2010, is part of our wider work on **Kind Towns**.

"I am still getting lots of positive comments from the elderly residents of Parkside, from when they met the Ozone Youth Group for the evening of sharing. They really loved it."

Paula Carré,  
Herne Bay Salvation Army

## The Project:

Artists worked with every section of the community to uncover and celebrate positive stories. The work took place in bingo halls and beach huts, shop fronts and sports clubs, schools and residential homes. The project involved 14 professional artists and arts companies and 32 local organisations. In total, 5,702 people actively participated in 92 free public workshops and events.

It grew from the grassroots: members of Age Concern writing their own books on friendship, young people designing a comic, adults with mental health issues working with a professional film company to make a film on kindness. Schoolchildren – 882 in total – brought their own stories to life through crafts and design.

Before long, we were running events all over town. On the seafront, there was cake decorating, bunting, chalk literature, and poetry with John Hegley. A hairdressing salon was transformed into a theatre, hosting a play based on life-affirming stories heard from customers. The Sea Cadets collected and delivered messages of goodwill in a giant green bottle. Photos of unsung community heroes were displayed across the town. All the children in all the primary schools in the area were given cotton bags to decorate with their own stories and artwork.

We All Do Good Things culminated in a two-month exhibition curated by our artist-in-residence, Lucy Steggals. Photos, films, artworks and interactive exhibits created by local people were displayed in the main museum and gallery and across shop windows.

Finally, over 1,000 people came together for our Giant Picnic. People danced to live music from a local orchestra and African musicians, families took part in creative activities run by voluntary groups – and everyone enjoyed a sense of community.

# The Impact

The project has already inspired and supported the Herne Bay community in setting up a number of new initiatives that are increasing arts participation, trust and neighbourliness, and volunteering:

- A Community Action Group for young people aged 11–18 who want to make a positive difference in Herne Bay
- The Giant Picnic – set to become an annual event run by Herne Bay in Bloom and local partners
- Hut 136 – a council beach hut transformed into a reflective space where individuals or groups can dream up ideas for making the world a better place
- Links with local primary schools have been set up with Sea View Singing Group, a singing project for adults with dementia
- Creative Minds, a new arts group run by and for adults with mental health issues
- An independent community cinema showing classic and locally produced films

We're supporting these initiatives as they develop, but the aim is that they'll be fully independent and self-sustaining in the future.



A research team at the University of Kent is studying the wider impact of the project. Their analysis includes questionnaires, interviews and other research into arts participation, community cohesion, well-being and volunteering before, during and after the project. Early results suggest

that people who visited our exhibition were more likely to have positive attitudes towards the community.



The project won the Canterbury for Culture Community Award sponsored by Canterbury City Council.

**"This is vital work. People United is leading in the field of demonstrating how the arts can make a real difference in community settings."**

**Dominic Abrams,  
Professor of Social Psychology,  
University of Kent**

# The Potential

People United is a creative laboratory: we generate, develop and showcase ideas that others can borrow and build on. We want to share what we've achieved and learned with local authorities, charities, community groups, arts organisations and anyone else who's interested in promoting **Kind Towns**. Our work in Herne Bay has generated interest at many levels:

- **third sector organisations:** the Town and Country Housing Association ran a similar project across one of its estates in Tunbridge Wells
- **local government:** Oldham Council is drawing on the project in developing a strategy to improve community cohesion and participation
- **central government:** teams at the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Office have recognised the value of the project.



We All Do Good Things shows how effective projects like this can be in key areas:

- **social action** – “encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society” is one of the three main elements of the “Big Society agenda”. We All Do Good Things got one in six people taking part, and has led to new initiatives like the young people’s Community Action Group.
- **community empowerment** – many new initiatives aim to make it easier for neighbourhoods to decide the future of their area. The beach hut is one example of a new community facility that arose out of the Herne Bay experience.
- **wellbeing** – the government has announced plans to measure national well-being, and four out of five people believe that creating the greatest happiness, not the greatest wealth, should be the government’s priority . Kind Towns promotes well-being by focusing on positive messages.
- **resilience** – the economic downturn and public spending cuts are hitting individuals and communities hard. By improving trust and neighbourliness, Kind Towns develops stronger social networks that help people withstand and recover from these shocks.

# Contact Us

If you're interested in running a similar project in your area, we'd be delighted to help. We'd love to tell you more about what we do – and to hear your ideas.

Please call us on:

01227 811800

Or email:

[info@peopleunited.org.uk](mailto:info@peopleunited.org.uk)

People United is a creative laboratory. We explore how the arts can inspire kindness and social change.

We commission artists, create imaginative new work, develop research and support new social initiatives.

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[www.peopleunited.org.uk](http://www.peopleunited.org.uk)

[www.wealldogoodthings.org.uk](http://www.wealldogoodthings.org.uk)

“Working in central government, I am always interested to hear about local good practice. Every now and again I hear about a local project which is both exceptional and inspiring, making me want to tell others about it. The work that People United have done falls into that category. It shows how a positive focus on what people have in common can help tackle difficult social issues. And like all great ideas, it is simple enough for others to copy, but also highly original.”

David Anderson,  
Cohesion Guidance and Cross Govt Liaison,  
Department for Communities and Local  
Government

**Photos:** Peter Fry, Neil Kelly, Barry Lewis, Zoe Maxwell, Mick Norman, Lucy Steggals and George Wilson.

