The Secret Gardens

IMPACT REPORT
YOUR KEY TO OUR PROJECT SECRETS



LOTTERY FUNDED
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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
the garek trust
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THEATRE ROYAL BATH
the egg

A long-form, disability-led engagement project by The Egg where creative gardens popped up everywhere, each one a new adaptation of *The Secret Garden*. Creating over 7,000 engagements, with 3,354 of those in-person; employing 43 freelance creatives; and engaging 21 health, education and community partners. Celebrating collective joy, the healing power of nature and what disabled lived experience can tell us about new ways of creating and producing lasting artworks.

The Secret Garden

Commissioned by The Egg, writer Tom Wentworth and director Steph Kempson developed a new, original production of *The Secret Garden* in an adaptation that empowers the four principal child characters to redesign more honest ways of representing disability on our stages. The family production creates a space for grief and joy, imagination and wonder, championing the right to nature connection for all. The production was developed with young people and supported by volunteers.

I Take My Imagination Everywhere

Arriving in hospitals as a set of mysterious boxes, this self-led sensory project was designed to spark the imaginations of children in hospitals across the South West. A graphic story, letters and a link to the production film provide creative and therapeutic resources.

...in Primary Schools

A three-day in-school residency, inviting students in Years 3 to 5 to nurture a 'piece of wild' found in their classroom by recording a kindness soundtrack and creating a secret garden quiet space using collaborative weaving and interactive installations.

...in Secondary Schools

A three-day project for Year 7 students, exploring themes of secrecy, freedom and nature connection through creative prompts and a live escape challenge, which was set within a mysterious structure that appeared in the school grounds.

The Imagination Garden

A pop-up immersive experience for babies and their adults, sparking moments of gentle connection and imaginative play through moving projections and sound.

Key Impacts

Over 7,000 meaningful engagements

Across The Secret Gardens 3,354 live theatre audiences, 1,013 engagement participants, 2,498 digital interactions sat alongside community participation. Some of these overlapped, extending and enriching opportunities for each child far beyond the theatre auditorium.

3,700+ engagement programme participants

The integrated engagement programme reached 3,730 participants, spanning schools, hospitals, community venues, family events, early years settings and SEND groups.

120 young co-creators got involved

Children and young people did not simply attend. They helped shape and influence the art through schools projects, workshops, hospital consultations & creative development work.

Almost half the audience attended via funded initiatives

Of the 3,354 audience members who saw The Secret Garden, 46% attended through free Wonderfund tickets, helping remove financial barriers to high-quality cultural experiences.

We reached six South West hospitals

Children experiencing hospital stays accessed theatre, creativity and nature-inspired sensory experiences otherwise inaccessible, through *I Take My Imagination Everywhere.*

Young people shaped the artistic outcome

3 Young Associate Artists and 2 Green Guardians joined the artistic team, their ideas influencing everything from sound design to accessibility and sustainability discussions.

A local creative workforce was developed

The programme engaged 43 freelance creative practitioners, with 90% living locally and strong representation of disabled and neurodivergent creatives.

Engagement after the curtain came down

Audiences generated 2,498 unique interactions through the Talking Points installation, one of the programme's most popular examples of reflective and participatory engagement.

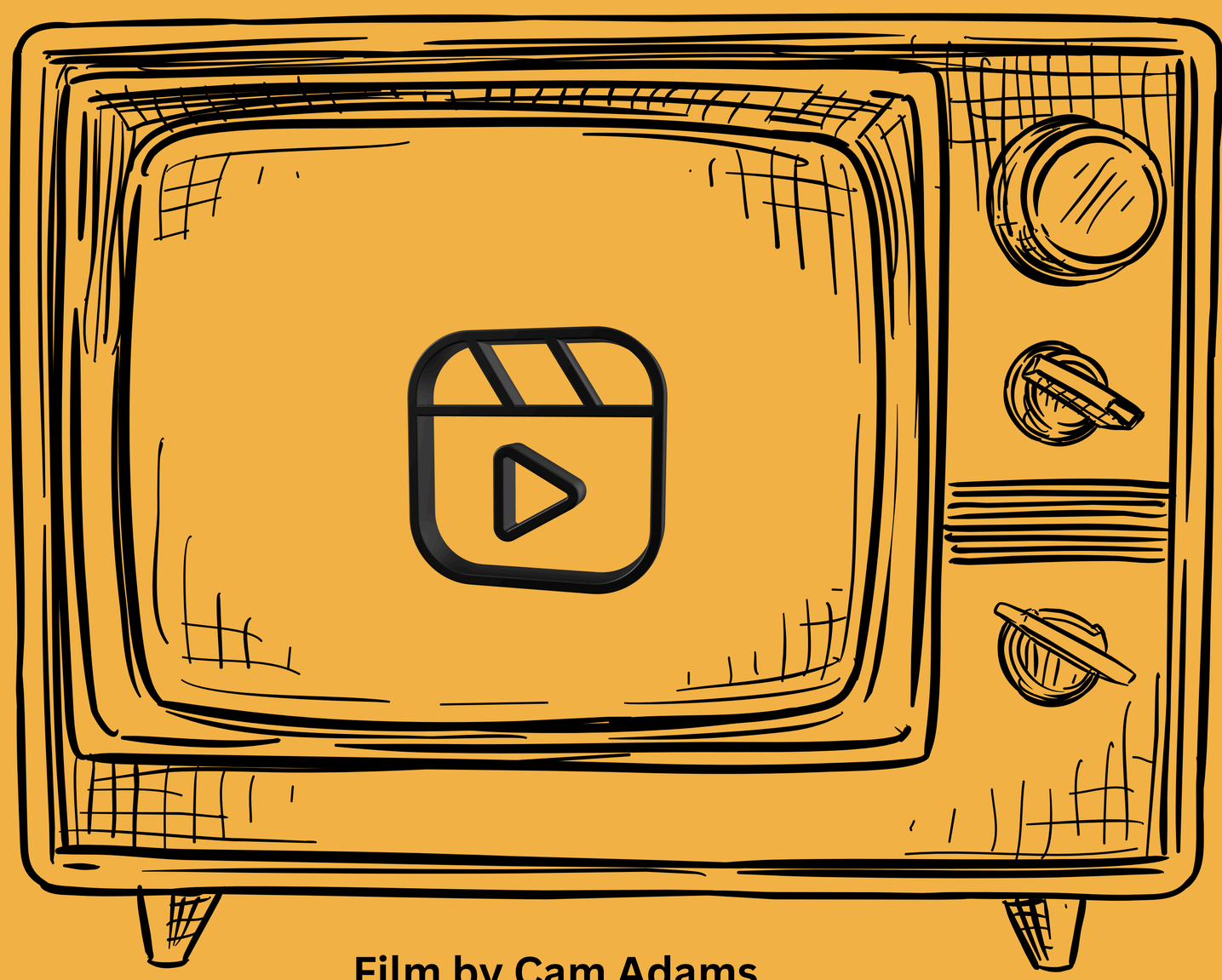
Sustainability within the creative process

Volunteers at 6 volunteer days helped transform 1,000 metres of reclaimed fabric into scenery, "Wilding" The Egg and embodying climate conscious and collective theatremaking.

A lasting model for future work

The success of The Secret Gardens has prompted The Egg to plan more integrated programmes, embedding climate narratives, access, into future slow-producing projects.

Click to watch our film



Film by Cam Adams

Legacy

Hospital Education Teams can enjoy the physical resources forever and can pass on newfound creative practice.

A high quality film of the Production for further work with schools, hospitals and family audiences.

A touring live escape challenge for the family outdoor sector, managed by The Egg for Kilter Theatre.

The Baby Pod will be rolled out again, adapted for different productions or environments.

Willow Pods are embedded in schools with a team of specially trained young ‘gardeners’ to take care of them.

All Egg Productions now given a sensitivity read by Mother Nature.



The Secret Garden

Writer, Tom Wentworth, spent long periods of his childhood in hospital, and whilst being ‘bewitched’ by Mary Lennox’s story of discovery also felt let down by the character treatment of Colin Craven and the novel’s unrealistic ending. In 2023, Tom joined director Steph Kempson on The Egg’s Incubator Programme to develop a new version of the story, which Tom says he wrote ‘for myself, aged 10’. Kempson (who also lives with long-term illness), wanted to update the story, believing that Colin’s journey deserved a truer understanding of his experience; seeing Mary as neurodiverse and misunderstood; and, along with the two working class characters of Dickon and Martha, empowering the four children to form a resistance to the dominating forces in their lives. Reflecting the experiences of disabled children was an early goal, as was an invitation to connect with nature and our relationship with the land.

The production process revealed the alignment between climate and access as artistic practice and hatched a new aim for the Egg of inviting ‘Mother Nature’ to sense-check all the work that enters The Egg’s stages! The Secret Garden was also filmed ensuring that there are live, digital and sensory ways to engage with this new imagining.

“Not sure I have enough words to express how magical today was! ...The Secret Garden had them absolutely spellbound.”

Teacher, Cheddar Grove Primary School



“little children might not understand why someone else is different to other people so it’s quite important for them to learn about what disability conditions are, so that was quite nice to see.”

Mills, Young Artistic Associate, aged 12







Talking Points

What if you could talk to the characters after you'd seen the show? Listen here.

We created six 'Talking Points' telephone handsets installed in The Egg foyer. Each handset corresponded to one of the main characters. When the handsets were picked up, a character asked a question and the child's response recorded. This critical reflection tool proved hugely popular, and will be something we continue to develop for future productions and projects. Designed by Holly Coulson. Build/creative technology by Ed Borgnis.



"Am I a friend or do I like to play tricks?"



"Why was the secret garden so important to me?"



"Would you like your own secret garden and if so, what would you do in it?"



"Did you discover anything about friendship watching our story?"



"Why do you think I make friends so easily with animals?"



"What do you think about the secrets I kept, or told?"

2,498 people interacted with the Talking Points, about 80 every show



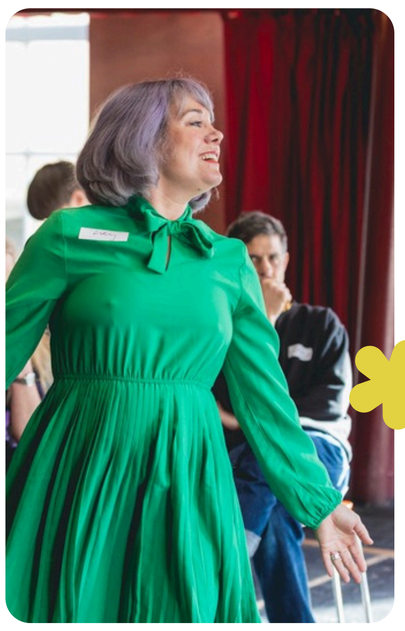
The Artists' Retreat

Creatives across all commissioned projects took part in a 2-day Artists' Retreat in the auditorium of The Egg in November 2025.

Spending this intensive time together ensured that every project was rooted in the story of The Secret Garden as we planned to tell it, as well as allowing space for connection, the sharing of ideas and resources and creative training in Climate Dramaturgy and Putting Access at the Heart of the Creative Process.

The input of the young artists who would work with us along the way - our 3 Young Associate Artists and 2 Green Guardians - kept conversatons active, relevant and fresh and led us into new avenues of creativity.









115 young people engaged in director-led workshops

Director-Led Workshops

Director Steph Kempson led 8 workshops in mainstream and SEND schools, and with community groups, inviting young people to join the creative development process. Workshops responded to participants' interests, using ensemble work, improvisation, character creation and songwriting. This participant-led approach was a foundational element of the entire programme, which leaned into 'gentle' and 'slow producing', leaving room for deeper exploration, reflection and co-creation. All workshop participants came to the final production, funded by The Wonderfund.

Climate Dramturgy & Access

What happens when access and care help shape a production and the making process?

Alongside The Secret Garden production's creative partnership between Tom Wentworth and Steph Kempson, another powerful collaboration informed the project approach. Creative access dramaturg Kate Lovell consulted on The Egg's Incubator ideas development programme strand for disabled artists in 2022. The aim was to create new plays about living with a disability, long-term health issue or as a carer. Shows like Self-Raising by Graeae Artistic Director Jenny Sealey, and Wendy, a young carer's view of J M Barrie's classic story Peter Pan, developed from that programme, increasing The Egg's confidence in creative access and the nuance of working with disabled artists. Within Secret Gardens, Kate struck up a conversation across workshop provocations and emails with theatre maker and climate narratives consultant Hannah Mulder. What emerged during the development process was a powerful realisation that the needs of an anti-ableist world and a regenerative world were closely linked and could be met by 'slow' and 'deep' producing approaches.

Climate Dramaturgy: ***"an evolving artistic practice that centres climate-positive choices and climate justice, making theatre that is joyful, inclusive and future-looking"*** **Hannah Mulder**

Creative Access Dramaturgy: ***"to explore access as both a pragmatic and creative tool within theatre practice"*** **Kate Lovell**



Slow producing: ***"a process that gives disabled people and those living with medical conditions a more hollow timetable in which to do their best work; an artistic approach offering time to think deeply"***

Deep producing: ***"does not place the production centre-stage, but the ideas. These can then morph to meet audiences in an array of circumstances that suit who and where they are today."***

Kate Cross, Egg Director

Young Associate Artists & Green Guardians

What does artistic work look like if a young person is involved as a member of the creative team?



“ I actually really enjoyed having independence and it’s prepared me for being away at uni and living independently in my future! ”

Green Guardian Jay on exploring his artistic practice through the project.



Shots of The Secret Garden rehearsals by Young Associate Artist Mills were exhibited in The Egg foyer throughout the show.

Our call-out for Young Associate Artists (young people aged 10-12, who had an interest in the programme) saw us exploring targeted partnerships with local special schools and charities, ensuring that the three young people who joined us would really enjoy the programme, would have an appropriate infrastructure to support them to participate, and, most importantly, were ready to use their imagination and apply their creativity.

The three young people we met and worked with spent time in production rehearsals; offered feedback on the hospital box at prototyping stage; recorded sound that was used in two of the project soundscapes and are key players in our documentary-style short film.

Our two Green Guardians - early career theatremakers aged 18-25 with an interest in climate dramaturgy - received creative mentoring from Climate Narratives Consultant Hannah Mulder and spent time with teams across the programme, as well as co-designing and delivering a climate and access workshop for Forest of Imagination artists in June 2026.

All five young people were allocated a Creative Development Fund, employed in different ways to offer them routes of progression beyond the programme - from seeing relevant theatre productions, to joining TRBTS courses with a funded place, to furthering interests in a specific artform (production photography) to the provision of further creative mentoring.

“You have made the project so accessible for us. Thank you”

Parent of Young Associate Artist





I Take My Imagination Everywhere (even to hospital)

Designed in collaboration with Bath RUH and The Great Western Hospital, Swindon, the self-led project invites children in hospital to follow their own journey through the seasons and connect with their bodies. Staff across hospital education settings were trained to use the resource offering abstract sensory experiences accessible to a variety of cognitions, evoking curiosity and connection to the natural world. A nature-based soundtrack, played through noise-cancelling headphones or portable speaker, supports the experience.

An illustrated journal unfolds, inviting each child to reflect on the sensory narrative within the box. A film of The Egg's The Secret Garden is available via a QR code on each journal. There is no set timeframe or 'right' way to experience the resources, rather they support individual self-expression, imaginative escape, sensory exploration, and connection to nature, all from within a hospital room.

"This offers children a chance to escape into a world of creativity and imagination from the comfort of their own bedside, providing moments of wonder and discovery when they are needed most" **Staff member, Great Western Hospital**



31 staff trained across
4 children's wards &
2 hospital schools

Led by Theatre Director and sensory artist Natalya Martin. Design & illustration by Claire Todd. Sound Design by Kat Pegler. Product design by Lars Fielding.

The Secret Garden ...in Primary Schools

Touring to six primary schools across Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, the team delivered a new 3-day performance project, gently anarchic in style. Normal classes were interrupted by two 'Secret Gardeners', looking for 'wild' and finding it in a puppeteered plant. Later on in the project, 'wild' is found in an interactive willow pod - which would become the school's very own Secret Garden to explore and enjoy, led by a new team of Secret Gardeners, selected from the student cohort.

Across three days, students could let their imaginations run free and explore their impact on the world around them by playing an active role in the theatre that unfolded. Guided expertly by facilitator-performers, experienced in accessible and sensory work, children who were seen as disruptive came to the fore and joined the final gardener team.

Before coming to The Egg to see *the show*, students communicated with the Secret Gardeners via 'Robin Mail', a series of handwritten letters, containing snippets of information about what they could expect.

440 primary aged children engaged

6 unique soundscapes created, featuring young participants

Created by Aurora Theatre. Performance, design & sound design by Stories in the Dust. Creative technology by Jonathan Green. Textile design by Claire Todd. Print design by Martha Lightfoot.



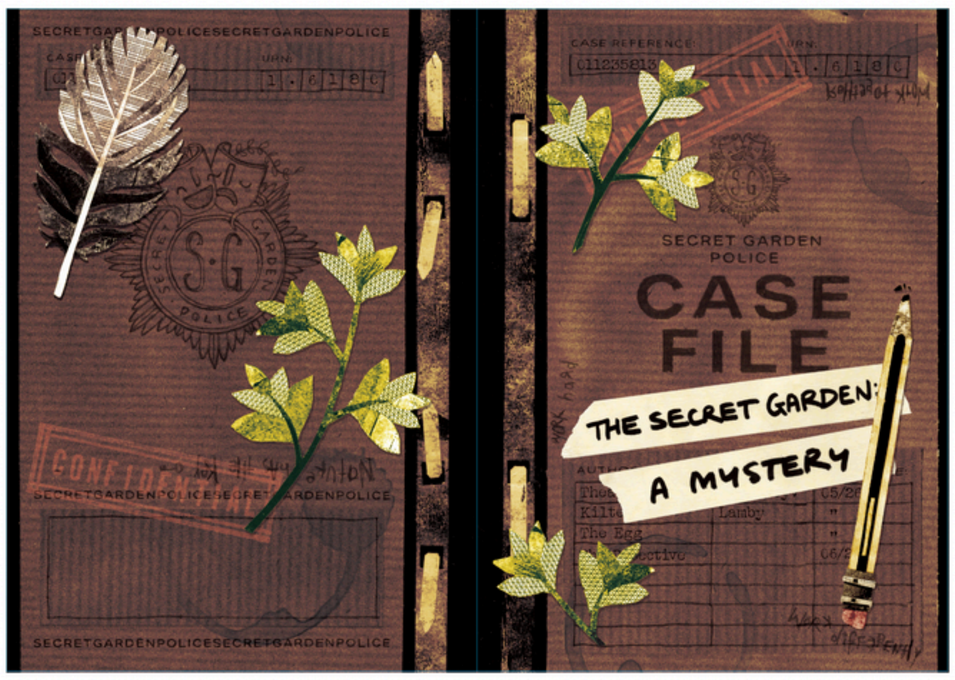
"A big thank you for the Secret Garden project. The children are still so excited about it, and using the pod every day"

Teacher, Oasis Academy









Back Cover Front Cover

"Thank you for the whole thing. It was amazing. The project has been awesome, I couldn't believe how engaged the students were, it was really great for them."

Teacher, Kingsbury Green Academy



390 young people enjoyed a live escape challenge

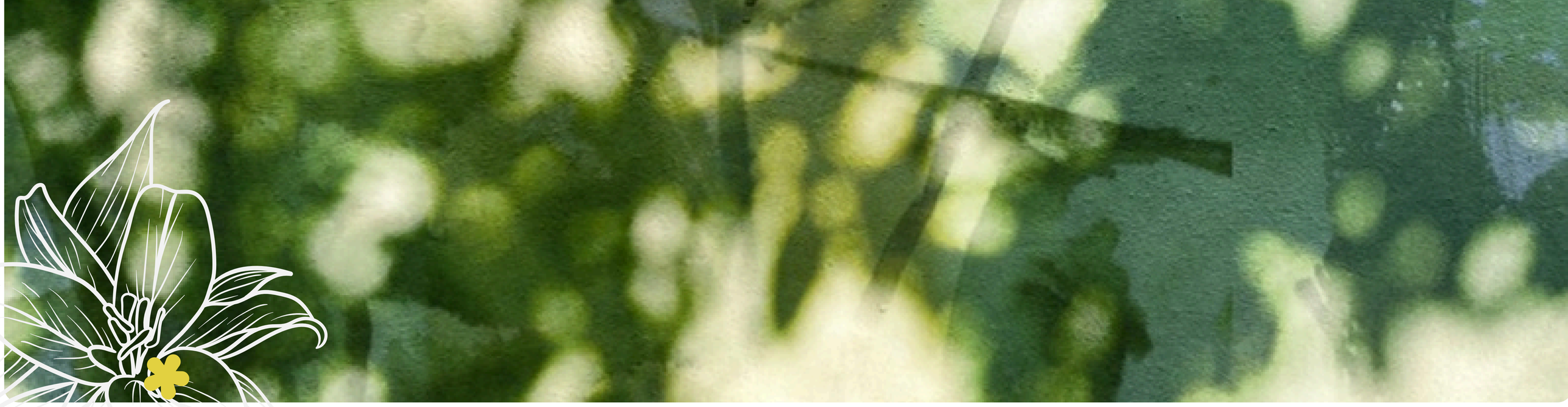
...in Secondary Schools

The Secret Gardens evolved into a live escape challege, enabling young people in Years 7 and 8 at Stanchester Academy and Kingsbury Green Academy to be immersed in a 3-day creative engagement.

In class groups, young people were invited to explore a mysterious greenhouse building that appeared in the school grounds - a site of investigation. Through a series of short 'Traitors'-style games, participants were supported to dive deeper into the themes of secrecy, freedom and nature. A zine provided a longer-term creative resource link to the production, which all students attended at no cost through the Wonderfund. Feedback showed that this engagement supported interpersonal relationships as well as providing a space for open-ended enquiry.

Learning from this project is shaping future Egg school engagement, which will focus on the transition period from primary to secondary school using the 3-day engagement model. The format provides a useful opportunity to build relationships with teachers and students through which creativity can be deployed with impact across the curriculum.

Caroline Garland & Oliver Langdon, Kilter Theatre designed and created the concept, narrative and script. Designed & made with Georgie Shire. Stage Manager: Seren Tuson. Performer: Kirsty Cox. Ed Borgnis.



The Baby Pod

The Baby Pod offered a rare and deeply engaging experience that placed pre-walking babies at the centre of the creative process, inviting them to shape a responsive world of light, sound and tactile exploration through their movements and vocalisations. Presented in The Egg foyer and then in residence at Radstock Trinity Hub and Yate Library, the installation engaged 127 visitors in high-quality artistic experiences for babies and their carers.

Feedback consistently highlighted the intimacy, calmness and sense of wonder created within the geodesic dome, with families often spending significant amounts of time in the space. The project provided an opportunity for adults to slow down, connect with their children and experience a shared moment of discovery, while introducing a new audience to creative activity in community settings, particularly in Radstock, where visitors were excited to see work from The Egg being brought to their local area.

Alongside these successes, the project generated valuable learning that will strengthen future iterations. Audiences responded most strongly when they could experience the immersive qualities of the work directly, reinforcing the importance of video-led marketing for experiential projects like this. Technically, this was an ‘in development piece’ which highlighted potential improvements to interactive sensors and projections to sustain focus and encourage deeper engagement over longer visits.

“Komorebi”

is a Japanese word for sunlight ‘leaking’ through tree leaves as you look up at them from below.

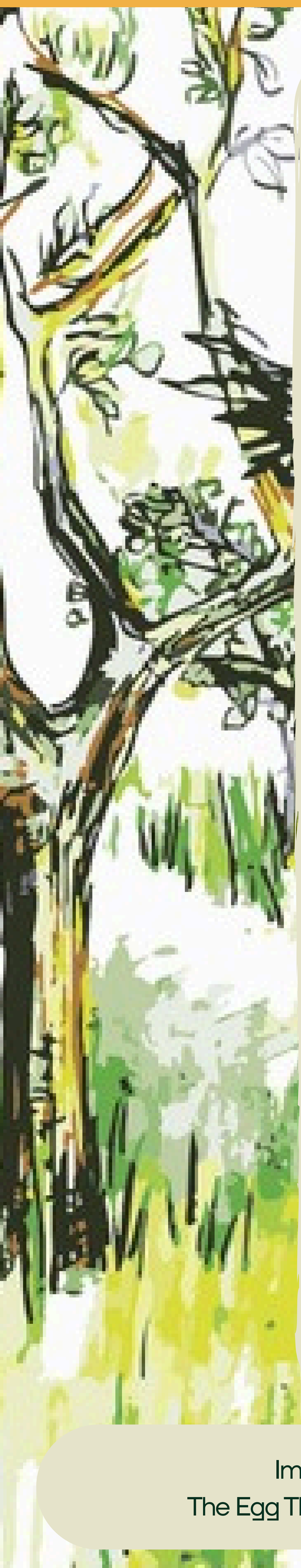


The Baby Bod uniquely demonstrated the potential of baby-led immersive theatre to offer something genuinely distinctive and much-needed for families with very young children. The project has opened up new conversations with partners about future collaborations, highlighted the value of creating dedicated spaces for babies and carers, and established a strong foundation for further artistic, technical and audience development. The designs for The Baby Pod also informed the willow structures that were developed with Primary Schools.

Created by Created by Jemma Grundon, Jim Cornick, Charlie Hooper Williams, Louise Taylor

Something in your Heart

by Jay Spence



Something in the air
A sound, a whisper.
Something so invisible
Yet clear
Something not begun
Yet happening right now.

Something all together
Yet alone, at home.
Something through the trees
In the leaves, the branches.
Yet something in your heart
A part of a whole.

Something in the beat
Beneath your feet.

It's growing, it's growing.
It's here, it's now.
Do you see it?
Do you feel it?
It's now. It's now.

Peeling back the page
Unlocking the cage,
Opening the door
Making room for more.

During the Secret Garden's Artist Retreat, Green Guardian Jay Spence wrote and spontaneously shared a poem with the group of professional theatre makers, Egg staff, Young Associate Artists and Green Guardians. The poem was a moving creative response from a young person that informed the development of this integrated engagement project.



Images by Cam Adams, Lloyd Evans - We Are Found. Illustrations by Claire Todd
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