



SPIRIT OF 2012
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

CRAFTING EVENTS THAT **MATTER**



Twelve years of
Investing in Happiness

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THE END OF ONE CHAPTER – AND THE START OF A NEW ONE

When Spirit of 2012 was founded, we set out with a bold ambition: to carry the joy, pride and optimism of the London 2012 Games into everyday life. Ever since that challenge was laid down, we have all been on an incredible journey together.

From the start, we believed in the magical power of events to bring people together. We knew that, when planned and managed with care, events could break down barriers, create moments that truly matter and lead to impact that resonates for a long time to come. Thanks to the passion and hard work of so many grantees, volunteers and partners, that belief has been proven right time and time again.

In the past twelve years, we have funded projects and commissioned research that takes the very best of what we do well – delivering world-class events – to ensure that commissioners, funders and delivery organisations are better-equipped to use events strategically to leave a lasting impact for people and communities.

This report is filled with stories that show the real impact of Spirit of 2012. Stories of people discovering confidence they didn't know they had; communities coming together in new ways; and events leaving a lasting legacy of connection and joy. These aren't just numbers or case studies – they're proof of what's possible when we craft events with purpose and heart.

As we close this chapter of Spirit of 2012, I feel a deep sense of pride in what we've achieved together. But, more than that, I feel hopeful. The lessons we've learned and the tools we've created are now available in our Knowledge Bank, ready for others to pick up and use. The spirit of crafting events that matter doesn't end here – it's a baton we're passing on.

A huge thank you to everyone who's been part of our journey, particularly the National Lottery Community Fund that generously endowed us to do this work! The story of Spirit of 2012 isn't over. It's just beginning a new chapter, written by all of you.

Ruth Hollis OBE
Chief Executive, Spirit of 2012



2012. AN UNFORGETTABLE YEAR OF PASSION, POSSIBILITY AND NEW BEGINNINGS.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games ignited a sense of hope and opportunity across the nation. It was from that energy that the Spirit of 2012 was born.

For more than a decade, our charity has made sure that the London 2012 Games spirit lives on. Through our work, we've supported events that spark joy, build belonging and hold social impact close to their hearts.

Events like these champion the importance of community and leave a lasting legacy that continues to evolve, inspire and empower people from all walks of life. The result? Building local, regional and national pride across the UK.

Now, as our chapter comes to a close, we invite you – policymakers, planners, and participants – to explore our story and make the most of the insights, ideas and practical tools we've gathered over the years to create events with real impact.

Through our projects, we have started to understand what works. And now you can, too.

Learn from our experiences. Take inspiration from our projects. And keep proving that events can be a powerful source of good.

We can't wait to see how you carry the spirit forward.

SPIRIT OF 2012 HAS MADE US REALISE WHAT A LEGACY ACTUALLY IS



“What is a legacy?

It’s more than the medals
(although they’re really nice).

It’s more than the spike in
participation.

It’s more than the stunning Queen
Elizabeth Olympic Park because,
the reality is, not everyone in the
country gets to go there.

What Spirit of 2012 has done is
given so many people over the UK
the chance to think about what
their connection to London 2012
is and how proud they are of that
connection. And it’s proven that
there are a lot of people who just
need a tiny little bit of help to think
about what they’re capable of.

Events organisers must think about
how an event impacts an entire
community in the long-term.

Spirit of 2012 has made us realise
what a legacy actually is – it’s
about how you empower people to
make a difference and show them
what they’re able to achieve. And
that’s life-changing – just like the
2012 Games were life-changing for
so many athletes.”

– Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson,
DL DBE

THE SPARK OF A SPIRIT: LOOKING BACK AT THE OPENING CEREMONY



“Whenever a city is chosen to
host the Olympics, there’s always
a certain amount of naysaying
involved. But my main memory of the
opening ceremony was this sudden
rush of warmth and enthusiasm
across the whole country. Not
only could you feel the collective
relief that it wasn’t going to be
a disaster, but excitement that –
actually – it was going to be rather
wonderful. And that spirit lasted all
the way through the Olympics and
Paralympics, right to the very end.

The opening ceremony represented
such a wonderful moment in this
nation’s history, capturing the best
of us in terms of our creativity,
organisation and joy.

Danny Boyle, the director of the
opening ceremony, was keen to
harness the enthusiasm of the
volunteers, and everybody involved
became incredibly committed. If you
talk to any of the volunteers now,
they still have gatherings together,
all these years later.”

– Stephen Daldry, CBE



Photo credit: Playing Out (Warwick Arts Centre)

CRAFTING EVENTS THAT **MATTER**

We've learned a lot through our years of funding projects, community empowerment and social impact.

Over the coming pages, you'll find over a decade's worth of learnings – categorised into four key themes – that explore pride, wellbeing, participation and partnerships. Within each section, we share:

- A few shining project examples – from happiness and hope, to youth leadership and community pride – to show what works, what matters, and what's possible.
- Insights from relevant thought leaders who have generously shared their experiences, opportunities and insights.
- Examples of ongoing, wider societal impacts.

We want this report to demonstrate what happens when the design and delivery of events are developed with the long-term impact – in terms of wellbeing, inclusion and connection – at their heart.

We hope it inspires you to continue to shape a better future through powerful, impactful events.

THEME 1: COMMUNITY PRIDE

SHARED MOMENTS, SHARED PRIDE

At a time when communities can feel increasingly polarised, it's easy to think that events only work when everyone already gets on well together. However, our work has shown that this is not the case at all.

When designed well, events can support social bonds, strengthen trust and build our sense of belonging to a place. Conversely, events that don't include the necessary ingredients for cohesion can reinforce social divisions.

Over the years, we've seen how living in host cities helps people find their own place within sporting and cultural events, as well as benefiting from opportunities before, during and after the event has taken place.

By supporting projects in very different communities across the UK, we've shown how events can play a unique role in supporting social cohesion and growing community pride.

CREATING PRIDE THROUGH CO-CREATION AND CO-OWNERSHIP OF EVENTS

“With the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement coming up, we decided to apply to Spirit to run an event to build social cohesion. From the start, we planned the event with its long-term legacy in mind, considering things like accessibility, inclusivity and interactivity to ensure the event itself would be exciting, interactive and engaging. But we wanted to think about how we could create a connection between the attendees that would last beyond the event. That meant involving a whole range of local communities – young people, Protestant and Catholic – from the very start, who helped us design and organise it and feel a sense of ownership about it.”

– Angila Chada, Former Director of Springboard Opportunities



Project 1: Playing Out

THE MORE THE MERRIER IN THE MIDLANDS

How a partnership with Warwick Arts Centre, for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Festival, brought creative activities and collective pride to the local neighbourhood of Canley.

Collaboration and co-creation were the name of the game in Canley. Our grant for Warwick Arts Centre funded this three-year project, which enabled the surrounding Canley community to unite in creativity and collective pride.

A Community Steering Group formed the beating heart of Playing Out, which was planned by residents, for residents. People of all ages and abilities were invited to workshops and events at community venues, schools and care homes. And the pinnacle of each year's calendar? The annual parade, where absolutely everyone was welcome.

The project had a profoundly positive impact. The number of residents who said they felt proud of their community and their place within it rose from 65% to 92%. And a massive 97% of participants said they felt better about their life and future as a result of being involved in the project. There was also official recognition of Playing Out's success when it was nominated for a Museum and Heritage Award in 2024.

The project in numbers:

- 3 Canley Parades hosted
- 263 community sessions covering visual arts, poetry, movement and music
- Over 7,000 people attended sessions
- 27 local events, including pop-up cafes, fetes and celebrations
- 40,000 Canley Newsletters compiled and distributed to all homes in the area
- The final annual parade in 2023 saw 130 residents walking the parade route and more than 280 waving from their doorsteps and the pavement

“By attending and experiencing creative workshops in public spaces – and by interacting with friends, neighbours and new people – local residents tend to create meanings, values, not only to building up other meaningful layers of the place but also to define their own identity that allow for a strong sense of belonging.”

– Nor Aziz, Founder of Canley pop-up café and Canley resident



Project 2: Our Lives, Our Legacy

ONE PROJECT, TWO COMMUNITIES AND 15 AGENTS OF CHANGE

What happened when Springboard invited two historically divided communities to share how the Good Friday Agreement impacts their worlds today?

Building connections between divided communities. Creating a space to share individual – and very personal – realities of the past, present and future. This is what Springboard's Our Lives, Our Legacy project was all about. In acknowledgement of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, it listened to, and amplified, the voices of 15 young people from both Catholic and Protestant communities.

The group held an event on the UN International Day of Peace in 2023, which included an immersive, interactive exhibition and performance. They shared their hopes and visions for the next 25 years and invited the wider community to share theirs, too. Taking their insights to an even younger generation, the group also ran workshops in seven Belfast primary schools.

Our Lives, Our Legacy's impact continues. The event was on display at the Ulster Museum, visited by 4,000 people every week. The group was involved in a documentary with TV company NI Screen, which captured their experience as agents of change within their communities. And they've been asked to speak at events attended by major decision-makers.

The project in numbers:

- For the 15 young people in the group, life satisfaction went from an average 4.1 to 8.2 out of 10
- 87% of the group felt they would continue the new friendships they made in the project after it had ended
- 165 people attended the event



Photo credit: Our Lives Our Legacy
(Springboard Opportunities Limited)

Project 3: Eurovision 2023

MUSIC, PRIDE AND BELONGING IN LIVERPOOL

When Liverpool was chosen to host Eurovision 2023 on behalf of Ukraine, something remarkable happened. Even before the music began, the city felt it. Anticipation grew. Pride swelled. And a shared sense of purpose brought people together.

Spirit of 2012 supported Liverpool City Council to deliver two strands of work for Eurovision 2023 – the EuroLearn schools programme, and a major study by the University of Liverpool into the social impact of the event. Partners like Culture Liverpool helped to spread the spirit far and wide.

Through EuroLearn, 17,746 pupils across 257 schools explored music, language, identity and creativity. The schools promoted Eurovision-inspired class projects – from making pysanka eggs to staging mini-Eurovision contests – to bring learning to life and help children feel connected to the city-wide celebration.

The research echoed this sentiment. More people took part in Eurovision events than expected. Our community and wellbeing evaluation found that 80% of residents felt proud that Liverpool was chosen to host. And wellbeing increased in the months leading up to it, proving that the impact of a major event can begin the moment you win the bid.

“People need a sense of belonging. This event was that! Didn’t matter who you were – you belonged to it.”

– Eurovision Song Contest Volunteer

“Everybody, even if they weren’t necessarily a Eurovision fan... took ownership of it. It was almost like we thought ‘we will take that under our wing and we will run with this now’.”

– Eurovision Song Contest Volunteer



Photo credit:
Liverpool City Council

INVESTING IN THE FEEL-GOOD EFFECT

Investing in Happiness has been Spirit's mission since the very start. Whether events intend to connect people, improve mental and physical health, or generate social action, wellbeing provides a common goal to aim for.

By embedding wellbeing into events, we can create long-lasting positive impacts on individuals and communities. That's why we always asked our funded projects to gather data on wellbeing using a set of common measures, allowing us to analyse all our projects over time to see the impact they've had through very different events.

By championing this approach, we've demonstrated the importance of prioritising long-term outcomes just as much as short-term outputs, measured through credible evaluations. This significant change ensures that events last in the memory and leave communities stronger, happier and healthier.

IMPACT THAT LASTS

"I knew from the very first meeting with Spirit that this was a different type of organisation and what they were going to do was pretty significant. Their focus on making things work – and making sure you are able to dissect and analyse when things didn't work – helped us design and plan events that make things better, and whose impact and influence lasts beyond the event."

– Angila Chada, Former Director of Springboard Opportunities



Project 1: EmpowHER

IMPROVING GIRLS' WELLBEING THROUGH YOUTH-LED SOCIAL ACTION

Could the centenary of women's suffrage be used as a moment to improve the wellbeing of young women and girls? EmpowHER used events to develop confidence, happiness and purpose for teenage girls.

Between 2018 and 2023, 2,626 girls between the ages of 10 and 19 took part in a powerful 12-week programme across England. Led by UK Youth, the British Red Cross, the Young Women's

Trust and co-funded by the #iWill Fund, EmpowHER supported girls to connect, grow in confidence and lead the change they wanted to see through social action, volunteering, learning and leadership.

They learned about feminism, human rights and mental health, then took that knowledge and created 319 social action projects – from raising awareness of period poverty and supporting food banks, to volunteering in their local vaccination centres. These projects reached over 50,000 people, and the programme's impact speaks for itself.



Photo credit: EmpowHER (UK Youth)



Photo credit: EmpowHER (UK Youth)

For every £1 spent, the programme delivered £5 in wellbeing value. Girls who started the programme with the lowest wellbeing saw the biggest change. Confidence, optimism and trust all grew. And many kept volunteering long after the programme ended. EmpowHER didn't just build new skills, it built belief – in themselves, in each other, and in the future.

A toolkit developed by UK Youth now means that other organisations can continue the legacy of helping more young women find their voice – and their power.

“I learnt the importance of getting involved in the community and that, if you're passionate about something, the impact you can have on other people is huge. I've never had the opportunity to do something for my community and EmpowHER gave me that.”

– EmpowHER Participant

The project in numbers

Of the young women and girls surveyed:

- 63% reported an increase in confidence
- 53% reported increased levels of happiness
- 55% reported increased levels of life satisfaction
- 79% reported that they were “quite likely” or “very likely” to take part in volunteering in the next 12 months

“It makes you excited, like you're making a change and the world will one day be better because you're doing something about it.”

– EmpowHER Participant

Project 2: Our Day Out

CREATIVE JOY AND CONNECTION IN LATER LIFE

Sometimes, impact looks like music, dance and laughter in a community hall. It's that simple.

Our Day Out, a project led by Creative Arts East, brought fortnightly creative sessions to older adults across rural Norfolk, with a focus on people living with dementias and their carers. Its goal was to emphasise the importance of celebrating life, creativity and community – at any age.

Hundreds of participants joined inclusive workshops in music, movement and visual arts. But what made it special was the atmosphere – warm, welcoming, and tailored to each person's abilities and interests. This allowed people to connect with others in similar circumstances and focus on the joy of new experiences.

Using a wellbeing scale designed for people living with dementias, the programme saw a 64% increase in wellbeing for both participants and carers, on average. This was credited to a sense of belonging, connecting with others, trying something fun and new, expressing themselves creatively and, ultimately, simply getting out of the house.

Even when Covid-19 hit, the team adapted, with artist-made wellbeing packs and newsletters keeping people connected.

"I may be old, and I may be infirm at times, and I may be a bit crotchety at times, and I may be a disagreeable, old, grumpy old git at times. But most of the time I'm a happy, jolly, well-connected old fool."

– Our Day Out Participant

"It gave me something to get out for... it can be so easy to shut yourself away, and not bother to do anything... I think it's why these groups have been so, so brilliant... it's meant an awful lot to my life."

– Our Day Out Participant

Project 3: UK Cities of Culture

TURNING CITY LIFE INTO COMMUNITY HAPPINESS

Nurturing happiness, health and wellbeing in Hull and Coventry through inclusive, creative programmes. Because feeling good about where we live makes an enormous difference.

We're honoured to have been a principal funder for two UK Cities of Culture Programmes – Hull in 2017, and Coventry in 2021. Our funding focus for these year-long arts and culture programmes was on social outcomes for city residents.

In Hull, our grant supported a series of curated community arts projects. Things like Square Peg, an extensive disability arts programme. And The Land of Green Ginger, the flagship project that ran across seven sites including Longhill – one of the most disadvantaged parts of the city. We also provided long-term support for the city's landmark volunteering programme.

Hull 2017: The project in numbers

- Over 2,800 events, cultural activities, exhibitions and installations across the year
- 90%+ of residents engaged with at least one cultural activity
- 3 in 4 residents said it changed their perception of their city for the better
- 2,400 volunteers, 84,000 shifts and 337,000 hours of volunteering
- 71% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that there had been an improvement in their self-esteem

“But since this has happened [Hull UKCC], I just have embraced it and actually fell in love with it [Hull].”

– Hull Resident



Photo credit: Hull Volunteers (Absolutely Cultured)

Project 3: UK Cities of Culture

In Coventry, the Caring City programme was all about inclusivity, representation, mental wellbeing and social connectedness. Caring City listened to the stories, hopes and struggles of Coventry's seldom-heard communities. It encouraged social cohesion, inspired social change and helped address some of the big issues vulnerable residents face – like food poverty, immigration, environmental action, homelessness and loneliness.

Having small cohorts within projects was a driver for increasing levels of wellbeing, allowing individuals to receive tailored care in safe spaces.

Coventry 2021: The project in numbers

- The programme reached a total of 22,000 people
- 250 direct beneficiaries across its four projects.
- The wellbeing of the young producers involved in the project improved across all four ONS Measures of Personal Wellbeing.
- Anxiety scores of participants, which had started at 4.40 (above the UK average of 3.06), fell to 2.60 by the project's conclusion.
- A social return on investment calculation found that, for every £1 spent, there was a £3.20 return on investment in social value

“Working with creativity... It creates that space for people to...see themselves reflected, to heal, to imagine better futures... To create new ideas and ways of being, to create connections, to feel less isolated. It becomes this mechanism for so many different possibilities.”

– Caring City Producer, Evaluation Debrief, June 2022

“Being part of this project gave me something to focus on and made me calm. I feel less stressed and anxious.”

– Caring City Participant, April 2022



PARTICIPATION WITHOUT BARRIERS

Rooted in the legacy of the London 2012 Paralympic Games and the commitment to Inspire a Generation, Spirit of 2012 worked to embed inclusion at the heart of the UK events sector. Over the past decade, we've funded projects that support disabled people, non-disabled people and young people to take part as equals.

We've also commissioned research to help event organisers understand how to design inclusive events and explored the wider role events can play in shifting attitudes and creating a more inclusive society.

Our Theory of Change and funding strategy continue to place inclusivity at the centre – helping to shape a more equitable and representative events landscape.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF AUTONOMY

“Being on Spirit of 2012’s Youth Panel gave me a rich insight into who wasn’t engaged in the power of arts, culture and sport, and how we reach those people in the UK. The panel was given decision-making power, and having that opportunity and autonomy at that age is really important. But it’s also rare for young people to be trusted in that way, which is why the experience was so transformative. Today, I work with young disabled people, giving them access to sporting opportunities.”

– Sophie Humphries, former member of Spirit of 2012’s Youth Advisory Panel



“As the Chair of the Youth Panel, I was able to develop my leadership skills, confidence and communication skills that played a big part in me going on to found my social enterprise, 2-3 Degrees, which supports young people in the ‘forgotten middle’ to fulfil their potential. For me, that is probably the biggest legacy I take from it – that we were able to give opportunities to young people who wouldn’t usually get them, and directly influence them in terms of their education and career decisions. My experience on the youth panel gave birth to a desire to do more of it.”

- Carl Konadu, former chair of Spirit of 2012’s Youth Panel

Project 1: Get Out Get Active

CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT INCLUSION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

To extend the energy and excitement of the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Get Out Get Active was developed to ensure that activity programmes were accessible to many more people by removing the barriers that prevent inactive people becoming active.

Get Out Get Active (GOGA) was Spirit of 2012's biggest grant, delivered with Activity Alliance and partners across all four nations. Spanning 39 locations, GOGA was a nationwide effort to design physical activity programmes that work for everyone – disabled and non-disabled people alike.

GOGA reached more than 55,000 participants, with 44% identifying as inactive when they joined. That's a much higher proportion than many traditional sports programmes manage to engage. Over time, 77% sustained their activity levels for more than six months – a strong indication of real, lasting change.

A wellbeing cost-effectiveness analysis found a £3.70 return for every £1 spent. And, for disabled people, the programme provided a protective effect. That means, on average, those who took part saw their wellbeing maintained or improved, while a matched sample of those who didn't take part saw their wellbeing decline.

GOGA didn't just deliver inclusive activity. It ensured people could enjoy being active together, reshaping how organisations saw inclusion, workforce development, and community partnerships.

**"It was just like a big family...
I became much more aware of
myself and what I could do, even
with my disability."**

– Sharon, GOGA Participant, Derry
and Strabane

**"Everything was tailor-made to
each person and their own ability...
I loved the way they adapted
some of the programmes to
suit everybody."**

– Mo, GOGA Participant, Thanet



“People see the Paralympics and assume that every disabled person is going to be a Paralympian. But, while it’s important for disabled people to be physically active, it’s OK for a disabled person not to be very good at sport. And this is something that Spirit of 2012 was very good at encouraging and supporting. Disabled people don’t have to be a Paralympian to change their life with activity, and so many more young people are now active, which is really important for the health of our nation.”

– Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DL DBE

Project 2: Critical Mass

DANCING INTO A NEW ERA OF INCLUSIVE EVENTS

What does true inclusion look like on one of the world's biggest stages? Critical Mass, part of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Cultural Festival, made sure the opening ceremony featured people from the local community, focusing on those most likely to be excluded.

Critical Mass redefined inclusion in major events. Setting out with a bold ambition to develop a truly inclusive mass, amateur dance group – from scratch – to perform as part of the Cultural Festival, including the Opening Ceremony.

This huge, collaborative effort integrated practical considerations about accessibility and inclusion into the event's core organisation. To share their learnings, a playbook was created to guide others on how to embed this into future events, including budgeting for accommodations, managing logistics, safeguarding, and communications.

The project also provided a transformative experience for 242 young participants aged 18–30 who took part in weekly sessions. 45% of these identified as disabled or neurodivergent, emphasising the project's commitment to inclusive participation.

The project in numbers

- 91% joined to be a part of the Commonwealth Games
- 92% of participants rated their overall experience as either 'good' or 'excellent'
- 89% felt that the biggest difference made was meeting new people and making new friends

"I joined for personal development originally, but I've realised that it's so much more than that. I have my own little dance family now."

– Critical Mass Participant

"Personally, I've never had the experience of working with people of different disabilities... It's educated me to want to be able to change my ways to work with people, and also educate myself about different disabilities that are out there."

– Critical Mass Participant





Project 3: Camp Glasgow and the Pop Up Clubs

GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE A SPORTING CHANCE

One of our very first grants, StreetGames opened the doors to the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games for young people from communities across the UK who would normally have been left out.

Major inner-city events should always inspire young people from surrounding low-income areas, too. So you provide tickets. Somewhere for them to stay. Activities to do while they're there. And then, you take the fun on the road.

The Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games radiated energy across the city. Our grant for Camp Glasgow to StreetGames helped it reach even further by opening the experience to young people from around the country. As well as tickets to watch Commonwealth Games events, Camp Glasgow set up a dedicated residential site for those coming to watch.

There were on-site sports like football and table tennis, and instructor-led activities like mountain biking, raft building and archery. And, after the main event, StreetGames brought the action to over 200 sites across the country with Pop Up Games.

It didn't end there. The initiative was such a success, StreetGames revisited it for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. They invited young people from around the UK to watch events, and ran Pop Up Clubs, providing multi-sports equipment that could be used long after the project had finished.

The project in numbers

- 1,000 tickets provided for Commonwealth Games events like athletics and cycling
- 521 young people went to the residential camp in Glasgow
- 12,000+ people went to Pop Up Games at 200 locations across the country

“Our young people are from one of Scotland’s most deprived local authorities and therefore this was an opportunity for them to participate in activities which would not have been accessible to them otherwise. Although they live close to Glasgow, the Commonwealth Games was relatively alien to them.”

– Pop Up Games Project Lead

“Every aspect of this trip was amazing – loads of memories to take back to South Wales with me.”

– Camp Glasgow Participant

THEME 4: PARTNERSHIPS

WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY

After ten successful years of funding projects – and deeply exploring how events can have a sustained, long-term impact – in 2021, we shifted our focus to our own legacy.

Ahead of our planned closure, we began to think about how we could most effectively share and leverage our knowledge, connections and collaborations to ensure that we leave the landscape of UK events stronger and better-equipped to deliver for people and communities.

Creating an event must never be the work of a single organisation or sector, and our work continually demonstrated the value of cross-sector collaboration.

By bringing together leaders and practitioners across sports, art, culture, and community – and uniting organisers, funders, hosts and volunteers – we wanted to ensure that the events of the future are stronger, the impacts are greater and the legacy is even longer-lasting.

CREATING A SHARED LANGUAGE

“Spirit has been a really brave funder in terms of how they’ve engaged with diverse, community-led voices during their decision-making. Over the years, I’ve had the pleasure of speaking to some of their youth panel, their trustees, and some of the working groups around, for example, disability and inclusion. All those voices were baked into the funding decisions, as well as into the communities that then went on to benefit from the funded programmes.

What Spirit and other organisations have done is convened different sectors and made them talk to each other. Whether people are from arts, sport, academia, events – there is more of a shared language now, so their dialogue is even more powerful.”

- Dr Verity Postlethwaite, Lecturer in Strategic Event Management,
University of Loughborough



“People come together to celebrate. They come together to watch excellent sportspeople and to watch artists. And, when they do so, they have shared experiences, develop memories, and are reminded that where they live is an inclusive place. That’s why sport has always had a cultural element to it, because it’s about the power of togetherness.

The more that we blend sport and cultural events together, the more it makes sense – and Spirit has focused on these commonalities and crossed those boundaries so we can take learnings on board when we start to think about events in the future.”

– Jonothan Neelands, Professor of Creative Education, University of Warwick

INQUIRY INTO THE POWER OF EVENTS

In 2023, Spirit of 2012 published the findings of an Inquiry into the Power of Events, highlighting the role events play in building happy, connected and thriving communities.

The Inquiry was set up to learn the lessons of past events and identify how we can capitalise on the power of events to facilitate and encourage wider social and economic change.

Over 18 months, the Inquiry listened to the views of people from across the UK using polling, focus groups, interviews and an open call for evidence.

The Inquiry made five recommendations to national and local government, funders and event organisers:

- Long-term impact and a clear plan for “what next” must be the driver for the decision to bid or host a major event.
- The long-term impact of events must be underpinned by demarcated funding, accountability and governance.
- Greater attention must be paid to who benefits from events and who is left out.
- More events should be designed and curated with a broad range of stakeholders to build common ground across divides.
- Events that use volunteers should have a clear strategy to boost longer-term community volunteering.



Photo credit: Katherine Arundell (Spirit of Windrush, Royal Museums Greenwich)

CREATING THE GOLDEN THREAD

Creating the Golden Thread, commissioned by Spirit of 2012, examined how the infrastructure around events can be improved to create better legacies.

Warwick Business School report explored the impacts of a wide range of events that took place in the UK in recent decades, making five key recommendations to strengthen the infrastructure, accountability, reach and delivery of major events to ensure a long-term legacy for investment.

In exploring these different events, the entire project team was struck that what was often missing was a sense of what bound these events together and how they operated in a wider system of place-based change. The DCMS Select Committee referred to this as the “golden thread” that brings together the various impacts of events, and works to ensure they are more than the sum of their parts.

The report concluded with a set of recommendations which aimed to provide a framework to strengthen the legacy of culture, sport and ceremonial major events, and maximise the impact value from significant levels of public investments.

LEGACY LEARNING PARTNERS

To ensure our decade of learning and evidence continues to inspire meaningful change after Spirit’s chapter comes to an end, we partnered with four Legacy Learning Partners to carry forward our insights and learning.

Appointed in 2023, our Learning Legacy Partners were carefully chosen to align with our impact areas of wellbeing, social connection and disability inclusion. Their role is to review and build upon our evidence base, and use these learnings to create new resources for their audiences.

We opened up our archive so partners had access to evidence from 230 funded projects and research, and were able to use it alongside their own evidence and learning. In this way, Spirit’s legacy will be transferred to these partners to ensure our learnings last beyond the life of the organisation.



OUR LEGACY LEARNING PARTNERS

Loughborough University

Loughborough University is translating the knowledge we’ve gained into a digital learning resource designed for early years and primary education settings. By using digital storytelling, they aim to challenge stereotypes about sport and disability. Their work fosters positive perceptions of activity, inclusion and capability from an early age. Their team, drawn from the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences and the School of Design and Creative Arts, uses the voices and experiences of contributors – turning research into engaging tools for educators and young people.

Belong – The Cohesion and Integration Network

Belong created a practical guide for anyone designing and delivering events with an aim to strengthen social connection and cohesion. Whether it’s a small neighbourhood gathering or a regional event, their resource aims to help organisers use arts, culture, sports or volunteering to unite communities and help support lasting connections.

PBE

PBE analysed wellbeing data from three of our projects to understand the value for money their impact represents. Their methodology is being applied by HM Treasury to measure the value of national policies, showing the importance of using these established wellbeing metrics to measure impact. This work will be of interest to funders, policymakers and events legacy planners who are keen to measure the wellbeing impact of their work or funding. In the future, PBE will also explore the challenges of using these wellbeing measures for people with learning disabilities so we can find a measure that works for everyone.

What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Prior to their closure in April 2024, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing conducted a companion piece of research that brought together practice evidence from ten creative projects to draw out ‘how’ and ‘why’ activities support wellbeing, using case study synthesis methodology. Together, the PBE and What Works reports identified the strengths of our evidence-led approach as funders on both qualitative and quantitative data collection. They set out highly replicable methodologies for proportionate evaluation that can – and should – be used for many years after we have closed.

CONCLUSION

FROM NORFOLK TO NORTHERN IRELAND, FROM GLASGOW TO LIVERPOOL - ACROSS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE UK.



For over a decade, events up and down the UK have been opening up new opportunities, changing lives and strengthening communities.

International city-stopping moments. Workshops in community halls. Sports, arts, culture, education. Whatever the event, we've seen that they all have the power to make a difference long after the doors have shut and the last person leaves.

And this is still just the start.

We look forward to seeing how the spirit of everything we've achieved since 2012 continues in future events for many years to come – with you in the driving seat.

Jane, Lady Gibson OBE
Chair, Spirit of 2012

Our overall learnings

- **The power of the collective is strong.** Helping people share experiences and moments builds pride that unites and bonds.
- **Events are all about emotion.** And measuring how they make people feel helps inspire what we do in the future.
- **Inclusivity is everything.** When we break down barriers and open doors, everyone benefits.
- By highlighting how **we're all part of the bigger picture**, we can encourage everyone to make sure events become more than the sum of their parts.



With thanks to all our partners whose contributions have made our spirit – and our legacy of impact – even stronger.

www.spiritof2012.org.uk