

Year

Dartmoor Frame of Mind Project Evaluation

November 2024

About Dartmoor Frame of Mind

Dartmoor Frame of Mind was part of a series of community wellbeing projects developed by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), in partnership with local Art Therapists from Youth Arts & Health Trust (YAHT) and Dartmoor based professional photographer Jo Bradford. The project formed part of wider Dartmoor themed programme at RAMM inspired by the flagship exhibition that opened in October 2024 called 'Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape'.

Dartmoor Frame of Mind started in February 2024. RAMM and YAHT invited 48 young people aged 12 – 18 living in Devon to take part in a 4-month long nature photography course led by Jo Bradford.

This was an inclusive, partnership project that empowered young people from across Devon to come together and get creative, taking photos on their smartphone or tablets. The aim of the project was to support young people, particularly those with additional needs, to get out in nature and take a closer look. The activities were designed to inspire more connection, improve wellbeing and increase confidence in being creative outdoors.

The project offered photography skills tuition workshops online, leading to workshops at RAMM, culminating in a guided photography walk on Dartmoor. The young people's photographs were on display at RAMM in a 6-month exhibition between September 2024 and February 2025, celebrating their achievements and inspiring others.

About the young people taking part

RAMM and YAHT advertised the project widely, focusing on areas where young people might have less access to this kind of opportunity.

Applications to take part came from the home-schooling community, Devon Young Carers, Young Devon, some non-school attenders and schools and colleges in Exeter, around Dartmoor, in South Devon and in Mid Devon.

Many of the young people taking part had been referred to YAHT for their additional needs and other social and communication/interaction difficulties. With the support of the YAHT Arts Therapists the project was able to support all students, including those with more complex needs to feel supported to engage.

When and how did the sessions run?

Tutorials and settling in:

- 4 groups of up to 12 young people were created, and updates were regularly emailed out with key information about what was coming up to help with engagement and to answer any questions.
- In February 2024, zoom meetings were set up to welcome participants to the project, introduce photographer Jo Bradford, bring people together and tell everyone about the project. Photography tips were introduced, challenges set and games played.
- Online photography tutorials followed and were provided on specific dates for each group, with further photography tasks and Q&A sessions with Jo.
- In March, short, recorded photography video tutorials were sent by photographer Jo for participants to practice at home.
- In April, all participants were invited to meet at RAMM for a guided and supported photography practice day at the museum.



Jo Bradford (middle) photographing a hawthorn tree with two young participants

About Youth Arts and Health Trust

The Youth Arts & Health Trust are a registered charity based in Exeter who provide creative arts therapies and arts opportunities.
www.youthartsandhealth.org



Photo taken by Elsie, aged 13



Photo taken by Samson, aged 13



About Jo Bradford

Jo is an award-winning photographer and the Director of Green Island Studios. Based on Dartmoor, she is passionate about using photography as a creative tool for social, cultural and environmental change. @greenislandstudios

"I've spent many years working with children and young people on photography engagement projects. This particular group were incredibly engaged and a pleasure to get to know. They should be very proud of what they've achieved. Rewarding to see making new friendships and growing in confidence. Their cameras gave them the confidence to communicate verbally. Out in nature."

Jo Bradford, Artist



Dartmoor photo walks

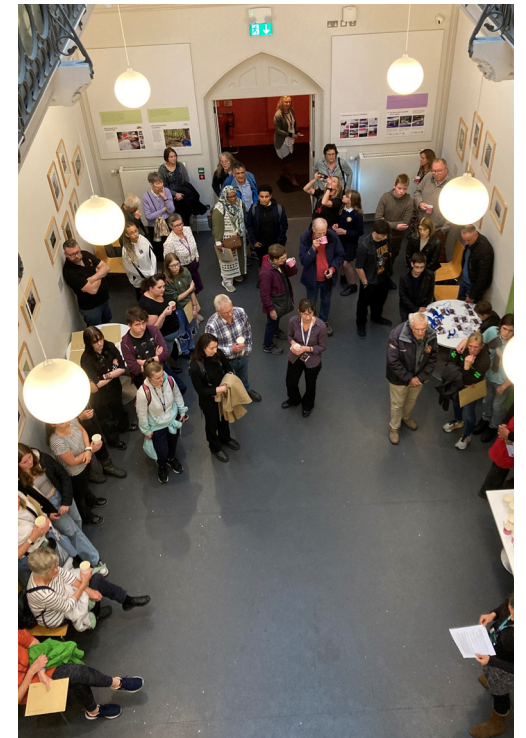
- Over the summer, the 4 groups met on separate occasions and travelled together from Exeter Central to Okehampton by train to meet their now-familiar local nature photographer, Jo, and have a guided photography walk in the woodlands and on the moors, practicing all the skills they had been introduced to and acquired. It was fantastic to see young people getting to know each other and growing in confidence.
- The route took in a small pocket of ancient rainforest, complete with epiphytic ferns and various lichens and mosses.
- Wildlife included bugs, trees, fungi, mosses, lichens and moving water in the woods. Herons, kingfishers, dippers and several other native birds of prey, such as buzzards and kestrels, also made an appearance. On the open moor the young people encountered some rare breed Herdwick sheep, Belted Galloway cows and various small rare-breed ponies.

Celebrating the young people's achievements

- As the summer arrived, participants were asked to select 3 of their photos to be displayed at an exhibition at RAMM. The exhibition opened in September 2024 and ran for 6-months.
- In September over 70 young people, family and friends gathered for a celebration event for the exhibition opening in the Café Gallery at RAMM. This coincided with the museum's exhibition 'Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape', which explored Dartmoor's evocative landscape through photography, film and Land Art and included work by Jo Bradford.
- 24 participants exhibited their photographs in the RAMM café and invited their friends and family to the exhibition opening.

"Nature and wildlife inspired me greatly to catch still moments on camera. My focus skills have improved."

Young person



Learning and feedback from the project

This project was accessible to those who were experiencing anxiety, depression or other challenges and feedback from young people reported increases in confidence, feelings of wellbeing when taking part and since then continuing to take pictures and share these with family and friends.

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. They said that they would love more opportunities to meet outdoors and in person, for inspiring, creative group activities. They really valued face-to-face contact with other young people over online, digital learning.

"For anyone taking part in this in the future I would say just do it, face your fears and you will learn so much."

"My mental health has improved and I have learned to not be afraid of mixing with people I don't know."

"The course is a great opportunity to learn the basics of photography, make new friends and memories."

"I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and my photography has improved because of it. Thank you so much for the chance to participate!"

Young participants

Photography is an accessible art form, and the gradual approach to getting to know a new group was useful for some, moving from online workshops first to a face-to-face session at RAMM later on, which then led to meeting up again for the Dartmoor trip.

"I loved going on Dartmoor to take the pictures!"

"Being out in nature and seeing all the different colours and shapes inspired me and I can now see more opportunities to take photos of things that I wouldn't have seen as photographable before."

Young participants

RAMM and YAHT valued partnership working, bringing the skills and experience of a leading arts and heritage venue together with a local provider of more specialised arts in health projects. The partnership enabled both organisations to broaden the reach of the project.

Overall, we learnt (or perhaps were reminded of) how healthy it is for everyone to come together and be in nature, to challenge ourselves and be creative. This project offered many moments to pause and connect with the world around us and each other. It brought young people together who would not have had the chance to otherwise and this felt especially important following the Covid-19

pandemic and experience of isolation during lockdowns, moving away from an age where young people communicate increasingly online or via social media.

"We feel the project was successful in encouraging young people to look slowly and outwards at the beauty in nature and Dartmoor. Taking a pause to feel grounded and connected to their own creativity and curiosity without the pressure of taking flawless selfies and showcasing rapid snaps on social media. There is something deeply healing and liberating in that experience."

Maya Herbolzheimer, Engagement Officer at RAMM

Next steps

RAMM will continue to build on the relationships made and lessons learnt from this project. The partnership with YAHT has been strengthened and both organisations are keen to explore ways to work together in the future on new wellbeing projects.

For more information please contact Maya, Engagement Officer at RAMM
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"Dartmoor Frame of Mind has been an exceptional partnership project, bringing many together to learn photography skills and connect with the beauty all around us. Jo has inspired young people with her contagious passion and accessible teaching style. They have shown such creativity and commitment and I hope have enjoyed themselves along the way."

Laura Blatherwick, Charity Director/Arts Therapist