

BEACON ILLUMINE PROJECT REPORT



Image: Trip to Craig Cerrig-gleisiad with Illumine 'Image-Makers' 2018.

This project received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government. Illumine also received funding from Powys County Council and Brecon Beacons National Park Sustainable Development Fund.

Introduction:

"I've lived here almost all of my life and I had no idea I'd be able to see this place in a different light. It's a re-enchantment."

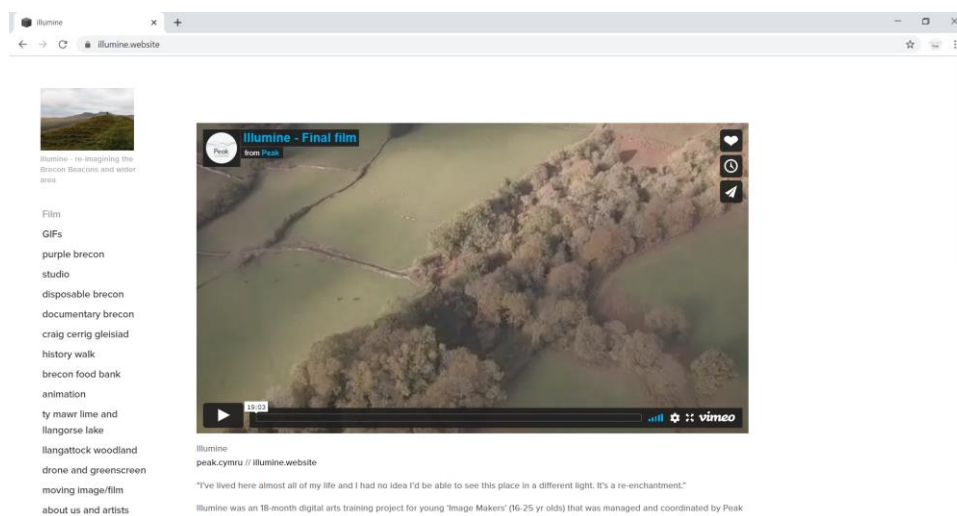
Illumine was an 18-month digital arts training project for young 'Image Makers' (16 - 25 year olds), managed and coordinated by Peak on behalf of Powys County Council. Having commenced in Spring 2018, our Image Makers worked closely with professional artists and industry professionals to 'reimagine' the Brecon Beacons and wider area, creating new and original digital content for display at y Gaer in Brecon, a £13million capital project undertaken by Powys County Council, which has remodelled the former Brecknock Museum and its surrounding site as a new cultural hub encompassing library, museum, gallery, tourism information, and a suite of dedicated community facilities.

The project was made up of workshops, mini-residencies, trips, studio visits, and location shoots responding to the unique qualities of this place. Image Makers collaborated with ambitious artists, focusing on those whose artistic practice encompassed creative use of digital technologies, to explore themes including sustainable tourism, folklore, geology, craftivism, public space, fashion, bilingualism, and identity.

This project had a focus on skills development, but also provided an opportunity for young people to meet like-minded peers in a rural area. One-to-one mentoring with Associate Producer Morag Colquhoun allowed young people to identify and develop skills and networks. Peak is committed to supporting these emerging practitioners to pursue creative careers through further project work in the future.

"Illumine has energised me to make artwork and working with professional artists in Wales has made me feel like a career in the arts is a plan, not an idealistic path."

This case study should be viewed alongside the final film piece made by the Illumine Image Makers <https://vimeo.com/397978559>



TIMELINE:

Start Date: April / May 2017

**Actual: December 2017- Delivery started
Spring 2018**

End Date: February 2019

**Actual: Delivery finished December 2019-
Eval. Winter 2020**

Need for the project:

Participation: The project served as an engagement tool for y Gaer to include young people in this important local project, enabling their voice to be heard and embedded in the new building, and encouraging their future involvement and access to the new Hub.

Training: Whilst y Gaer meets the need of local communities, businesses, and visitors, Illumine met a need and demand to enable rurally-based young people with an interest in the creative industries to access, gain insight into professional practice and to develop practical skills in the creation, production, and presentation of digital content, with the support of professionals, at an industry-level standard.

Illumine fed into the major capital Brecon Cultural Hub scheme, y Gaer, and formed content and resource which is now housed in the new building and managed as part of the new and ongoing operation of the public facility. Illumine content has been embedded into the facility forming the heart of the hub (through a large projector and screen as well as a smaller flat screen). The ability is there to update and refresh the edit, adding in new material into the digital infrastructure as and when it becomes available, thus maintaining evolving content.

The Brecon Tourist Information Centre (TIC), highly valued by visitors and local people alike, closed in 2018 as part of measures to achieve budgetary efficiencies required of the Council. Once y Gaer opened in Dec 2019, the building became an additional visitor information point to the Town Council's newly established 'Visit Brecon' shop location nearby.

y Gaer offers a natural alternative as a draw to visitors and community members seeking information. There is no resource planned to provide this as part of the scheme, neither in the form of facility infrastructure, staff or budget; however, there was an intrinsic expectation that the hub would deliver a form of service in place of what has been lost.

The market town of Brecon relies heavily on tourism and the associated impact on the local economy, jobs, and businesses. Without a dedicated visitor centre, a great deal of valuable custom is likely to be lost. Stakeholder engagement in the development of the Brecon Cultural Hub project is longstanding, involved, and broad; deep concern prevails around the potential damage that the removal of the TIC will cause to the town, the region and the economy.

Consultation has been undertaken with PCC colleagues within Tourism & Regeneration, officers including the Sustainable Tourism Manager from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and personnel representing Visit Wales. Its aim will be to establish what support, if any, is available for tourist information provision in Brecknockshire going forward. There are strong indications that outcome will be a move towards electronically stored or web-based information, with a move away from providing face-to-face services. However, funding is not being strategically invested in innovative solutions beyond support for websites and some online event or accommodation booking services.



A wide range of individuals, groups and organisations are enthusiastic supporters of the Brecon Cultural Hub scheme and keen to see it succeed in meeting the needs and achieving the ambitions of the community. An anticipated future reliance on volunteers to provide some face-to-face interaction with visitors and members of the community is understood but this will not be easy to manage or support. It is for these reasons that the project is conceived unashamedly to provide 'visitor information' but in a new innovative, creative and sustainable way using digital technology, wholly un-reliant on paid staff and in its image based form. The 'product' made available to the public will be direct, inspiring, and intriguing – painting a picture of Brecknockshire and the Brecon Beacons as a place to enjoy, in which to stay and spend time. The visual content stimulates in viewers intuitive, instinctive, and emotional responses encouraging people to explore, discover and experience the offer of the area.



Field trip to collect film and photography footage to form part of final piece

Project outputs:

- A final film, created by the Image-makers, that curated a selection of the project portfolio output synthesised with a soundtrack.
- A portfolio of still photographic images, digital film, animation, slow motion, and time-lapse footage, as well as prints and drone footage. This body of work is now shown via digital display within the large public atrium of y Gaer, with ample opportunities for refreshing and rotating content due to the large volume produced by young people during the project.
- Installation of digital infrastructure at y Gaer to display the content comprising a high resolution laser projector positioned to display on a dedicated wall mounted screen (approx. 4m x 6m) and a multi-media screen, with integrated headphones to enable visitors to listen to the soundtrack, which was a particularly successful and innovative output created by the imagemakers.



Image Makers working with Clementine Schneidermann and Charlotte James

What went well?

- Outcomes achieved for young people involved. The core group of Illumine Image Makers achieved:

- new skills in film / image making; advanced use of digital media; technical & editing competency (*benchmarking at project outset & feedback forms*)
- experience in team working and creative collaboration (*assessment benchmarking at project outset & feedback forms*)
- developed communication skills (*assessment benchmarking at project outset & feedback forms*)
- enhanced knowledge of creative practices (*assessment benchmarking at project outset & feedback forms*)
- research, development, and project management capabilities (*assessment benchmarking at project outset & feedback forms*)
- proficiency in time management & organisational planning (*assessment benchmarking at project outset & feedback forms*)

- Physical outputs consisting of; Final film work, photographs, prints, animations, showreels, creative writing, recorded performance, rap, poetry, soundscapes, illustrations. Furthermore, there was a screening and exhibition celebration w/end 13th December 2019. All are of very high quality, made with professional artists.

- The calibre, number and expertise of artists working on the project was a highly successful element. All the content produced was created through collaborations between professional artists and young people working side-by-side. All artists delivering on the project were high-calibre professional artists, who were experts in their own field. When working with young people, we asked that all artists gave a talk on their own practice and 'journey' into a creative career, acting as role models to the Image Makers. Highlights included a mini-residency with Clementine Schneidermann and Charlotte James, whose work has gone on to feature in the New Yorker, Vogue, The Guardian, as well as a rap/poetry workshop with Casey Bailey who is the current Poet Laureate for Birmingham.

- **Bursaries and other support offered to young people.** A hugely successful element of the project was the bursary support we were able to secure from Brecon Beacons National Park Sustainable Development Fund. This allowed us to offer bursaries to young people of up to £800 each to cover the cost of food, travel to and from sessions, as well as small materials for the Image Makers. The group fed back that this was extremely important in overcoming barriers to participation, particularly to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. One parent fed back that this support was vital, and helped 'J' gain 'more independence, travelling alone by public transport for the first time' (J, 19 is a young person living in Powys with Autism). J's mum said this had knock-on effects, as he used the work created in Illumine towards applying for college, and thus secured a place at Hereford College of Arts. Further support was offered to young people, including one-to-one mentoring for all participants with Associate Producer Morag Colquhoun, identifying opportunities when possible. Young people also had access to digital equipment for loan, proving hugely valuable to those who were not in the position to afford/or would like to experiment with different media: digital poverty was a concern to many of the young people who took part in Illumine.

- **Co-Creation model:** The project model developed by Peak Staff and Illumine Associate Producer Morag Colquhoun was another successful element to the project. Morag in particular set up a framework to the project that allowed young people to co-select and programme the artists they worked with, responding to their needs and interests. We had a general plan for the programme but remained flexible and contacted artists around a month before the planned session. This allowed the programme to flow naturally and encouraged young people to suggest what they wanted to try/experiment with, as well as who they wanted to work with. This co-creation way of working is vital, particularly in order to engage young people over this length of time and for the age range of participants.

- **Mentoring/group as emerging artists/peer support.** Another successful element of this project was the development of the core group of image makers into emerging artists over the length of the project. Although the project overran, this allowed the group to flourish; in time, they began to identify each other's strengths: one young person was particularly good at editing, another was a Welsh language poet, another was particularly good at photography etc. This allowed the young people to work together more collaboratively as they knew each other well.

- **Working towards a final piece/work that was showcased and visible.** This is vital (especially given the length of the project) but young people fed back that they felt it was important to have something concrete to work on. Many of the Image Makers said they had been involved in projects in the past where there is not something 'concrete' at the end. Illumine, however, allowed young people the time, equipment and space to create large portfolios of work that they could use towards A-Levels/College/University/Job applications, and therefore have something tangible to put on their CVs and talk about in interviews.



Trip to Welsh National Opera 'Digital Engagement' department to trial their new VR experience

What didn't go so well?

- **Project timeline/building delays**

The host 'location' for Illumine to be publicly presented is the Powys County Council facility, y Gaer in Brecon – a new capital investment cultural hub scheme in Brecon. Due to the complexity of the construction plan, budgetary issues and programme, delays were experienced and especially impactful at the finalisation stage. These delays affected the completion of Illumine which was expected to culminate in the live presentation of content in the building upon opening.

- **16-25 age group.** Although this age group worked well in some instances, as it allowed a wider number of young people to participate (and younger participants could use work towards school qualifications), this age group also presents complex challenges in terms of safeguarding that need sensitive handling, e.g. with 16 year olds in the same small group as 24/25 year olds. There were no specific issues, but something we were aware of when delivering the project – if we were to rerun the project, we might consider delivering for 18-25year olds.

- **Geographical location** – although the project was Powys-wide, we struggled to engage with young people North of the County. Due to the size of the county, we focused our efforts on both documenting the landscape/generating outcomes and engaging with young people in the South of the County. If we were to rerun this project/deliver a similar project, we would look at having two delivery partners – one as ourselves as Peak, and the other in the North of the County e.g. Oriol Davies, and create a wider body of work in this way.

- Partly due to the delays to the building outlined above, the Image Makers fed back to us that they felt **isolated/disconnected** from the building. This made practical things like deciding on outputs/curating the work more difficult; sometimes the group of young people got frustrated that they could not visit the building. We felt overall that it was best to continue with the project rather than pausing and recommencing, as we had the group together and the momentum was there with the group.

- **Underestimating editing time** – We had never delivered a digital project with young people at this scale before, and we definitely underestimated the amount of time it would take to edit the final piece and showreels etc. Staff were overstretched to deliver the showcase in December 2019 as other projects in Peak's portfolio were already running. This was exacerbated by the general overrunning of the project. If we were to rerun the project, we would build in more time to edit material to allow for a smoother project end and installation.



Green Screen filming with filmmaker and animator Ewan Jones-Morris

What could be done to improve/advice to others?

- **Allow enough time for engagement.** Engagement of young people, particularly this age group (16-25) is time-consuming, and takes up a lot of energy and resource, which can be particularly felt in a small staff team covering a large geographical area who might be delivering multiple projects.

- **Start small** – start with a small group of young people who are engaged/interested, and take the time to properly consult with them. Delivering a project with young people this age for this length of time (12months +) will be far more successful and fruitful if young people have an opportunity to shape the project for themselves. Young people are best placed to tell you what will work well/what won't/where other young people are and how to reach out to them.

- **Stay flexible where possible.** We encountered various changes to the project throughout its course, particularly around things that were beyond our control e.g. delays to the building opening, which meant we had to adapt our project plans, sometimes at short notice. Have an overall framework/project plan which outlines a timeline but make sure it can be flexible to account for any sudden changes – working in this nature is particularly helpful when working with young people.

- **Build trust.** As well as starting with a small group which can grow over time, and giving yourself enough time to find and engage the young people, make sure to build trust. This takes time with young people, particularly those who are facing any barriers – create a safe, inclusive space for young people where they feel they can share their voice – this is vital for a successful project. Involve them actively in decision making processes, encouraging them to take ownership of the project. Illumine was initially supposed to be a much shorter project; although it overran, its greater length allowed us to get to know the participants much more effectively so we knew how better to support them for their next steps.

-**Next steps.** When the project ends, try to have a legacy/follow-on project/pathway for young people to follow onto if they want to stay engaged with your work. You may need to look at securing extra funding to support this or find other ways to support the group if they would like to continue to meet and make work together. It can be difficult for young people, particularly those with mental health challenges/additional support needs if there is not another opportunity for them. We will continue to track the young people we work with as they move onto other things.

-**Involve professionals with a variety of lived experiences/potential role models.** This was something that we believe worked excellently with the Illumine project. The calibre of artists involved and sharing their knowledge/expertise with the Image Makers was inspirational to the group. We involved practitioners based in Wales (including other young people who grew up rurally/those who face similar barriers), as well as artists, thinkers, and educators from further afield. 2020 has firmly sharpened our focus as an organisation that we need to work harder at placing people of colour at the centre of our artistic programme, which we outline in our Anti-Racism Action Plan which can be viewed here; <https://peak.cymru/anti-racism-action-plan/> . Opportunities for young people living rurally to hear diverse voices is crucial, and was noted in feedback from the group with which we worked.

Artists we worked with:

- **Morag Colquhoun**, Associate Producer for the project <https://www.moragcolquhoun.com/>
- **Ewan Jones-Morris** – Animator and Filmmaker <https://www.ewanjonesmorris.co.uk/>
- **Clementine Schneidermann** – Photographer <https://www.clementineschneider.com/>
- **Charlotte James** – Creative Director, Fashion Stylist
<https://www.lensculture.com/articles/clementine-schneidermann-it-s-called-ffasiwn>
- **Jon Pountney** – Photographer <http://www.jonpountney.co.uk/>
- **Sion Marshall-Waters** – Filmmaker and Photographer <https://sionmarshallwaters.com/>
- **Susan Adams** – Visual Artist <https://susan-adams.co.uk/>
- **Blue MacAskill** – Digital Artist <https://businesswales.gov.wales/bigideas/profile/blue-macaskill>
- **Jackie Chettur** – Artist and Printmaker <https://www.jackiechettur.com/>
- **Natasha Russell** – Printmaker <https://www.natasharussell.com/>
- **Uschi Turoczy** – Writer and Educator
- **Chris Meredith** – Poet <https://christophermeredith.webs.com/>
- **Tessa Waite** – Visual Artist <https://www.tessawaite.co.uk/>
- **Melissa Appleton** – Producer and Curator
- **Gweni Llwyd** – Digital Artist <https://gwenillwyd.com/>
- **Stefhan Caddick** – Artist <http://stefhancaddick.co.uk/>
- **Casey Bailey** – Poet, writer and educator <http://caseybailey.co.uk/>
- **Teddy Hunter** – Audio/Visual Artist <http://www.teddyhunter.co.uk/>
- **Rhoda Lane** - Marketing support throughout the project
- **Stephanie Allen** – Curator and Producer
- **Jamie Thomas** – Digital production/development
- **Cathrin Brynach** – Translation services



Workshop with photographer + filmmaker Sion Marshall-Waters

Partners and project friends:

- **Brecon High School** - taster session delivered to art students, Brecon High School students enrolling as Image Makers.
- **Brecon MIND** – taster session delivered with participants, one Brecon MIND participant went on to become one of core group of Image Makers, and the most engaged young person.
- **Brecon Library** – taster session delivered with users, *Illumine* film plays in new library/work showcased in space
- **Crickhowell High School** – two-day mini residency delivered to art students; a number of these went on to enrol as Image Makers.
- **Brecknock Museum** – *Illumine* film showcased in space, partnered with the museum for archival material including maps (which formed part of Natasha Russell's work for Green Man) and the Magic Lantern Slides collection which was used for Susan Adams' stop-motion animation mini-residency with Image Makers.
- **Dering Lines** – community day, stop-motion animation workshop – participatory family-friendly activity
- **Greenman Festival** – Horsebox commission, participatory arts workshops for festival goers in both printmaking and creative writing
- **The Muse, Brecon** – Regular 'home' to project whilst y Gaer was being fitted, showcase for final event etc. Benefited financially from Venue Hire costs
- **Brecon Town Council & Visit Brecon** – profile raising, sending visitors to view work.
- **Brecon Food Bank** – Image Makers visited the Food bank to volunteer and document the work of the Food Bank, profile raising/sharing the work of the volunteers
- **Llangattock Community Woodland Group** – Image Makers visited the woodland group, documenting the work of the volunteers and sharing. Profile raising/education of young people around food, sustainability.
- **Brecon Cathedral Choir** – visit to record choir to use in soundtrack
- **Visit Brecon** – promoting Brecon as visitor destination
- **Theatr Brycheiniog** – promotion: features in imagery and Venue Hire cost for taster sessions
- **Greenman Festival** – provision of participatory arts activity in festival programme for festival goers including 'settlers' – Green Man's offer for families in the lead up to the festival



Project Illumine at Green Man Festival 2018

Please see Imagery Report for further information.

For more information please contact:

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