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## **Children and families affected by domestic abuse** (<https://cafada.stir.ac.uk>)

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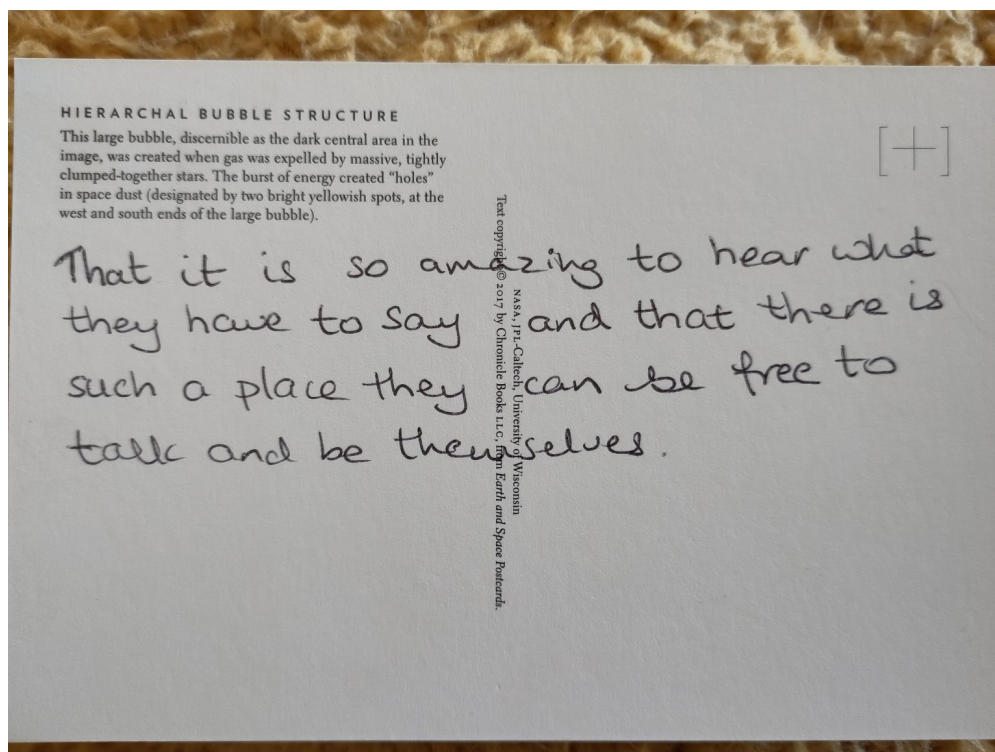
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# Participation work with children and young people in CAFADA

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Post written by cwp | August 9, 2023

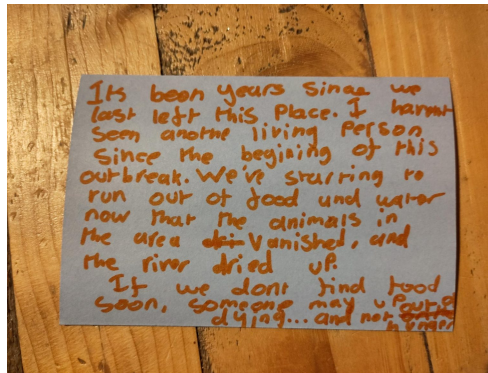
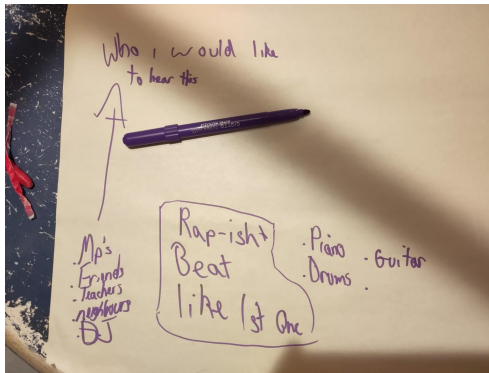


*This image represents feedback from an attendee of the participation event showcasing the young people's work with CAFADA.*

One of the most exciting and complex strands of our work for the CAFADA project has been the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a creative participatory project that some of our researchers led in a specialised youth centre in England, aimed at supporting young people affected by domestic abuse. Started from the careful work of Jo Alexander, this project has then been handed over to Laura Bellussi just before its start, in September 2022.

Laura worked closely with youth workers and artists to deliver something special. Over the course of six months, a group of eight young people, aged 10 to 14, met monthly with the researcher and a range of artists – including a spoken word artist, and three music composers – to gather thoughts and ideas on their experiences being part of this innovative youth service. Creative and narrative methods were used to give shape to feelings and to elicit memories. Jasmine Plumptre, a poet, spoken word artist, and doctoral student in creative writing at the University of Newcastle,

encouraged the young people to use a range of media – such as, photography, creative writing, and drawing – to express their views on a series of topics.



*Examples of the outputs young people created during the participation sessions, to inform the creation of the spoken word poems.*

These included...

- ... memories of their hometown.
- ... memories of the service.
- ... what an ideal service would look like.
- ... and metaphors, such as, "the lighthouse".

Laura complemented her work by co-facilitating the group and guiding written or verbal reflection on what ideal support looks like, and what kind of help is currently available for young people affected by domestic abuse.

The young people were amazing to work with, they were motivated and attentive. Their views were articulate and deliberate in stating what they liked and did not like, what worked or did not work for them, and their thoughts were a source of inspiration to us. Youth workers helped us make sure that everyone was heard; we learned from each session what could be adjusted to make sure that the groups were effective in bringing this important piece of work forward.

All data collected were meticulously elaborated by Jasmine into a collection of four poems, that were then transformed into four songs, composed by the brilliant musicians from Off Beat Workshops and Musical Seeds. The musicians

worked closely with the young people to make sure that their ideas for the backtracks, including mood, speed, and sound effects, were respected and applied. The group collaborated then with a recording studio (LUMA Sounds) and the young people gave voice to the poems by transforming them effectively into spoken word pieces. It was an exciting experience, and everyone had fun.

Below are two of the spoken word poems, read by the young people who took part in this project.

### **Song 1: A place for us**



*Poem 1: A place for us*

### **Song 2: Apocalypse**

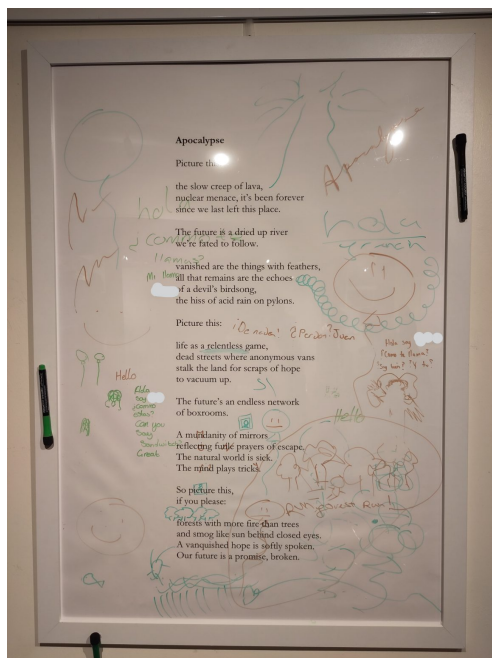


*Poem 2: Apocalypse*

A youth worker commented: “This has been a really wonderful project to be a part of, it has been incredible to hear the young people’s thoughts and ideas and see them brought to life through music and poetry.” Music, postcards,

photographs, and many other “memorabilia” of the project became part of an art exhibition and a public engagement event, hosted in March 2023, which saw the participation of the young people and attendance of families, stakeholders of the service, and outstanding members of the community.

During the event, the poems were printed on maxi-sized sheets and hung to the walls on frames, that could be doodled upon by the young people. It was lovely to see them writing and working on them by adding funny extras and new layers of meaning, taking full ownership of what they created. A young person drew next to the title of one of the poems: “I did this!”. The songs were then played in front of the audience, and there was some time for comments and open discussion. Plus, of course: a delicious buffet.



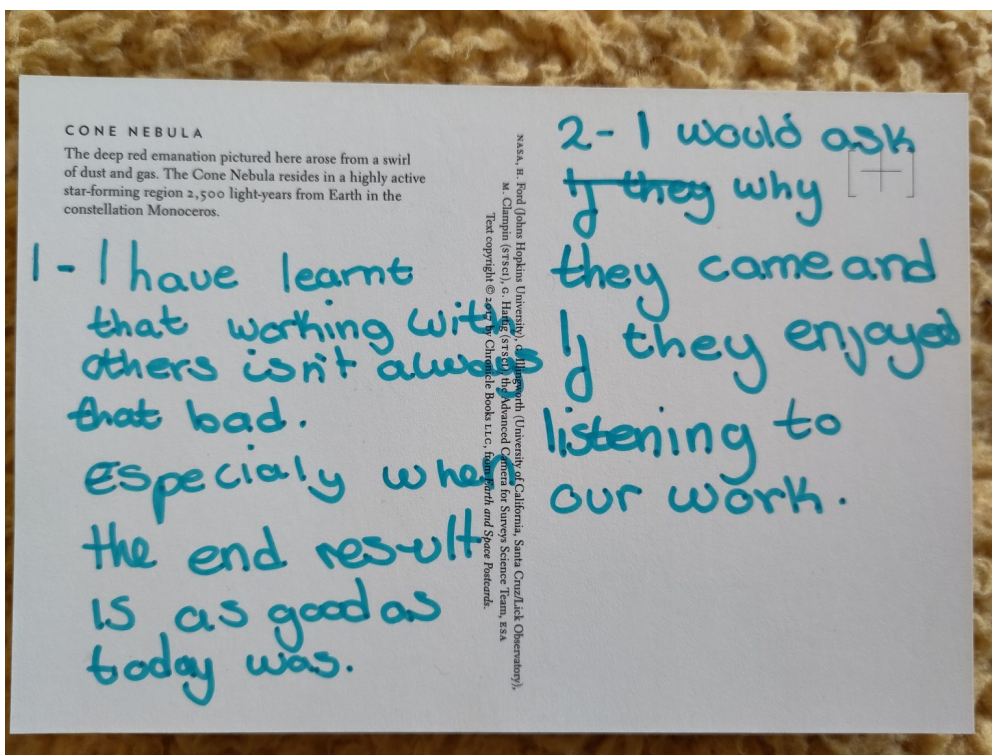




*Examples of the media created and available during the final event to showcase the work of the young people.*

Laura Howes, music composer from Off Beat Workshops, remarked: "It was a pleasure to be involved with this project. The young people and other artists created such amazing and emotive poetry. It was a joy to work with them and to craft a sound that fitted the feel of the poems. Really loved the final result and very much enjoyed hearing the final pieces at the reveal party. I hope the young people involved are very proud of themselves, they created something amazing!"

During the engagement event with stakeholders and community members, including trustees and politicians, we wanted to make sure that young people had their chance to communicate with them, without putting anyone on the spot. That's why we distributed postcards where adults could ask questions to the young people anonymously, and vice versa, and then anyone in the audience could raise their hand and answer. The result was fascinating, and we collected excellent feedback from the attendees about how articulate the young people are, as they left the room with a deeper understanding of their experiences and what feeling supported and respected means for them.



*This image represents feedback from a young person collected during the final event.*

Mark Louisy, a music composer from Musical Seeds, concluded: "I thought it was a great project to be involved in. What was particularly powerful was the young people's voices. They're words coming to life. I thought given the change in personnel, we all worked really well together." However, the project is not ended until we are able to gauge its impact in practice. We will write reports, and articles, and get back in touch with the attendees, to make sure that their commitments to the service are put into action. Research shows that young people are disillusioned with "participatory" projects that exploit their opinions without translating their wishes into practice. This is our commitment as a research team, to make sure that young people's voices are heard, and our promises are more than just words.

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