



## Funding awarded for children's social care work in Gateshead, Darlington and South Tyneside

### Blue Cabin

Funding has been awarded to roll out a new approach to working with care-experienced children and young people across three local authorities in the North East.

The Creative Life Story Work project uses creative activities facilitated by professional artists, combined with therapeutic life story work, to help children and young people better understand their own life stories, and improve their lives at home and school.

The project builds on earlier work carried out in South Tyneside and will now be rolled out across Darlington Borough Council and Gateshead Council, thanks to funding awarded by [What Works for Children's Social Care](#) (WWCSC).

Jenny Young, Director of [Blue Cabin](#), the organisation leading the project, said: "Many children and young people who have experienced being separated from their birth families have unanswered questions about their lives – for example, around events that took place early in their lives, or relating to their hopes and ambitions for the future.

"Between 2018 and 2020 we worked with South Tyneside Council, a team of Associate Artists and Professor Richard Rose, who is an internationally respected authority on life story work and the founder of [Therapeutic Life Story Work International](#), (TLSWi), to develop this new way of helping children and young people talk about and understand their life stories, and we're excited to be able to apply what we've already learnt with people across Darlington and Gateshead."

All local authorities carry out life story work however there is currently no national guidance on best practice. This project builds on work already carried out in the North East which has shown the potential to improve young people's experiences of life story work, and will provide learning to be shared across the rest of the region and the UK.

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The approach combines creative sessions with artists, one-to-one work with social workers and foster carers, and therapeutic life story work, and includes training for social care teams, allowing them to embed this new way of working across the three local authorities.

Blue Cabin, South Tyneside Council, Professor Richard Rose and a team of Associate Artists will work with Darlington Borough Council, Gateshead Council to roll out the new approach over a 15 month period, targeting children and young people aged five and over and their carers.

Professor Richard Rose said: *“It is so rewarding to be part of this project in partnership with Blue Cabin, South Tyneside, Gateshead and Darlington. I believe that every child needs to know their story, but also each need to know the meaning behind this. Social media and other advances such as DNA matching means that children and young people are searching for answers with little support when they find information. If we don’t tell them their story, who might and how might that impact on them? We are all what we were, knowing your story, the past and the present is our passport to the future. I believe that this innovative partnership will be the blueprint for consistent life story work across the country.”*

Jane Kochanowski, Assistant Director, Children’s Services, Darlington Borough Council, said: *“I’m absolutely delighted at the prospect of working with Blue Cabin to enrich the lives of the children and young people in Darlington.”*

Councillor Gary Haley, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Gateshead Council, said: *“As a corporate parent we understand the role we have in nurturing our young people’s stories. This needs to be done with care and thoughtfulness and working in partnership with Blue Cabin will enable us to help our children and young people to both understand and tell their life story.*

*“We believe that this work will not only benefit those young people directly involved but will also help to improve the life story work carried out with all the young people in our care, both now and in the future.”*

Councillor Moira Smith, Lead Member for Children, Young People and Families at South Tyneside Council, said: *“As one of just a handful of local authorities to be selected as a Partner in Practice we have benefitted from additional funding to drive forward this innovative project aimed at helping looked after children to better understand the past events of their lives. Every child needs to know their background and understand how they fit into the world. We have seen first-hand the benefits of this approach for children and are delighted to be able to continue this work and develop it further.*

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*“Being a part of developing best practice in this area is a real privilege for South Tyneside’s Children’s Services. We are committed to giving all our children and young people the best start in life and working alongside other local authorities to enhance the support they offer to their looked after children is a real bonus.”*

Nicola Golightly, Associate Artist, said: *“It is such a privilege to have the opportunity to further expand and develop the life story work myself and my fellow Blue Cabin Associate Artists piloted with Blue Cabin in South Tyneside in 2018 - 2020. This work has played such a significant role in my development as an artist and human!*

*“As both an artist and adoptive parent, I know the true importance of this work, helping children to understand who they are and providing them with a nurturing environment to explore this creative, giving them the absolute best opportunity to grow.”*

Michelle Wood (Sea Tern Print), Associate Artist, said: *“As an artist delivering the All About Me creative sessions, it’s finding a balance between asking questions of the child and their carer and helping them create a unique and meaningful outcome.”*

Pady O’Connor, Associate Artist and Artistic Director of MeeMee Theatre, said: *“The incredible thing about creative life story work being developed again is that it gives me, as a theatre maker, an opportunity to create a safe space for families and young people. A place of curiosity and possibilities and when you begin to discover possibilities, for me this is ultimately the starting place of hope.”*

*“We are all made up of many doors - to be able to help young people to open some of these doors, even for a short while, and explore what’s behind them, always knowing that at any time they can close it again, but leaving them with a positive memory of turning that key. This is a wonderful place to explore stories that are part of their very being.”*

Elena Miller (Star Bright Arts), Associate Artist, said: *“Working with Blue Cabin on this project has felt like having a big hug through the whole process. Never before have I felt so supported and nurtured as an artist which has enabled me to be just as supportive when delivering the creative experiences with the children, young people and their carers.”*

*“The potential benefits of this work for children, young people and their families and carers are huge,”* added Jenny Young. *“We anticipate that children and young people who take part will not only gain a better understanding of their own experiences, but that they will also benefit from improved relationships with the adults in their lives - whether that is carers, their birth families, and social workers - and improved stability at home and at school.*

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*“Our hope is that we can share the findings from this work and contribute to our national understanding of what good life story work looks like and how it can improve the lives of care-experienced children and young people.”*

Blue Cabin is a North East-based organisation which transforms outcomes for care-experienced children and young people through creative activities which are facilitated by professional artists.

Find out more at [www.wearebluecabin.com](http://www.wearebluecabin.com)

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