

## **Evaluation Report**

Escape2Make (E2M) hosted a fair that had various workshops and activities, primarily aimed at young people but also appealing to families and the wider community. To evaluate this initiative, interns (Sadie and Natasha) conducted a series of interviews with stakeholders, including youth board members, workshop facilitators, volunteers, participants, parents, and general members of the public. The purpose of this report is to document the effectiveness of the event and to examine how E2M's newly acquired space, its creative programming, and its community-oriented ethos impact on local young people and the wider community.

The intern-led interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, allowing participants the freedom to discuss aspects most important to them. However, most (if not all) of the interviews conducted used the following similar prompt questions; what brought them to the festival, what activities had they taken part in, what do they think of the festival/new building and if they thought E2M fosters a sense of community.

This qualitative approach gathered important insights into participants' experiences and provided clear evidence of E2M's continuous efforts of community-building initiatives, the scope of its creative offerings, and the efficacy of its new building. Below, the findings are organised under four key themes that emerged from the interviews.

### **1. Community Engagement**

#### **1.1: Inclusivity and Social Cohesion**

One of the most consistently mentioned aspects of E2M's programming is the sense of belonging it cultivates. Stakeholders, ranging from a Youth Board member to parents and volunteers, repeatedly highlighted the "lovely sense of community." Notably, a young interviewee stated there were "no horrible people" and that "everyone gets along," clearly highlighting the broad acceptance and warmth that the fair brought to the community. This open, supportive environment encouraged people who might otherwise feel isolated or apprehensive to partake in the activities.

#### **1.2: Intergenerational and Diverse Engagement**

An integral element of E2M's community impact lies in its ability to bridge age groups. Families, grandparents, and children collaborated on creative projects, with one

grandparent noting that their young (age 5) granddaughter was so absorbed that “we couldn’t get her out!” of the activities. From observing that family before interviewing them, it was noted by the interns that the grandparents were also involved in the activity with their granddaughter, showing that the environment that was created by the facilitators in that specific activity (botanical art) was warm and supportive of all age groups. Members of the public also described how the atmosphere “brings people together,” reinforcing E2M’s capacity to foster relationships across demographic divides.

### **1.3: Sustainability of Volunteerism**

E2M demonstrates a virtuous cycle of engagement: participants who initially discover the initiative through workshops often return as volunteers. One young person mentioned transitioning from attending clubs/activities to volunteering, thereby illustrating how early positive interactions (and relationships formed) can evolve into long-term commitments. This not only sustains E2M’s community engagement but also fosters leadership and continuity, an important factor in any non-profit or youth-oriented initiative.

## **2. Creative Element**

### **2.1: Creative workshops**

The fair’s activities shown a wide array of artistic and cultural genres: poetry making sessions, mural painting, upcycled furniture projects, drama (e.g., “Peter Pan” performances), musical performance, arts and crafts, production, and more. This inclusive and range of workshops reflects a deliberate effort to appeal to diverse interests and skill sets. Such variety helped E2M attract young participants who may not have had prior exposure to specific art forms or might have assumed a lack of interest. A member of the Youth Board detailed helping with both poetry and the painting of a large mural, noting the pride in having contributed “all the beanbags and decorations” that made the new building feel comfortable and vibrant.

### **2.2: Confidence building**

Multiple accounts from all workshops demonstrated how E2M empowers participants to step outside their comfort zones. A pair of workshop attendees mentioned their “amazing” podcasting experience, while another talked enthusiastically about developing an interest in furniture upcycling. The consistent refrain of positive language shows that young people gain not just technical and artistic skills but also a sense of personal achievement and motivation for future creative exploration.

Beyond learning new techniques, participants indicated that these workshops had a lasting impact on their self-image and aspirations. For instance, two girls who produced a podcast

expressed interest in exploring more creative opportunities. One facilitator described the workshops as a place where “everyone was just going for it,” illustrating the supportive environment that emboldens participants to take creative risks and explore their capabilities.

### **3. Introduction to the space**

A Youth Board member recounted the building’s former “giant horrible pink wall” being transformed into a vibrant, youth-friendly environment. Participants and volunteers collectively redecorated the new space with beanbags, artwork, and comfortable seating. It was clear that the co-creation process strengthened personal and collective ownership, reflecting a participatory approach to design that fosters pride and emotional investment among the young people who helped.

Facilitators noted that, in contrast to E2M’s previous space, the permanent location offers advantages such as secure storage and “opportunities for ongoing projects”. Both volunteers and facilitators characterised the new building as a “game-changer,” allowing for more frequent workshops and sustained engagement. The new space was frequently linked with opportunity for future expansion. One facilitator envisioned E2M’s model “extending to other towns”, pointing to the ongoing issue of youth-centre shortages.

### **4. The impact on young people**

#### **4.1: Friendships**

A repeated theme throughout the interviews is the profound impact on young attendees’ social lives. E2M draws participants from different schools and backgrounds, young people who might not otherwise intersect have opportunities to connect and form friendships. As one parent observed, their child “didn’t know anyone” in a drama workshop yet soon discovered a supportive group dynamic. A Youth Board member noted, “I’ve definitely met lots of new people that I wouldn’t have done ordinarily as they obviously go to different schools”.

#### **4.2: Personal development**

Participants consistently reported feeling comfortable expressing themselves. A young individual with ADHD remarked they could “let my ADHD run wild,” underlining E2M’s approach to accommodating diverse needs and personalities. A parent echoed this sentiment, stating that “you can be your bonkers self,” further affirming that both young people and families view E2M as a uniquely safe and accepting environment. Beyond self-

expression, E2M's structured yet flexible creative environment seems to cultivate soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and communication.

Many young participants expressed eagerness to continue engaging with E2M after their first experience. One duo explained how they first discovered E2M through a previous podcast workshop and commented, "Now we've done one, I think we'll do some more", demonstrating the lasting impact from the previous fair. Another young attendee exclaimed, "Can I do the next one!?" immediately after finishing a session, illustrating the genuine excitement these workshops bring.

Likewise, a parent reflected on how their child had "missed quite a few sessions" due to "email miscommunication" (due to their email correspondence from E2M accidentally going into their junk mail) but was determined to participate once they discovered the workshops, reporting that "She's had a great week! She's really enjoyed it!" This renewed enthusiasm shows how quickly E2M activities can instil confidence and motivation.

Overall, E2M's strengths lie in its inclusive ethos, wide range of creative opportunities, and emphasis on youth-driven engagement.