

MK Gallery

Shortlisted for the Family Learning Innovation Award

About MK Gallery

[MK Gallery](#) is a contemporary visual arts gallery hosting exhibitions, creative workshops and events in Milton Keynes. Their mission is to provide access to high quality and innovative cultural programmes that bring people and communities together to create, participate and debate.

Annually, they host three major exhibitions – including contemporary, historic, transhistorical, thematic and solo shows – which feature international and national loans along with new commissions. MK Gallery provides multiple entry points to these exhibitions through their public programmes, which also offer opportunities to reflect and celebrate the creativity of the diverse surrounding communities.



Family Learning Innovation: Art and Us

From 2018-2025, Art and Us family workshops were the core offer within MK Gallery's Inclusive Practice in the Arts (IPA) programme. Participation in the arts for children with additional and complex needs, and their families, is significantly lower. With some venues struggling to accommodate various access requirements or provide an offer which meaningfully engages the full family, certain communities are less likely to receive the benefits offered by creative engagement.

Art & Us ran on Sundays throughout the year, offering an average of 25 families with children with additional or complex needs the opportunity to work one-to-one in a bespoke creative encounter with an artist. With support and guidance from MK Gallery's in-house IPA team, artists planned workshops which were person-centred, tailored to the access requirements and interests each family.

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Art and Us was grounded in providing experiences which are safe and playful, offering dynamic creative environments, in which children and families lead the process and outcome. From messy sensory play and imaginative storytelling to experiential space making and more conventional crafting, Art and Us allowed families to express themselves in whatever way meant the most to them.



Impact and next steps

Art and Us had a profound impact on the lives of the participating families and learners. Sessions provided a space where families felt recognised and accepted, enabling them to relate to art on their terms and develop a creative language that resonated with their experiences.

Over 40 families who have a child or children with additional or complex support needs have taken part in the programme, with over 2,300 bespoke creative encounters taking place. Some families have taken part in the full 7 years of delivery.

The importance and impact of the consistency of Art and Us has been reiterated by parents and carers, who gave incredibly positive feedback and noted huge changes to their children's communication and development.

"It's not about the transformative stuff, it's about the things that help us survive. And it's long term, it doesn't last a few weeks – that's when we feel the difference, when things are embedded in our lives."

"To find somewhere that everyone can join in, is unheard of. Usually [her] sisters can play, while she has to watch, or she gets special help, while they have to sit on the side. This is totally unique and amazing, thank you."

MK Gallery's future aims are to re-fund the programme, which is currently on hiatus due to current funding circumstances. They aim to ensure this provision remains available for their community of families for years to come.