



# Beowulf

A Proper Job Theatre project

Supported by Kirklees Year of Music  
2023 and Arts Council England



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

# About Beowulf

Beowulf was a major theatre production held at St Peter's Church in Huddersfield which ran from 8 – 11 November 2023.

A new version of the Anglo-Saxon epic featuring a massive cast of singers, actors and members of the community, Beowulf was a spectacular, site-specific event created for Kirklees Year of Music 2023 by Proper Job Theatre.

Each night was completely sold out, with over xxx people in attendance at the church. The performance was preceded by a procession through the streets of Huddersfield, with passers-by able to experience some of the magic of the show.

In total, more than xxx participated in the project as community choir and cast members, actors, musicians and other technical / creative roles.



# About this report

This evaluation report summarises the Beowulf project and its impact on audience members, participants and contributors.

The methodology consisted of:

- An online audience survey (n=95) shared directly with audience members who booked tickets through Lawrence Batley Theatre's box office system. The survey was also share on social media.
- In-depth case study interviews with individuals who contributed to the project including sound artists, musicians and community cast members (n=6)

Raw survey data and full case study reports are available on request.





## Summary of evaluation highlights

Beowulf received high ratings by audience members who praised its immersive and atmospheric nature.

There was recognition of the measures taken to make the production accessible to a wide range of people.

Beowulf led to new experiences for audience members: two-thirds had never been to St Peter's Church before, and one-in-five had never been to an outdoor / site-specific theatrical performance.

83% said it had encouraged them to see local places in a new way, and 74% said it had increased their interest in local history & heritage

Audiences travelled from across the district and beyond, with 72% of visitors indicating that Beowulf had made them more likely to return to Huddersfield / Kirklees in the future.

Spend per person was estimated at nearly £50, demonstrating the economic value of cultural events such as this.

# Audience rating

Audiences rated Beowulf extremely highly: 87% rated it 5 stars and 10% rated it 4 stars.

The 4.8 stars out of 5 average for Beowulf was higher than any other Kirklees Year of Music events including the Huddersfield Christmas Lights Switch-On (4.1 stars), HERD (4.7 stars) and Pride (3.9 stars).

Q3 Overall, how highly would you rate Beowulf?

4.8★  
average rating



## Audience comments:

*“It really felt like you were in the moment, fantastic performance, staging, music and lighting.”*

*“It all seemed to work really successfully. Well thought-out. Creative and imaginative staging in the church.”*

*“Everything was considered, well planned and well delivered. Well done to the actors behind the scenes and stewards. Excellent experience and well worth the money.”*

*“The venue was perfect for the play, story and music were interestingly well blended and actors were fabulous!”*



# Accessibility & other suggestions

There was recognition that accessibility had been factored into the production despite the venue's limitations.

The most common complaints were around the seating – some felt there could have been more support offered to audience members in finding seats, and some said the seats were uncomfortable.

A couple of respondents said they had found it difficult to follow the storyline due to the complex nature of the production.

Other suggestions included:

- Transcripts for deaf audience members
- A cast list
- More performances

*“I know the team were working hard to allow for disabled access, which was hard due to the nature of the space at St. Peter's church. I believe they did what they could in this space, but always worth a consideration.”*

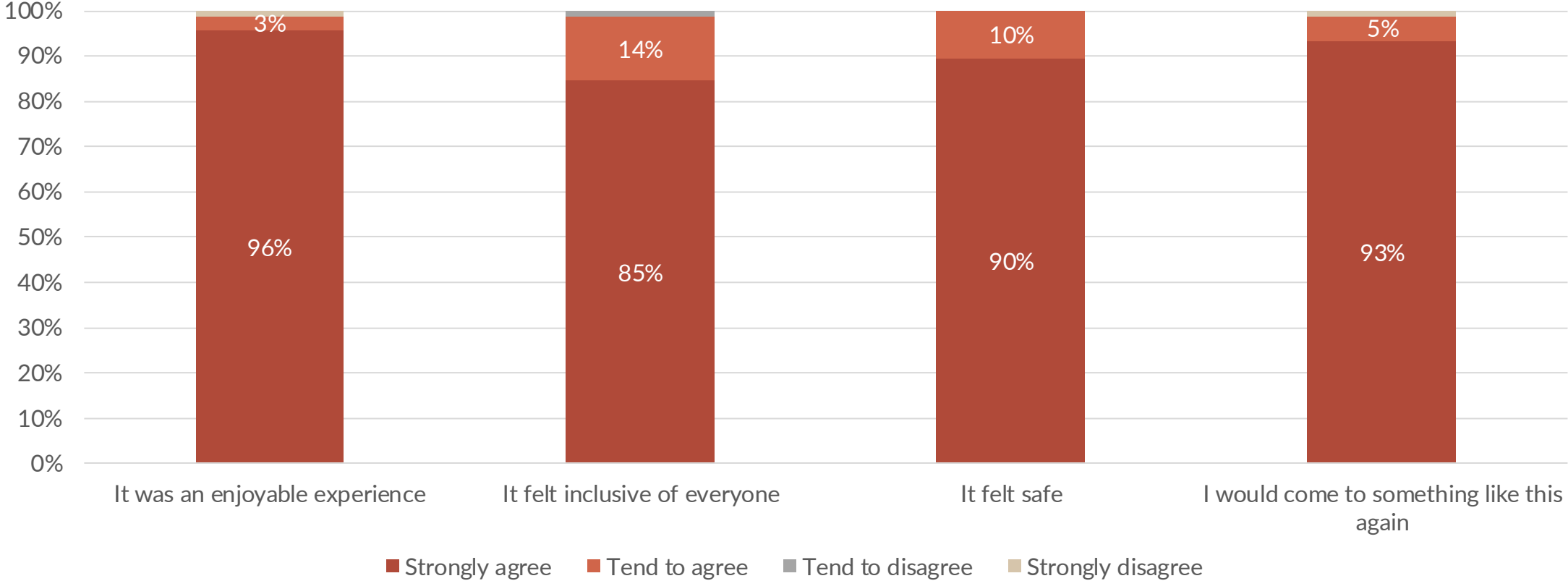
*“As a wheelchair user I was so included in the audience and so helped thank you so much I do not think you could do anything to improve it was wonderful and so deserved a standing ovation.”*

*“It would have benefitted from a bit more focused stewarding of the seating once we were in the church. One of the cast pointed us to two empty seats , which was lovely but probably not his job! I spotted other empty seats - someone needed to encourage people to shuffle along and use the space.”*

- Audience members

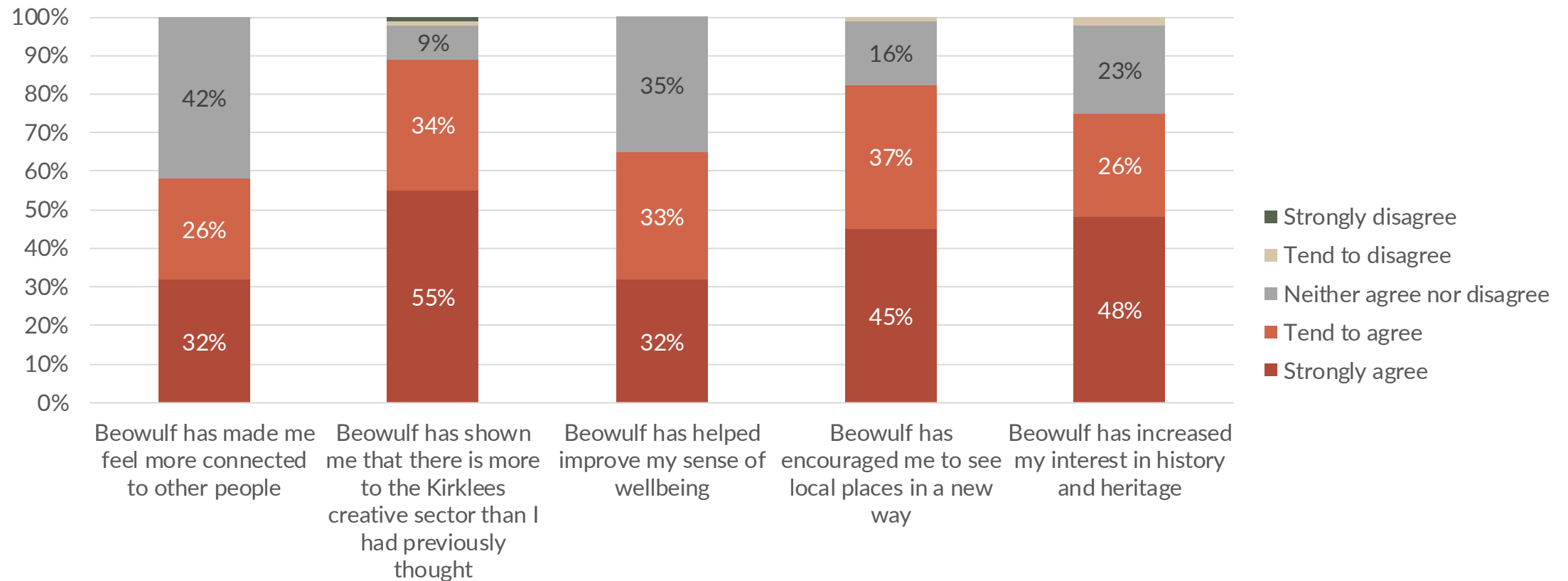
# The vast majority of audiences enjoyed Beowulf and felt it was a safe and inclusive event

How far would you agree with the following statements about Beowulf? (n=91)



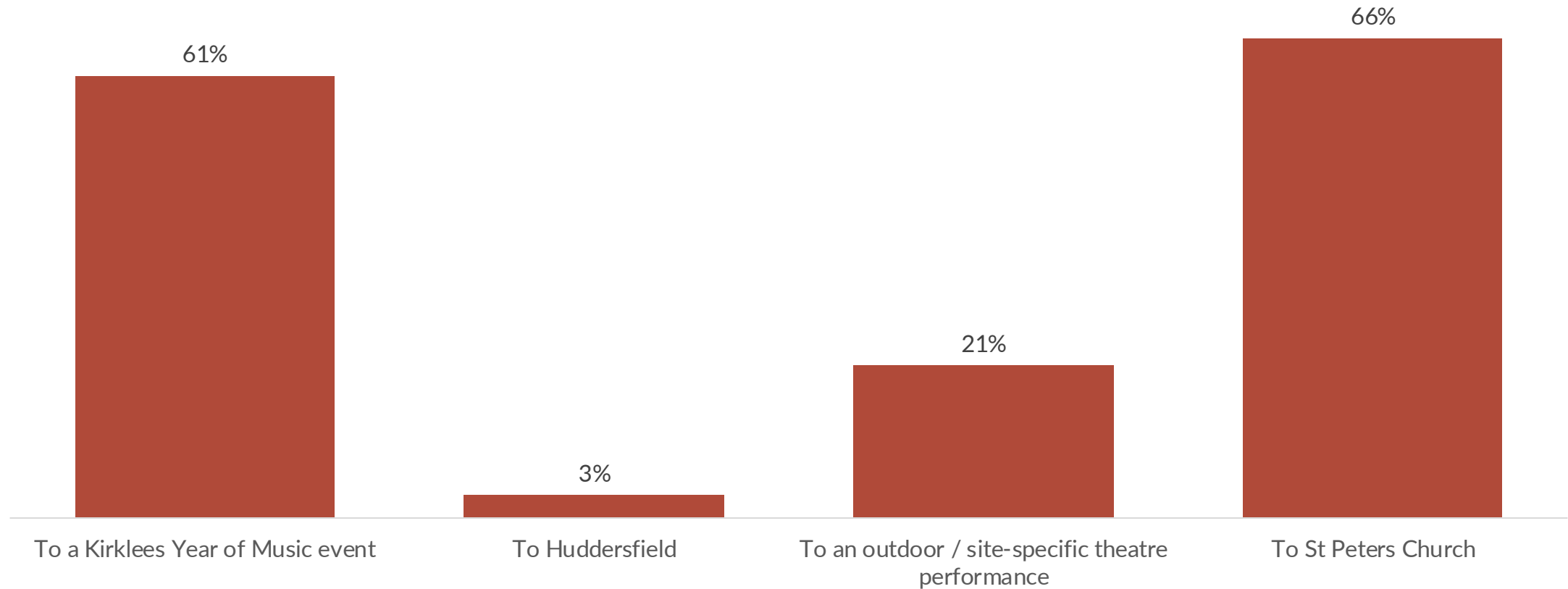
# A high proportion of audience members said Beowulf had enriched their perceptions of creativity, history & heritage within the district

How far would you agree with the following statements? (n=91)



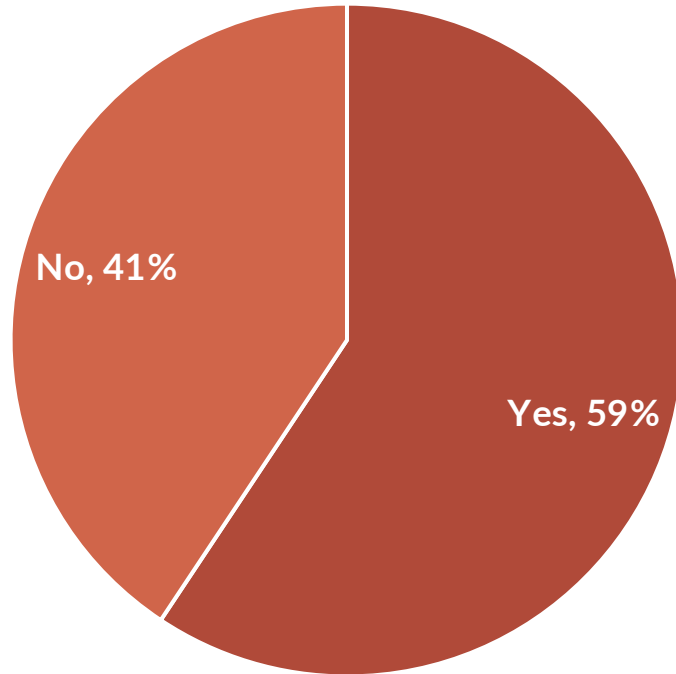
# 84% had new experiences through attending Beowulf, most commonly by visiting St Peter's Church or a KYoM23 event

Q: Was this your first visit to... (n=95)

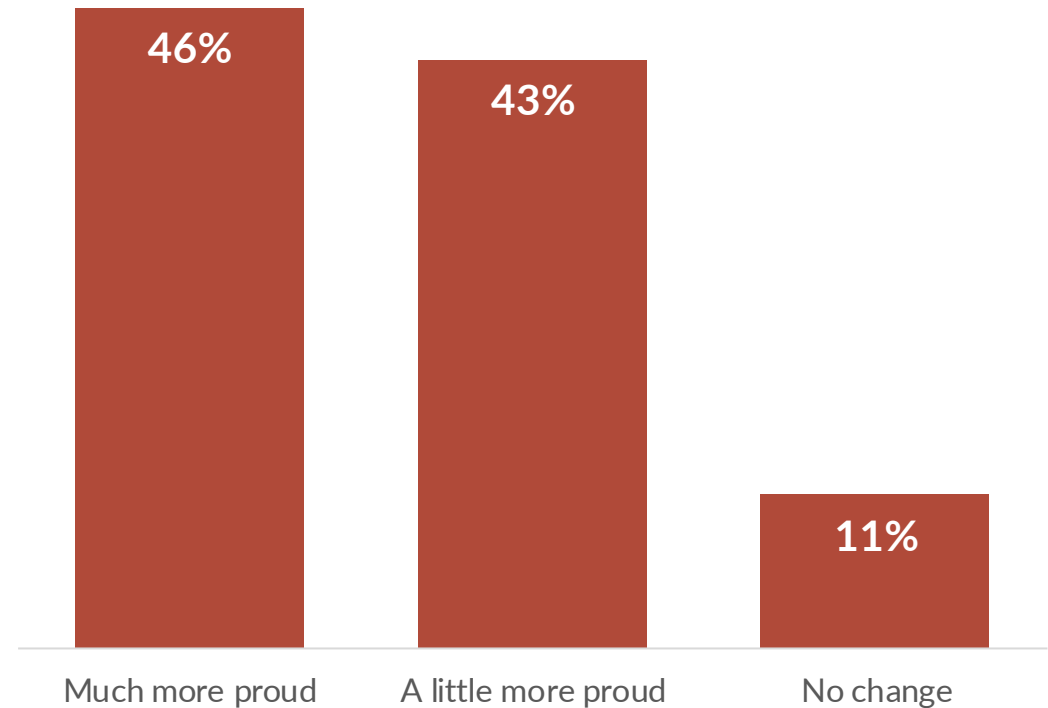


# Beowulf increased civic pride amongst 89% of local audience members

Q: Are you a resident of Kirklees? (n=91)

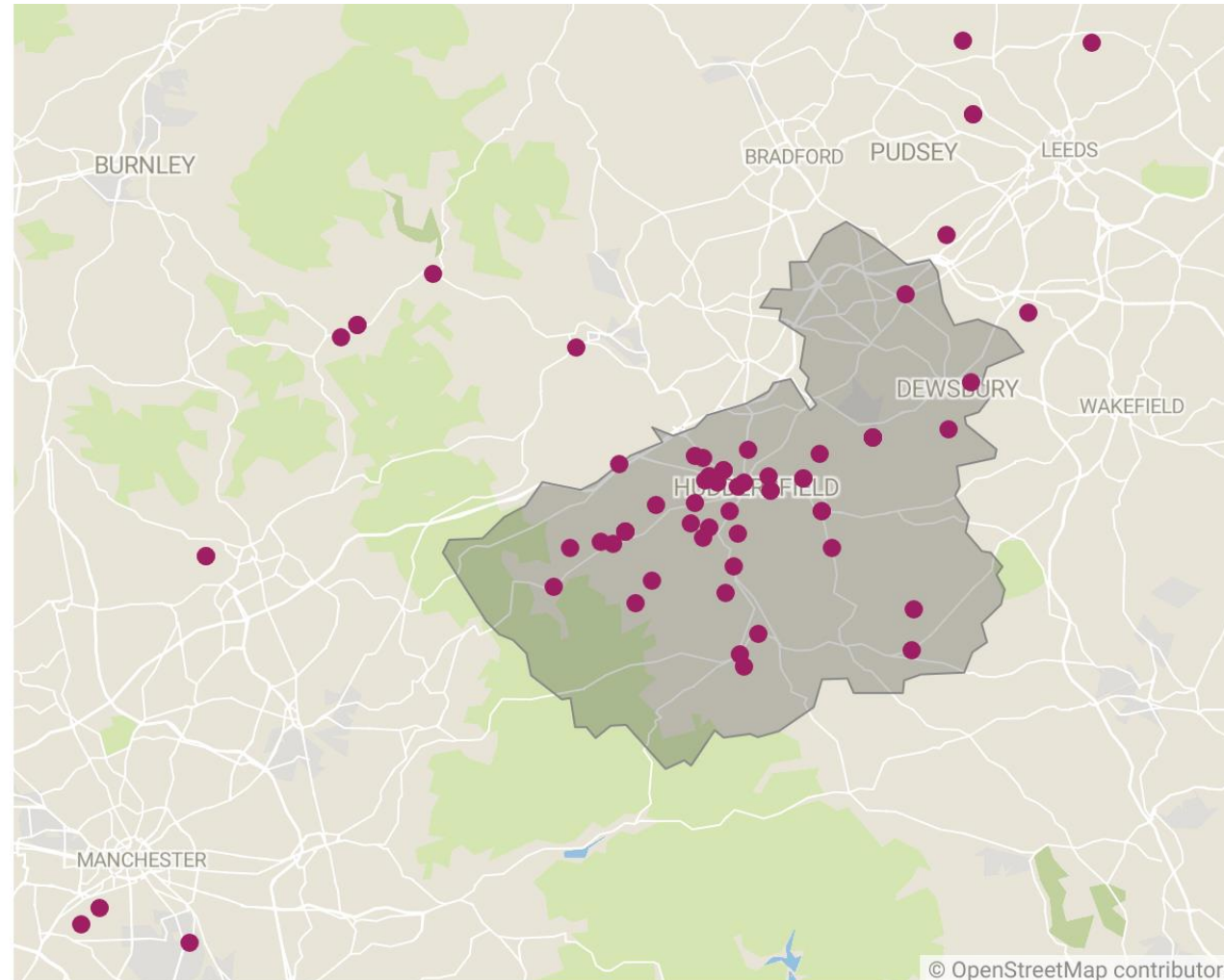


Q: Did Beowulf make you feel any more or less proud to live in Kirklees? (n=54)



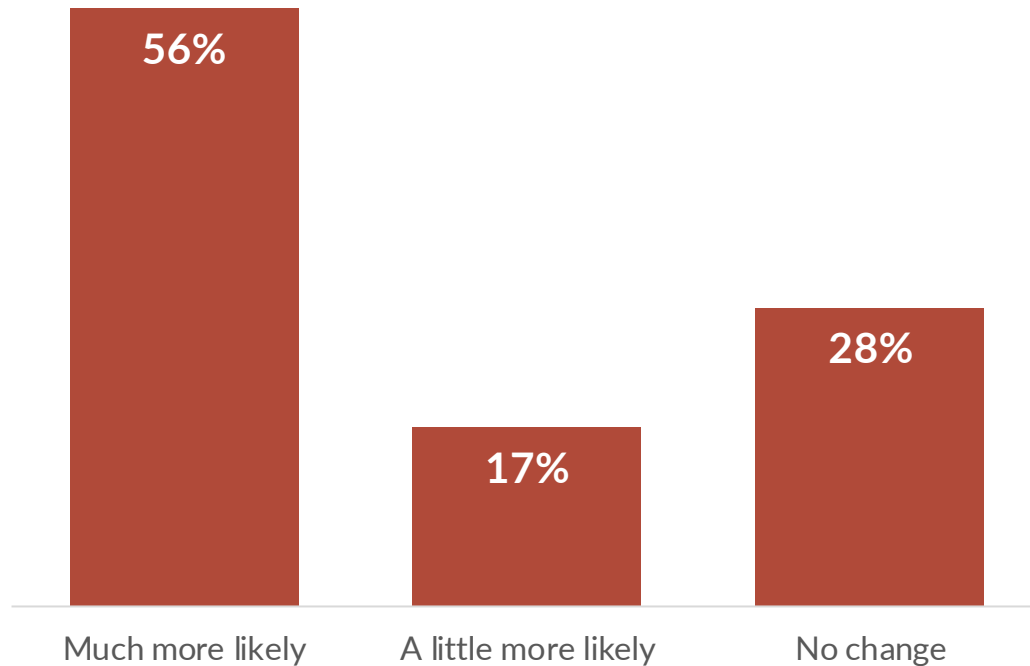
# Beowulf attracted audiences from across the district and more widely including Leeds and Manchester

Regional map of Beowulf audiences based on postcode data collected through audience survey (n=75)

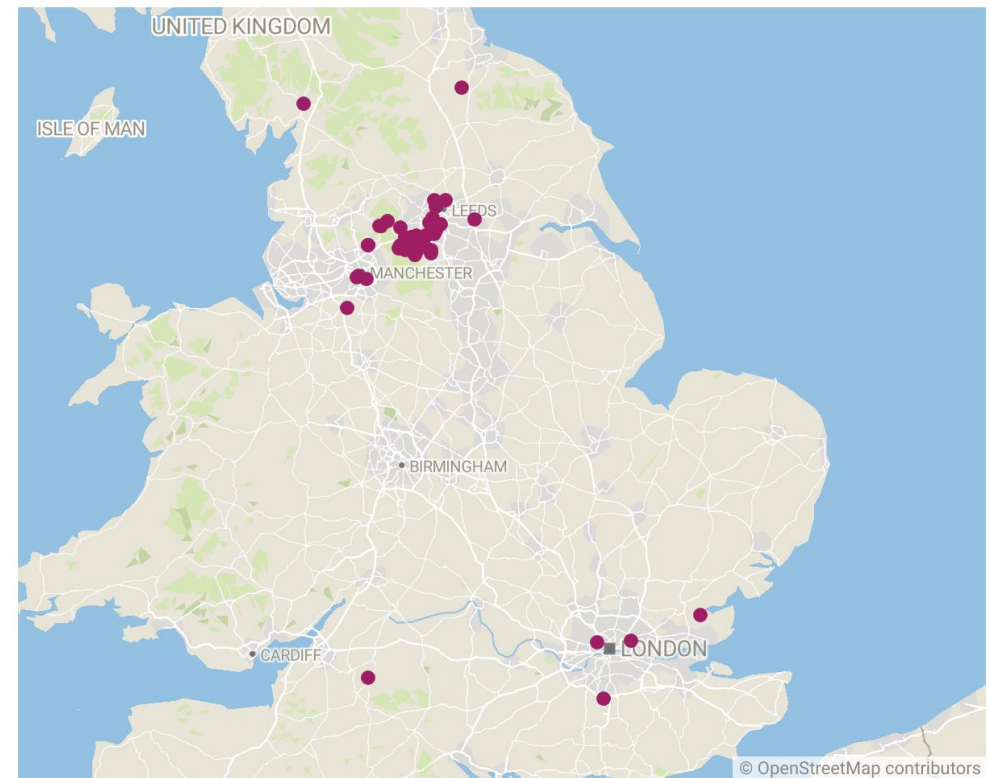


# 72% of visitors said that attending Beowulf had increased the likelihood of them returning to the area in future

Did Beowulf make you any more or less likely to return to Huddersfield or Kirklees in the future?  
(n=36)

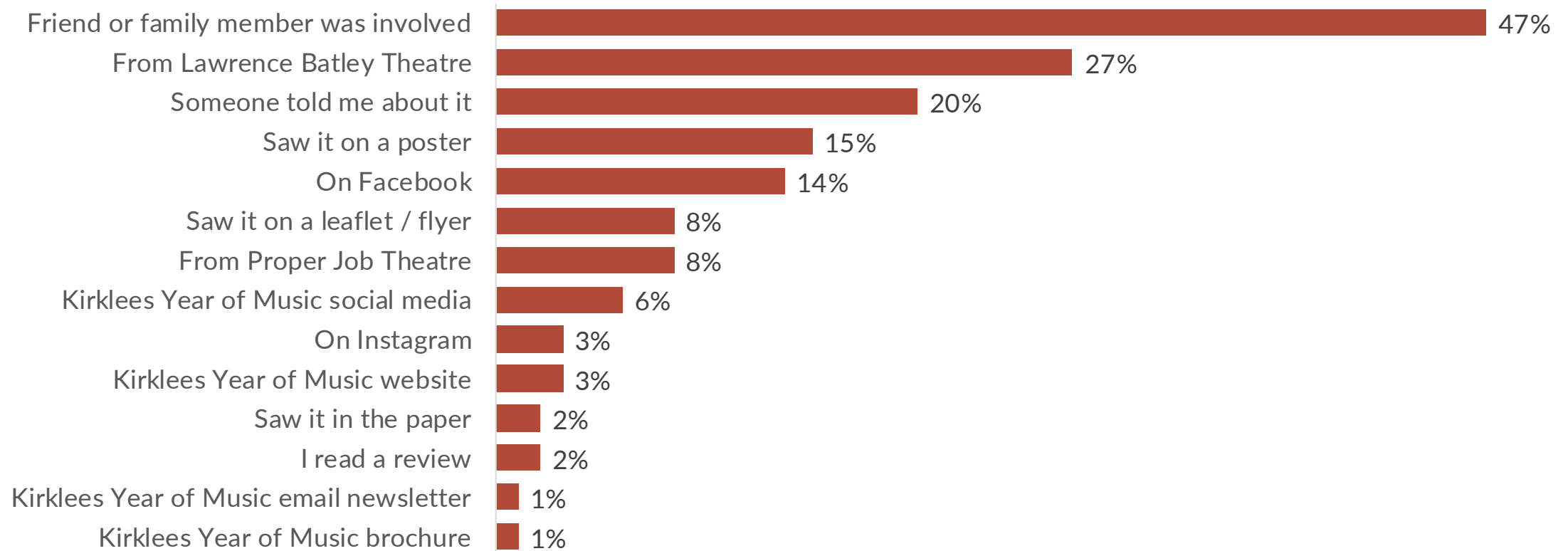


UK map of Beowulf audiences based on postcode data



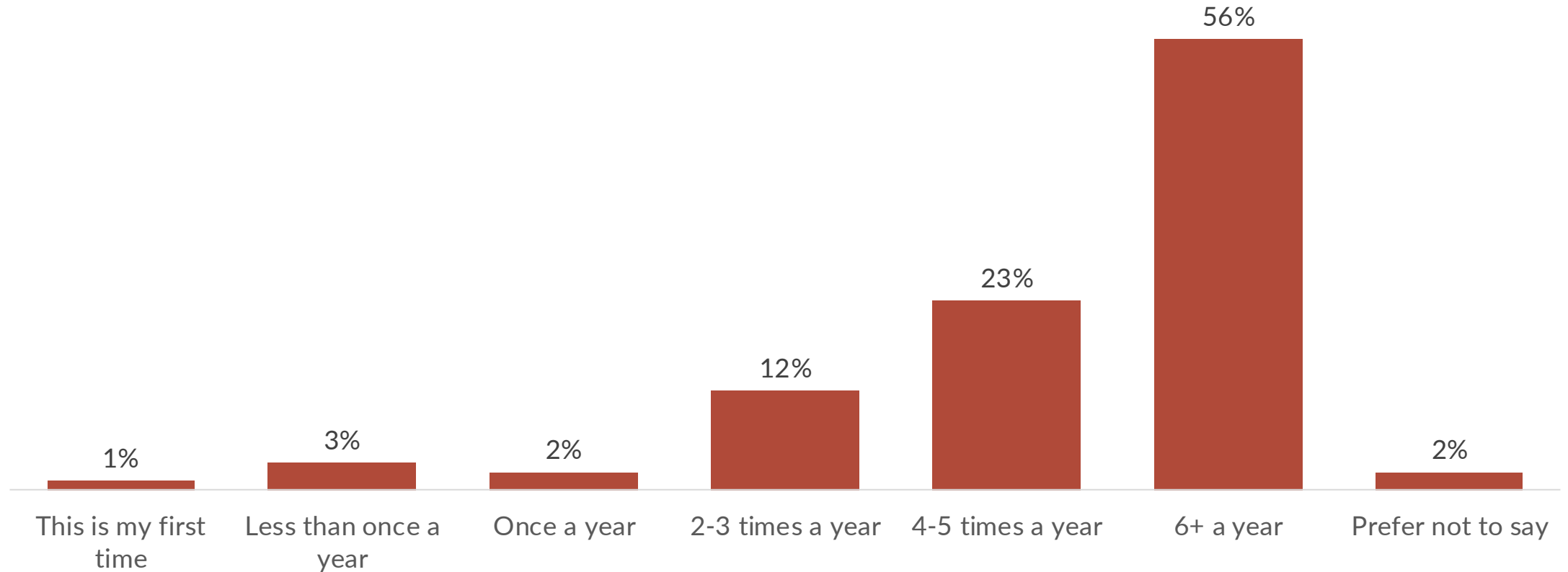
# Many respondents had links to the production, reflecting how community engagement can help build audiences

Q: How did you hear about Beowulf? (n=95)



# 91% of audience members said they engage with arts and culture at least twice a year

How often do you attend or participate in arts and culture experiences? (n=90)



# Average spend was £49.25 per person, predominantly on food & drink



Food & drink  
£27.41



Merchandise  
£1.07



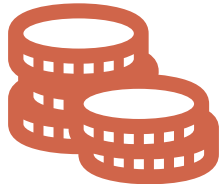
Parking £1.17



Train / bus tickets  
£5.83



Accommodation  
£11.73  
(8% stayed overnight)

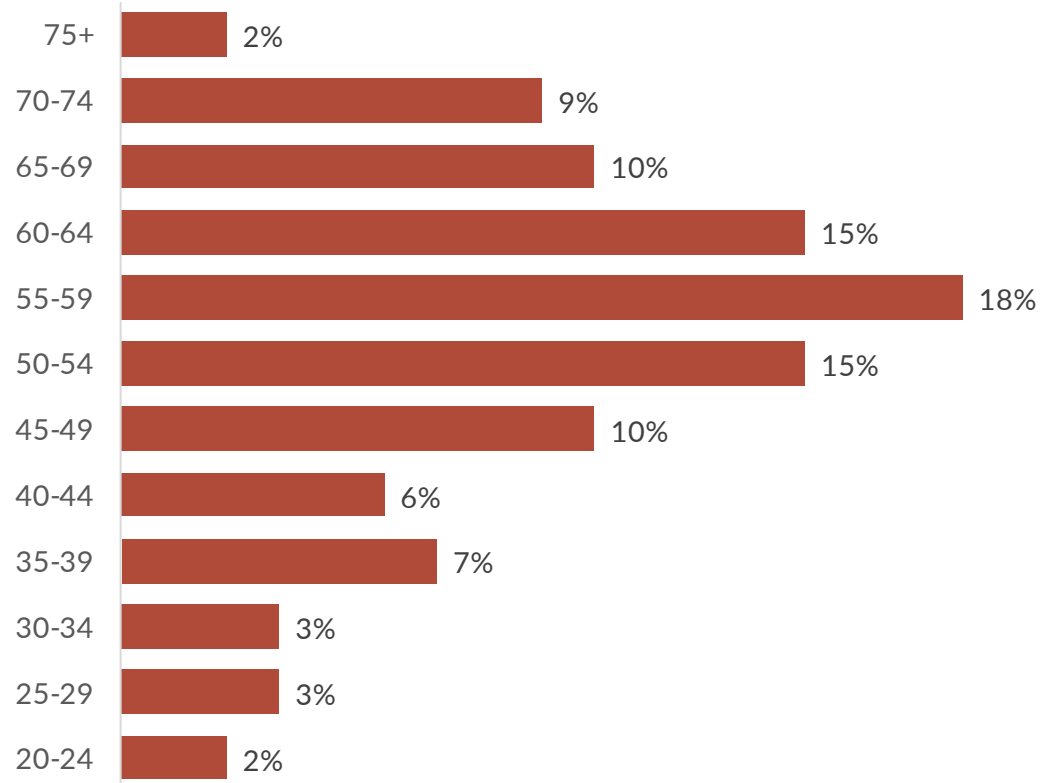


Anything else  
£2.06

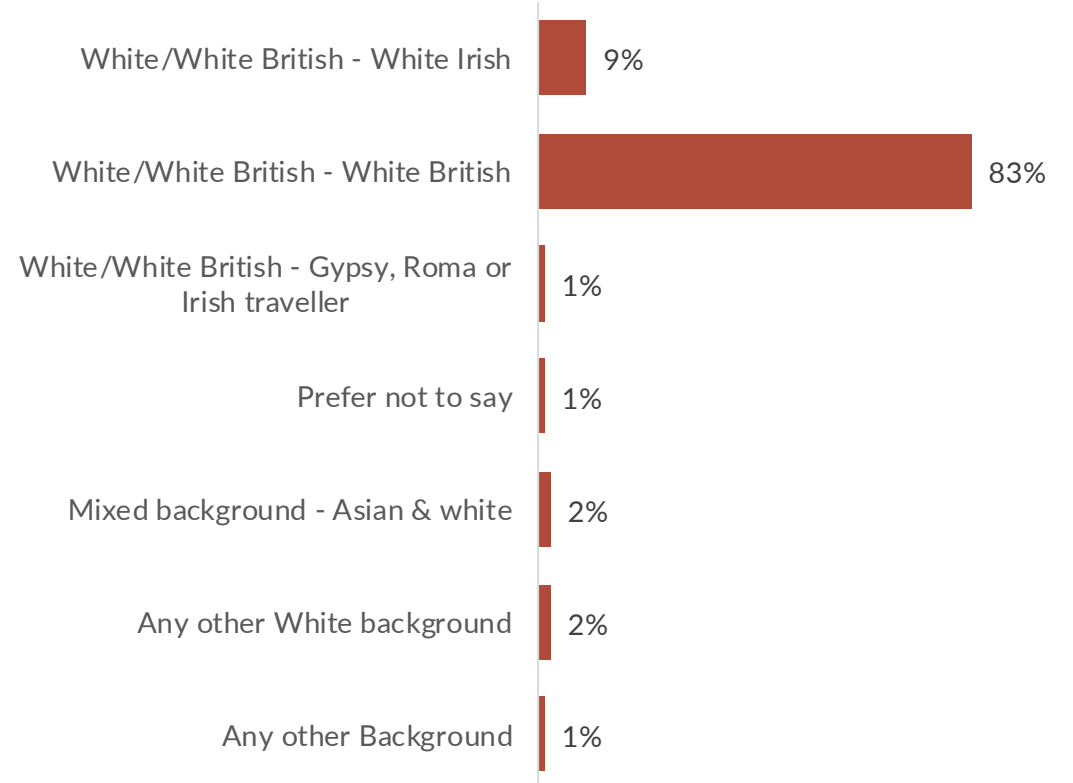
\*Based on data supplied by 75 audience members

# Age & ethnicity

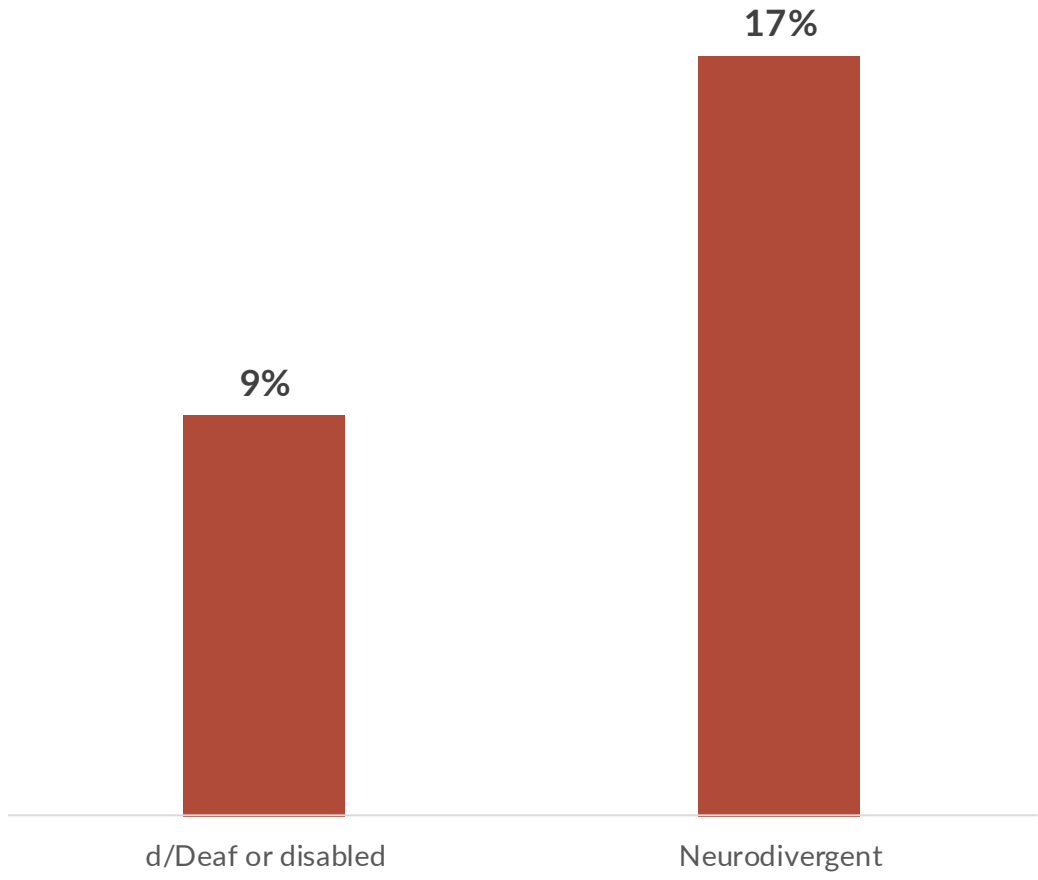
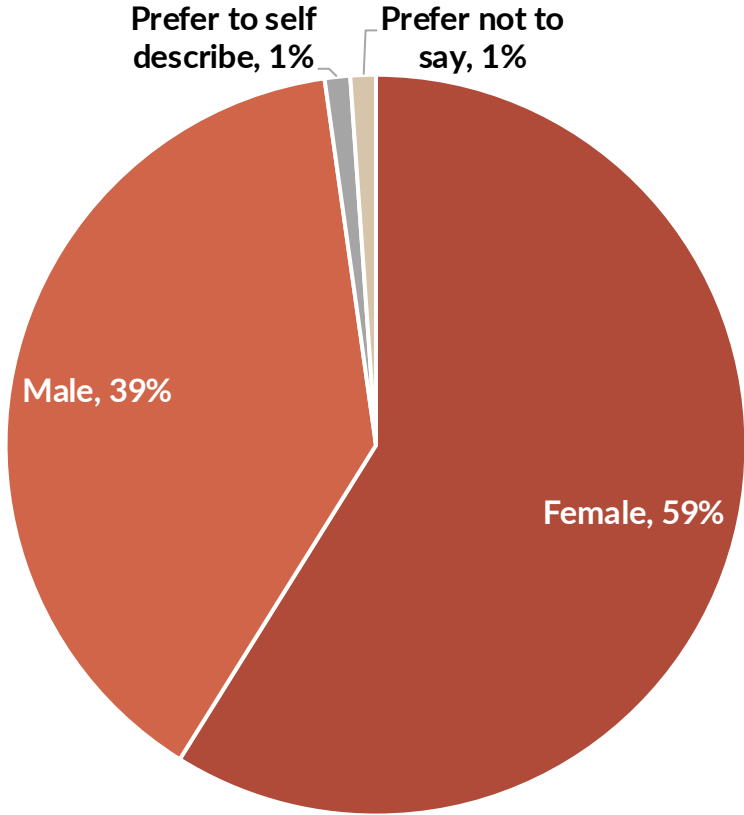
Age band (n=89)



Ethnicity (n=88)



# Gender & disability



# Supriya Nagarajan

**Supriya Nagarajan is a classically-trained South Asian vocalist and composer, and the CEO of Manasamitra, a Dewsbury-based artist-led organisation. She was an integral member of the creative team that devised and performed the musical elements of Beowulf.**

On how Beowulf drew on and celebrated the diversity of the Kirklees community:

*“The choir were entirely drawn from the community in Huddersfield, that represented the people of Yorkshire. For me, that was the most important thing because ultimately it was being showcased here, so we needed to reflect the mix of the local population. We also had local musicians, including a cellist who works in the cafe downstairs at Byram Arcade. So there we all were, singing, playing, doing Indian ragas, and I was singing in Old English language. You couldn't get a better mix.”*

On the value of working with community groups:

*“The impact is magnified if you're working with the community because you're building audiences for the future. It can also help to sell tickets because people are more likely to be promoting the production in the local area.”*

On how Beowulf was received by audiences and what that means for the future:

*“It was sold out, so there is clearly an appetite for work like that. That all points to the possibility of doing something in the next couple of years in that direction, which looks very hopeful.”*

On the suitability of the venue:

*“I think for next time, if this kind of a production happens, it is worth looking at a bigger venue because we didn't have enough capacity. It fitted the church beautifully because it was a play about Vikings so the church backdrop was perfect in that sense, but because there was a scaffolding it didn't have enough capacity. Maybe it's an outdoor production in the summer, I don't know, but that's probably the only thing that I would change to say, let's have more people actually watch the show. Apart from that, I think it came together really well.”*

On the professional opportunities that Beowulf has generated:

*“I'm talking to Jamie about doing a Bollywood Theatre production. It's a fun discussion at the minute and I don't know if Jamie is serious about anything like that, but the very idea that the people in the room could be talking about a next project is a measure of success. If we had not had such a positive experience then nobody would be talking about collaborating or doing the next production with Proper Job, but everybody is talking about it. It was such a nice experience.”*

On the importance of broadening access to arts and culture across Kirklees:

*“For the spirit of the community and all the changes happening in both Huddersfield and Dewsbury, I think it's worthwhile for Kirklees Council to think about making something happen as a legacy, even if that something is recreating Beowulf in Dewsbury. Because that's the other point, is that Kirklees have to sit up and realise that everything that happens in Huddersfield is missed in Dewsbury. If nothing happens then nobody will come and it's a vicious cycle; nobody comes because nothing happens.”*

# Duncan Chapman

Duncan Chapman is a freelance Composer, Sound Artist, Educator and Performer who works regularly with Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and Dewsbury-based Manasamitra. For Beowulf, Duncan provided creative and technical expertise, and devised various musical elements of the soundtrack.

On the unique, place-based sound effects that were used in Beowulf:

*"I did a big project a long time ago with a local rhubarb farm because rhubarb makes a noise as it grows, and we used some of those sounds in Beowulf. I'm very interested in what makes this place different from everywhere else and finding things that only happen in one place in the world. It's part of the identity. So Grendel, this evil monster, is partly the sound of Yorkshire rhubarb growing, which I really like because in a bizarre way it's celebrating a unique thing about the area."*

On what he most enjoyed about being involved in the production:

*"People are great, especially if you get the right ones. It's nice to be with people who are all going towards making something together, and having a lightness but seriousness at the same time. It was a real joy to be part of – it wasn't a room full of egos and stress."*

On how Beowulf generated interest and intrigue amongst audiences:

*"It was nice because the procession drew a lot of people in who didn't go to the performance. There was a kind of quiet, entertaining engagement with people in the street, it was a puzzling, dramatic spectacle for them, and I liked that."*

On how Beowulf's success and how it should be measured:

*"I think the mixture of it being sold out, but also having an impact locally on the creative soul of people who actually live in Huddersfield and Kirklees in a way that they feel actually this was something that belonged to them. Sometimes big things can arrive in a place and be quite expensive and do quite expensive things, and not involve people who live there. But actually this did involve people so it added to the cultural capital of music in Kirklees and Huddersfield in particular. That's probably more of the measure of success rather than column inches or the fact that people in London saw it in a newspaper."*

On how Proper Job managed the project:

*"I thought that the way they dealt with people was fantastic. The other thing that I really liked is that the people organising and directing it were very practically hands-on. I liked that feeling of all being part of the same thing. Making something really high quality, clear and well-constructed, and being able to do that whilst having a huge amount of empathy and understanding and support for others was brilliant. I always felt really supported."*

On establishing new professional relationships off the back of Beowulf:

*"That's a relationship [with Proper Job] that will continue I think. We all got on. It looks like there'll be future collaborations definitely, which is nice."*

On what he hopes will be the legacy of Beowulf in terms of empowering the community and raising creative aspirations:

*"I just think it's a responsibility, you've got to try and make it so that people feel, 'I could be part of that next time' or 'that's an idea I might run with creatively' or 'I could form a viking band'. I always think that it's nice if people think you can have an idea about something you might want to do and it actually happens. People are very understandably and justifiably cynical, particularly in places like Dewsbury, and they're right in a way because they've had a really bad deal. But if people could go, 'I could have an idea for something and I could make it happen' then that's quite empowering."*

# Mollie Wood

**Mollie Wood is an Engagement and Outreach Manager at Proper Job. For Beowulf she took time out from her role to perform as part of the ensemble cast.**

On the various elements that came together to make Beowulf such a success:

*“Something I really enjoy is having an event experience and feeling like it’s something you might not see in a typical theatre setting. With Beowulf what they did really well is to merge that event feel and that traditional theatre feel seamlessly together and the music was a massive part of that.”*

On the audience reaction to Beowulf (from people who don’t typically engage with the arts):

*“The reception of it was incredible to be honest. My partner is not a theatre person at all, he’s a chemist and very grounded in reality and facts and numbers and things like that. When I got involved with the project, he was like, ‘of course, I’ll come see it, no worries’ which was nice of him, and then he came out of the other side of it and he was like, ‘that is the best show I’ve ever seen in my entire life’. He absolutely loved it, which was incredible for me as someone who loves theatre, to see someone who wouldn’t typically come to something like that and really, really enjoy it and take so much away from it.”*

On how the venue was integral to the immersive nature of the production and its sense of place:

*“The transformation of that space was incredible. I’ve never actually been in St. Peter’s Church, I’ve lived in Huddersfield for seven years now and never set foot in that church, which is really gorgeous.”*

*“There was something special about the church allowing us to use this sacred space, like the community of Huddersfield were all banding together to make something magical happen.”*

On the new artforms and creative approaches that have been brought to her attention as a result of Beowulf:

*“Large-scale theatre and processions hasn’t really been on my radar, but since I’ve participated in this project, I’ve gone ‘hey, these are the things that I enjoy in theatre – an event, an experience, something different and non-traditional’. It’s opened my eyes to that side of the production.”*

*“The collaboration with the musicians of different cultures and heritages has opened my eyes in terms of what’s available out there in the world of music. I’m actually writing a piece currently, it’s a semi-musical drama, and Beowulf has just opened me up to those musical possibilities that I might not have been aware of before.”*

On how Beowulf is a demonstration of the strength of the creative sector in Kirklees, and how this has influenced her career aspirations:

*“Beowulf has shown that you have some real talent here, and real passion and drive for the creative industries. The light doesn’t often get shone on Huddersfield as we’re not a cultural epicentre like London, Manchester or Leeds, or any of the other big places that often get the funding and the ability to deliver something of this scale. So I think the fact that it’s happened here is incredibly important.”*

*“For me, as a relatively young creative working in Huddersfield, it’s really lit that fire under me. I don’t have to move to London or another of those so-called cultural epicentres to make the kind of work that I want to make. So for that reason I think it’s been incredibly beneficial.”*

# Emily Brown

**Emily Brown was an Assistant Producer on Beowulf and was responsible for collecting environmental impact data. She also runs Make, DO, a physical theatre ensemble based in Kirklees.**

On embedding sustainability within the production:

*"We were documenting sustainability... it's about things like trying to make sure that the materials have either had a previous life or that they can be reused and recycled, trying to make sure that people are traveling sustainably where they can, or asking the actors to bring their own cups, even looking at how many kilowatts we're using with the lights."*

On the quality and professionalism of the production team:

*"I think everybody that worked on it was really professional and it was a really nicely curated team. We had some people who were much more experienced and some people who were much less experienced."*

On the importance of Beowulf happening in Kirklees:

*"A project like this lets people who live here know that there is stuff going on in town, and there are cultural events, music events, theatre events that are happening in Huddersfield and you don't always have to go further afield to find something so exciting and joyous and musical. I think that's really cool."*

*"We don't often get really large-scale productions in Huddersfield. I think often we feel like you have to go to Leeds or Manchester or Sheffield to experience something of that scale and magnitude. The coming-together of that many creative people working on a project such as this would normally only happen in a bigger city, so I think it's a really big deal for Kirklees to have done this because it demonstrates that we have our own cultural centre...I think that's really special and it makes me feel quite proud to be in Huddersfield."*

On the wider impact on the creative sector:

*"It's given local artists and musicians a platform and perhaps brought a lot of individual artists or individual companies to the forefront whereas they might not have been so showcased before."*

On the personal and professional benefits she experienced as a direct result of being involved in Beowulf:

*"When we got to dress rehearsal day, I was thinking, Am I still cut out for this? Because I'd not done it for three years and I'm thinking, 'What if I've forgotten how to act?'" I hadn't realized that it had affected my confidence in that way. So being given the opportunity to do something like this was huge for me personally, because it helps me feel like I can still do it. Also just working with that lovely team of people was super confidence-boosting for me."*

*"I'm now thinking I'll apply for other acting work off the back of this which is not necessarily something that I would have even done before. It's opened some doors for me in terms of thinking, 'yeah I could do that now.'" I feel in a better place to apply for other acting and creative freelance work."*

*"It's strengthened our connection with Proper Job. We were already using their rehearsal space but now it feels like we could probably go to them for other help as well. I'll probably ask them at some point for a bit more biomechanics training and we might directly get back in touch with the puppeteer who did the workshops with us."*

*"My company's based in Huddersfield and it's given me confidence that I can have a theatre company based in Huddersfield as opposed to having to take it to Manchester or Leeds in order to make it successful. It makes me think, 'yeah, I can make that successful here - we have a thriving theatre and music scene.'"*

# Heather Pollard

**Heather Pollard was part of the community choir which performed as part of the Beowulf production.**

On her highlights of the project:

*“The most exciting part was watching the cast members and the choir coming together for the first time because we had rehearsed separately for quite a long time. The moment that we both came together in the church was absolutely amazing.”*

*“It was an experience that I'll never forget where I enjoyed every minute of it.”*

On what was new and exciting about being involved:

*“I've never been in a choir of this magnitude. I've been in high school choirs and we did Christmas concerts in a church every year. But I haven't been in a choir as part of a theatre production.”*

On the rehearsal process and how the team were able to accommodate her needs (Heather has a learning disability):

*“My experience with the rehearsal process was really good. Everyone was accommodating to my needs and helped me to learn the songs. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to learn the songs in time, but I managed to learn them with their help and support.”*

On how Beowulf has helped her to make new friends and seek out further creative opportunities:

*“It's nice to have those friendships even though Beowulf has finished.”*

*“I now know that if I want to get back into being creative, that there's organisations out there that provide that I can approach to get that support.”*

On some of her friends and family missing out on seeing the production:

*“I wasn't able to get as many of my family involved to see the production because all the tickets were sold out. They'd gone really quickly and there was a limit of 100 tickets per night, which I thought was a bit on the low side especially for a big production like this with many community cast members involved.”*

# Moira Wade

**Moira Wade works at Proper Job but her involvement in Beowulf was as part of the community choir.**

On how the choir was challenged to learn and perform the music for Beowulf:

*"I'm used to singing but the material was really challenging. Some of it was quite complicated and I think people got quite dependent on scores and with the type of community singing that we do we've never really used scores very much, we just learned by ear."*

*"10 weeks sounds like a long time to learn the songs, but it's only 10 Monday evenings and each session was an hour and a half. So really that's only 15 hours to learn four quite complicated pieces. So it was a challenge."*

On the benefits experienced by the choir members in terms of social capital and pride:

*"I felt really proud for being involved with it, and I think other people really embraced it and felt fortunate to be part of something so amazing."*

*"We started as this really disparate group of people who didn't really know each other, and we became a really tight, supportive group of people all with this common aim of providing this great soundtrack for this amazing performance."*

On how the unique experience gave choir members confidence and an appetite for further opportunities of this nature:

*"I've never done anything like it. I've sung, I've performed with choirs and I've performed as a quartet, but I've never done anything like that."*

*"I think it gave a lot of people a lot of confidence to try new things. I didn't speak to everybody about it, but I'd be surprised if people weren't looking for more opportunities to do more things like that."*

On breaking down barriers to music participation and how the Beowulf community choir provided a positive example of this:

*"I think it is key that people know that they don't have to have done it before and you don't have to read music. I wouldn't say I read music and I still managed fairly well, even though bits were complicated. When you say 'choir', people think of the Huddersfield Choral Society but it's much more accessible than that. I think that's what people need to be able to know. So the way we did the open call, like 'come and have a go', that was really good."*

On what she hopes to be the legacy of Beowulf:

*"I'd love for us to be able to do something more regularly. Not necessarily every year but maybe every other year, to do something that's Kirklees-focused, on such a scale to such a high standard. To anybody that saw it, it showed what's possible and what Huddersfield and Kirklees is capable of."*