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Media release  
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### **Unheard Voices project transforms literacy education at HMP Deerbolt through art.**

An innovative project titled ‘Unheard Voices’, was introduced to literacy lessons at HMP Deerbolt in County Durham, inspired by The Bowes Museum’s highly acclaimed *Kith and Kinship: Norman Cornish and L. S. Lowry* exhibition.

Deerbolt is a prison and young offender institution, for men aged 18 and over. The initiative aimed to integrate art into literacy lessons to inspire the learners and enhance their functional skills, using creativity as a tool to overcome barriers and challenges they have faced within traditional educational settings.

The project was delivered through workshops to over 15 male learners, aged 18 – 25. Working with The Bowes Museum and a creative facilitator, Jonah York, learners and tutors explored the exhibition’s thematic, community, place, kith and kin.

As the learners developed their confidence, they discussed the artwork from the exhibition they resonated with, sketched, and reflected through letters to themselves, their families and support networks. The learner’s responses brought to life the relevance of Norman Cornish and L. S. Lowry’s artwork today, enabling the museum to gather unique perspectives and insights into navigating key themes explored in the exhibition, namely community, brotherhood and chosen family.

The output of the project culminated in co-produced soundscape and zine with new and varied interpretations of the works, representing the voices of the region’s community through the learner’s own sense of place, hope and aspiration. The front cover of the zine was produced using AI technology to reflect the style of Cornish and Lowry, and the design of its content incorporates descriptions, reflections, quotes and sketches from the learners and images of the artwork that appealed to them, capturing what they described as their “unheard voices”, “the voices that people chose not to hear”.

Unheard Voices is the first project in a co-production programme, set to continue until 2027, made possible by the generous support of The John Horseman Trust. Using The Bowes Museum’s collection and upcoming exhibitions as a way of embedding literacy into artistic exploration, learners have been empowered to express themselves while gaining crucial educational and life skills.

The programme is supported by Novus, a not-for-profit social enterprise that delivers education, training and employment to adults and young people in UK prisons, and HMP Deerbolt. Together, staff members at HMP Deerbolt and Sarah Hartley, Novus National Lead for Creative Strategies have extensive years of experience in education and the prison system, and their expertise ensured the programme is tailored to meet the complex needs of learners.

Sarah Hartley, NOVUS National Lead for Creative Enrichment commented,

“At Novus we are committed to providing creative enrichment opportunities that go beyond traditional educational provision, aligning with Ofsted’s aim to promote inclusivity and meet the needs of all learners. Projects like the one with The Bowes Museum provide an opportunity for foster social cohesion, encourage reflection on societal diversity, and act as a bridge between

communities. By exposing learners to different cultures, these projects enhance understanding, tolerance and engagement in a safe, supportive environment, offering a positive outlet for expression and learning."

Mark Shovlin, Contract Lot with responsibility for HMP Deerbolt added,

"Creative enrichment projects like this one with The Bowes Museum offer our learners a real development opportunity. Working with Jonah allowed them to do something different, spend time creating and take pride in the work and themselves. Many of them will have never done anything like this before and it makes them realise how much they can achieve, which is a massive step in their rehabilitative journey."

The Unheard Voices soundscape and zine can be accessed via The Bowes Museum's website [thebowesmuseum.org.uk/learn/unheard-voices](http://thebowesmuseum.org.uk/learn/unheard-voices) and visitors can pick up a physical copy to take home with them during their next visit.

-ENDS-

#### **Note to editors and picture desks:**

Download a high-resolution image of a visitor reading the Unheard Voices' Kith & Kinship [zine](#).

#### **About Novus**

[Novus](#) delivers education, training, employment, and support services for adults and young people in custody in England and Wales.

For over 30 years, we have been helping men, women, and children of all ages and abilities, in custodial and community settings, take new directions by providing them with the learning, skills, and opportunities needed to build positive futures for themselves, their families, and our communities. We work together with our public, community, and employer partners towards shared aims, helping individuals turn their lives around.

We are part of LTE Group, a UK social enterprise dedicated to improving lives and economic success through learning and skills. The Group comprises five specialist organisations – The Manchester College, UCEN Manchester, Novus, MOL and Total People – all with a shared mission and values. Find out more at: [novus.ac.uk](http://novus.ac.uk)

#### **About The Bowes Museum**

The Bowes Museum is a charity managing a Grade 1 listed accredited Museum and Grade 2 listed parkland in Barnard Castle. Founded by Joséphine & John Bowes 150+ years ago, this purpose-built Museum brings together an extraordinary, Designated collection of European fine and decorative art as a cultural resource for the people of Northern England, where today we celebrate artists, designers and makers.

The Bowes Museum receives funding from Durham County Council and, as a National Portfolio Organisation, receives support from Arts Council England. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)

The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions, whose commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service. [discoverdurham.co.uk](http://discoverdurham.co.uk)

Admission to The Bowes Museum is £16.00 for local members (residents of County Durham and Darlington), £18.00 for members (residents elsewhere), £19.00 for a day ticket, £20.90 for a day ticket including gift aid. Under 18s, full time students and carers are free.

As a registered charity (number 1079639) The Bowes Museum needs to generate more than half of its income each year to care for the historic collection, buildings and parkland. Your donations are vital to that work. Visit [thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/](http://thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/) for more information.



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