

INTERIM REPORT: DSLR

(DEVELOP SKILLS, LEARN AND REFLECT)

PHASE 2 (SEPTEMBER 2025 - JUNE 2026)



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Background & Context

About In Focus

Since 2015, In Focus Education and Development has worked to provide much-needed personal development, creative education and transferable skills training across Southampton and Hampshire. With a shared passion and working knowledge of photography and the visual arts alongside lived experience and a deep empathy for marginalised groups, In Focus encourages, teaches and empowers young people and communities to thrive.

With a focus on the development of pro-social identities and increased mental wellbeing, In Focus engage primarily with young people who are referred by local services and community partners, as well as those who have chosen to self-refer, finding sessions through promotion on social media and printed materials distributed in the city/surrounding areas.

OUR VALUES

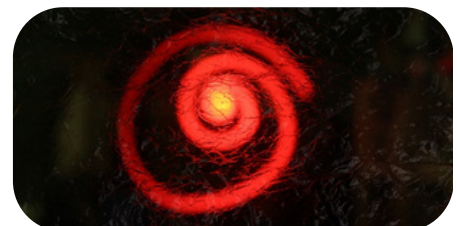
CREATIVE LEARNING & GROWTH

To provide high-quality creative education that supports learning and development of those we work with, from individuals to communities.



INCLUSIVITY

To be inclusive, fair and equitable in everything we do. Everyone is welcome, regardless of age, circumstance or ability.



EMPOWERMENT

To use our passion for photography and visual art forms to empower people to express themselves, communicate and connect with others in new ways.



About DSLR 16-25

Studies have shown that investment in creative arts youth work delivers significant benefits to participants (including improved mental health and employment prospects), as well as to wider society (a decrease in crime and anti-social behaviour, improved public health outcomes and greater participation in communities, education and employment).

Since 2023, In Focus' Develop Skills, Learn & Reflect programme (DSLR) has engaged with young people aged 16-25 through photography and visual arts-based learning, to encourage the development of pro-social identities and improved mental wellbeing. Following on from the success of DSLR, In Focus applied for and were granted further support from Arts Council England. This has enabled a 19-month extension of the DSLR programme that builds on the groundwork and progress made in those initial two years (2023-2025).

In this second phase (running from September 2025-March 2027), new approaches in both outreach and delivery have taken place (detailed below) that have served to strengthen the impact of the programme as it continues to positively impact the lives of young people.

(Kristianne Drake, CEO)

“We know from experience that creative learning and empowerment can really help young people with improved confidence, skill-building and the development of pro-social behaviours. It can help them to live happier, healthier and more socially-connected lives.”



The story continues...

Delivering weekly sessions for young people in Southampton

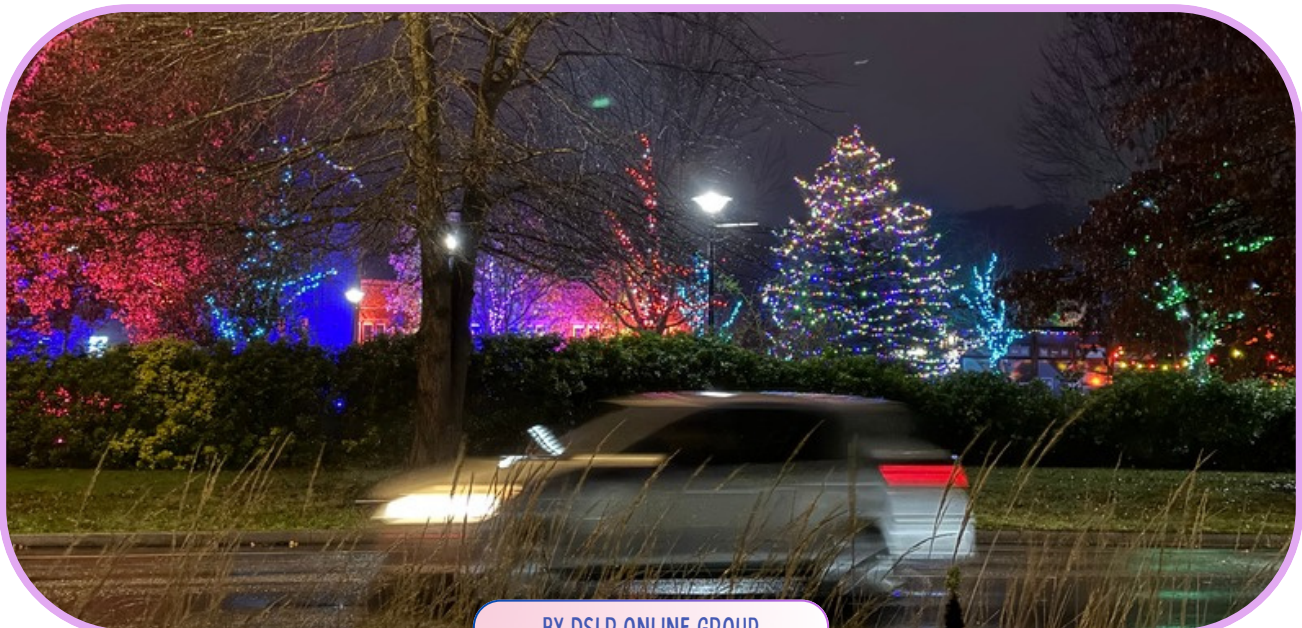
Building on the strong foundations of our two-year Develop Skills, Learn and Reflect programme, we began delivery of Phase 2 in September 2025, with a series of workshops for young people that looked at different elements of photography while building transferable skills around teamwork and communication.

Participants attend sessions via referrals from service partners in the local community (including Breakout Youth and No Limits), or as a result of self-referring after seeing printed marketing materials and online advocacy.

Extending outreach in Southampton and beyond

Alongside continuing sessions in Southampton, In Focus has also widened its scope for Phase 2 of DSLR, through increased outreach on the Isle of Wight, and in launching a new group in Southampton for asylum-seeking/displaced young people.

Whilst maintaining safe and inclusive in-person spaces for attendees, we also began delivery in 2025/6 of some online sessions (in partnership with Breakout Youth), as a way to reach young people across Hampshire who are unable to attend in-person sessions, be it due to physical or mental health barriers, or living in more remote parts of the county with limited access to transport.



BY DSLR ONLINE GROUP

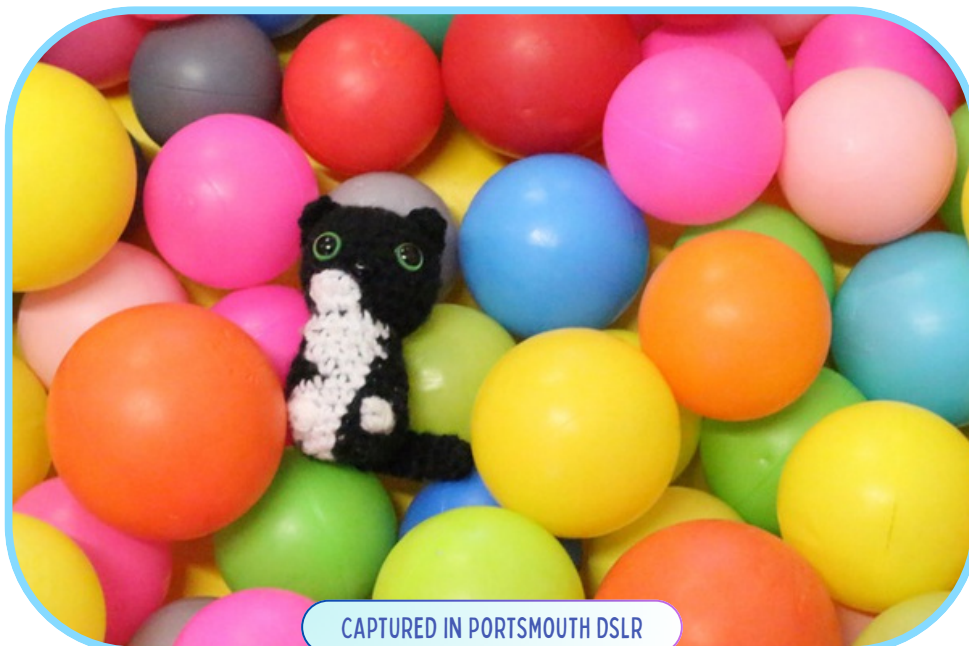
A further recent addition to DSLR's reach has come in the form of in-person delivery in Portsmouth, in partnership with Portsmouth City Council's LGBTQIA+ group. These sessions have been running since March 2026 and while still in its infancy, the team report things are going well.

"Being more involved in Portsmouth is fantastic," says Faye Phillips, Operations Manager and one of the team responsible for delivery there. "The LGBTQIA+ group are really engaged and open to trying new ideas. We've recently submitted a piece of work they made as a group to an open call from Aspex Gallery, reflecting on the future of Portsmouth. It would be amazing to have their work exhibited there."

As a result of these new partnerships in Portsmouth, In Focus has also joined the Portsmouth Youth Alliance. "Being a part of the Alliance is a great way to hear more about the other youth services in the city and make those new connections," says Faye. "It's inspiring to see the way another city is operating and learn how In Focus can add to that and further the opportunities for young people across Portsmouth."

Plans are also underway to have a small exhibition of the young people's work displayed at S.A.L.T Festival (Suicide Awareness Let's Talk) in September.

These newer aspects of the charity's outreach represent real growth for In Focus, both geographically and demographically, as the team continue to connect with new communities in the broader area.



CAPTURED IN PORTSMOUTH DSLR

Youth Leadership Pathways and Progression Group

With a commitment to embedding youth voice at the heart of our work, we continue to facilitate our Youth Leadership Pathways and Progression group. Consisting of Young Trustees and a group of self-selected young people from across DSLR and other programmes, meetings are led by a young trustee, with support from our staff where required.

Established in late 2024, the group now meets quarterly to ensure that youth needs and aspirations directly influence and impact the work of In Focus. “It supports the young people we work with to have authentic ownership of In Focus’ organisational delivery, processes and strategy,” explains Kristianne Drake, In Focus’ Chief Executive.

The group also provides young people with the chance to learn from creative sector professionals, via visiting speakers, workshops and work experience (both in paid and voluntary capacities).

“Wherever the organisation feels significant change needs to be made, our Youth Leadership group is the first port of call for feedback directly from young people themselves.”

(Kristianne Drake, CEO)



Engaging young people through creative learning

Across Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and online, In Focus runs creative learning sessions for a range of young people. This takes the form of open sessions for anyone within the age bracket of 16-25, as well as specific LGBTQIA+ groups, and a closed group for displaced young people living in Southampton after fleeing their home countries due to war, poverty or persecution.

Due to the nature of this latter group, we keep these sessions 'closed', meaning only those referred by community partners are able to attend. This is to ensure enhanced protection for participants, who have already experienced so much in their young lives and need a guaranteed safe space in which to learn, create and develop, free of judgment.



CAPTURED BY DISPLACED YOUNG PEOPLE SEEKING SANCTUARY

This connection came about as a result of team member, Holli Kalina's MA Photography project, and is now an established part of In Focus' outreach in the community. "It began with us supporting Holli's studies through access to equipment and space, and has developed into something we now embed directly into our work, that she delivers for us," explains Kristianne.

Participants have found safety and community in attending these sessions, and their feedback reflects this:

(DSLRL Participants)

"The workshops give me a sense of calm, purpose and community during a very challenging time."

"I attend every week. These arts and photography sessions have been profoundly therapeutic for me. They offer a meaningful escape from the stress and anxiety I experience while adjusting to new circumstances as a refugee."

Learning new transferable skills through visual arts ...



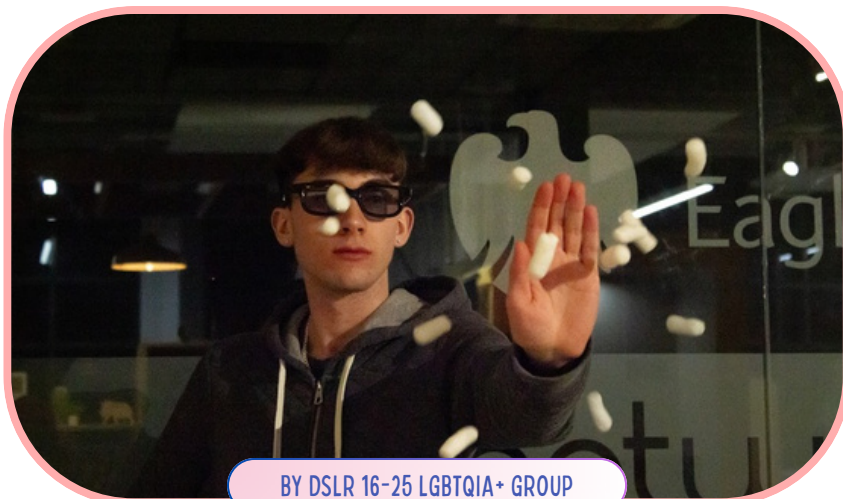
BY DSLR 16-25 OPEN GROUP (THURS)

In the first half of Phase 2, young people were taught a range of lens-based and visual arts techniques, ranging from portraiture, shadow, light play and landscape triptychs, before moving on to work with different types of physical media that could be used to tell stories. Here the groups were introduced to the concept of visual storytelling through zines and postcards, before spending a couple of sessions crafting physical board games using or inspired by photography.

(DSLR Participants)

"I've been getting to know the camera and how it works. Now I can fairly say I have ideas about photo shots and operating the device."

"I've learnt a lot about how aperture, shutter and ISO work... It helped me to take amazing pictures that can be sold and I can get paid for it."



BY DSLR 16-25 LGBTQIA+ GROUP



BY DSLR 16-25 ISLE OF WIGHT
SHANKLIN GROUP

A focus in these months was on learning new skills in photography and other mediums, picking up transferable skills in the process (including in group work, communication and collaboration, time management and problem solving). In November, participants worked together to make group images, using Hans Holbein's painting 'The Ambassadors' as inspiration. Negotiation skills were key to the work, and as a group, they agreed on roles to ensure everyone was included and had a part to play in creating the final pieces.

Changing approaches to session planning and delivery

As a result of planned and ongoing expansion for In Focus in terms of the amount of sessions being delivered in Phase 2, it was decided that adopting a more uniform approach across all groups would be beneficial. “It’s gradually become more formally pre-planned,” explains Dev Place, Communications and Marketing Manager, who is also now responsible for delivering some of the sessions with young people. “While we always checked in with each other before and after leading our own sessions, we now work in unison on the same scheme of work across groups.”

Since In Focus implemented this change, Dev and other members of the delivery team have reported it to be helpful, both for the staff and the young people engaging in the sessions. While still remaining flexible to the needs of attendees, the team have found that in standardising session plans, it has become easier to identify what works well and what doesn’t. “We don’t expect people to be able to come every week; it’s still open and flexible. But where groups can differ quite a lot in terms of dynamics or interests, it has meant we can all report back to each other and better understand why certain activities work best, in a more measurable way.”

“I can forget that I’m a young person sometimes. When I come here, I remember I’m not a proper adult. And that’s a good thing.”

(DSLR Participant)



“It gives them a clearer view that they are playing an important role in all this. They understand that they’re invited here as artists.”

(Dev Place, In Focus)

“What it’s shown us too is that through evaluating our delivery more coherently, the needs of the groups aren’t actually too different from each other, regardless of where they’re meeting us from,” says Dev. With a scheme of work that is matched week for week across all groups, it has meant the team are able to focus more deeply on how they approach the young people, and how best to communicate with them to meet their needs.

“Collaboration can only be achieved when people feel equal and included, and to do this they need to feel they have something to bring to the table. This is what we want our projects to give to young people.”

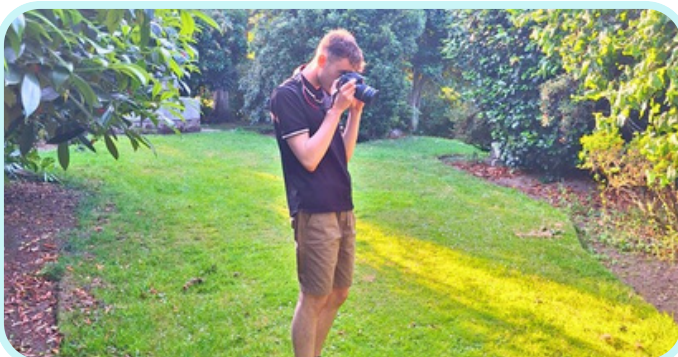
Not only this, but it means that attendees are able to have advance warning of what will be taking place in each session. “They know better now what they’re walking into, what they’re signing up for each week. And we can measure how they feel about that in real time, across groups. By the end of their visit, you can see more clearly whether that session has worked for them or not.”

(In Focus)



BY DSLR 16-25 OPEN GROUP (THURS)

Having clear outcomes at the end of a piece of learning is proving beneficial to the young people too. “We have had a lot of feedback from attendees that they really enjoy the fact we’ve been doing ongoing work with an end goal they can clearly see. We can say to them, ‘You are going to be in this exhibition.’ And they know then that if they don’t do the work, there won’t be any content for that exhibition,” says Dev. “It gives them a clearer view that they are playing an important role in all this. They understand that they’re invited here as artists.” This mentality serves the young people well, providing them with context for their collaboration and nurturing community, of enabling them as individuals working together towards a shared goal.



“Every single group has fed back to us that they really enjoy being able to see that reward, the payoff of working towards something with their project.”

(Dev Place, In Focus)

Embarking on longer-term projects with the groups

From January 2026, the groups began work on the first longer-term project to be programmed as part of DSLR. This change was a direct result of feedback from the participants, who requested the chance to do something they could build on each week, taking longer to see their ideas through to completion, and allowing them to see how several smaller ideas might feed into a bigger piece of work.

It is central to In Focus that the young people attending the sessions feel listened to and included in shaping workshops themselves. This is important, not only to keep them interested, but to afford them a space where they are considered as artist peers, not just students, where they are able to self-direct learning in ways that work best for them.

Operations Manager and session delivery team member, Faye Phillips, discusses the positive feedback around this. “They’ve really enjoyed having this longer-arching project, something to get their teeth into,” she says. “And what I’ve also noticed is the fact that they’re more likely to come to multiple sessions a week now too. They’re more comfortable dipping into other groups as they know they can turn up and continue with their project.”



BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 OPEN GROUP

“I like having a big project to work on, and having everything laid out ahead of time so I know what is happening.”

(DSLRL Participant)

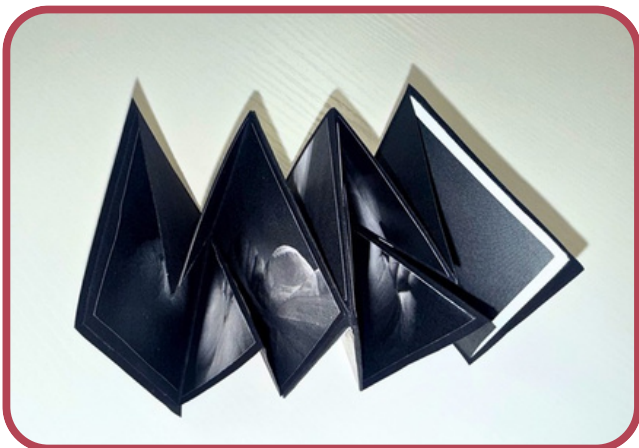
This longer-term project takes the form of zine-making, using Christopher Booker's 7 Basic Plots as inspiration, with sessions shaped around narrative themes, complemented by different photographic and visual arts techniques:

- Voyage and Return (with a focus on aperture)
- Rags to Riches (with a focus on black and white vs colour photography)
- The Quest (with a focus on shutter speed)
- Overcoming the Monster (with a focus on creating sets and using lighting)
- Rebirth (with a focus on either birds and worms-eye perspectives or 'a picture in a picture' concepts)
- Tragedy (with a focus on shadows and reflections)
- Comedy (with a focus on light painting)

Participants worked over a number of weeks to create zines based on the different plot themes, with work being exhibited across a number of months in a pop-up zine library at God's House Tower.

(DSLR Participant)

"I like the zine library at God's House Tower because we get to exhibit our work. This is one of the things that makes this group stand out."



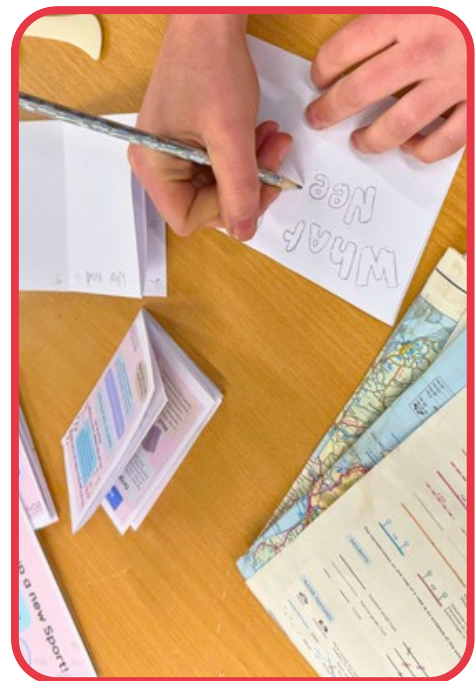
While much of the feedback is provided anecdotally during the sessions themselves, In Focus is keen to gather data and measure impact through other means too. One of the key elements of gaining this insight from young participants is through anonymous feedback forms, which provide an opportunity at various stages of the project for reflection and input. This can then help to shape future sessions and keeps attendees engaged. The anonymous nature of the feedback is designed so they feel able to voice whatever they would like to, and this can also be a helpful tool for bringing things to the team's attention that a young person may prefer not to say aloud in a group of their peers.

When asked what they felt had worked well for them as part of the longer-term 7 Story Plots project, responses were varied, though often referencing common themes, such as enjoying the slower pace of the work. Some reported that they liked the amount of different examples of zines they were shown how to make, others that they were given more time to work towards the exhibition phase of the project.

Further feedback from participants mentioned some would like even longer between starting work on different topics. “Maybe two weeks per theme to allow more time,” suggested one person. “More time to make zines!” said another. “I would like more planning time and sharing sessions,” wrote a third.

“I like that we were given enough time before the first set of zines went in the zine library.”

(DSLRL Participant)



Interestingly, the idea of being given tasks or ‘homework’ to do in between the weekly sessions was something mentioned by several members of the group. This demonstrates genuine interest and a hunger to keep making and creating in their own time, which is particularly interesting given that many attendees struggled with certain expectations of traditional schooling. “Sometimes it would be useful to have homework to pick up things on how the camera works,” wrote one young person in their feedback. “Maybe more time to practice with photo-taking, printing and camera operating would make the project even more enjoyable and impactful,” said another.

“Most of it worked really well! At times I struggled with the sense of deadline but this was eased when we were told there were holding weeks and additional catch-up sessions before the exhibition changeovers.”

“I like that it’s a project that spans multiple weeks which allows me to put more effort into a piece of work.”

(DSLR Participants)

Others said they would like to have more advance information around what would follow in the coming weeks; “getting the briefs prior or showing the photo of the briefs” was mentioned as a request by some. This type of feedback is valuable to the In Focus team as they are able to act reflexively. Session plans spanning the duration of a project are now printed out and added to a pinboard in the creative space so that young people are able to refer back to them whenever they like, and know which sessions are coming up too.

Another example of In Focus responding to participant feedback and the needs of the young people they serve comes from changing the Southampton Wednesday group to a later start time, to better accommodate a wider range of young people with differing commitments. The team reports this has worked well in terms of seeing a boost in attendance numbers.

“I liked the arts and crafts element of zines and how we were challenged to incorporate our photos. I would enjoy another mixed project like this.”

“I like making zines from our photos. It makes me feel more purposeful and accomplished.”

(DSLR Participant)

“Having a long-term focus and catch up sessions really help because I work slowly and starting new projects very often is difficult.”

“I really liked having a continuous project to work on with a public facing outcome. I enjoyed having multiple sessions to work on a prompt, and to have more time to develop ideas.”



“It was all good! Though I am envious of the ‘And Everything In-Between’ exhibition newspaper [part of a previous DSLR project] - I’d like to be featured in something people can take home too!”

(DSLR Participant)

Confidence levels amongst participants have grown since they first began attending the sessions. Joining a new group can be a daunting prospect for many, as Dev explains. “One young person who started coming to my sessions initially wanted a trusted adult to stay with them the whole time. They didn’t really talk to me or acknowledge others in the group - they were really, really shy.” This story is the case for many participants when comparing their first weeks with In Focus to present day.

“They had no confidence and would say things like, ‘Oh I’m not creative...I don’t know why I’m here.’ Just four months on, they now teach other participants how to make what they’ve made. I’ve seen them walk out and meet their service provider and say, ‘Look what I made today.’ They’ve shown me ideas they have and thanked me for thinking they were good. Some of their work now features on our exhibition posters. That tangible acknowledgment has been very valuable to them.”

(Dev Place, In Focus)

CASE STUDY**Successes and challenges of delivery on the Isle of Wight**

Through our relationship with Breakout Youth in Southampton, we have been able to expand our delivery on the Isle of Wight. Building new relationships with other organisations on the island, we also began delivery of two new regular sessions last year - with Aspire Ryde in Shanklin, and a further new session in Ventnor at the Exchange. This means much wider reach across the island, and an opportunity for more young people to engage with In Focus' workshops.

"On the Isle of Wight, the challenge has been around growing awareness - getting people knowing and understanding what we do and spreading the word," says Kristianne.

CASE STUDY: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF DELIVERY ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

“It’s brilliant that our reach is growing for the young people there. For us, it’s about not stepping on anyone’s toes, but instead forming partnerships to work alongside youth organisations on the island - to collaborate.”

(Kristianne Drake, CEO)

Having a staff member who actually lives and works on the island is a huge contributing factor to successes in growth there. “We could never have done it without that aspect, because Holli [Kalina, IOW Project Coordinator] knows the landscape fully. If it had been me or another team member from Southampton, we’d be seeing only half the picture. Because Holli is there and on the ground, she knows where to go next. You don’t give up, you just sidestep.”

Kristianne is keen to emphasise In Focus’ mission is to help young people through forming sustainable partnerships on the island.

Getting around the island as a young person can be challenging, so location is a crucial element of delivery. “Despite the short distances between towns here, bus routes generally all go into the centre (Newport) and then back out again to the next town. This makes journeys slow and expensive,” explains Holli. For drivers, travel is generally slow too. “Despite it only being 16 miles from Cowes to Ventnor, an average journey between the two can take 45 minutes to an hour.”

“We now have a dedicated group of young people taking part in the regular sessions at Aspire, and also at the Exchange. Ventnor took many weeks to pick up momentum, but now has registered participants who are very keen young photographers, wanting to keep returning to learn more about the techniques and the art form.”

Another aspect is that some of the workshops delivered by In Focus are grouped as delivery within broader youth group sessions. “This can mean there is a conflict of attention for the young people, working between other activities as well as the photography sessions we deliver,” says Holli. Space limitations influence this, with locations able to provide more breakout space perhaps working better for the dual elements of engagement.



BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 (SHANKLIN)

CASE STUDY: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF DELIVERY ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

In terms of attendees, success from outreach is gradually becoming apparent. “There has been more recognition, on Facebook and Instagram, particularly with the Home Education community,” says Holli. The potential challenge with this group however, is that the 16-25 age bracket of DSLR can mean that some from the Home Education community aren’t able to take part until they’re older. “The young people attending the youth groups with which we work are often at the lower end of the 16-25 demographic, or even slightly younger than this. But as members of the collaborating young club, they are there taking part in other sessions.”

(Parent of DSLR Participant, Aspire, Isle of Wight)

“They’re really enjoying the photography sessions [at Aspire]. They keep insisting on coming back, and they talk about them a lot.”



BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 (VENTNOR)

“When we get to do photography, those are my favourite weeks.”

(DSLR Participant, Aspire, Isle of Wight)



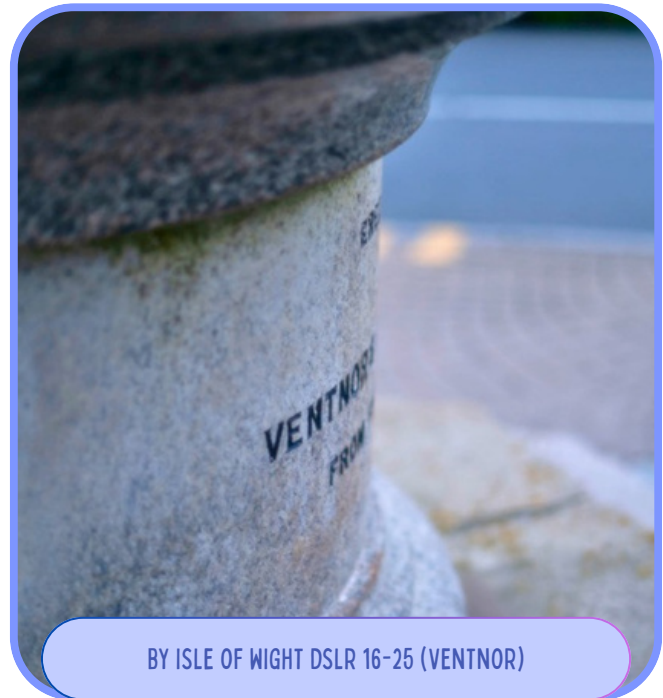
BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 (VENTNOR)

Holli wonders, therefore, whether in order to achieve a longer-lasting cohort within the DSLR target age, young people from this community may need to be invited to take part in sessions from a slightly younger age. However, she adds optimistically, “a Home Ed Expo I attended earlier in the year has resulted in a big uptick in participation in Ventnor and Shanklin.”

CASE STUDY: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF DELIVERY ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

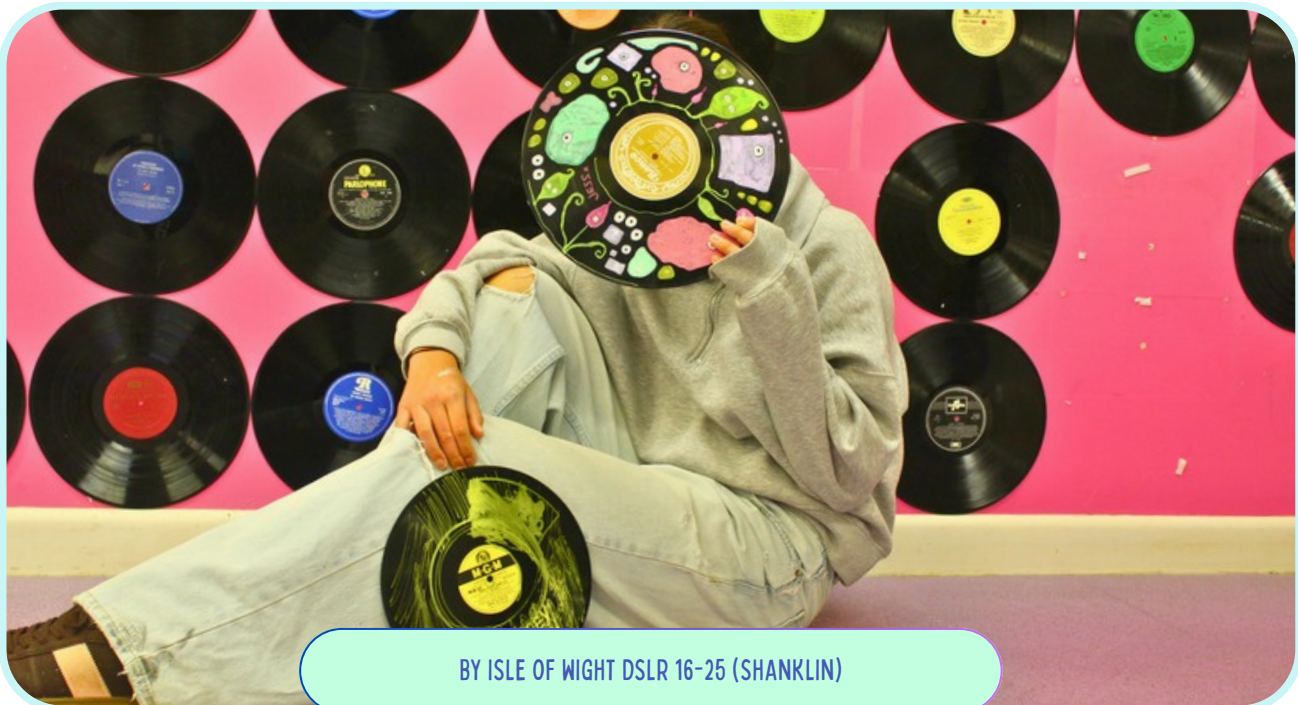
Young people in Ventnor have been very interested in photography, Holli says, and their “knowledge of photographic practice is broadening, due to new concepts being introduced during our sessions.”

In terms of things on the horizon for In Focus and its delivery on the island, there are plans to establish new sessions in Newport, an important location due to it being only a single bus journey from other towns. There had been plans to use a building next to Quay Arts but unfortunately this opportunity is no longer available.



BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 (VENTNOR)

Seeking new connections in Newport also fits with another project In Focus have been selected for the delivery of. Can You Hear Us? is a part of Creative Island’s celebration of creativity and culture across the Isle of Wight. As part of this, In Focus began running workshops in Shanklin, Ventnor, Ryde and Newport from late May 2026, for young people aged 14 and over.



BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 (SHANKLIN)

CASE STUDY: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF DELIVERY ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

“We have been delivering photography-based workshops around the concept of ‘Photo Voice, platforming the voices and perspectives of young people on the island,” explains Holli.

Can You Hear Us? asks young participants to consider and respond to questions, including, “What do you love about living on the island? What needs to be improved? What hidden sides of island life do you want people to see?” Those taking part will have the opportunity to have their photographs featured as part of an upcoming Island Photography Exhibition.

Summer presents further chances for In Focus to spread the word about DSLR and beyond on the island. Events such as Ventnor Day (part of Ventnor Summer Festival 2026), Pride and various carnivals, provide an opportunity for the team to shout about In Focus’ engagement with the local community, and show young people on the island that there are free, no-pressure workshops with professional photographers available to them throughout the year.

If you or someone you know is interested in taking part in creative sessions on the Isle of Wight, you can find out more here: www.infocusedu.co.uk/isle-of-wight



BY ISLE OF WIGHT DSLR 16-25 (SHANKLIN)

“The collaboration between In Focus and Aspire is flourishing here on the island, and we are hoping this will continue to grow, with delivery expansion into Ryde, through their other premises there.”

(Holli Kalina, In Focus)

New chapters and building on DSLR's legacy



A new partnership formed during Phase 2 is with Central Library in Southampton. Kristianne's previous experience with working in libraries themselves has proven helpful in forging a strong relationship. "I feel I understand the challenges libraries have and the demands people place on them. We've made a good connection there."

As well as their zines being exhibited in a pop-up zine library at God's House Tower, the young people's work is featuring as photography exhibitions in Central Library. "The library team are tying in literacy and stories that people can learn more about, by connecting the 7 Story themes to recommended reading lists for different age groups," says Kristianne. "I love that there's a connection being made between the written word and the visual."

The exhibitions at Central Library mean In Focus are able to act as something of a bridge, or a trail between other parts of the city, leading from the city centre to places like God's House Tower by the docks, and their ongoing revamped-phone-boxes-turned-exhibition-space on Winkle Street, that display work produced by young people attending DSLR and other programmes with In Focus.

“I would love for all this to join the city up a little bit. We don't just want to bring people into our space; we want to take them out to other spaces too, to stretch expectations physically and mentally, through the work of the amazing young people we get to learn from every day.”

(Kristianne Drake, In Focus)

“The Library team have been so welcoming and accommodating,” says Faye. This partnership with Central Library has also meant In Focus can put young people in touch with them directly. “While we were in between DSLR exhibitions at the library, a young person from our LGBTQIA+ group held their first ever solo exhibition there,” explains Faye. At the opening of their exhibition, this young person thanked In Focus for the lasting impact they’ve had on their life.

This same young person has also taken on new employment after In Focus encouraged them to apply for the post. Working for Southampton Mental Health and Wellbeing Partnership, their role focuses on lived experience: “I’m using my lived experience to inform mental health and wellbeing provision across Southampton. I’m so excited - I really want to be part of a positive change in the mental health and wellbeing sector, and I’m looking to develop my skills professionally,” they explain.

“Thank you to In Focus for providing me with a safe weekly space to develop, not only my creativity in ways I couldn’t have imagined, but to help me maintain my mental health and wellbeing enough to actually keep taking part.”

(DSLR Participant at the opening of their solo exhibition at Central Library)

“In Focus pointed this role out to me and suggested I apply, but really, In Focus has done a lot more than simply signposting. Without the experience, skills and confidence I have gained through being part of the DSLR groups, I wouldn’t have been able to apply, let alone be hired.”

DSLR Participant

Offshoot successes, new developments and further opportunities: National Saturday Clubs

While the direct impact of the DSLR programme represents real success for engaging with young people, it has also led to other opportunities. In Focus were successful in their application to become delivery partners in Southampton as part of the National Saturday Clubs scheme, an opportunity that came about after encouragement from the wider Arts Council team.

“We were introduced to Peter Heslip (Head of Visual Arts in the South East for Arts Council England),” explains Kristianne. “We talked to him about what In Focus does as a charity, how we do it and how we might start looking at potential for growth, surrounding and beyond our DSLR programme.”

Heslip suggested In Focus would be well-placed to run a Southampton-based Saturday Club for young people aged 13-16. Thanks to this conversation, In Focus submitted a bid and were successful in being awarded the work.

This project also marks a full circle moment for one young person who has been engaged with DSLR since it began back in 2023. A callout for an assistant delivery role was put forward to DSLR participants, and after submitting an expression of interest, this young person was hired to work alongside delivery team member, Becki Needham, on delivering the 15-week programme. They have been able to gain valuable experience in delivering arts workshops to the general public, something that would not have been possible were it not for the support from Arts Council via the DSLR programme. “The transformation of this young person from their first moments with In Focus to now is exactly what we strive for,” says Kristianne.

As Kristianne explains, a great deal of what In Focus has been able to achieve and facilitate over the past few years is because of Arts Council’s support of the DSLR programme.

“It has allowed us to share more broadly and with new audiences what we can do, and in the process of sharing those things, we have been able to catch the attention of other organisations who we have then gone on to collaborate with.”

(Kristianne Drake, In Focus)

The increased visibility that being Arts-Council supported has meant for In Focus is far-reaching, and has had something of a ‘snowball effect’ on the charity’s outreach and successes. “Things like the National Saturday Club work aren’t directly attributed to DSLR, but at the same time, everything sort of is - it all feeds into it, and into our core mission as an organisation.”

Visiting London, the Blagrave Trust and the Hayward Gallery

In February 2026, thanks to ongoing support from The Blagrave Trust, In Focus were invited to take a group of young people (including those from DSLR sessions) to their offices in London, for a pop-up exhibition of their own work. Alongside this, the group were able to visit the Hayward Gallery to see two exhibitions. Much of this experience was entirely new for those in attendance, from travelling on the underground to visiting a major London gallery.



(Kristianne Drake, In Focus)

“It’s always such a pleasure being able to take young people to immerse themselves in an experience they wouldn’t usually have the opportunity to partake in, due to access barriers. A huge thank you to the wonderful people at The Blagrave Trust for their support, and to the young participants for their enthusiasm and engagement in the whole day.”

Encouraging further paid work opportunities for young artists

Another example of crossover success for young people taking part in In Focus' DSLR programme is the recent Jane Austen 250 initiative. "We partnered with Artswork on this last year and it has been carried through into Phase 2 of DSLR," says Kristianne. "We have supported the delivery for Southampton Forward as part of the ongoing Jane Austen anniversary celebrations. Young people from DSLR were being paid to help run workshops, and so we were able to say, 'These young people have all been paid for their work on this - we can put them forward to work with you too, but we have been paying them, so you should.'"

"It's nice because in that sense, we're able to influence organisations bigger than us, to ensure the idea of fair pay for a fair day's work is taken seriously. It should already be happening, but in many places it's still not. So if we can push for others to pay a Real Living Wage as we do, then we will."

As part of ongoing collaboration with 'a space' arts at God's House Tower, In Focus have also been running monthly zine-crafting workshops on-site there. "A couple of these have been funded by us, and 'a space' are funding the delivery of five more." Partnership work between 'a space' arts and In Focus continues to thrive.



Work placement through Artswork's Breakthrough scheme

Arts Council funding has also made In Focus eligible for further opportunities for young people in the area. Signing up as part of Artswork's Breakthrough programme meant In Focus were able to take on a young person for six months as a paid employee, funded by the scheme. "They were amazing - truly transformative for us," says Kristianne when asked about the initiative. "It was an even more positive experience for us as a team than we'd anticipated."



THREADS
OF LIFE
DURING
SLEEP

(Breakthrough scheme participant)

"Through working at In Focus, I discovered that a positive, creative and open-minded workplace does exist. I felt really valued by the team and that the work I created is helping to make a difference."

Unfortunately, not all funding opportunities can line up timing-wise, so while the team worked hard to source further funding to employ the young person beyond their placement, the young person found work elsewhere as their contract came to an end in March 2026. They remain in touch with the organisation, however, and In Focus are hopeful that they will apply for future job opportunities with them.

It is clear that the young person gained a great deal from the experience, and as an organisation, In Focus feel they have too.



The young person explained that previously they'd had interviews for jobs they didn't get, but that since working with In Focus, they feel a lot more hopeful about the future and employment. "I have so many amazing skills now from working here that I didn't have before." Kristianne and the team are sad to lose them, but knowing they have been part of their development and journey is very rewarding.

"I saw creative industry roles advertised with various organisations, but I found that In Focus stood out for me. It was the resounding message of inclusion, their mission, their work and the impact they have on the community. Also, the fact it's run as an inclusive space with neurodivergence and LGBTQIA+ people in mind really led me to apply."

(Breakthrough scheme participant)

Personal development has also been made possible within the core staff team. Faye, Operations Manager, and one of the artist educators on the delivery team, has been able to take on an apprenticeship for Business Management through Southampton City Council.

"We're proud to be able to support someone to develop new skills in a formal way, and fill gaps in our team's knowledge too."

Kristianne emphasises that it's about investing in a person's future, not just the organisation itself. "There's that little bit of fear that they might then find a new job, with their new qualifications. But if that does ever happen, it serves as a reminder that we've done a good job, of nurturing our people."

"We proactively went out, found providers, spoke to people and brought them in to encourage them to be able to have those conversations. Phase 2 has definitely allowed us to do this - we wouldn't have been able to do it without that recognition and support behind us."

For In Focus, it's certainly about prioritising longevity and sustainability for the charity, not just the short-term wins.

Growing sustainably for the future

Looking to the future, the rest of DSLR Phase 2 and what might lie beyond, is potentially rather daunting, but the team are taking it in their stride.

“If you’d have said to me before we started Phase 1, this will all be happening, I’d have thought, no, that’s too much to ask for from us. From running several regular sessions with different groups of young people, making paid work opportunities for them, setting up a youth leadership group, all these other things...it would have seemed impossible,” says Kristianne. “But it shows us that everything has to come in increments, otherwise it’s not sustainable.”

“So far, Phase 2 has meant we’ve been able to build on what existed from our previous work, to give us greater reach for helping young people,” they continue. We’ve also been able to build on, not only the size of the team and its operations, but our skillset too, and supporting people to grow in and of themselves. If you can sustain the work you’re already doing and demonstrate that to people, then you can move to the next phase, I think.”



“[Arts Council England’s support] has shown us what’s possible - for a small, grassroots organisation to achieve this success is beyond what we could ever have imagined.”

DSLR Phase 2 continues until March 2027, with further workshops and exhibitions planned for young people aged 16-25 throughout the coming months.

Kristianne Drake, In Focus

To find out more about the work of In Focus, including the Develop Skills, Learn and Reflect (DSLR) programme, supported by Arts Council England, go to www.infocusedu.co.uk or get in touch via info@infocusedu.co.uk

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