

The Evoke Culture Festival
IMPACT REPORT

Introduction & Intention

This Impact Report captures the impulse and spirit of a pioneering partnership between One Planet Abingdon (OPA) and Evoking Belonging.

Following an invitation from One Planet to join hands in partnership for the One Planet Living Festival, Dr Dianne Regisford, founder and visionary of Evoking Belonging came on board as a co-creation partner.

The intention was to bring another dimension to the 'culture and community' principle guiding One Planet through the Evoke Culture Festival.

The Evoke Culture Festival was created to platform African-Caribbean ARTivists from across Oxfordshire. Key to the creative conceptualisation of the ECF is the intention to address the social justice pillars of voice, participation, representation. The platform is designed to increase visibility of who we are and what we do, shared creatively as acts of belonging.

The Need
The complexion of Abingdon-on-Thames is changing!

The changes that the EVOKE Culture Festival responds to are the evolution of an increasingly diverse population living and working in Abingdon.
As more and more African-Caribbean and other families of diverse ethnic origin come to live in Abingdon, the social, cultural and racial dynamics of the town also changes.

The Evoke Culture Festival creates touch points for the artist participants to experience themselves 'in-community' and to express their Diaspora culture in a way that is bold and undiluted. Equally, for the visitors at the Festival, the ECF creates spaces and opportunities for visibility, diversity by inviting new ways to connect.

The partnership between Evoking Belonging and One Planet Abingdon at the One Planet Living Festival was the first ever of its kind in Abingdon. The vision is to nurture relationships between the two entities, to deepen our symbiotic relationship and to enliven diversity in Abingdon.

To ensure a vibrant, socially cohesive town which is economically buoyant, just and equitable, it is imperative to create clear strategies which create the conditions for all to thrive. In essence, this partnership platforms a social justice vision of belonging and connects a climate justice advocacy for all.

The Evoking Belonging Impulse
Evoking Belonging is a body of work that lies at the intersection of social justice, social transformation, regeneration and place-making. Created by Dr Dianne Regisford, Evoking Belonging is a co-created cultural practice.

Comprising various expressions, this transdisciplinary practice is:

- ...An enquiry
- ...A movement...
- ...An act of Social Sculpture...

The Evoking Belonging approach is rooted in Ubuntu: An African Bantu philosophy and cultural practice illuminating our collective humanity. In this humanity, we are all inter-connected and, from this perspective, we are invited to co-create our human being in community.

In the Evoking Belonging practice, we focus on culture, race and equity through the lens of Ubuntu for the enlivenment of Belonging for all communities.

Impact

For this social justice vision of a connected, socially cohesive, culturally diverse Abingdon to be achieved, the Evoke Culture Festival was created by Dr Dianne Regisford as platform to achieve the following objectives:

1. Cultural Awareness
2. Cultural Education
3. Cultural Engagement

During 2024, Evoking Belonging has been developing a strategy to create multiple opportunities for community engagement building up to a summer festival in the Abingdon Town Square. Through a series of small cultural, public-facing events taking place at the Makespace Charter Studios, founder, Dr Dianne Regisford is leading a process which invites multiple stakeholders to work collaboratively towards a shared vision of placemaking and belonging for African-Caribbean Diaspora communities in Abingdon and Oxfordshire.

As such, Dr Dianne Regisford of Evoking Belonging entered into a co-creation partnership with One Planet Abingdon to feature the Evoke Culture Festival at the One Planet Living Festival on June 15, 2024.

Partnership

This was the first time in Abingdon's history of public events, that a cultural festival which platforms Oxfordshire based, African-Caribbean culture, local entrepreneurs and artists took place.

The envisaged objectives include:(to name a few)

- Public Exposure for African-Caribbean artists, entrepreneurs, performers
- Centering a Black-led management team leading on strategy, implementation and creative direction
- To develop a model for equitable, collaborative partnerships which, respect the interwoven complexities of our complex histories of colonialism and the impacts present today.

This first collaboration between two Abingdon based, social value, impact driven, local businesses was approached and documented as a learning journey for all parties. The success of the joint initiative will be measured in some quantitative but mostly qualitative ways specially designed to illuminate the interconnectedness of our joint social justice missions. We are evaluating the event using the social justice lenses as

described above and also integrating the Evoke principles, theories and practice. This creates an opportunity to consider how to co-create new metrics to measure impact against the stated objectives in a way that respectfully considers the social value created in qualitative, quantitative and 'evocative' cultural measures.

Partnership Design

It was important to keep the integrity of both partners intact through respect, transparency and on-going dialogue. This approach created the necessary conditions to enable the shared vision to manifest into the success story it became.

There were various unexpected challenges (logistics, resourcing and others) that emerged as could be expected when two partners were working together for the first time. However, due to the steadfast commitment of all parties, nothing was insurmountable as we tackled each occurance with positivity, grace, patience and a spirit of collaborative learning.

I found the Heather, the project manager to be an excellent logistics person. Her experience and can do attitude provided the necessary cohesion in a diverse team juggling multiple priorities.

This approach is one of the key qualitative measures of success emerging from this collaboration. We have established trustful relationships which create the foundations upon which our ever expanding dreams of a bigger festival for 2025 can be built.

The EVOKE ARTivist Collective

The EVOKE ARTivist Collective gathers independent African-Caribbean Diaspora artists of all disciplines for a moment in time as a collective. Aligning with the Evoking Belonging social justice agenda, the invitation is to each artist to connect to the ARTivist call.

Coming together in a diverse, independent yet collective identity as an act of solidarity is what moved the 10 artists featuring in the EVOKE ARTivist Collective to assume the mantle of ARTivist for the occasion.

For the Evoke Culture Festival at the One Planet Living Festival, 10 EVOKE ARTivists gathered to offer poetry, music, culinary delights, digital imaging, performance, dance and fashion to the market square in Abingdon town centre.

"I said yes out of curiosity and solidarity",
Rawz: Poet, Musician, Artist, Inner Peace Records

A Celebration of First time achievements

There were many firsts and achievement to be celebrated and documented as the beginning of this intentional partnership between Evoking Belonging and One Planet Abingdon. Below are seven highlights (there so many to mention) which illuminate the importance of the collaboration.

1. **African-Caribbean Diaspora ARTivism**
   The EVOKE ARTivist Collective came together to co-create an expression of African-Caribbean Diaspora ARTivism never seen before in Abingdon. For each of the ARTivists (see images below), this was the first time they had performed in a public space in Abingdon. This placemaking is an important of expression of belonging.

"Abingdon should be like this every weekend",
Jenny, festival visitor

2. **Learning & Connection**
   One of the EVOKE ARTivists featured included Chef Omar, offering a specially designed vegan/vegetarian Jamaican food offering. The culinary arts of the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, are world renowned. This was the first time that Evoking Belonging has hosted an outdoor culinary event. The food was well received by a diverse range of people from different backgrounds. All enjoyed the opportunity to learn about Jamaican food. The EVOKE team developed new skills and expanded our business in this way and became an integral part of the success the partnership afforded us as social entrepreneurs.

3. **The Evoking Belonging corner**
   An entire corner of the square was dedicated to African-Caribbean Diaspora entrepreneurs showcasing their works and talents. This has never been seen or done in Abingdon. The presencing demonstrated powerful presence. From the comments gathered at the Evoking Belonging stand there is demand for more opportunities to support black businesses.
   From an Evoking Belonging perspective

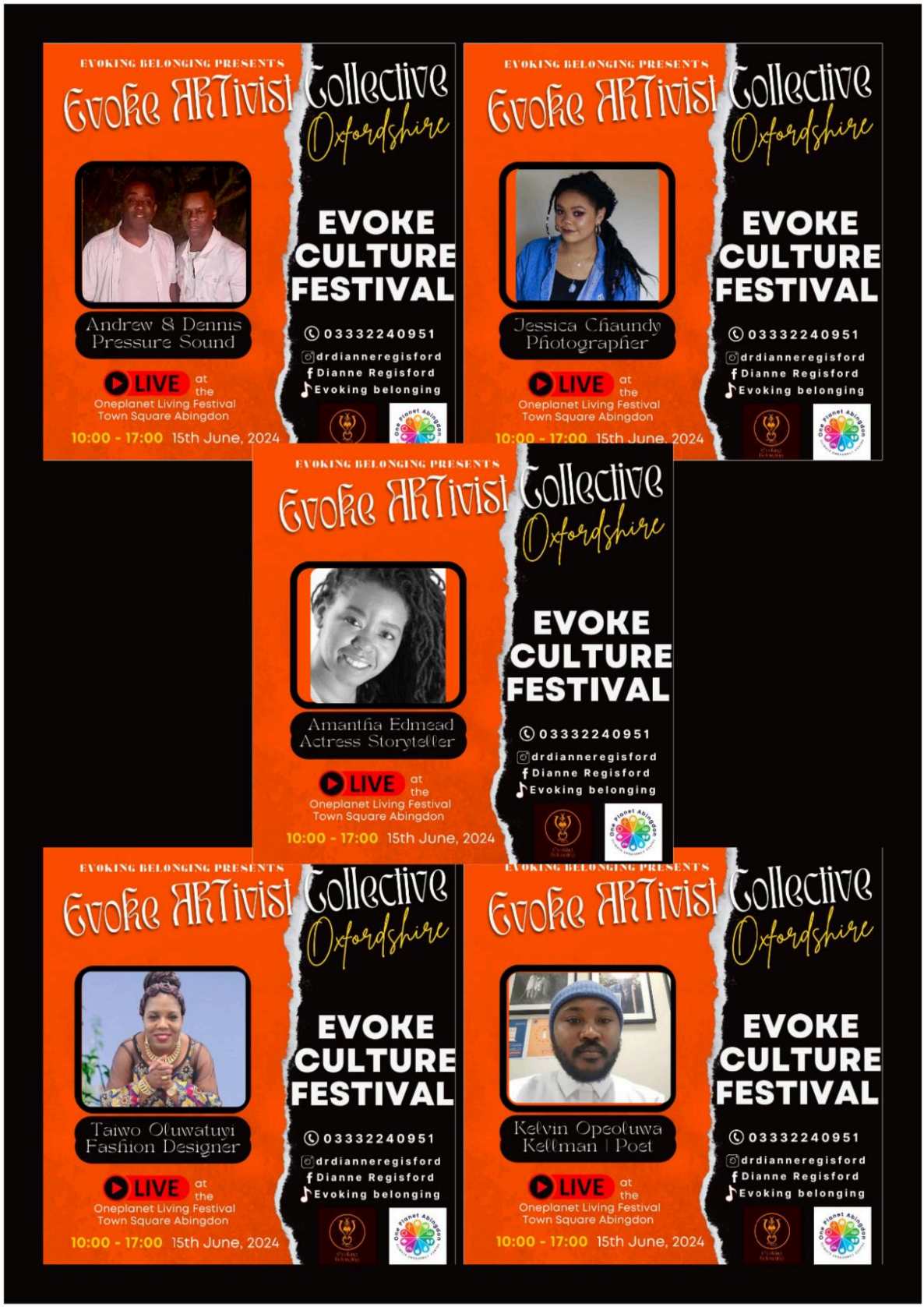
4. **Creative & Artistic Direction: An emergent co-creation**
   The show was co-compered between D-Empress Evoke (Dr Dianne Regisford) & Michelle Charlesworth. The comperes held space and energy for education, inspiration and deep commitment to the One Planet Living Principles. The intention was to work with an outline programme and to flow with the energy of the moment. This worked spectacularly well providing free flow and fertile ground for creative engagement through the power of live performances, talks and more.

5. **Collaborations happened spontaneously!**
   The Morris Dancers and the African Dancers (Alpha Afro Fitness) unexpectedly danced together to the delight of the crowds.

6. **Inter-generational participation**
   Evoking Belonging is an intergenerational practice which includes at least three generations. Members of the Windrush generation participated with second generation African-Caribbean Diaspora children. Examples of the intergenerational collaboration include: The fashion show by Taiwill Fashions, the food and story telling at the EVOKE Ital Food stall and the Botanical Folklore shared by poet and author, Natty Mark Samuels.

7. **Resourcing: Energy, vision, passion, money, talent and more.**
   The partnership delivered two festivals in one on a minimal budget. This is a demonstration of commitment and vision. All participants were offered and accepted honorarium fees on the basis that this was a collective investment in an initiative with future prospects that stand to benefit all involved. The resourcing of this collaborative festival


EVOKING BELONGING PRESENTS
Evoke ARTivist Collective Oxfordshire
EVOKE CULTURE FESTIVAL
Stephanie Gonna
Dancer | Educator
RAWZ
Poet. Musician. Artist
D-EmpressEvoke
Poetess | Compere
Natty Mark Samuels
Rootical Folklorist
Chef Omar
Jamaican Culinary Artist
LIVE at the Oneplanet Living Festival Town Square Abingdon
10:00 - 17:00 15th June, 2024
03332240951
drdianneregisford
Dianne Regisford
Evoking belonging


EVOKING BELONGING PRESENTS
Evoke ARTivist Collective Oxfordshire
EVOKE CULTURE FESTIVAL
Andrew & Dennis
Pressure Sound
LIVE at the Oneplanet Living Festival Town Square Abingdon
10:00 - 17:00 15th June, 2024
03332240951
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Dianne Regisford
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EVOKING BELONGING PRESENTS
Evoke ARTivist Collective Oxfordshire
EVOKE CULTURE FESTIVAL
Jessica Chaundy
Photographer
LIVE at the Oneplanet Living Festival Town Square Abingdon
10:00 - 17:00 15th June, 2024
03332240951
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Dianne Regisford
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EVOKING BELONGING PRESENTS
Evoke ARTivist Collective Oxfordshire
EVOKE CULTURE FESTIVAL
Amantha Edmead
Actress Storyteller
LIVE at the Oneplanet Living Festival Town Square Abingdon
10:00 - 17:00 15th June, 2024
03332240951
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Dianne Regisford
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EVOKING BELONGING PRESENTS
Evoke ARTivist Collective Oxfordshire
EVOKE CULTURE FESTIVAL
Taiwo Oluwatuyi
Fashion Designer
LIVE at the Oneplanet Living Festival Town Square Abingdon
10:00 - 17:00 15th June, 2024
03332240951
drdianneregisford
Dianne Regisford
Evoking belonging
EVOKING BELONGING PRESENTS
Evoke ARTivist Collective Oxfordshire
EVOKE CULTURE FESTIVAL
Kelvin Opeoluwa
Kellman | Poet
LIVE at the Oneplanet Living Festival Town Square Abingdon
10:00 - 17:00 15th June, 2024
03332240951
drdianneregisford
Dianne Regisford
Evoking belonging



Background: Belonging, Heritage, and Culture

Belonging, heritage, and culture are intricately interwoven threads that shape individuals' identities and perceptions of the world around them. At the core of human existence lies the innate desire to connect, to feel rooted, and to understand where we come from. Belonging encapsulates the feeling of being accepted, valued, and integrated into a community or group. It is the sense of fitting in, of being recognized and embraced for who you are.

Heritage refers to the legacy passed down through generations, encompassing traditions, values, language, and customs. It serves as a reminder of our ancestors' experiences, struggles, and triumphs, grounding us in a shared history that shapes our present and future. Heritage provides a sense of continuity, anchoring individuals amidst the ever-changing currents of life.

Culture is the vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of heritage, reflecting the collective expression of a community's beliefs, rituals, art, cuisine, and social norms. It is a dynamic force that evolves over time, influenced by interactions with other cultures and the challenges of modernity. Culture enriches our lives, fostering creativity, diversity, and resilience.

For many, belonging is intimately linked to their heritage and cultural identity. It is through the lens of culture that individuals find meaning, forge connections, and navigate their place in the world. Whether through shared experiences, language, or rituals, culture provides a sense of belonging that transcends geographical boundaries and unites people across continents.

However, the journey to belonging is complex. In an increasingly globalised world, individuals often find themselves straddling multiple cultural identities, navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity, the local and the global. The quest for belonging can be fraught with challenges, particularly for marginalised communities whose heritage and cultural practices have been historically suppressed or erased.

Yet, amidst these challenges, belonging, heritage, and culture continue to serve as sources of strength and resilience. They provide a sense of belonging, grounding individuals in a shared history and empowering them to celebrate their cultural identity with pride.
Ultimately, the journey of belonging is a deeply personal and collective endeavour, one that invites individuals to embrace their heritage, honour their culture, and cultivate a sense of belonging that enriches both their own lives and the communities they inhabit.

Insights & Evaluation

We are evaluating the event using the social justice lenses as described above and also integrating the Evoke principles, theories and practice. This creates an opportunity to consider how to co-create new metrics to measure impact against the stated

objectives in a way that respectfully considers the social value created in qualitative, quantitative and ‘evocative’ cultural measures.

This is an on-going enquiry which we will continue through further research residencies building up to the next iteration of the EVOKE Culture Festival

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