

First Southampton-to-Southend Festival of Exchange

19th May 2022

COMMUNITY EVENTS



From Erin Baxter
Community Reporter

SCHOOL and charity groups from twin city Southend-on-Sea visit Southampton as part of new yearly cultural exchange event.

The groups from two Southend schools and a centre for adults with learning disabilities arrived in the city on Wednesday and were met by local counterparts to begin a series of events designed to create closer links between Southampton and its new identical twin.

After introductions by the Lord Mayor at the Civic Centre to inaugurate the scheme, the visitors had the chance to see exhibitions organised by local community groups in recent weeks while having the opportunity to get to know each other better.

Mayor Hanson said: "It's with great pride and joy that we welcome our friends from Southend and hope that it begins a new long-term relationship between our great cities."

"I met with Mayor Garrett recently and we compared notes on what a privilege it is to represent our local communities, as well as sharing tips on how we deal with the challenges the role can bring. It is in this spirit of exchange that we encourage you all to approach the following days, so that we can see how much we can learn from each other."

"To some, there might not be much to separate these two places. They're both in the South, both on the coast, both have very popular local mayors! But as we will see once we begin to share our stories, we have so much to discover about our neighbours, and so much to offer them in return."

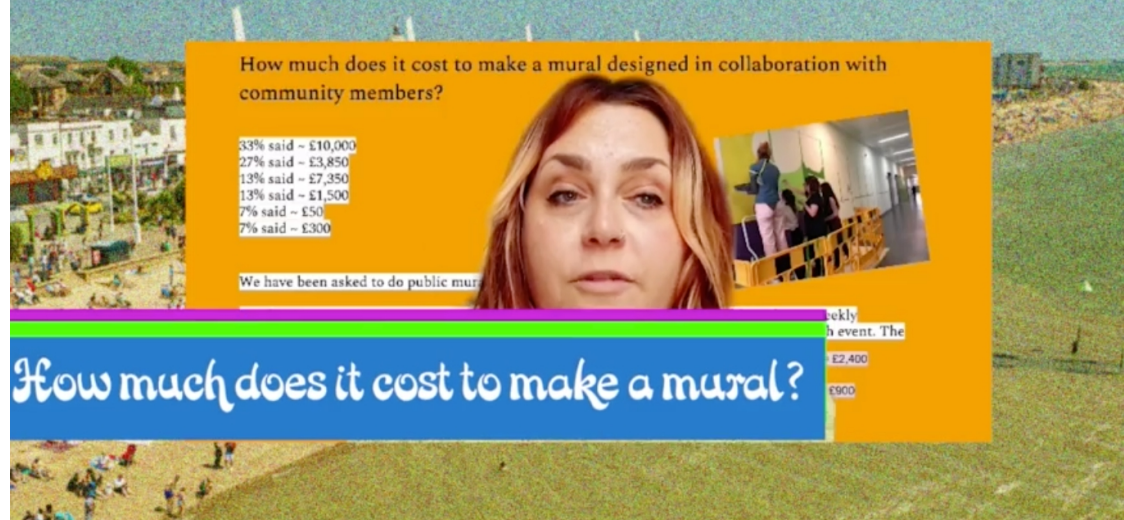
The first event of the afternoon saw children from both cities take part in a craft and geography workshop together. Rebecca Parting, Year 4 teacher from Southend's St. Mary Bishop Primary, said: "The class had lots of fun. We've been working on local geography at home recently, but after the pupils from Southampton showed us some of their sculpture work we played a game of 'Guess the County' from the shapes, and then made some of our own sculptures based on Essex's border."



Make Your Mark: school groups resign the city with sculpture

"There was a funny moment when we explained that Southend is north of the Thames Estuary, and one little boy from a local school started singing the Eastenders theme tune. It was actually very useful because we then drew maps of the whole river region that they recognised from TV."

The older students and adult groups took part in photography and art workshops. After visiting a photo exhibition titled Pathways to Health, showing spaces in the city that helped young people feel safe and listening to some of the young photographers explain their work, there followed a screening of a short film by Southend artists Emma Edmondson and Lu Richardson about creating public art.



From: What Makes Good Public Art? a video about Southend-on-Sea

A lively discussion about local murals in both regions began the public art workshop, for which the groups were tasked with designing plans for their own murals - one for their hometown, one for its twin. A local graffiti artist named Jaydon came to discuss his own work in the city and judge some of the ideas.

Jaydon, who grew up in the Flowers Estate, was impressed by the work he saw. "It's great to see young people being encouraged like this. When I was their age you didn't think of your surroundings as yours you know, a lot of graffiti culture is about that, challenging the idea that you don't have a right to your own space. But some of their ideas, it's like they're thinking about their right to the area, to their own communities. They know what they've been denied and they know what they deserve. It's inspiring."

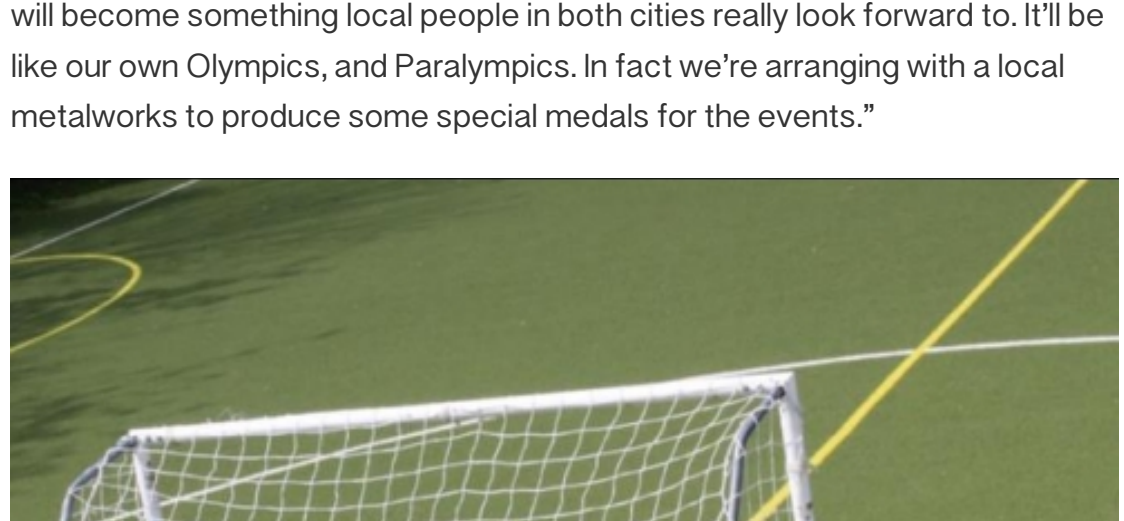


"I saw some of my own work in one of the exhibition photographs. I was a bit choked up by that, honestly. Thinking that my art represents something to someone in our space, that it makes them feel safe. That's real. It's why you do it."

Jaydon has agreed to travel to Southend to lead some of the local young people in producing the first "twinned mural", while it is hoped that Emma and Lu will help design the Southend-inspired equivalent for a space on the Southampton Common underpass off the Avenue.

"It'll make a big difference to young people I think. No one reads plaques and that stuff, you don't notice them around do you? If I'd walked past a plaque saying 'we were visited by the Mayor of Southend here whenever' I don't think I'd have looked. But the underpass, you walk that route, you see those designs, those colours, it's how you know the place. If it says something about Southend, yeah, I'd learn it right?"

The next stage of the Festival of Exchange will see a multi-sport inter-city competition hosted at St Mary's Stadium by the Saints Foundation and supported by local business partners. Spokesman Trevor Billing said: "Rivalry is one of the best parts of friendship so we're hoping that over the years this day will become something local people in both cities really look forward to. It'll be like our own Olympics, and Paralympics. In fact we're arranging with a local metalworks to produce some special medals for the events."



Photographs courtesy of the Pathways to Health exhibition

If you represent a local youth or community group, school or college and would like to become involved in the sports event, or would like to find out more, visit festival-of-exchange.co.uk/sports