# East Midlands CHWA Gatherings, June 2020.

Hosted and facilitated by CHWA Regional Champions Rachel Howfield Massey (Arts Derbyshire) and Laura Phillips (Derby Museums).

The gatherings took place on Monday 8th and Thursday 11th June, 2020.

The notes below reflect the group discussions that emerged in response to the Rachel’s provocation and the question, ‘*Is creativity for wellbeing being revalued by participants and how do we harness this new enthusiasm?’*

The champions also consulted on the development of a CHWA regional steering group for the East Midlands.

Emerging questions and ideas

* What does the future hold for us? Most of our community is older people, face to face contact is so important for arts and health work. As practitioners it isn’t so satisfying either.
* Staying local is really important- to support existing links and communities. Many felt that most meaningful activities are with participants they already engage with. Relationships and trust crucial at this time.
* Wellbeing within organisations, how are people supporting staff at a distant?
* Concerns for volunteers and FOH staff who are struggling without social interaction and the meaningful purpose of their roles at Museums. Keeping in touch is so important, yet resource heavy. How can we make our organisation and the people involved more resilient, how can we best support each other?
* Moving forward it is likely to be less regular groups, more visitors- how do you keep in touch with vulnerable individuals over space and time with more distanced modes of practice?
* How people’s behaviour going to change? Social anxiety- when social spaces re-open, sense of people being fearful of public spaces. How do make spaces feel more safe? How do you communicate that it is safe? There will be different ways that people will operate.
* Generally practitioners feeling more tolerance and a spirit of generosity within their communities of practice. People are being more open and sensitive to each other with the adoption of new ways of working, particularly digital.
* How can we harness the creativity that has emerged to sustain us moving forwards?

*Practice*

* Consider the longer-term impact and sustainability and building relationships. Is knee jerk more harmful? We are changing the way we are working in a rapidly changing situation/context…how are you able to keep up with change and keep continuity?
* Digital plasters or digital programmes? How do we integrate this new way of programming and producing authentically into the organisation? And how do we evaluate this?
* The divide of online and offline is really pronounced. It’s about making connections and feeling care for, thought of. Positive feedback from door-step drops and communications vis post
* How can we support more analogue ways to get involved? Do we create our own or connect with bigger, national initiatives such as First Sight?
* Co-ordination of art parcels with food bank initiatives at local authority (Leicester).
* Exposing mixed levels of digital expertise and confidence within organisations
* We are living in a temporary time. We are experimenting, we are piloting, we are testing things out. We mustn’t be afraid to say this and also learn from our mistakes and share knowledge with others.
* Seeing the opportunities rather the challenges- working how can healthcare work with music, when musicians aren’t there? So we are working with healthcare professionals at a distance and experimenting with them- online resources, tools to use to make music with patients, finding ways that work. We recorded a song for wellbeing of staff- experimenting and doing this together.
* Feelings of unease around free online content; how do we par it back so people will attend physically and pay?
* Concerns around funding pipelines for future investment and sustaining the sector
* How can we spend our time currently having these conversations with each other and our participants? Let’s really find out what people need, want and expect coming out of this? We are all do-ers and thinkers. We need to learn more from people with lived experience, how can we involve these communities?
* Seeing the opportunities rather the challenges. We are working with healthcare work with music, when musicians aren’t there? We are working with healthcare professionals at a distance and experimenting with them; online resources, tools to use to make music with patients, finding ways that work (Opus Music)
* Backlit Theatre have focussed more inward to support our artists, with online webinars and linking up to other cultural offers and creating a professional development hub. How do we connect with the wider world?

Feedback on Engagement and Participation

* The role of artists as facilitators, instigators, working to support others to set their own groups/activities has been empowering for participants. They feel heard and valued. Shift in focus.
* The act of making something for someone else is a big motivator and wellbeing boost. It creates purpose. Finding new ways to connect, via Whatsapp etc.
* Digital inclusion/poverty and interest dips from newly formed groups with shift to online.
* It’s easier to keep in contact with people you know. Who is falling through the gaps?
* Creative Writing group has been very successful via Zoom, both inspiration and support each Big exclusion for people who aren’t on the internet/digital access. How do we embrace people who experience digital poverty? We send out through the post, but resources are few.
* Funding determines who we work with. Our challenge is to reach people who we are not funded to support.
* Clear feedback from existing groups that the efforts to continue practice and activity (even online, and not perfect) has ‘got them through’ and in many cases re-invigorated the passion for the group and live activity.
* Some people feel safer working on the internet rather than coming to a group. Working with women who have been stalked, they don’t feel so vulnerable. There are opportunities for different groups, creative production online which need to be explored and built into future practice.
* For some people they have had more time to connect because activities are online. It has been more accessible for people who do not want to social interact in a room.
* The value of touch, that is completely out of reach. As you get older, in care setting, physical touch reduces. The importance of touch for wellbeing and connection with culture and nature.
* It has been an opportunity to build online communities and strengthen relationships with new audiences who haven’t engaged before. Interesting to see how this evolves alongside “normal” practice after lockdown.

Learning from Experience- Lived Experience Network

* I am older person, I find Zoom really frustrating. Ironically before the lockdown project I started an Arts Council funded project about Social Isolation…social isolation was there before Covid-19. I live in sheltered accommodation. Read more about Tony’s work [here](https://madcovid.wordpress.com/tony/)
* Carers need support too, their downtime is often when someone else is involved
* Autism community will be most likely to come back first, as museums will be ordered and quieter. *There needs be more co-production.*

Evaluation, Research and Demonstrating Value

* Is there anyway we can capture and evidence the regional sector response to the impact of Covid-19?
* Lots of people have consumed culture, but not had that process of reflecting on the impact of the activity on health and wellbeing. How do we instigate this?
* I have noticed that people who don’t have a creative outlet, are really struggling with boredom? That part of the brain isn’t utilised a lot… the unique offer of the arts, culture to stimulate that part of the brain could be an angle to raise awareness.
* The notion of usefulness, and our sectors responsiveness and resilience. How do we capture this and document it?
* There has been an incredible amount of work and emotional labour in the sector, back to the big question, how do we capture this value? The work is more visible than before, my fear is when we can go back to “normal”- unless we have found a way to research this, translate this- we will resume a status quo- we need to shift.
* Do we need a marketing message?
* Feelings of unease around free online content; how do we par it back so people will attend physically and pay?
* Gemma Collard Stokes (The University of Derby) made Reference to [‘ Doing Arts Research in a Pandemic report’](https://www.theculturecapitalexchange.co.uk/publications-and-resources/tcce-publications/)

Thoughts and ideas about the East Midlands CHWA development

* We must integrate lived experience and need to share resources, knowledge and the voice of lived experience.
* Sustainability- how can we map resources and collate practice regionally?
* Do we need a research/academic on the steering group to help us to reference research and demonstrate value?
* Drawing together a wider steering group would make sure feedback to the national and priorities set for the region are representative and true to the sector.
* There are missing voices due to the current situation. We need to understand who is missing…such as Peterborough Presents.
* Wait until September to develop plan for recruiting steering group members to make sure furloughed voices aren’t missed.

Steering Group Meetings

* We could use the zoom technology to run steering group meetings, this would support capacity and reduce environmental and financial impact of travel.
* There is a need for both physical and digital meetings. Perhaps one physical event organised annually.
* Meetings could move around the region or be hosted by different organisations digitally from across the region, supporting representation and a chance to amplify work of different organisations and communities
* How do we share information and resources and connect between sessions? Is it a Facebook group, or a Trello board?

Thank you to all who participated in the gathering sessions in June:

Andy Collins *(Borderland Voices*), Isobel Murdoch (*Freelance Practitioner*), Jane Wells (*Junction Arts*), Gemma Collard-Stokes (*Dance artist and researcher-Derby University),* Jemma Bagley (*Practitioner and Loughborough Wellbeing Project*), Lyndsay Thomson (*Museum Learning Officer*), Jacki Cairns (*Artist, Heartwork*), Jenny Staff (*Artist*), John Bowtell (*Drama Therapist*), Alison Bowry (*Creative Programme Manager, Arts, health and Wellbeing*), Rosemary MacLennan (*South Derbyshire Adult Education*), Nick Cutts (*Opus Music CIC*), Alison Colledge (*Health and Wellbeing Officer, Arts, Museums, Festivals and Events Service, Leicester City Council*), Suzanne Golden (*Backlit Theatre),* Leonie Matthew (*Freelance writer and facilitator*), Tony Fisher *(Artist, LENS),* Kelly McCormack (*LENS East Midlands Champion*), Deborah Munt (*Arts/Derbyshire- Derbyshire County Council- Social Prescribing*), Ola Wilson (*Artist*), Karla Jones (*Hubbub Theatre*)

Please do get in touch if you feel, we have missed anything crucial in these summarised notes