

**South Yorkshire
Creative Health
Enabling Plan**
September
2025–2028



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Here, you can follow the story of Mina, a fictionalised character who lives in South Yorkshire. Throughout her life, Mina has access to Creative Health opportunities that improve her physical and mental health. The seeds sown in childhood inspire her in later life, helping her cope with challenges, build connection with friends and family, giving her life purpose and meaning.

Mina’s mum has postnatal depression and struggles to bond with her. They attend Storytime at the library. Mina’s speech and attachment improves.



Foreword

Creative Health enables people to be well in body and mind. Nurturing friendships, inspiring joyful movement and growing new skills, Creative Health opportunities keep people well in their communities, contributing to a healthy and prosperous society and reducing the demand on health and social care systems. South Yorkshire is rich in Creative Health expertise and assets, leading impactful work that supports our diverse communities and narrows health inequalities.

This Enabling Plan provides a definition of Creative Health and an insight into current Creative Health provision in South Yorkshire. Illustrated case studies take the reader through the life course, demonstrating the benefits of Creative Health in terms of quality of life. The plan puts the South Yorkshire Creative Health movement within a national context and defines our aspirations for our region. Finally, we offer a set of strategic aims that will enable the sector to reach its full potential, bringing the most benefit to our communities.

South Yorkshire’s Creative Health providers have a track-record of engaging people that statutory services can find it harder to reach. However, this work is rarely embedded holistically in health and care commissioning and delivery. Whilst excellent practice is clearly evidenced in statistics and stories, the challenge is securing long-term, fair resourcing to maintain and grow this work, strengthening a Creative Health workforce and scaling and sustaining the results.

This plan describes the steps that are needed to enable this shift and release the full potential of Creative Health across our region, benefitting all of our communities.



Rachael Leslie,
Chair, South Yorkshire Creative Health Board

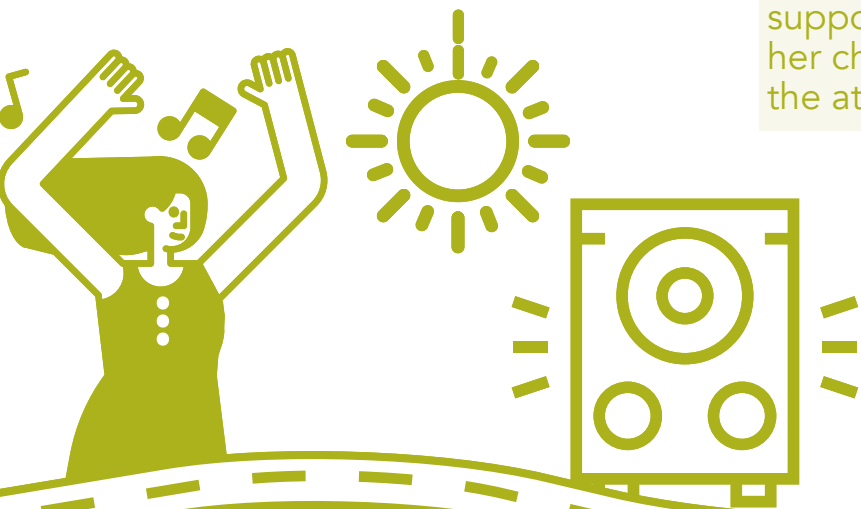
What is Creative Health?

Creative Health is defined as creative approaches and activities which have benefits for our health and wellbeing.

- Activities include visual art, dance, music, drama, crafts, film, literature, cooking and creative activities in nature, such as gardening.
- Creative Health can be applied in homes, communities, cultural institutions and heritage sites, and healthcare settings.
- It includes creative and innovative ways to approach health and care services, co-production, education and workforce development.



As a young person, Mina has a high body mass index and experiences bullying. Through local dance classes, she gains confidence and makes new friends. Her mental health improves, and she no longer needs CAMHS support. Her fitness improves, reducing her chances of developing obesity and the attendant health risks.



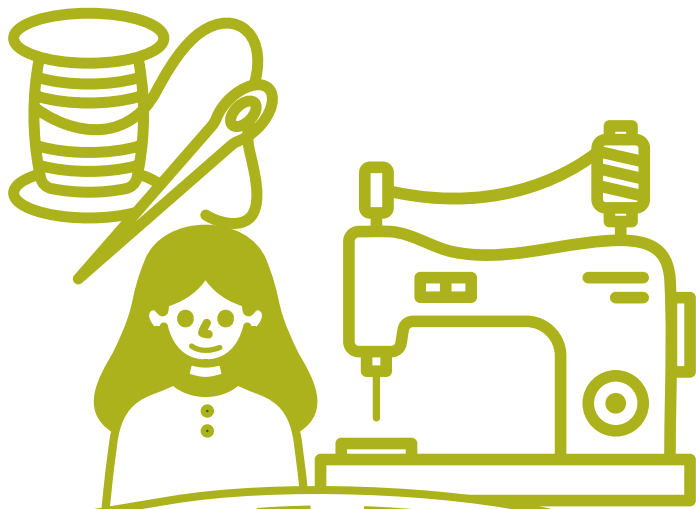
What can Creative Health do?

- Contribute to the prevention of ill-health, promotion of healthy behaviours, management of long-term conditions, and treatment and recovery across the life course.
- Reduce demand on health services.
- Deliver cross-sector, place-based solutions to health inequality: building health and community cohesion, developing bespoke training and improving employability.
- Support system change, through creative approaches to connecting networks, bridging gaps, nourishing systems and people.

In 2023, the Creative Health Quality Framework was published by CHWA based on extensive research and collaboration across the sector; the Framework sets out the principles that govern high-quality Creative Health practice (see Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance 2023).



As an adult, Mina initially finds it hard to secure long-term employment and is reliant on benefits. She remembers her love of dance and becomes a volunteer, making costumes for the local dance school. Volunteering helps Mina builds new contacts and confidence to secure a job as a seamstress.



Why is Creative Health needed now?

"A healthy life should be available to everyone in South Yorkshire, but it isn't."

Professor Alan Walker, CBE, Co-Director of the Healthy Lifespan Institute, University of Sheffield

The Creative Health sector in South Yorkshire is ready and able to play a core strategic role in health creation in our region. Changes in the policy landscape related to health and devolution offer opportunities for Creative Health to become embedded in new delivery structures and systems.

The Creative Health sector in South Yorkshire has a track record of delivering impactful projects that improve lives.

Our Creative Health Boards provide the scaffolding to support the development of a low-cost, high-value Creative Health System across the region.



Dance On, darts, Doncaster. © James Mulkeen for darts

"...our findings show strong 'grade A' evidence for the following outcomes, suggesting that this evidence can be trusted to guide policy:

- **The use of the arts to support aspects of social cohesion**
- **The use of the arts to improve wellbeing (i.e. positive psychological factors) in adults**
- **The use of the arts to reduce physical decline in older age"**

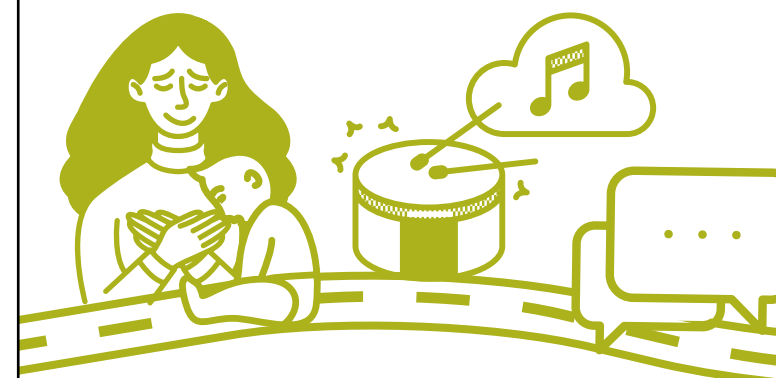
Fancourt, Warren & Aughterson, 2020

"Arts interventions are often low-risk, highly cost effective, integrated and holistic treatment options for complex health challenges to which there are no current solutions"

WHO Europe, 2019



WE Wonder Festival, Wentworth Woodhouse, Rotherham. © Paulina V Photography



Mina has a baby and attends Tuneful Chatter, which helps her cope with the changes a new baby brings. Music and storytelling activities strengthen her bond with baby. Through peer support, Mina is encouraged to breastfeed, supporting her own and her baby's health.

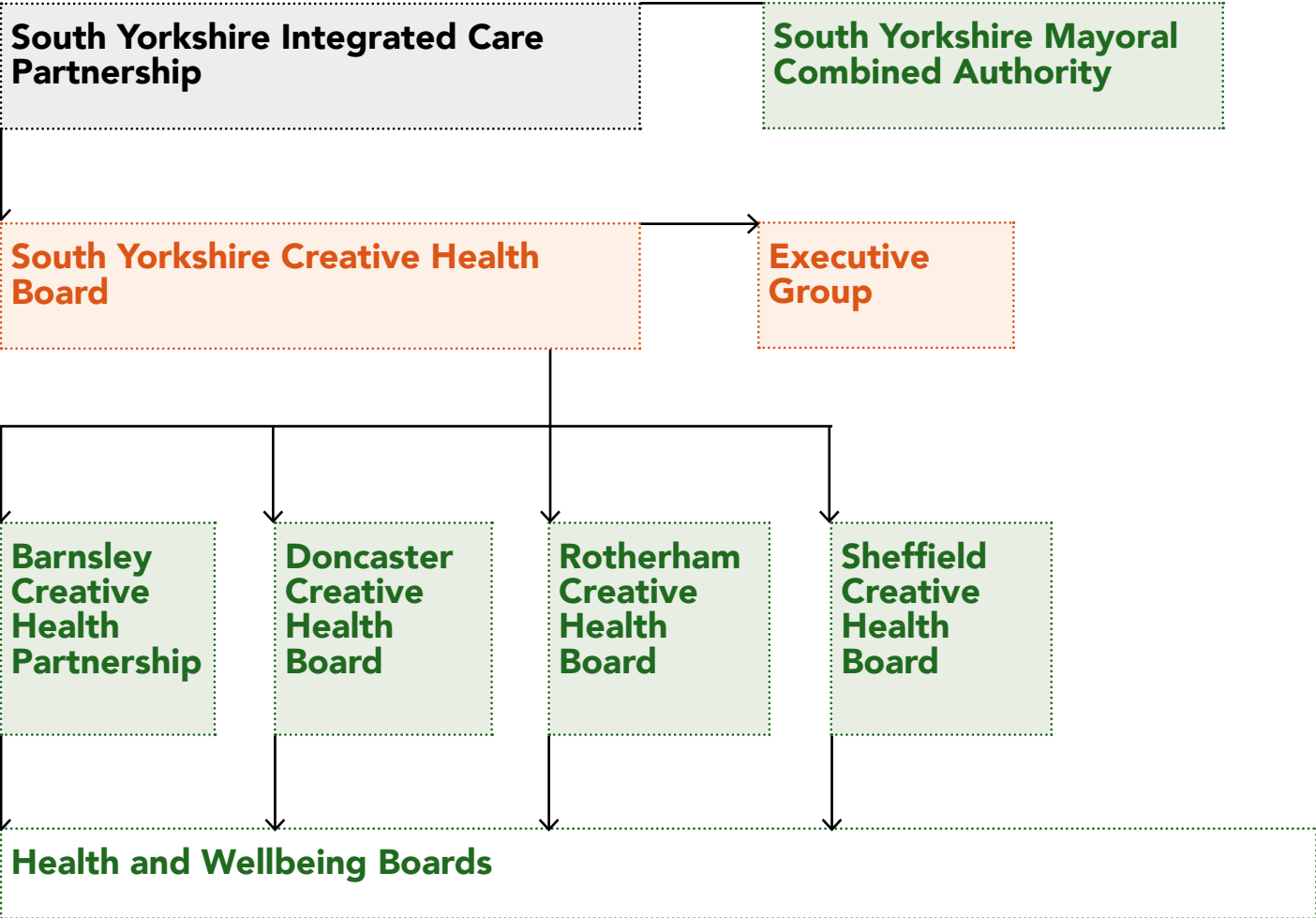
Creative Health in South Yorkshire

Phase 1: July 2023-July 2025

In 2023, Creative Health providers from across South Yorkshire presented a paper to South Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), making the case for more joined-up and sustainable working. The ICP gave them a mandate to form a Board and develop this Enabling Plan.

Phase 1 included:

- Strengthening infrastructure through four Creative Health Boards in each local authority area and including (paid) lived experience participation.
- Forming South Yorkshire Creative Health Board (SYCH Board).
- Investment from all four local authorities, SYMCA and Arts Council England, for a dedicated role (currently funded to December 2026, one of the first roles of its kind in the country).
- Stakeholder Events in each locality, building partnerships, raising awareness, strengthening networks.
- Positive national recognition for our strategic approach and representation at national events and networks (e.g. Mayoral Authorities Creative Health Network).



Phase 2: July 2025 – July 2027

In Phase 2, we will build on existing opportunities. For example, Barnsley is innovating new approaches to workforce development; Doncaster is host to a £2.1million research programme with its trailblazing Creative Health Board model; Rotherham is leading the way in commissioning Creative Health for Children and Young People; in Sheffield, CreativeHealth is integrated into the city’s new Culture Strategy and there is a large and thriving ecology of practice with diverse communities, from grassroots through to hospital arts programmes.

We aim to bolster the resilience, breadth and impact of the sector through cross-sector partnerships, training, increased resource and improved infrastructure. We will:

- Continue to add value, securing blended funding to develop and sustain projects that tackle complex problems caused by health inequalities.
- Continue to demonstrate South Yorkshire’s leadership as an emerging Creative Health System, raising our profile with national partners, conferences and networks.
- Contribute to the development of vibrant neighbourhood health services through existing grassroots, neighbourhood-based Creative Health projects.
- Connect isolated practitioners and projects to share skills, resources and support.

We are basing this report on a number of significant national studies (see Bibliography) as well as local data (case studies from Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield can be found on the CHWA website – see [‘For more information’, below](#)).



“Mobilising existing creative, cultural and community assets through the provision of a supportive infrastructure will lead to stronger, more resilient communities with less reliance on public services in the long-term.”

National Centre for Creative Health, 2023

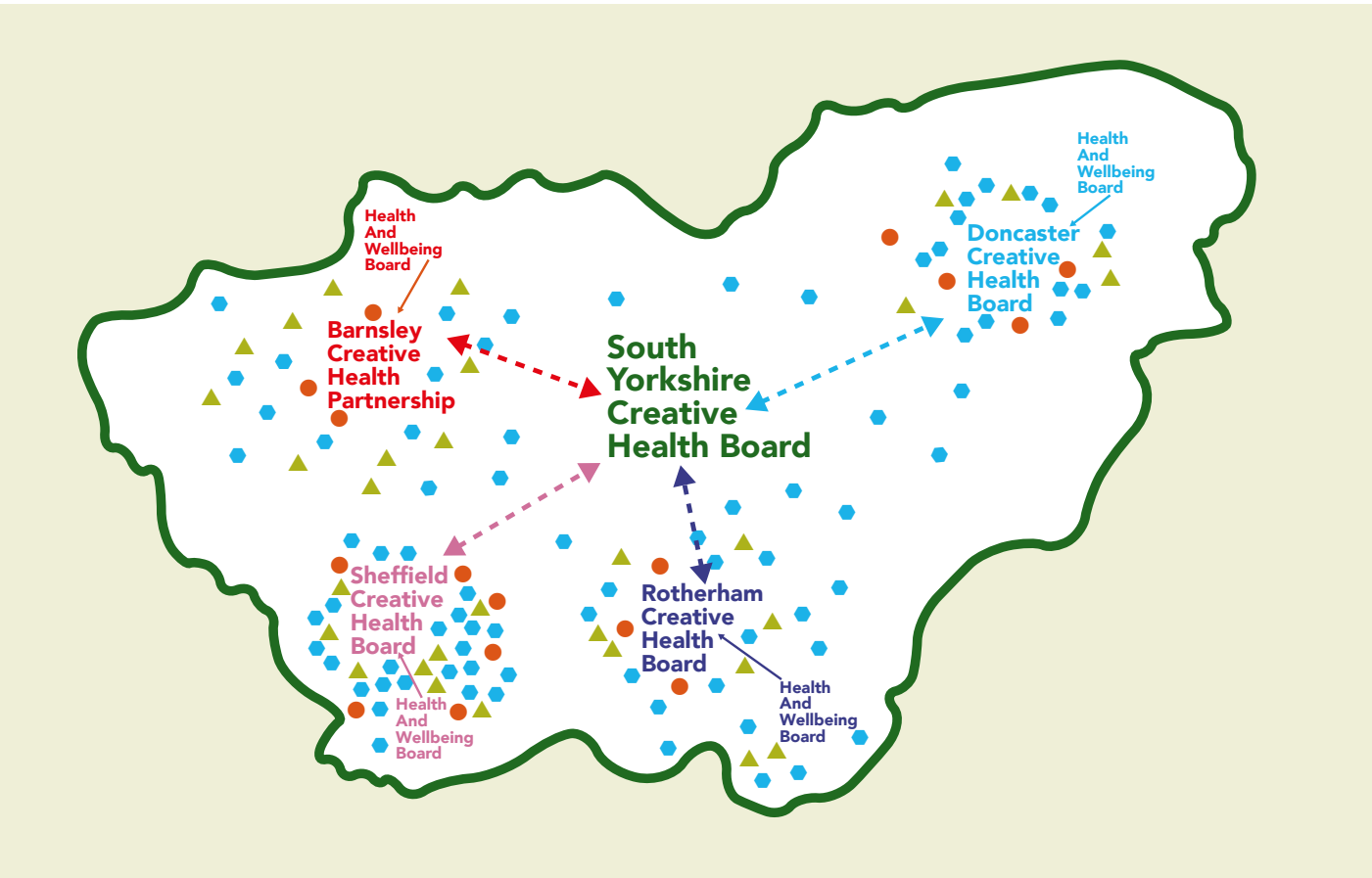
From Neighbourhoods to System-wide

The Creative Health sector in South Yorkshire is rich and diverse but, in common with the rest of the UK, it is poorly networked, with pockets of excellence happening in isolation at neighbourhood level. The majority of the workforce is freelance or employed by small-to-medium-sized charitable organisations, surviving on short-term project funding. This combination of weak financial security and poor infrastructural support has made it harder for Creative Health to reach its potential in supporting health and care services.

The creation of the four locality and one overarching Creative Health Boards has facilitated a meaningful shift in galvanising the power of the sector. The areas that have progressed more quickly have benefitted from having Creative Health leaders in statutory or voluntary cultural organisations with the capacity to take the work forward strategically.

Current infrastructure

- Key
- Medium/large sized Creative Health providers
 - ▲ Small/grassroots Creative Health providers
 - Freelance Creative Health practitioners



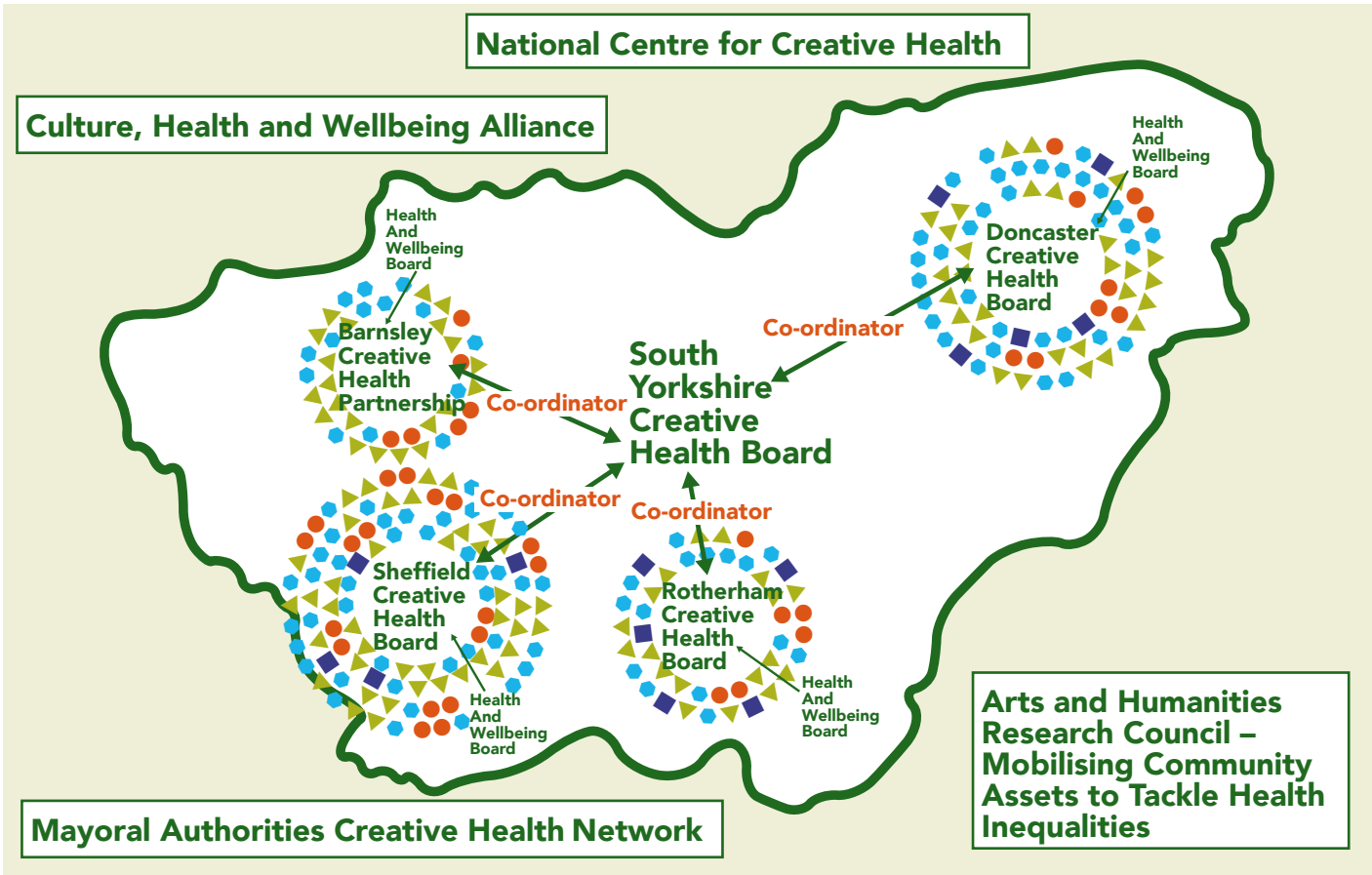
We anticipate that our Creative Health Boards will play an increasingly proactive role in connecting existing Creative Health at Neighbourhood level, to build a strong infrastructure across the system. Place-based coordinators (hosted in partner organisations, resourced through blended funding) would increase capacity, accelerate progress and enable more efficient collaboration across the system. These roles act as the glue and the grease, strengthening the sectors ability to help people live happier, healthier lives for longer. Early research (due for publication 2025/6) into equivalent roles nationally suggests they are a low cost – high value way to advance and support sustainable partnerships with culture, health and care sectors.

“Arts Council England and the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance support a dedicated role for Barnsley. This has meant that we have been able to build a strong case locally to embed Creative Health into strategic plans... we just wouldn’t have made progress at the same pace, or had the wide-ranging reach to creative practitioners and grass root organisations.”

Julie Tolhurst, Public Health Principal,
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Future infrastructure

- Key
- Medium/large sized Creative Health providers
 - ▲ Small/grassroots Creative Health providers
 - Freelance Creative Health practitioners
 - Neighbourhood Health Forums



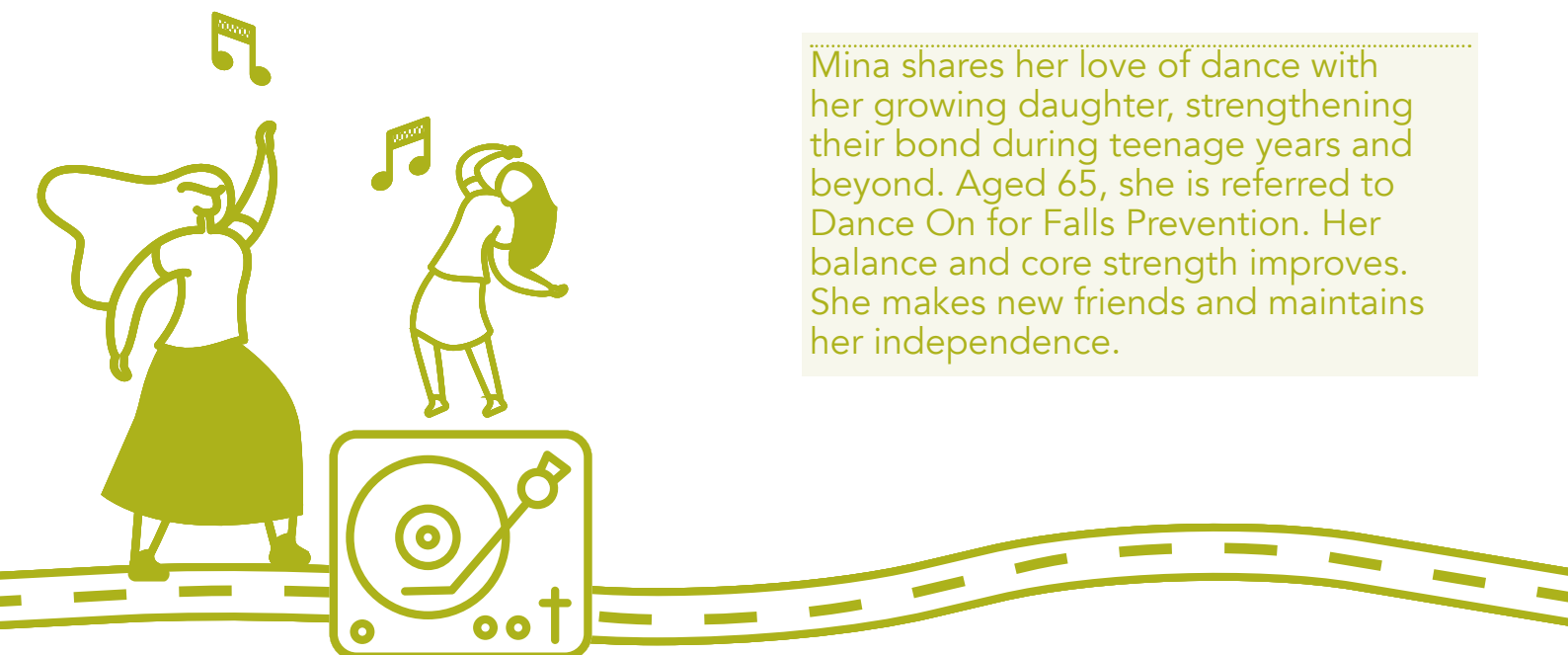
National Context

The 10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future sets out how the government will reinvent the NHS through three radical shifts (hospital to community, analogue to digital, sickness to prevention).

Numerous national studies (see Bibliography) suggest that this offers a transformative opportunity for creative health to move from “nice-to-have” to becoming integral to community-based, preventative health services.

Together, we can unlock the potential of Creative Health to:

- Deliver creative activities that support health literacy, preventative care and health creation.
- Reduce demand on NHS services (e.g. support people’s health and wellbeing while they are waiting for elective care).
- Co-design Neighbourhood services, bridging with communities as a strategic partner within VCSE sector.
- Place creative practitioners within multi-disciplinary Neighbourhood teams to support people with complex needs.
- Support patient choice and control through creative expression and advocacy.
- Positively engage people that statutory services often find harder to reach.
- Share knowledge and data to inform and support the development of a fairer and more equitable health service and tackle health inequalities.
- Contribute towards measuring wellbeing as an indicator of a successful economy.



Mina shares her love of dance with her growing daughter, strengthening their bond during teenage years and beyond. Aged 65, she is referred to Dance On for Falls Prevention. Her balance and core strength improves. She makes new friends and maintains her independence.

Regional Context

The South Yorkshire Health Equity Panel Report, *Health is Wealth: How South Yorkshire will become the country’s healthiest region*, opens with these sobering words from Professor Alan Walker CBE: “A healthy life should be available to everyone in South Yorkshire, but it isn’t.” Professor Walker goes on to say that “Some live for 20 years longer than average in poor health and some die up to 20 years earlier than they should do.”

The health inequalities in our region require a radical new approach to prevention.

ICS Bold Ambitions	How Creative Health can contribute
Development in early years so that every child in South Yorkshire is school ready	Exemplar programmes like Tuneful Chatter in Doncaster or the Children’s Capital of Culture in Rotherham improve physical and mental health amongst children and young people, including confidence and communication skills.
Act differently together to strengthen & accelerate our focus on prevention and early identification	Creative Health offers low-cost, evidence-based, preventive interventions across the life course, (e.g. darts’ Dance On falls-prevention programme in Doncaster) with large cost-benefit ratios for the NHS (for more on cost-benefits see Frontier Economics, 2024). Creative Health has expertise in connecting with underserved communities; preventative approaches; health inequalities; and neighbourhood approaches.
Work together to increase economic participation and support a fair, inclusive and sustainable economy	Micro-local creative health interventions like Creative Recovery in Barnsley or RivelinCo in Sheffield upskill participants and are tailored for the specific requirements of those with greatest need.
Collaborate to value and support our entire workforce across health, care, VCSE, carers – paid and unpaid	Workforce development programmes (such as the Creative Health Training programme led by Barnsley Creative Health Partnership & BMBC Public Health, or the SWYFT Extension of Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) Introduction to Creative Health) improve Creative Health skills and support health and social care practitioners.

Strategic Ambitions

In South Yorkshire we have a long history of working successfully at Neighbourhood level. We now have the scaffolding for a structure that moves between local and regional. We want to stay at the forefront of the national movement in the Creative Health sector and continue to lead South Yorkshire towards a Creative Health system that is thriving as part of a diversity of providers.

South Yorkshire Creative Health Board will continue to convene and lead strategically, building relationships and advocating for Creative Health in strategies and policies. We would like to collaborate with health and care partners to explore these ambitions:

Building communities of support and delivery

- Continue to build relationships with colleagues in SYMCA / VCSE Alliance / ICS to maximise the benefits of Creative Health for people in South Yorkshire.
- Secure resource to improve networks and support for Creative Practitioners - networked communities of providers will help signpost people (like Mina) to a range of interventions through their life course.
- Continue to demonstrate leadership at conferences and events including the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance International Conference in Barnsley 2026, and annual Creative Health symposiums.

Workforce development and co-production

- Build on previous successes, create more opportunities for creative practitioners and health and care staff to co-produce Creative Health that responds to local needs, building parity of esteem and trust, sharing learning and training across the system.
- Continue to lead within national Creative Health training networks.
- Support the implementation of the Creative Health Quality Framework
- Embed learning from Children's Capital of Culture, Rotherham: children coproducing a daily programme for thousands of their peers, with 140 new traineeships and 13 alumni roles.

Evidence and knowledge sharing

- Maximise the impact of existing South Yorkshire research around the impact of Creative Health on addressing health inequalities, to benefit our communities.
- Gather and share case studies and evidence from across the region (SY ICS Insights Bank and CHWA website).
- Build on South Yorkshire's Creative Health Boards research programme: researchers, practitioners and commissioners will support the development and implementation of impact measures that are meaningful both for the individual and for the commissioner.

Investing and Embedding

- Explore sustainable funding models to embed Creative Health into health and care pathways using a mixed funding ecology from statutory and charitable sources (e.g. health commissioning, charitable trusts and foundations, cultural sector funding, Local Authorities).
- Support organisations with commissioning responsibility to consider ways to embed Creative Health into core contracts for the delivery of health and social care services.
- Actively seek opportunities to embed Creative Health in new and existing programmes, such as Neighbourhood Health, Criminal Justice, Housing.

Strategy alignment

- Demonstrate alignment with cross-cutting strategies and the rapidly changing policy landscape. The English Devolution Bill and the 10 Year Health Plan will set out the roles of Mayoral Combined Authorities in relation to reducing health inequalities. We will collaborate to embed Creative Health for optimum impact.
- Demonstrate how Creative Health supports the shift towards 'inclusive growth', positioning health equity as a central objective.
- Play an instrumental role in supporting the Three Shifts (from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention), through our strategic Boards and networks.

Together Festival, Stand and Be Counted Theatre, Sheffield.
© Ai Narapol



Tuneful Chatter, darts, Doncaster. © James Mulkeen for darts



Colour Walk, Creative Recovery, Barnsley.



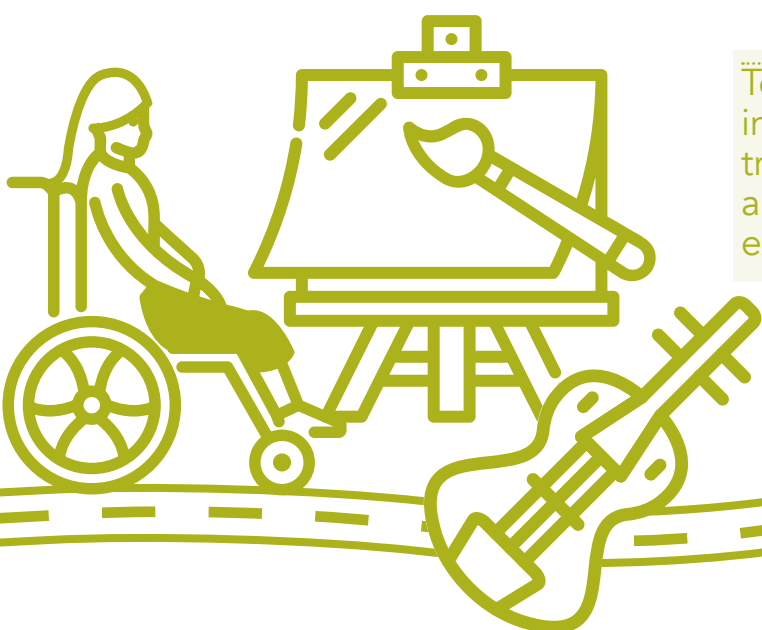
Tuneful Chatter, darts, Doncaster. © James Mulkeen for darts





Impacts of Creative Health

Mina benefitted from a range of creative activities that complemented and supported the support she received from other services (e.g. NHS, Local Authority, Department of Work and Pensions). These Creative Health interventions helped improve her health and had ripple effects into her relationships and overall wellbeing, helping her to gain agency in her own life and live a happier, healthier life for longer.



Towards the end of her life, Mina moves into a Creative Health care home where trained staff run creative activities. Mina and her daughter enjoy sharing creative experiences together when she visits.

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