

Short report: How creativity and culture has been supporting people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19

This report is based on case studies of 48 projects, received from **45 organisations**, all of whom have created new programmes or adapted existing work to reach people who are **shielding or vulnerable in their homes**.

Aim

This report is intended to bring to light the scope, breadth and reach of the work that cultural and creative organisations and individuals have been doing since lockdown to reach the most vulnerable in our communities, and the immense creativity and care with which this work has been designed.

Almost all of the case studies in this report were undertaken in partnership – with local government, health, and/or third sector partners. It is this collaborative approach, together with a commitment to building responsive projects from the ground up, that has supported people’s creativity at the height of a national crisis. The skills, time and energy required for this work are undervalued, however. We hope this report will help us learn from what has worked during the crisis; and that it will help make the case for comprehensive financial and infrastructural support for work that will be as vital to our recovery as it has been a lifeline during lockdown.

“Creative Care packages have been sent to some of our most vulnerable families and have proved to be a lifeline to those that are engaging with them... Many, many thanks to all involved in bringing this opportunity to our community.” (Cambridge Curiosity & Imagination’s *Creative Care* programme)

The work

The majority of organisations have deployed a **mixture of on and offline** approaches. Some have worked *only* offline, recognising that vulnerability is often tied to lack of digital access. Offline work has varied from the targeted distribution of creative packs – usually in collaboration with local authority, NHS or community partners – to printable resources, phone calls and workshops, and creative exchanges by post. Online work has encompassed workshops, resources, exhibitions, performances, peer-support, social media, and much more...

Outcomes

The work in these case studies has been designed to tackle issues varying from stigma, to community relations, to slowing the impacts of dementia – but the vast majority is directly addressing **loneliness and social isolation, and supporting wellbeing**. We know from years of research¹ that creativity and culture are well-placed to impact all of these outcomes.



Arts Drop, Creative Learning Guild

¹ See for example Fancourt, D. & Finn, S. (2019). What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report 67, World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/329834>

Reach

The work has been designed to reach people living at home, with a variety of needs or vulnerabilities. The groups receiving greatest support through these case studies are **unpaid carers, people with dementia, people with ongoing mental health needs, and vulnerable young people**. Not everyone who submitted a case study was able to quantify how many people they reached, but for the **38 projects** that could estimate numbers, we can estimate **97,500** participants; an average of over 2,500 per project. It seems likely therefore that the 45 organisations will have reached over 100,000.

The largest reach was that of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which is delivering a total of **38,000 creative packs** to vulnerable young people and older people across the 10 districts of Greater Manchester. At the other end of the scale, Coram has worked closely with **13 young people with experience of care**, supporting mental health and tackling loneliness through Letters in Lockdown – a mixture of on and offline creative writing workshops that will lead to a future, physical exhibition.

Partnership & funding

94% of these projects were undertaken in partnership: 69% of projects in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations; **50% of projects in partnership with local authorities** (31% of projects received funding from local authorities); **48% in partnership with the NHS** (15.5% of projects received funding from the NHS). 60% of projects were supported by National Lottery distributors, including 36% by Arts Council England and 24% by the National Lottery Community Fund; 53% received funding from trusts and foundations.

Challenges & successes

We asked people to describe the main challenges and successes of this targeted work during the covid crisis. Emergent themes include:

Challenges

- Resources, funding and staff capacity (and sometimes partners' capacity)
- Recreating the responsiveness and relational qualities of face-to-face work online
- Supporting and training staff and facilitators to work digitally
- Increased time needed to build or maintain relationships (e.g. long phone calls)
- Logistical challenges and cost of offline work (e.g. creative packs and postage)
- Safeguarding in digital spaces
- How to reach the most vulnerable and maintain engagement
- How to evaluate in a safe, confidential way

Successes

- Swift, responsive programmes
- Successfully reaching isolated or vulnerable people
- Maintaining relationships with existing participant groups
- Increased reach (geographically and in terms of numbers)
- Risk-taking: successful experimental projects
- Developing new partnerships, expanding existing partnerships
- Learning new skills
- Increasing public awareness of the value of creativity & culture

Context

Many of the people and organisations driving this response are in an extremely vulnerable position. 20 of the organisations who responded have under 15 employees; **6 have no employees at all, only freelance and voluntary support** – yet these 6 reached an average of 137 people with each of their projects. Most of the organisations who responded to our recent survey of the wider culture, health and wellbeing sector are facing losses in medium to long-term funding because of covid. Yet these are the people reaching our most vulnerable neighbours, providing vital support for wellbeing and community cohesion, and tackling inequalities of access, isolation, mental health and loneliness.

Recommendations

We recommend that leaders in health, social care, local government and culture give serious consideration to these organisations and practitioners who have been so vital for the wellbeing and cohesion of our communities during the covid crisis, and learn from the ways in which they have worked. This in turn will ensure culture and creativity can support many more people as we rebuild. Organisations like these, and the many freelancers who work with them, need to be sustainably resourced, and supported with local, regional and national infrastructure if they are to sustain our physical, mental and social health. In particular, these case studies suggest the following needs:

- Significant investment in partnerships between culture, local government, the NHS and the third sector which supports creative and cultural ‘providers’
- When considering investment, partners and funders should give consideration to *all* the elements of delivering these complex projects (partnership development, coproduction, signposting, pastoral care, practitioner support, logistics, and so on)
- Additional investment in the networks and alliances (national, regional and local) that support practitioners and organisations to continue and develop their work and partnerships, collect data and advocate for this work collectively on their behalf
- Research and evaluation support for the sector in general and to better understand the impact and process of working remotely

These recommendations are intended as a starting point; we hope to work with our strategic partners to develop them further.

‘I feel so valued and I want more people to experience this. We need resources; we have the family we just need a home to put us all in! I want Theatre Orchard to be a “forever”. I want my grand-babies to experience what I have experienced because I know that they might need a safe space too.’

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to all the organisations who made time despite increased pressures on their resources to respond to our call for case studies.

Art & Soul, Arts Derbyshire, Arts Development Company, Aspex, the Beaney House of Art & Knowledge, Butterflies, Cambridge Curiosity & Imagination, Celebrating Age Wiltshire, Colchester & Ipswich Museums, Coram, Christchurch Belles WI, Create, Creative Learning Guild, Creative Minds, darts, Devon Recovery & Learning College, Denbighshire Leisure Ltd Community Arts, Dream Time Creative, Escape, Free Space Project, Fun Palaces, the Garden Museum, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Inclusive Intergenerational Dance (iID),

Intermission Youth, Live Music Now, Look Again, Magic Me, Manchester Museum, Museum of London, Museum of Oxford, National Archives, National Museums Liverpool, Open Art Box, The Reader, Royal Central School of Speech & Drama, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Southbank Centre, South London Gallery, Spitalfields Music, Suffolk Artlink, Tees, Esk & Wear Valley NHS Recovery College, Theatre Orchard, University of Cambridge Museums, Yorkshire Dance.

Selected case studies

We have included six examples below. You can [read all 48 case studies here](#).



Arts Drop, Creative Learning Guild

Project: Arts Drop
Organisation: Creative Learning Guild
Region: Yorkshire & Humber

- Reaching 2,500 at-risk and looked-after children, young carers, and children with refugee/asylum seeker status across Calderdale with creative packs
- Supporting skills development and the 5 Ways to Wellbeing

“Arts Drop provides clinician-approved creative activity packs that use arts and culture to boost wellbeing for the most vulnerable children.

It was designed to reach children and young people (CYP) identified by the local authority as the most vulnerable. This encompassed:

- *Children deemed at risk of abuse and neglect*
- *Looked-after children*
- *Young carers*
- *Children with refugee or asylum-seeker status*

‘I encourage special time with this family, so the fact they received these packs meant they could have that special time and it would be extra special!’

We knew these children and young people would have little / no access to online content and even if they did, may not have access to the basic art materials often assumed to be available. We also knew that these CYP would be living in chaotic and stressed households where the benefits of tailored arts activities could have significant impact.

The Arts Drop framework was created by specialist Arts & Health clinician Elaine Burke to ensure that activity would map to the developmental needs of CYP within 3 distinct age brackets: Early years, primary and secondary. This framework also ensures that any materials needed to undertake activity are provided and that activity is emotionally and psychologically safe for children living in difficult circumstances.

Packs were distributed to CYP and their families by social workers and key workers.”

Projects: Theatre Lounge, Chapter One, Holidaying at Home, Creative Ease, Boredom Buster
Organisation: Theatre Orchard
Region: South West England

- Reaching 20,000+ vulnerable adults, older people, vulnerable families and hospital in-patients with an online festival, events, workshops and printable resources
- Tackling loneliness, and supporting mental health, skills development, family activity, self-expression, and peer support



Image credit: Megan Clark-Bagnall/Theatre Orchard

"It has been a privilege to be able to work with North Somerset communities over lockdown, and we have been bowled over by the honesty and bravery of the participants, many of whom face very challenging personal circumstances. Different projects have unlocked different qualities. Drama and writing have allowed for reflection and self-expression, Holidaying at Home gave a license to step into a new reality and forget the physical surroundings, for a little while, then perhaps return to them refreshed. Boredom Buster has united a community of artists - both local and international - in the shared aim of reaching out to isolated hospital patients, bringing a little creative diversion and entertainment during this disconcerting period when familial visits were not permitted.

All the projects have brought forth different perspectives on lockdown – the negatives and the positives, with a whole host of suggestions emerging from more marginalised voices as to what learnings we can take forward, so that ‘recovery’ also incorporates ‘transformation’.

[Read the full case study here](#)

A verse from Theatre Lounge and Chapter One member, Vickie Bardsley:

*The silence is deafening, the darkness is blinding,
The scent of aloneness overwhelming. A new life
For ten weeks so far for many, in trepidation of the living.
Isn't it the dead we're meant to fear? Isolation is a haunting
Made of nightmares, so few understand
The daily hell I spent trapped in. Now we are the same,
But once lockdown is ended, who will remember
Those of us still forced into isolation?*

'I'd have had nothing to do, no hope and been bored if we hadn't had this. When I do come online and get involved, I come away feeling better. But I just want to go back to normal Intermission.'



Image: Zoom rehearsal of *The Tempest*, copyright Ariel Films

Organisation: Intermission Youth
Region: Greater London

- Reaching over 30 young people aged 16-25, mostly from the BAME community, who are vulnerable, at-risk and from socio-economically challenging backgrounds, with a huge range of online workouts, performance, films and learning – and phone support
- Supporting wellbeing and physical health, supporting self-expression and young people's confidence and capacity to influence change, particularly in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and in relation to the #BlackLivesMatter movement

"Two or three weeks before lockdown began, we started to think about creative ways to engage with our young people. These are the outputs we have achieved during C-19:

- *Daily online **pre-recorded video workshops** ...*
- *Weekly online **pre-recorded Question Time videos** with industry leaders ...including Sir Mark Rylance, Naomie Harris, Robin Belfield, Libby Purves, Ola Ince, Jenny Agutter, Rudolph Walker...*
- *Weekly online **Chill 'n Chat** nights when the young people come into a safe online space to chill out, chat and be together ...*
- *Weekly **Saturday Watch Together** ...a chance to come together online to watch a short film (in which some of our graduates took part), recordings of our youth theatre productions in which they featured, films, etc.*
- *An online **Zoom production over 2 evenings: Shakespeare's Monologue Slams...***
- *Weekly **online rehearsals of The Tempest***
- *...the **Intermission Film Festival** in which we have invited youth theatre cohort members and graduates to produce a short (5 minute) film ...shot on iPhone/android*
- *An online **Zoom Scratch Night** in which ...youth theatre cohort members and graduates perform in front of their peers*
- *A daily 10-minute **workout challenge**, helping the young people to keep fit.*
- *A fun **Bards Beat** video to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday in April: Intermission Youth team, young people and friends of Intermission took part in an 'iambic pentameter' rhythm challenge*
- *Five of our young people were selected to be writers for a development film **Hear My Voice...** a co-production with 1961 Productions and Royal Opera House ...*
- ***Ongoing 1:1 support & mentoring** via phone. Regular phone calls have been a highly important aspect of our work, as demonstrated by a recent survey carried out on our behalf by Relationships Foundation."*

[Read the full case study here](#)



Project: Creative Care Programme
Organisation: Cambridge Curiosity & Imagination
Region: East England

- Reaching 490 people across Cambridge and Peterborough – vulnerable families and teenagers, and people with ongoing mental health needs – with packs, online workshops, films and social media
- Supporting wellbeing and developing new partnerships

“The Creative Care Programme has developed invitations and resources to support people of all ages to be creative at home. Where possible these are delivered as part of ‘creative care packs’ but are also free to download or access on line. To date five artists have designed a series of twelve ‘invitations to create’ to help people rediscover the world on their doorsteps in creative ways. These have been distributed within 357 packs alongside specially chosen materials selected by the artists. These invitations encourage people to go out into the world around them, and reconnect with all their senses and with the pleasures of noticing, listening, making and shaping.”

‘What a pleasure to see everyone this morning, to know they’re okay, and for them to know all these people are still thinking of them. I could literally see that on their faces. Thank you for putting all of these materials and ideas together. You are wonderful.’
(Headteacher)

Four focus on families with younger children, four on teenagers and four for adults of any age. They all need only the simplest of materials and everyday objects and require no special art skills. The Creative Care packages include high quality art materials and open-ended resources selected by the artists. Online support trialled to date has included artists joining Zoom classroom sessions and WhatsApp weekly meetings as well as emails and phone-calls to encourage engagement and dialogue. Small films are being developed to support each invitation and build connections with the artists. Plans are being developed to develop a future iteration of the box and support with a youth panel for the county.”

[Read the full case study here](#)

Project: Museum of You

Organisation: The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge

Region: South East England

- Reaching 100 people who are shielding, people with dementia and their carers, and people with visual impairments by phone and newsletter, with a view to producing an exhibition documenting the experience of lockdown
- Tackling loneliness, supporting mental health and wellbeing and developing new partnerships

“The aim of Museum of You was to produce a high-quality exhibition that captured the local experience of lockdown. The exhibition call-outs focused on MIND's 6 Ways to Wellbeing. With each call-out was an accompanying newsletter containing evidence-based, accessible activities designed to improve health and wellbeing whilst at home. Alongside the open call, a targeted approach was employed to ensure that as many groups as possible would be able to participate and that the exhibition would truly reflect the demographic of the local community.

By hosting this opportunity, more people will have access to the therapeutic value of the arts, particularly in what is acknowledged to be a very challenging time for people's physical and mental health. Alongside Museum of You we ran a “Creating Heritage Blog” from the day that the museum closed: a digital record of life during lockdown, with contributions from museum staff, volunteers, local school children, artists, healthcare professionals and staff from other arts organisations. A poet was commissioned to use the blog's contents as inspiration to write a poem, the content of which will be printed onto floor vinyls to act as social distancing reminders. These floor vinyls are important interventions in the museum to manage people's anxiety by providing a more pleasant way of providing social distancing measures.”

[Read the full case study here](#)

‘I found the process of drawing and painting both cathartic and healing at the most difficult time of my life.’



“Lockdown Life” by Rebecca Douglas for Museum of You, the Beaney

‘Being home 24/7, it’s very easy for a person with dementia to decline. There isn’t any outside stimulation, everything has to be artificially created... So Clay for Dementia that was always a fantastic programme, has, there’s no doubt about it, become even more fantastic during this period.’

Project: Clay for Dementia
Organisation: Garden Museum
Region: Greater London

- Reaching 31 people with dementia and carers by post and with online workshops
- Maintaining contact and social connection, and supporting wellbeing.

“Clay for Dementia began at the Garden Museum in autumn 2017 as a pilot with Arts4Dementia. It has continued since its first 8-week course with the same teacher, some of the same volunteers and many of the same participants. All sessions and materials are free ... We run about 3 sets of sessions a year – spring, summer and autumn/winter. We exhibit the outcomes at the museum. During the lockdown, we held 6 sessions over April and May with a 3-week break and after consulting the group have just started another 6 sessions. Participants didn’t want to have the usual length of break between sessions, so we are planning to keep running as many sessions as possible whilst participants are at home shielding.

Bags of clay and cutting wires were sent to the homes of the participants, as well as powdered slips more recently, for adding colour.”

[Read the full case study here](#)



Cristina is in her 90s and is shielding with her daughter Marion. They’ve been coming to Clay for Dementia since Cristina was diagnosed.

About the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance

The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance is a free-to-join, 5000-strong membership organisation. We are funded as a Sector Support Organisation by Arts Council England and work with regional champions and national partners around the UK. Our vision is a healthy world powered by our creativity and imagination. We are an organisation driven by the collective power of our members. We connect, amplify and support their work to transform people's lives and communities through culture and creativity.

<https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/>



Supported using public funding by
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