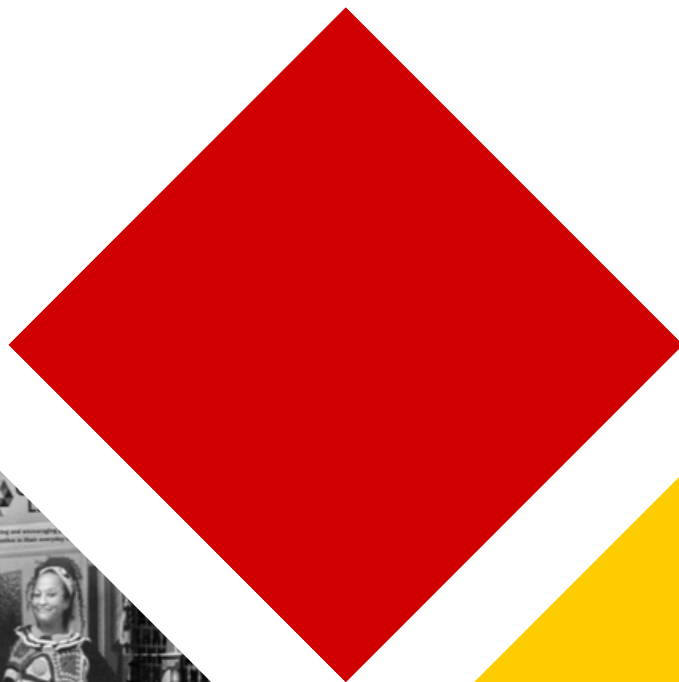




STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-29



April 2024

www.creative-lives.org

INTRODUCTION

Creative Lives is a registered charity that was established in 1991. We champion community and volunteer-led creative activity, and work to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative. In particular, we celebrate and promote people expressing themselves creatively with others, recognising the benefits this can bring.

Our focus is on local creative groups – by which we mean not-for-profit, volunteer-led groups whose creative activities are shaped and directed by the people who take part in them. These groups exist in almost every community and involve both the mainstream population and people from almost every diverse community.

Creative Lives is constantly evolving to address the changing environment in which it operates. We repositioned the organisation in 2021 to make ourselves more relevant and use our capacity and resources more effectively, focussing more of our work on supporting communities to express their voices, work in collaboration and have a greater civic role.

We believe 2024 represents both a moment of opportunity and a moment of real need for Creative Lives, because of the challenges facing local communities, recent policy changes by Governments and Arts Councils, increasing recognition of the value of everyday creativity, the development of social prescribing and the continued contraction of local government. To focus our activities more effectively we have developed a new strategic vision for Creative Lives which sets out our bold ambitions for the next five years.



Our Mission is Building Creative Communities

We champion, support, promote and nurture local creative groups in order to build more sustainable communities.

Over the next five years, Creative Lives will focus its work in pursuit of a single strategic goal.

Our Goal: local creative groups have the capacity, resilience and connections to enable them to work collaboratively towards solutions to local challenges.

Context

In 2024 there is a fragility to society. The National Lottery Community Fund's Community Research Index, published in January 2024, identifies the cost of living as people's top priority in 2024, with 76% predicting continued rising demand for local food banks in the year ahead, along with greater local need for debt advice (71%), mental health support (70%) and housing charities (63%). In this context, it is increasingly challenging to rely on local and national governments to support creativity in communities.

The whole sense of community is currently under pressure: people are feeling a sense of powerlessness and a lack of agency. Our work is to enable people to see themselves as valued contributors to civic partnerships and therefore local development.

People coming together, forming groups, and taking part in creative activities helps to reanimate communities.

To build better communities we need to enable everyone to affirm the value of local voluntary and independent contributions to affecting change in their communities. Working in partnership with local authorities and others, enables substantial impacts to be made. We need to energise dismissed communities and cultivate a new forum for creative and social change.

A creative approach can address particular needs and problems, alleviate loneliness, improve mental wellbeing, develop civic pride and forge or strengthen community identity – through activities that attract people because they are genuinely inspirational and joyful.

Taking part in creative groups allows people to contribute and feel invested in their local area, and to forge links that connect people and enable local change. This in turn generates a greater spectrum of inclusive voices, strengthening local democracy and building trust and sustainable cohesion.

Our values

We believe in the importance of:

- People expressing themselves creatively...
- ...and doing this collectively with others;
- Creative groups whose activities are shaped and directed by the people who take part in them;
- Everyone being treated equally and feeling included;
- Actively working to increase opportunities for people to be creative;
- Knowledge, skills, contacts, venues and equipment being pooled to enhance creative cultural activity, for the common good;
- Taking meaningful actions to reduce our environmental footprint and mobilising positive change to contribute to the pathway to net zero emissions.

The opportunity: the role local creative groups play in their communities

Lots of people choose to spend their own time and money taking part in local creative groups – by which we mean not-for-profit, volunteer-led groups whose creative activities are shaped and directed by the people who take part in them. Research suggests there are around 63,000 formally constituted local creative groups across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, regularly involving approximately 10 million people. Local creative groups exist almost everywhere, and involve people from almost every diverse community.

Local creative groups have traditionally been mostly independent and self-sufficient – run by their members and not requiring any public funding.

Local creative groups naturally create a range of benefits, both for their individual participants (confidence, skills, wellbeing, improved mental health, self expression, social connections etc.) and for their communities (cohesion, civic action, pride and identity, economic impact and creative solutions to local problems).

The impact of local creative groups is wider than the cultural activity they generate, often supporting adult education, health and voluntary sectors. Local creative groups have proven themselves to be good at addressing a wide range of societal problems, including isolation and loneliness, poor health, divisions in communities and dis-empowerment.

The need: the role Creative Lives plays in building creative communities

1. In communities facing particular challenges, such as socio-economic deprivation, discrimination or neglect, the independent, self-sufficient model of local creative groups has always been more difficult to realise, preventing groups from making their potential contribution to the wider community.
2. The viability of independent local creative groups is currently under threat in many communities because of:
 - Increasing regulation/compliance demands (including GDPR, safeguarding, health and safety);
 - The costs and availability of suitable venues;
 - The cost of living crisis;
 - Post-lockdown disengagement from in-person activities.
3. The potential for local creative groups to make a full contribution to their communities is restricted by barriers, including:
 - Disconnection (both from other local creative groups and from local authorities);
 - Unheard voices;
 - Being under-valued;
 - Humility/lack of confidence.

Over the next five years Creative Lives will focus its work specifically on addressing these barriers and threats in pursuit of the strategic goal:

Our Goal: local creative groups have the capacity, resilience and connections to enable them to work collaboratively towards solutions to local challenges.

This strategic goal is intended to lead to a range of impacts in communities:

- Reducing isolation and disconnection;
- Improved mental wellbeing and life satisfaction;
- Increased inclusion and civic participation;
- Stronger community identity and social cohesion.

Creative Lives: What We Do

We champion, support, promote and nurture local creative groups in order to build more sustainable communities.

Creative Lives champions and promotes local creative groups across the UK and Ireland. At a local level, Creative Lives operates a programme of hyper-local place-based development work in partnership with local authorities and other local agencies (including higher education, health, trusts and arts organisations) in communities facing particular challenges such as socio-economic deprivation, discrimination or neglect. We work on the premise that there is creative activity taking place in every community: our starting point is to find, value and celebrate what is already there before looking at how it can be supported, sustained and increased.

In choosing the target places for our local development programme we are trying to identify communities facing particular challenges, where Creative Lives can make a tangible positive difference. Initially, in England, we have been aligning our target areas with Arts Council England Priority Places and DCMS Levelling-up Areas, as these are based on indices of deprivation and other significant needs. We want to ensure that each project focuses on an area that is facing specific challenges, which may include socio-economic deprivation, racial discrimination and chronic loneliness. This may include hyper-local communities that represent pockets of deprivation or challenge within otherwise affluent areas. We are less concerned about ensuring an even geographical distribution of target areas across the country, preferring to choose areas of genuine need where we believe we can effect a positive change which will make a significant contribution to rebuilding local communities. But, over the next few years, we would hope to cover a variety of different types of challenged communities to maximise our learning to inform our national advocacy role with governments, funders and policy-makers.



Our place-based development work consists of:

Mapping

We map existing local creative groups and collaborative everyday creativity in communities. In particular, we recognise and value different forms of creativity, with a focus on economically diverse communities and on creativity taking place through community groups, neighbourhood organisations and other non-arts organisations. In addition, we also map local cultural venues and infrastructure. These are added to our existing national Creativity Map, capturing creative opportunities across the country.

Connecting

Bringing local creative groups and volunteers together in each community to connect them to one another, and to the relevant local authority and other agencies. Giving voice to neglected communities, developing self-sustaining peer support networks and supporting groups who feel isolated or ignored. We undertake programmes of creative matchmaking – such as developing unusual pairings between local creative groups and environmental groups.

Training

Training and development sessions for local volunteers and local creative groups to address their key challenges and development needs, as well as helping them to become more environmentally sustainable.

Inspiring communities

Through taster events, celebrations and profile raising.

Seed funding

Practical developmental support in the form of micro-grants (£200-£300) to address barriers to participation and make groups more viable, sustainable and effective.

Creative Lives On Air

Our unique radio partnership with the BBC that amplifies the reach of existing everyday creativity by sharing the stories of the people and places that make it happen.

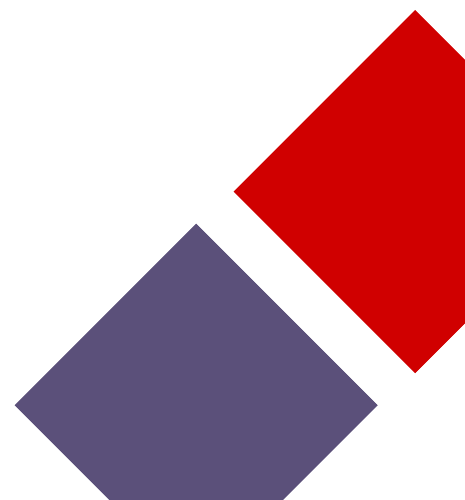
Our place-based development work is designed to address barriers to creativity that impede the quality of life of ordinary people, using the Creative Lives Open Conversations model (originally developed by our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory Panel) to develop equal opportunities for everyone to be creative as part of their everyday lives. The Creative Lives Approach is about creating a safe space for people to explore what they are thinking and manage differing perspectives respectfully.

Creative Lives delivers its place-based development programme through a rolling team of freelancers based within the target places, thereby providing development opportunities to people from a range of diverse communities and enabling Creative Lives to continue to diversify its workforce. We plan to initiate a peer support network to enable these freelancers to connect with each other and share learning and best practice.

Creative Lives collects equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) monitoring data from all its events and recruitment. This monitoring information is scrutinised quarterly against targets set by the Board, to refine practice and introduce new initiatives.

Our place-based development work is intended to build peer support networks of existing (but often unseen and disconnected) local creative groups, to make those groups and their creative activities more resilient, sustainable and effective and to give their members a collective voice with which to address local challenges. Creativity has a unique way of enabling people and developing agency, giving a voice to those who are otherwise unseen, unheard and unacknowledged, and thereby providing the opportunity for greater democratic engagement and pride in place.

The learning and evidence from our local, place-based work informs our national advocacy work with governments, funders and policy-makers to influence policy changes that could replicate these positive effects more widely across the country. Similarly we will use the learning from our place-based projects to inform our national programme of advice and information to local creative groups in order to provide guides, toolkits and briefings to enable the development of self-sustaining networks in other areas across the country.



Our national role involves:

Creative Voice

Continuing to provide a single national voice for local creative groups across the UK and Ireland. Explaining the challenges faced by tens of thousands of groups. Championing the role everyday creativity plays in building communities, improving health and wellbeing, supporting informal adult education, reducing loneliness, increasing community cohesion and cultural democracy. And influencing legislation, regulation and policy to develop the best possible environment for everyday creativity to flourish, thereby enriching life for everyone. To this end we work in partnership with the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, National Academy for Social Prescribing, Local Government Association, Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association, Libraries Connected, Association of Independent Museums, Learning & Work Institute, Workers Educational Association, National Centre for Creative Health and others. Creative Lives is also a founder member of the AHRC Everyday Creativity Research Network.

Creative Knowledge

Clear, relevant and appropriate guides, briefings and toolkits to support the volunteer organisers of local creative groups across the UK and Ireland. We produce case studies highlighting innovative uses of public spaces for creative cultural activity that specifically demonstrate a positive effect on the environment. Our online Creative Networks and Creative Learning sessions provide interactive opportunities for peer support and learning.

Creative Lives Awards

Our annual national awards scheme which highlights the remarkable impact local volunteer-led creative groups have on their communities. The annual Creative Lives Awards ceremony celebrates groups that enhance people's lives in villages, towns and cities across the UK and Ireland. Each year, we invite community-led groups to enter our Awards so we can shine a spotlight on the activities they deliver and take part in. All of them help foster a sense of community and provide vital opportunities for people to express their creativity, make friends, learn new skills, have fun and increase their wellbeing. The Creative Lives Awards recognise the skill, innovation and hard work of the people involved and the benefits they bring to local communities.

Outputs

The above activities lead to the following outputs:

- Connections between local creative groups;
- Training and support opportunities for local creative leaders;
- Promotional activities to raise the profile of local creative groups;
- Advocacy meetings, campaigns and consultation responses on behalf of local creative groups.

Strategic aims

The above outputs are intended to lead to the following strategic aims:

- Local creative groups are better connected with each other;
- Local creative leaders have enhanced skills, capacity and motivation;
- There is increased visibility and appreciation of local creative groups;
- An improved infrastructure and regulatory environment for local creative groups.

Our Goal

These strategic aims lead to our strategic goal:

- Local creative groups have the capacity, resilience and connections to enable them to work collaboratively towards solutions to local challenges.

Outcomes

This strategic goal leads to the following outcomes:

- Local creative groups are working collaboratively to make change happen in target areas
- Local creative activities in target areas result in reduced isolation and disconnection
- Local creative groups are playing an increased role in strengthening community identity and social cohesion



Evaluation

Progress towards our strategic goal will be measured by the **Creative Lives Monitor**. We will use surveys of local creative groups – in the target areas for our place-based development work and users of our services nationally – to rate:

- Capacity of local creative groups (thriving, surviving, struggling);
- Resilience of local creative groups (assessing current threats and challenges);
- Connections with other community groups and public agencies.

The Creative Lives Monitor will be updated annually using surveys and focus group discussions to assess progress in relation to each of the three factors (capacity, resilience and connections). We will also assess progress against the three factors throughout the year, at the conclusion of every training session, event and project.

Additionally we will monitor our strategic progress quarterly through Key Performance Indicators relating to our four strategic outcomes:

Strategic aims	Outcomes	KPIs - Annual Targets
Local creative groups are better connected with each other	Local creative groups are working collaboratively to make change happen in target areas	<p>At least 8 collaborative networks involving local creative groups or connections between groups and local authorities or other relevant agencies established</p> <p>At least 4 case studies produced and shared of effective collaborative models</p>
Local creative leaders have enhanced skills, capacity and motivation	Local creative groups are working collaboratively to make change happen in target areas	Improvement in skills and competences of at least 10 local creative leaders
Increased visibility and appreciation of local creative groups	Local creative activities in target areas result in reduced isolation and disconnection	<p>At least 100 new participants engaged in creative activities who are at risk of or experiencing chronic loneliness</p> <p>At least 4 case studies produced and shared showing how community-led creative activity can reduce loneliness and disconnection and increase life satisfaction</p> <p>At least 8 local creative groups demonstrating a significant increase in visibility and appreciation</p>
Improved infrastructure and regulatory environment for local creative groups	Local creative groups are playing an increased role in strengthening community identity and social cohesion	<p>At least 4 challenges identified by local creative groups reduced through changes to the infrastructure or regulatory environment</p> <p>Learning from at least 4 local target areas used to influence national policy</p>

