

Creative Lives

The Difference We Make

Annual Report 2020-21

Creative Lives (formerly Voluntary Arts) is a registered charity established in 1991, that champions community and volunteer-led creative activity. We work to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative and, in particular, celebrate and promote people expressing themselves creatively with others, recognising the benefits this brings to both individuals and communities.

This report highlights some of our activities from the year 2020-21.

In June 2021, we changed our name from Voluntary Arts Network to Creative Lives. To avoid confusion this report will refer to the organisation as Creative Lives throughout.



**Creative
Lives**

Contents

Introduction	1
#CreativeNetworks	3
Get Creative at Home	4
Epic Awards 2020	5
Common Ground: Rewilding the Garden	6
Up for Arts	7
#LovetoDraw Ireland	8
My Creative Time	9
Lockdown Life	10
Stoke-on-Trent micro-grants	11
Communications	12
Events, meeting and outcomes	13

The Difference We Make

Introduction

The entirety of our activity for the year between April 2020 and March 2021 was spent under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, and like many organisations, Creative Lives has been evolving, adapting and ensuring our continued relevance in an ever-changing landscape.

In 2020 our understanding of remote working became our key strength, enabling us to quickly provide an online offer via our daily #CreativeNetwork sessions, which supported local creative communities through this extraordinary time of adjustment.

In response to the pandemic, in March 2020 Creative Lives launched the #GetCreativeAtHome campaign which provided more than 900 creative activity listings for people to try at home or online during lockdown, supported by programming across BBC TV and Radio.

In February 2021 we launched Get Creative & Make a Difference, profiling those creative activities that have social connectedness at their heart in order to support those people most at risk of loneliness as a result of the pandemic.

In Spring 2021 we launched our new Creative Learning online training seminars that aim to help members of creative groups gain or improve key skills through peer-learning activities and professional advice.



The Difference We Make

Introduction

Creative Lives has also been working closely with government departments in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland throughout 2020 and 2021 to ensure that voluntary arts groups are able to restart their activities safely in compliance with current pandemic legislation and government Covid-19 guidelines.

Throughout the pandemic it has been wonderful to see how many voluntary arts groups found ways to carry on their activities in some form - and how determined they were to do so. During lockdown, voluntary arts groups have demonstrated the role they play in the social fabric of their communities - supporting their more vulnerable and elderly members and the wider community in a variety of ingenious ways.

The reinvention of Creative Lives since the start of Covid-19 has been transformational: the changes we have embarked on are still developing and our name change is an indication of a determination to affirm our lead role in supporting 'everyday creativity'.



#CreativeNetworks

In March 2020, at the start of the pandemic, Creative Lives launched the #CreativeNetwork: a series of online get-togethers open to anyone involved in arts, culture and creativity in order to connect and collaborate in unusual times.

Facilitating these conversations enabled people from across the UK, Ireland and beyond to talk with others, develop ideas and projects, and find sustainable ways forward in changing circumstances.

Over 150 daily discussions attracted a total of 2,000 participants from the UK and joined by others from across the world. The sessions were an amazing experiment – a creative thinktank for the sector – and a very effective way of building our connections during this challenging period.

The #CreativeNetwork sessions have since developed into a series of thematic online gatherings.

Feedback

“

“I absolutely love these meetings: they always spark something in me.”

“I find it a complete pleasure to interact with people whose paths I wouldn't normally cross so I always find I get out more than I put in! So thank you for getting me involved - it is joyous.”

“It's genuinely refreshing and welcome to have someone with such an accessible approach. I felt that the Zoom session was really comfortable and that we were in the right place. That's not often the case.”

“Really great, thought-provoking discussion this morning. Wonderful to be there and hear all the views.”

”

www.creative-lives.org/creativenetwork

Get Creative

Get Creative is a campaign and festival run by a group of cultural organisations to celebrate and support the everyday creativity happening across the UK.

Because of Coronavirus restrictions it was not possible to go ahead as planned with the Get Creative Festival in May 2020, so the partners developed and promoted the #GetCreativeAtHome campaign.

The Get Creative website was relaunched at the beginning of April 2020 to host listings of online and remote activities for people of all ages and abilities to get creative during lockdown. By Autumn 2020, there were more than 900 activities live on the website, and over 27,000 page views. The #GetCreativeAtHome campaign on social media achieved 640,000 impressions across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

As part of #GetCreativeAtHome the BBC Lockdown Orchestra invited the public to submit recordings or artworks to accompany the backing track of 101 musicians from BBC orchestras playing “You Got The Love”. The call was featured on Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 4 and Radio 6 Music, as well as The One Show on BBC One. Nearly 1,500 submissions were received from across the UK and the final video premiered on BBC Four in May 2020.

Life Drawing Live! was broadcast in May 2020 on BBC Four. The two-hour live broadcast encouraged the public to join in a live life drawing class with tutors and models in the studio. 26,500 drawings were submitted by viewers.



#GetCreativeAtHome Masterclasses were produced for BBC Arts to offer expert tips and advice from world-renowned artists in short videos. These videos achieved 211,769 views on Facebook alone, and were also available on BBC iPlayer.

Epic Awards 2020

Our Epic Awards are an annual celebration of the achievements of voluntary and community-led creativity. Judging panels in each of the nations selected a total of 29 groups to be shortlisted for the 2020 awards.

Creative Lives celebrated the 10th anniversary of its Epic Awards scheme with a special online ceremony in October 2020, with more than 150 people attending the event.

The Epic Awards 2020 winners were:

England winner: [The Joy of Sound](#)

England runner-up: [Jestaminute Community Theatre](#)

Ireland winner: [Care for Creation](#)

Ireland runner-up: [Moon Base Projects](#)

Scotland winner: [Bridgend Eco-Bothy](#)

Scotland runner up: [The Spit It Out Project](#)

Wales winner: [Art on the Hill Newport](#)

Wales runner-up: [Avant Cymru](#)

The People's Choice Award: [Tullyvin Musical Society](#)

The Peer Award for Excellence: [Sahyadri Friends Group](#)

The Celebrating Diversity Award: [The Spit It Out Project](#)



“

“Strength in community is so important right now and all of the groups here tonight have shown what we can achieve together. Congratulations to everyone, long may you continue to do your excellent work!”

Sara Harrison, Arts Council England

In 2021, the Epic Awards were renamed the Creative Lives Awards.
www.creative-lives.org/awards



Common Ground: Rewilding the Garden

In late 2020 Creative Lives published Common Ground - Rewilding the Garden, based on an ambitious programme of work investigating how creative activity is supported in areas of socio-economic deprivation across the UK and Ireland.

A programme of 'Open Conversations' undertaken from 2017-19 revealed a huge amount of existing creative activity in almost every part of the UK and Ireland. This activity is often unfunded, voluntary, everyday creativity rather than professional arts but it is no less valuable, and is in need of significant support and recognition.

Our aim was to surface and celebrate the full extent of voluntary creative activity within different communities of place and interest, which predominantly exists without the support of public funds. Ultimately, we wanted to explore whether the shared undertaking of creative activity has a part to play in contributing to the reconciliation of divisions within communities.

Responding to 'Common Ground - Rewilding the Garden', the playwright Lee Hall (writer of 'Billy Elliott' and 'The Pitmen Painters') told us about his own experience of growing up in Walkerville, Newcastle in the 1970s and 1980s:

"A lot of people would, I think, from the outside have mistaken it for being a place where culture really didn't exist. But I found it an incredibly rich place to grow up at that time".

Lee spoke about how ordinary working class culture is participatory culture, saying that:

"Anybody and everybody can be creative and we are all equally creative, in a fundamental sense, and being creative is as much about sharing with other people as it is pursuing your own gift, if you like: the bigger gift is that you're sharing it with others."

"I think we should embrace the radicalism of this report. In terms of infrastructure we're asking for a great, radical project here, and I think that should be embraced and celebrated."

Dr Dave O'Brien, University of Edinburgh



UP FOR ARTS



**Partnering with
BBC Radio**

Creative Lives developed new Up for Arts projects in partnership with BBC Radio Lincolnshire, BBC Radio Merseyside and BBC Contains Strong Language as well as continuing existing projects with BBC Radio Leeds, BBC Radio Devon, BBC CWR and BBC Wales.

‘Are we ok?’ was a podcast series we produced with BBC Radio Merseyside in late 2020. We worked with a group of young people to create five 12-minute podcasts about themes impacting them throughout the pandemic. The episodes included discussions on mental health, the power of music and Black Lives Matter. The series was launched on BBC Radio Merseyside on World Mental Health day.

We co-produced a podcast series with a group of older people with mental health issues living in Liverpool called ‘It’s About Time’, in partnership with the Richmond Fellowship and Time Banking UK. The group overcame many barriers (which were further compounded by Covid-19) to put together a wonderful series that explored themes driven by the group’s personal experiences of the pandemic. This gave a platform for voices that otherwise would not be heard and featured on BBC Radio Merseyside in December 2020.

We led on community engagement for the BBC’s Contains Strong Language annual poetry and spoken word festival in Cumbria in 2020, working with school groups through Radio Club and producing new poetry with young people, which featured on BBC Radio 3. We also worked with local poets to highlight experiences over lockdown and ran a series of community events including: dolls house dioramas, poetry takeaways and poetry walks - all conducted in Covid safe ways to bring people together to enjoy poetry during the autumn.

Creative Lives established weekly on-air Up for Arts Thursday sessions on BBC Radio Leeds throughout 2020, hosted by presenter Gayle Lofthouse, encouraging people to be creative at home with guests inspiring people to try new things. This included card making, wreath making, halloween masks, bookbinding and Christmas crafts - all to drive creativity to those people most isolated throughout the pandemic.

In 2021, Up for Arts was renamed Creative Lives on Air.
www.creative-lives.org/on-air



#LovetoDraw Ireland

#LoveToDraw Ireland was a project developed by Creative Lives in partnership with the Glucksman Gallery in Cork, Artlink Donegal and Take A Part Carlow and funded by The Arts Council.

The project aimed to involve diverse groups across Ireland and in particular people who do not regularly take part in the visual arts and people from both rural and urban areas of socio-economic deprivation.

A series of drawing workshops delivered by professional artists/facilitators were delayed due to Covid-19 and took place in remote and socially distanced formats in late 2020 and early 2021. Artists Paul Nash (Cork), Elaine McGinn (Donegal) and Eilish Langton (Carlow) adapted their usual working practices and made use of online spaces and the outdoors as places to engage people with the practice of drawing.

Participants were recruited via a range of community organisations and the people who signed up were sent drawing packs in the post, with basic materials to get them started.

100% of the people who took part say they intend to continue drawing in the future. Artlink Donegal are already running more online drawing classes and the Glucksman is continuing to support children and their families to draw, at a homeless support centre in Cork City.

A short video documenting the project can be found on YouTube:
<https://bit.ly/lovetodrawirl>



“I loved it. It suited me especially as I work during the day and the class was accessible from the comfort of my home.”



My Creative Time Wales

- **What does your creative time mean to you?**
- **What has creative activity meant to you during lockdown?**

'My Creative Time: Poetry inspired by voluntary arts' was a project delivered by Creative Lives in partnership with Literature Wales, supported by the Ashley Family Foundation. The project set out to highlight the importance of taking part in regular creative activity, particularly during the pandemic.

Based on a project developed by Voluntary Arts Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Poetry Library, this new initiative gave participants the opportunity to explore and express the varied benefits that arise from taking part in creative activity, and celebrate the work of voluntary arts groups and the connection they have with place and community throughout Wales.

Originally envisaged as an in-person project, we were forced to change our plans due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore all work was delivered at distance. We commissioned eight poets, and partnered them with eight creative groups in the fields of theatre, crafts, visual arts, hip hop and creative writing.

The project culminated in an Anthology, which presents a curated selection of the poems submitted as part of the project. Despite the distressing context of the pandemic, the poems provide a powerful testimonial to the benefits of participation in creative activity during such a difficult time.

“

"Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this project. The Shared Reading Group in Newport still regularly talks about it and it has inspired them to continue to write poetry and one member is even writing a short story, so it is definitely a project with a legacy!"

My Creative Time Anthology:
www.creative-lives.org/my-creative-time



Lockdown Life Scotland

The Scotland team produced three videos capturing aspects of life in lockdown, and how creative groups responded to this.

Love Music Community Choir

We interviewed the choir leader and members of the group to hear how they were enjoying still connecting and singing together via Zoom, while in-person rehearsals were not possible.

<https://youtu.be/5eVf2ygJZKk>

Edinburgh Bhangra Crew

This student-run dance group moved all its rehearsals and sessions online. We spoke to them about the challenges of dancing as a group when they were all in different homes.

https://youtu.be/1gxe_6TC3Ag

Learning to Jam with Jamulus

As music and singing groups across the world discovered the limitations of meeting on Zoom due to the time lag, the online platform Jamulus provided a solution. We spoke to amateur musicians about learning how to use Jamulus effectively and how it helped them stay creative through lockdown.

<https://youtu.be/XK4JrGDc7AA>

(Please note, these videos were all originally shared on the Voluntary Arts YouTube channel - they have now been moved over to the Creative Lives channel, hence the very low viewing figures).

Get Creative**AT HOME**

Stoke-on-Trent Micro-grants

8 Get Creative At Home projects in Stoke-on-Trent were awarded micro-grants to kick off the city's local #GetCreativeAtHome campaign in lockdown.

From Street Ceramics to Tele-poetry, eight creative and community organisations in Stoke-on-Trent have been awarded funding to bring communities together through creativity in lockdown.

The micro-grants of up to £200 were provided by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, in collaboration with Creative Lives, to support organisations that want to help local people ease the stresses of lockdown together, by expressing themselves creatively.

The funded projects were featured on the [Visit Stoke website](#), along with virtual local museum tours and other remote creative projects happening in the city under the banner of #GetCreativeAtHome and #MyStokeStory. All of the projects were registered on the Get Creative website so that everyone had the opportunity to take part, regardless of where they are in the world.

www.creative-lives.org/news/stoke-on-trent-microgrants-announced

Communications

An overview of our reach and engagement

April 2020 - March 2021: Communications during the Covid-19 pandemic

The reach and engagement rates recorded between April 2020 and March 2021 across our digital communications channels show a clear connection to the change in audience behaviour urged by the Covid-19 pandemic and the reconfiguration of our organisation's offer.

The fluctuating trends across quarters shows high numbers of people reached and engaged around our main campaigns: Get Creative at Home, Epic Awards and The Big Conversation. It also correlates with the increasing screen fatigue that audiences may have felt from the beginning of 2021. For instance, the #CreativeNetwork series peaked in late Spring (2020) then moving towards a slow decrease in reach and engagement reflected in the number of participants. Another factor for the drop of rates from the final quarter analysed (Jan - Mar 2021) can also be the change in some platforms' algorithms that influence what type of content is pushed to users (especially in the case of Facebook).

Between 2 August 2020 - 1 January 2021, our Facebook posts recorded the highest reach and engagement rates (82,640 and, respectively, 645 link clicks). What contributed to these results was largely the promotion of the People's Choice Award and the Epic Awards online event as well as paid promotion of the Big Conversation survey and the launch of the Common Ground report.

We can see a different trend on Twitter, where the peak was reached between 31 December 2020 - 31 March 2021 (417.9 impressions), compared to almost half (250 per month on average) between 1 April 2020 - 30 December 2020. Instagram recorded its highest rates thanks to the Epic Awards and Get Creative at Home campaigns. Similarly, the website (www.voluntaryarts.org) was most visited in May 2020 and August 2020 (11,659 and 14,601 visits respectively). The newsletter was opened by 322 people (on average) every month, peaking in May 2020 (571 opens).

Generally, we can deduce that the most successful posts were those with references to other groups and organisations as well as those with an exciting call to action (e.g. voting for the People's Choice Award and Get Creative at Home: 640,000 impressions across social media).

Events and meetings

2020-21

(remote activity)

2019-20

(in-person activity)

298

events

87

4,183

participants

5,628

109

influencing
meetings

138



Strategic Outcomes Framework

Creative Lives works to a 5-year Strategic Outcomes Framework, which sets out our overarching priorities and the outcomes we are working towards:

- 1. Building strong connections and relationships to support participation in creative cultural activity**
- 2. Demonstrating how taking part in creative cultural activity improves social connectedness**
- 3. Opening up more public spaces for creative cultural activity**

We track our progress to achieving our intended outcomes in each of these priorities through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Creative Lives almost always works through partnerships: we believe collaborative action is more likely to generate effective sustainable positive change.

Key outcome 1

A more supportive environment in which the people involved in cultural policy and practice work together constructively

- We established 5 new self-sustaining networks, e.g. [the West Midlands Creatives Facebook group](#).
- We supported and contributed to collaborative action as members self-sustaining networks, e.g. [Scottish Community Alliance, of which Creative Lives is a member, submitted a proposal to Scottish Government for a £200m New Deal for Communities](#).
- We achieved positive changes to legislation, regulation and policy relating to creative cultural activity, e.g. [Arts Council England's strategy for 2020-30, 'Let's Create' which recognises the need to "celebrate the creative lives of everyone in this country"](#).



Strategic Outcomes Framework

Key outcome 2

Media and policymakers shaping a deeper public understanding of how and why being creative with other people can decrease loneliness and increase wellbeing

- We produced and shared 10 case studies demonstrating how regular creative practice with others can reduce loneliness and isolation, e.g. [The Mess Room disability arts group in Medway](#).
- We produced and contributed to 5 research outputs demonstrating how and why regular creative practice with others can reduce loneliness and isolation, e.g. [The Big Conversation 2020 survey of creative participation](#).
- Our evidence was used in broadcast and print media, and by Arts Councils and Governments, to raise public awareness of the role regular creative practice with others plays in strengthening social connectedness, e.g. Nick Capaldi, Chief Executive of the Arts Council of Wales, publicly pledged to support the Common Ground Pact in 'Common Ground - Rewilding the Garden'.

Key outcome 3

More voluntary arts groups using public spaces to undertake creative cultural activities and making innovative use of public spaces not previously used for creative cultural activities in order to broaden participation in the arts

- We produced and shared 6 case studies demonstrating innovative use of public space for creative cultural activities, e.g. [Walking with Common Cause in Dumfries](#).
- We produced and shared 4 innovative models for developing public spaces for creative cultural activity, e.g. [Making Space in Lisburn, which curated empty space in shopping centres for local creative cultural activity](#).
- We facilitated the opening up of civic spaces to regular and sustained creative cultural activity, e.g. The BBC Contains Strong Language festival in Cumbria, which involved making use of public spaces to engage people in poetry and spoken word, including poetry performances broadcast by megaphone.

Funders

We are extremely grateful to the following funders for their support for our work throughout the year.

Arts Council England
Creative Scotland
The Arts Council of Ireland
The Arts Council of Northern Ireland
The Arts Council of Wales
The Ashley Family Foundation
Community Foundation in Wales
Oak Foundation
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Leeds Community Foundation
Coventry City of Culture Trust
Culture Guides KSD
Celebrating Age
Erasmus+

Photo credits

Page 4	Get Creative at Home Masterclass - BBC Arts
Page 7	Contains Strong Language - September 2020 (Cumbria)
Page 8	#LovetoDraw Ireland
Page 10	Staying Creative: Edinburgh Bhangra Crew



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