



Creative Lives

The Difference We Make

Annual Report 2021-22

Creative Lives 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 2021-22.

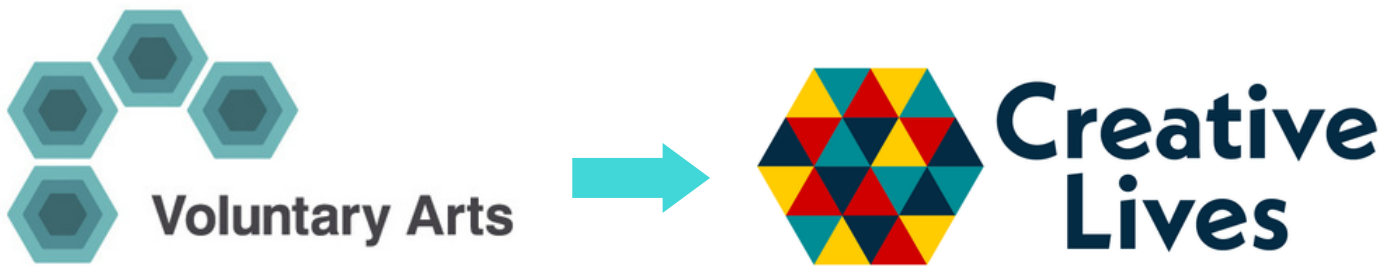
**To find out more about our work, please see our website:
www.creative-lives.org.**





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In June 2021, Voluntary Arts changed its name to Creative Lives.

Over the last 30 years Voluntary Arts has supported, celebrated and advocated for amateur creative participation, significantly impacting the academic, political, social and cultural landscape.

Since our establishment in 1991, we have seen huge policy shifts across the UK and Ireland, which increasingly embrace the contribution of everyday creativity and the role of amateur, community and grassroots arts and creativity. This change has been driven by a rise in academic research demonstrating the impact of arts and creativity on health and wellbeing, as well as reducing isolation and improving community cohesion. We have also seen a rise in creative organisations striving for equality across the arts and cultural sector, which no doubt derives from the long and successful history of community arts in the UK, born in the 1970s.

Voluntary Arts has been instrumental in this transformation through its campaigning, lobbying, research and innovative creative activity - always working collaboratively to champion active participation in arts, culture and creativity.

We used the occasion of our 30th anniversary to change our name to Creative Lives, to reflect the evolution of our work and our vision for the future. Creative Lives expresses our role as a voice for positive change, working to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative as part of their everyday lives.

Culture During Covid

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it became more apparent than ever just how much having access to creative activity meant to people.

Groups that were unable to meet in person found myriad ways to keep the connection going, recognising just how important it was to their members. It also exposed existing inequalities in terms of digital access - but also brought to light just how much accessing activity online could help those previously excluded from taking part. Creative Lives wanted to capture all of this during this very special (and incredibly challenging) moment in time.

We recruited Amy McTurk, a PhD student at the University of St Andrews, through funding from the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities. Between February - September 2021 (part-time), Amy carried out research into the impact of the pandemic on voluntary creative groups - and interviewed people from across Scotland, the UK and Europe. The result is 'Culture During Covid: Examining in the impact of the pandemic on the voluntary arts sector' an extensive research report and podcast, featuring seven interviews with creative groups.



Spaces for Creativity

In late 2021, as indoor creative activity was starting to resume after the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, Creative Lives conducted a survey to gather evidence about the issues facing creative groups and venues in the UK and Ireland.

The survey captured a transition point of activity. Of the groups that were gathering again:

- just over half (51%) of the creative groups were back meeting indoors,
- with 42% in a mix of remote and in-person,
- and the remainder meeting entirely remotely (6%) or outdoors (1%).

We found a wide array of issues as creative groups started to reconvene after the restrictions of the pandemic, but the overall picture is that local creative groups are struggling to find suitable venues in which to meet. Groups reported difficulties finding large enough venues with adequate ventilation; restrictions on their activities or participant numbers; and finding accessible venues at a reasonable cost.

To help address these difficulties and create an environment that is more supportive of community-based creative activity than before the pandemic, Creative Lives is embarking on a new phase of work to support restarting local creative activity.

Our findings are summarised in our new report: Spaces for Creativity.



“We have practically had to stop singing as it is too difficult online and it's too cold to be outside. It's a real heartbreak as we had kept the group going through thick and thin for a number of years!”

Creative Networks

At the start of the pandemic, Creative Lives launched the Creative Network: a series of online get-togethers open to anyone involved in arts, culture and creativity in order to connect and collaborate.

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. 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 Creative Network sessions developed during 2021-22 into a series of thematic and geographical online gatherings, covering Crafts, Theatre and Wellbeing; London, Wales, the South West and the West Midlands; as well as special one-off events on topics such as Spaces for Creativity.

49 events

**699
participants**



Feedback

“

"I've found Creative Network so important - it was through Creative Network that I was connected with Mothers who Make as someone mentioned it in a network meeting, and it's been invaluable to me."

"Thank you for hosting such a positive event, it was great to hear from so many people and organisations who are excited and focused to make creative arts accessible."

”

Get Creative

& make a
difference

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

Following the Get Creative at Home campaign in 2020, in early 2021 Get Creative and Make a Difference sought to target groups most at risk from loneliness and isolation to support and increase wellbeing and connections through creativity.

The campaign was delivered across three strands:

- 1. The Get Creative & Make a Difference public awareness campaign, supported by BBC Arts and BBC local radio**
- 2. A crowd-sourced online database of creative activities**
- 3. Micro-commissions to develop local creative projects across England, Scotland and Wales supporting target demographics at risk of experiencing loneliness**



11 micro-commissions were awarded to partnerships between community-based charities and creative groups.

“

“I believe that we’re all dancers; we’re all moving and breathing... The most important thing for me is that the people involved are coming away and telling me that they feel less isolated; they have a greater sense of wellbeing and mindfulness; they’re more confident with movement.”

Johnny Autin, Autin Dance Theatre, Birmingham

[Get Creative on the BBC](#)



Get Creative Outdoors

In the summer of 2021, as pandemic restrictions eased, Get Creative Outdoors encouraged people across the UK to get involved in creative activities and events in the open air. The initiative was supported by a broad coalition of cultural and environmental organisations.

**300+
events**

**50+
activities**

**61,000+
participants**

**Social
media**

**3,300
engagements**

**910,300
reach**



The Get Creative Outdoors partners were Crafts Council, BBC, Local Government Association, Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Libraries Connected, Scottish Libraries and Information Council, What Next?, RSPB, National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Council for British Archaeology, Born Free Foundation and BugLife.



Creative Lives Awards

The Creative Lives Awards (formerly the Epic Awards) are an annual celebration of the achievements of voluntary and community-led creativity. A total of 31 groups were shortlisted for the 2021 awards.

On 1 March 2022 we celebrated the resilience and imagination demonstrated by creative groups during the Covid-19 pandemic, at a ceremony in Coventry Cathedral, which was simultaneously livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube.

“

“We are really proud of our Black Box Projects Volunteer Team for bringing so much enthusiasm, creativity and support to our projects and activities. We are delighted for the recognition from the Creative Lives Awards!”

Seonaid Murray from Black Box Projects, Ireland Winners

“I am so proud that we responded to the challenges imposed by Covid-19 with compassion, energy and vision. We reached out, through varied creative projects to involve hundreds in the community, drawing on talents from across the generations and from all the districts of the town, contributing to people’s well-being and quality of life.”

Catrin Jones from Creative Criccieth, Wales Winners

”





Creative Lives On Air is a dynamic partnership between Creative Lives and BBC Local Radio stations. It shines a spotlight on everyday creativity through local radio, boosting wellbeing and reducing isolation.

In 2022/23 we developed new partnerships with BBC Radio Sheffield, BBC Radio Norfolk and BBC Radio Suffolk. We continued to work with BBC Radio Coventry & Warwickshire (BBC CWR), BBC Radio Leeds and BBC Radio Wales/Cymru. Via this unique model of working we've promoted active participation in creative activity with approximately 1,027,000 weekly listeners across the country. We've also produced innovative audio - showcasing new creative voices from diverse communities.

"Thank you so much for coming, supporting, and promoting the queer arts scene! It means loads to have coverage like this!!"

Creative Lives On Air continues to shine a light and elevate the role of creativity in supporting connection and good mental health. In one interview an art group participant said:

"I came here with my neighbour because we both lost our partners last year. It's given us both something to do, to come out for."

Working in the North of England

Highlights include: Proud to Be, a co-produced podcast series, to celebrate the experiences of young women in Leeds, working in partnership with the Getaway Girls. Along with BBC Leeds presenter Gayle Lofthouse's weekly on-air sessions promoting singing, dancing, den building for all. Following in her footsteps BBC Radio Sheffield's mid-morning presenter Paulette Edwards has started a weekly feature promoting creativity and wellbeing, which has showcased growers, bread makers and coral singers!

City of Culture

Our weekly show Coventry Creates has put grassroots creativity centre stage of the 2021/22 City of Culture, featuring local groups, artists and makers. The Sound of Cov project produced a live simulcast across 8 community radio stations, an outdoor music festival and national conference celebrating community radio and creativity.

The Making of Coventry

Working with Heritage Crafts we delivered community workshops, which culminated in a national conference, featuring Patrick Grant, the BBC's Great British Sewing Bee presenter. The on-air content for The Making of Coventry was also compiled into [a BBC Sounds programme](#).



BBC Contains Strong Language

The BBC Contains Strong Language Festival was also in Coventry this year. We developed outdoor events for the community, and poetry workshops in schools with a range of audio features on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio 4.

“Joy! Delight! Pride in my city, in the young people. It was wonderful - educational, entertaining, inspiring.”

(performance attendee)

New Beginnings in East Anglia

At the start of 2022, listeners of BBC Radio Suffolk and BBC Radio Norfolk were invited to respond to the theme 'New Beginnings'. 170 photographs were sent in from people across the two counties, ranging from 10-80 years old. The outcome was a digital exhibition that was available at various venues across the country.

BBC Radio Wales

Throughout the year, a number of segments about everyday creativity have been featured on the BBC Radio Wales Arts Show, including content about the groups from Wales who were shortlisted for the Creative Lives Awards, a montage of poems from a writers' group in South Wales, and a feature about a new series of World Music events in Cardiff.

Micro-grant schemes England

Kent

Creative Lives' micro-grant scheme in Kent reached across coastal districts with funding from Kent Community Foundation and Colyer Fergusson Charitable Trust. Micro-grants launched in June 2021, shortly after the third Covid lockdown was lifted, supporting groups to:

- Get creative
- Bring people back together
- Reduce loneliness
- Share skills
- Use community spaces

Forty four groups applied from the Isle of Grain round to Thanet and Romney Marsh and 30 voluntary arts groups were awarded grants of between £100 and £200.

www.creative-lives.org/reviving-local-creativity-in-kent

Stoke-on-Trent

Eight new Get Creative At Home projects in Stoke-on-Trent were awarded micro-grants to kick off the city's local #GetCreativeAtHome campaign in lockdown in 2020. The micro-grants of up to £200 were provided by Stoke-on-Trent City Council in partnership with Creative Lives.

In 2021 Creative Lives ran a second consecutive annual micro-grant scheme in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

With a total of £2,000 pledged to the scheme by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Creative Lives granted 10 groups between £100 and £200 each to fund hyper-local creative community events outdoors during the summer months of 2021.

www.creative-lives.org/stoke-on-trent-microgrants-2021



Cheshire West

As part of Cheshire West and Chester's Re-opening and Recovery Programme for rural areas and local communities, the council worked with Cheshire West Voluntary Arts Network and Creative Lives, to offer micro-grants to kickstart creative activity happening in communities across the borough.

Funding of between £200 and £500 was distributed in November (round one) and December 2021 (round two), with six further grants allocated on a rolling basis to support creative activity being delivered until February 2022.

www.creative-lives.org/cheshire-west-microgrants-kickstart-voluntary-art





Creative Lives is the lead partner for Creative Places: Edenderry, a three-year project which aims to put culture and creativity at the heart of everyday life in the County Offaly town. The project is one of The Arts Council's new flagship place-based initiatives across Ireland.

With additional support from the St. Patrick's Festival and TikTok, we were able to offer free dance workshops through February and March 2022 in the hall of St. Mary's Primary School. These workshops were open to all ages and abilities and included ballet, hip hop, line dancing, swing dancing and Irish dancing.

Almost 100 participants from ages 3 and up joined in the workshops, learned some new moves and reconnected with their local community as pandemic restrictions were finally lifted in Ireland.

We worked with filmmaker, Molly O'Dwyer, to put together an exciting short video showcasing the dancers. This was launched across a number of social media platforms to celebrate St. Patrick's Day to a great reception. On Facebook alone, the video has had almost 18,000 views!

On completion of the project, 100% of respondents said the workshops were enjoyable with 88% saying it had enhanced their personal wellbeing. They proved so popular that a new weekly line dancing class has been started while a local ballet teacher is launching an adults class.



View the video on YouTube at:
<https://youtu.be/ANlQ0rkCvQQ>

Together Again micro-grants Scotland

The 'Together Again' micro-grants were distributed to support creative groups in Scotland who were addressing the challenges associated with meeting up in person again following the pandemic.

With funding from Scottish Community Alliance and Creative Scotland, Creative Lives awarded 28 micro-grants (£300 each) to volunteer-led creative groups across Scotland. The purpose of the micro-grants was to support the return of local creative groups to face-to-face activity, and costs such as purchasing materials, light bulbs, renting space or transport.

The principle of offering micro-grants to creative groups is to make small amounts of funding available in a light-touch, proportionate way, with a flexible process, and be able to reach truly grassroots groups for whom large grants would be inappropriate.

We are now developing a tailored programme of support for micro-grant recipients, to help make their groups more sustainable over the longer term.

“Before Covid, we were using a free hall from the local council. They are no longer open to community lets so we have had to hire a church hall at a cost of £30 per week. Whilst this might not seem like much, to a small group like ours it's a real barrier.”

Community Engagement in Scotland

Building on a long-term commitment to address inequalities in access to creative participation, Creative Lives recruited a new post - that of Scotland Community Engagement Officer. Beginning January 2022, this post will help us take another step on the journey to improve our support for volunteer-led creative groups that are led by or for people from minority ethnic communities in Scotland.

Through a process of connecting with and working alongside creative groups, this post-holder will deepen our understanding of the needs of ethnically diverse creative groups. In doing so, we expect to build a richer picture of creativity in Scotland, to inform the future direction of Creative Lives, and be better able to support the diverse needs of Scotland's creative groups.

Unearthing Creativity Wales

Unearthing Creativity is a new collaborative project which aims to make a substantial and lasting contribution to the arts in Wales.

The project is being delivered by artists Marion Cheung, Naz Syed, Creative Lives, and Age Cymru.

The project runs from September 2021 until March 2023, and is supported by the Arts Council of Wales.

Through engaging people who are currently creatively inactive, and by surfacing and celebrating the diverse but under-recognised creative activities that take place in communities across Wales, our intention is that more people from under-represented groups will be engaging in the arts; and that there is a greater recognition of the diversity of existing creative activities in communities across Wales.

One of the project strands is Gateways into creative activity: the development of a new range of creative projects ('gateways') in different artforms, that people can easily try from home, including:

- Paper landscapes
- Creative walking
- Printing at home with found materials
- Word-play, poetry and paint
- Inky splats

...and many more!



Communications

An overview of our reach and engagement

2021 - 2022 was a particularly exciting year for our communications team thanks to our 30th anniversary and rebranding efforts, as well as the first in-person celebration of grassroots creativity since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. These key moments, along with our seasonal campaigns (e.g. Get Creative Outdoors), partnership events and the ongoing process of showcasing stories of creativity, gave a substantial boost to our audience reach and engagement levels.

Following on from the brainstorming sessions during the virtual away day in 2021, our new medium to long-term communications strategy and plan integrate a storytelling approach - something that we have been actively embedding into our content.

Participation in high-profile events with significant local and national coverage has been a good way of ensuring our new brand's visibility, something that we are committed to increasing over the coming years. As a result, we recorded over 60 mentions in press and other media outlets. Total reach & engagement figures:



Our briefings were seen by over 5,000 people, of which over a third were viewed on our partner's website (Making Music UK). This underlines the importance of collaborative communications approaches that involve external stakeholders, which is reflected in the reactions to social media content as well.

By far the highest rates recorded during the year were between the end of February 2022 and the end of March 2022, due to the two major events: Creative Lives Awards and the Making Places conference, both in Coventry. Our messages reached and engaged between 25% and 400% more online audience members.

All of these actions encouraged more people to follow our updates via social media. Total followers on 31 March 2022 were:



Strategic Framework Outcomes

Creative Lives works to a 5-year Strategic 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 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 6 new self-sustaining networks, e.g. the [Creative Network Coventry group](#), which currently has 543 members.
- We supported and contributed to collaborative action as members of self-sustaining networks, e.g. the [successful collaborative application submitted by the Creative Edenderry group](#) in County Offaly (originally established by Voluntary Arts Ireland).
- We achieved positive changes to legislation, regulation and policy relating to creative cultural activity, e.g. our contributions to conversations with all five Governments across the UK and Republic of Ireland to clarify and influence [guidelines for restarting creative activities](#) following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Strategic Framework Outcomes


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 22 case studies demonstrating how regular creative practice with others can reduce loneliness and isolation, e.g. 'Staying Creative: Edinburgh Bhangra Crew' - a video capturing how a dance group has continued to create and connect while unable to meet in person.
- We produced and contributed to 5 research outputs demonstrating how and why regular creative practice with others can reduce loneliness and isolation, e.g. Culture During Covid: Examining the Impact of the Pandemic on the Voluntary Arts Sector.
- 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.

Key outcome 3

More voluntary arts groups using spaces to undertake creative cultural activities and making innovative use of 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. The Bridgend Bothy in Edinburgh converted an old farm into a community-owned centre for learning, eating and exercise where they can work and grow together to develop a flourishing community.
 - We produced and shared 4 innovative models for developing public spaces for creative cultural activity, e.g. Making Space in Lisburn, which led to experimental use of Instagram and Padlet as online spaces for collaboration and creativity.
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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 Wales
The Ashley Family Foundation
Community Foundation in Wales
Oak Foundation
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Leeds Community Foundation
Coventry City of Culture Trust
Erasmus+
Scottish Community Alliance
St Patrick's Festival x TikTok Creative Fund
Moondance Foundation



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