



**Creative
Lives**

The Difference We Make

Annual Report 2024-25





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Overview

2024-25 marked the first year of Creative Lives' new five-year Strategic Plan.

This Strategic Plan is our response to the current fragility of society. It focuses our work over the next five years on leveraging the proven ability of local creative groups to do the following:

- Reduce isolation
- Improve wellbeing
- Increase inclusion
- Build stronger community identity and cohesion

Creative Lives aims to empower, support and connect local volunteer-led creative groups across the UK and Ireland. We do this so they have the capacity and resilience to collaboratively address challenges facing their communities.

Creative Lives - our activity in numbers

ACTIVITIES	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Events	334	397	130
Participants	5,682	5,331	2,558
Newsletter subscribers	4,886	4,498	4,106
Website users	55,428	50,188	48,109
Funding distributed	£807,000	£53,235	£15,025

Creative Lives Awards 2024

Celebrating the achievements of community-led creative groups

- 6,000 public votes were cast in the People's Choice Award.
- 31 examples of local and national media coverage of shortlisted and winning groups.

The Creative Lives Awards celebrate the creative groups that enhance people's lives in villages, towns, and cities across the UK and Ireland.

The 2024 winners were announced at an inspirational ceremony in Cecil Sharp House, London, on Thursday 26 September 2024, hosted by BBC presenter Nick Ahad.

"I thought the quality and depth of work that won Awards was incredible, and the opportunity to meet some of the winners was so lovely. Well done to everyone at Creative Lives for pulling off a great event."

Jemma Channing, Arts Council England

"The positivity, creativity and love in the room was just what I needed. I skipped out of the event feeling that the world was a better place – and surely that's the MO for Creative Lives writ large!"

Teresa Bogan, BBC





"Thank you for creating such an amazing platform, where people can draw strength from each other, network and share stories of their amazing journeys. I feel blessed to have been part of the event."

**Mya Chemonges-Murzynowska,
Local Hero Award Winner**

"I want to thank you for what was one of the highlights of my entire life. The award ceremony was so moving, kind, gracious and caring. I met so many incredible people and was humbled by the extraordinary amount of creative volunteering being done all over the UK and Ireland. The whole evening was glorious."

**Kathleen Milne, OH!CON,
Scotland Winners 2024**



"It means so much to win the Creative Lives Award for Wales, as being Runner-up five years ago was a real milestone in inspiring us to continue to develop. We thank Creative Lives for valuing our work and its heritage stories by selecting us for this Creative Lives Award."

**Arlene Pryce, Heritage Theatr Cymru,
Wales Winner 2024**

Grants for local creative groups

During 2024-25, Creative Lives distributed 177 grants totalling £807,000 to local creative groups across the UK and Ireland, reaching at least 31,422 participants.

Creative Lives has a wealth of experience distributing small but meaningful grants to local creative groups. These have ranged in size from £100 to £20,000, and in each case have enabled local creative groups across the UK and Ireland to improve life for the residents in their communities.

Bradford 2025

Bradford is UK City of Culture 2025, and working in partnership with Bradford Council, Creative Lives distributed 54 micro-grants of £400 each to help local creative groups take part in the celebrations.

The funding was aimed at community-led groups from anywhere in the Bradford district, and encouraged unexpected and inspiring creative activities.

We received 161 applications from groups across Bradford who are all doing wonderful work in their communities. The 54 funded projects included a documentary film celebrating South Asian heritage; sculptures created by young people made from upcycled bikes and scooters; an interactive street performance by an older women's dance group (pictured below); sensory art sessions for children with autism, and many more.

You can see [the full range of funded projects here](#).



Policy and influencing

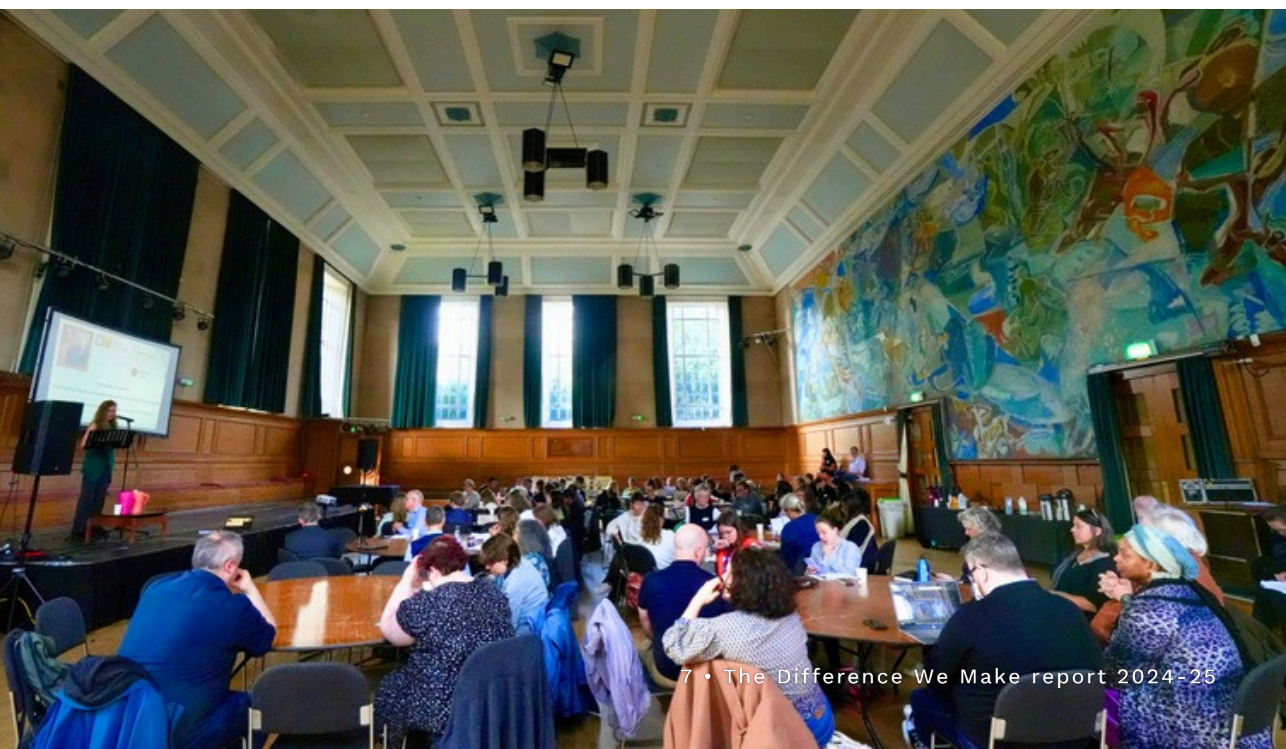
From creative health and charity banking to local transport and research into everyday creativity, Creative Lives has been busy influencing and affecting change.

A significant achievement this year has been our policy impact, particularly through our work mapping creative groups in Norfolk & Suffolk, which directly led to new investment in the creative health infrastructure through the establishment of a new post.

During 2024-25, we also carried out important work exploring the barriers to banking for local creative groups, and transport as an enabler to everyday creativity, which led to Greater Manchester Combined Authority including questions in their survey about the connection between local culture and transport.

We collaborated with the AHRC Everyday Creativity Research Network, hosted by the University of Brighton, to hold the first Everyday Creativity Research Conference (pictured below) on Thursday 26 September 2024, attended by 100 people.

“I’ve taken away so many insights and nuggets of wisdom – some of them validating the work I do already; others encouraging me to push boundaries and be brave.” Participant at Everyday Creativity Research Conference



Place-based projects

Creative Lives works closely with communities across the UK and Ireland, to support and promote local creativity.

Essex

Creative Lives was commissioned by Essex County Council to map the creative health landscape across Essex. We also examined how arts and cultural activities can improve health and increase wellbeing outcomes throughout the county.

The research provides crucial insights into current provision, challenges, and opportunities within Essex's creative health sector. It also begins to explore how the creative and cultural sector can strategically improve health outcomes in Essex.

The report outlines several key recommendations, including:

- Adopting the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance's Creative Health Quality Framework;
- Developing sustainable funding models;
- Strengthening cross-sector collaboration between cultural and health organisations.

Mapping Creative Health in Essex - report



Bridgend

- **We mapped 107 active creative groups in Bridgend County**

Creative Lives was commissioned by Bridgend County Borough Council to map all the opportunities for people to take part in creative activities in Bridgend County Borough.

We conducted desk-based research, published a survey of creative opportunities within the county, and held three creative conversation events, which were delivered in partnership with local artist and facilitator Tracy Breathnach.

Our findings revealed a vibrant and diverse creative scene in Bridgend, with a wide range of artforms and opportunities available to people of all ages and backgrounds. However, there are also significant gaps and unmet needs, particularly in terms of awareness, accessibility, and support for creative individuals and groups.

Mapping creative activity in Bridgend County - report



Edenderry

- **Our project putting people, place and participation at the heart of cultural life in Edenderry has since been extended for a further two years.**

Year 4 of our Creative Places, Edenderry project took place during 2024-25. The theme for year 4 was 'Empower and Embed', with a focus on training, mentoring, and the creation of four practical toolkits that the community can use for years to come.

Highlights from Year 4 also include:

A biodiversity project for all ages which led to a range of public art being created by the local community, in collaboration with artist facilitators.

Artist commission, 'The Bog, the Grand Canal and other Magical Places', an inter-generational performance project which celebrated life in Edenderry.

Throughout the year, Creative Lives has been instrumental in helping each project develop from initial idea to impactful conclusion. We offered both creative and logistical advice, helping to secure rehearsal and performance spaces, and encouraging participation from local community groups and individuals. We also helped nurture various spin-offs from the above projects.

"I have many wonderful memories of Edenderry and the creative energies generously shared by the communities I worked with during the six weeks of the project. The workshops touched many people's lives, from adults to children, and incorporated various art forms, including spoken word, music composition, singing, and dance." Project artist

You can read more about the wide-ranging work being carried out in Edenderry as part of Creative Places Edenderry **[on the website here.](#)**



Know Your Neighbourhood fund

Tackling loneliness through local creativity

- **65 creative projects funded**
- **£750,000 of new investment in creative activity**

2024-25 was the second year of Creative Lives' Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN) fund, a major new grants scheme for voluntary creative groups in England. The scheme is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Arts Council England, and Creative Lives is distributing funds along with Libraries Connected and the Association of Independent Museums.

The aim of the KYN programme is to fund voluntary creative groups in a number of designated areas across England, to help them deliver targeted creative activities for people at risk of loneliness and isolation.

The focus of the scheme was not just on creative activity, but on exploring ways in which that activity can build connections and a sense of belonging within a community.

Funded projects include a series of creative, nature-based sessions in Doncaster and Barnsley; arts workshops and a pop-up exhibition for autistic people in Stoke; textile workshops for women recovering from mental ill health, substance misuse, and trauma in Rochdale; dance, health, and wellbeing sessions for adults aged 65 and above in Sunderland, and many more.

You can read [the full list of funded projects here](#).



Creative Lives On Air

Our dynamic partnership with BBC local radio stations

Creative Lives On Air shines a spotlight on everyday creativity through local radio. Our partnership began in 2008 with BBC Radio Merseyside, and we have since embedded local Creative Lives On Air producers in radio stations across the UK.

Our producers deliver live creative taster sessions, and highlight local creative activity to radio audiences, reaching more than 600,000 listeners.

During 2024-25, Creative Lives worked in partnership with BBC Radio Tees, BBC Radio WM, BBC Radio Sheffield and BBC Radio Berkshire, producing 35 broadcasts showcasing local everyday creativity.

Supporting local creativity in Cannock Chase

Creative Lives worked in Cannock Chase in the West Midlands as part of the Know Your Neighbourhood initiative (see p.11).

A Community Producer was appointed to implement our successful Creative Lives On Air model in partnership with BBC Radio WM. They visited groups across the region and developed audio content to shine a light on creativity that reduces loneliness in Cannock Chase.

These broadcasts included The Hub at Pye Green Community Centre, Hednesford, demonstrating that breathing and a sound bath can help with stress and sleep issues; and how South Staffordshire College is teaching Maths and English through art.

"Brilliant content, excellent communication - can we have more please?!"
Producers at BBC Radio WM



Funders

We are extremely grateful to the following funders for supporting Creative Lives' work throughout the year:

- Reading Borough Council
- Department for Culture, Media & Sport
- Arts Council England
- Creative Scotland
- Arts Council of Ireland / An Comhairle Ealaíon
- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
- Offaly County Council
- Municipal District, Edenderry
- Creative and Cultural Skills
- Bradford 2025
- Children's Capital of Culture (Rotherham)
- Welsh Government
- Bridgend County Borough Council
- Healthy Offaly - the Healthy Ireland Fund



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.

Creative Lives Charity Limited is registered in Scotland as Company No. 139147 and Charity No. SC 020345.

Registered office: The Melting Pot, 15 Calton Road, Edinburgh EH8 8DL.

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