



Preparing the ground

Learning from the first year of Creative Civic Change

About this Report

Published in December 2020, this is the first of a series of reports sharing the learning and outcomes of Creative Civic Change, compiled by the project's independent evaluation team of Sarah Boiling, Anousheh Haghdadi from Beatfreaks Consulting, and Amanda Smethurst.

Creative Civic Change

Creative Civic Change (CCC) is an experimental funding programme delivered by Local Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Modelled on the Big Local programme, CCC offers flexible, long-term funding, in-area mentoring and a substantial peer learning programme to fifteen communities across England.

localtrust.org.uk/other-programmes/creative-civic-change

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Local Trust



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Introduction





Introduction

Since October 2018, 15 communities across England have been on a radical journey to transform their places through creativity. As part of the Creative Civic Change (CCC) programme, each area has benefited from £200k of funding, given with full trust to local residents to control. In addition to this funding, each area has been given the time, support and resources to realise their vision, whether it's transforming public spaces, celebrating shared histories, or bringing people together. This report reflects what we learned at the start of this journey, as communities worked together to shape plans, create connections and plant the seeds of creativity.

The title of this report represents the commitment each CCC area showed in the first year of this programme. With a clear sense of their end goal - the harvest - each community put time and energy into "preparing the ground". They took time to survey their landscape; understanding what assets could be nurtured and what obstructions needed to be cleared. Each community made a commitment to not dig up and discard what's good or concrete over the past, but to work with what they have, and help each thing to flourish.

In turn, the title reflects the commitment of each CCC funder to learn and grow with these communities. We have learned time and time again that the value is not only in the harvest - the flashy projects with our logos attached - but in the small everyday acts involved in the setting of the soil. We are learning how to shift and adapt our funding programmes to better support communities to thrive, and how to measure success based upon the things that communities themselves value.

CCC is a funding programme in which every single person involved - funders, residents, artists, and researchers - are learning and growing together. What follows is the story so far, but there is so much more to come.

Image: Fotonow,
Local Trust

Grace Bremner, Local Trust

About this report

This report focuses on what was happening between the project starting in 2018 and COVID-19 and the first lockdown in March 2020; it describes the different neighbourhoods taking part in Creative Civic Change; outlines their activities and priorities, and shares some learnings and reflections from the projects themselves, their Critical Friends, and funders.

It may feel strange to be reading about how things were in a pre-COVID world, but many of the themes explored are relevant now. The groundwork laid by our communities early in the programme has enabled them to respond to the pandemic in positive and creative ways and it will help them to build strong, inclusive and resilient communities long into our post-COVID future.

This report has been written by Sarah Boiling, with support from Anousheh Haghdadi (Beatfreaks), Amanda Smethurst and the CCC projects and funders.



Our Communities



2022

Creative Civic Change (CCC) funding was available to neighbourhoods in England with the greatest need - areas that haven't benefited from previous investment and where there is limited social and cultural infrastructure. The fifteen areas taking part face similar challenges of high levels of unemployment, in-work poverty, and poor health outcomes for residents, but they are also very different, each with their own distinctive history, context, and community make up.

The neighbourhood profiles that follow draw on official data to describe each place, along with a more nuanced illustration from residents' own experiences.



Creative Newington Ramsgate

Already a Big Local area, this project is based at the Newington Community Centre in Ramsgate. The Newington estate of about 2000 households was built for the miners of the Kent coalfields, and the solid family houses are home to a stable and settled community; with many families living on the estate since it was built in the 1950s. Official data paints a picture of low educational attainment, drug issues and anti social behaviour, and Newington was once considered a 'no go' area by other parts of Ramsgate, however, amongst residents, there is a strong sense of belonging and community spirit.

As well as the community centre, the estate is home to primary schools and a small woodland copse already recognised as a Community Asset. Starlings Support CIC lead the CCC work, and their priorities for the programme are "to create a bright, vibrant community, where green spaces are reclaimed, used and maintained by local people. A community where everyone can come together to enjoy building a safe and family-friendly community, and where the arts form a part of everyone's life. Our aspiration is for people in Newington to be proud of where they live, and of what they have helped to achieve."

www.renewington.com



Image: Sam Horn, Local Trust

Creative West End

Morecambe

The West End of Morecambe is amongst the 10% most deprived areas in the country, and residents describe the area as neglected, untidy and run down. Many of the former bed and breakfasts in this once thriving seaside town are now Houses in Multiple Occupation or HMOs, and the West End is cut off from the main town centre by an abandoned development site.

However, there is a strong sense of identity and pride amongst the 5000 residents, with many people committed to realising local potential through parks' friends groups, creative projects re-purposing empty spaces, and food clubs tackling food poverty. Harnessing this local pride, changing perceptions of the area, and generating positive economic benefits for residents, including local creatives, are amongst Creative West Ends' priorities, and their project is led by The Exchange CIC.

www.creativewestend.net



Image: Creative West End





Creative Kingswood & Hazel Leys Corby

Kingswood and Hazel Leys are two neighbouring estates of about 6800 residents on the outskirts of Corby. The well built 1950s and 60s estates are a mix of owner occupied, social housing and private rental, and the local area has lots of green spaces and historic woodlands, play parks and skate parks. However there is no library, post office, bank or convenience store on the estates, and 41% of households don't have a car.

Kingswood and Hazel Leys is already a Big Local partnership driven by a committed group of residents, and they are leading the CCC activity. Their aims are "To foster a sense of community pride and improve the sometimes negative perceptions of the area; bringing people from all sectors of our community together; enabling better relationships between neighbours; raising the ambitions and aspirations of our young people".

www.facebook.com/CreativeKHL



Image: Corby Community Arts



Filwood Fantastic Bristol

Filwood Fantastic is based at the Filwood Community Centre in the Filwood/Knowle West area of Bristol, far from the cultural buzz the city is known for. The Broadway was once a bustling high street and the heart of the neighbourhood, but has suffered from declining footfall, and like the area as a whole, has had a poor reputation amongst other Bristol residents. Despite this, people travel from across the city to enjoy the spectacle of their Christmas lights and streets decorated for Halloween. The CCC project is led by Filwood Community Centre working with Knowle West Media Centre, and their aims are to “Make Filwood Community Centre and Filwood Broadway a creative cultural hub for Knowle West and beyond - in order to grow community pride, change perceptions of the area, inspire and upskill the community and showcase, support and grow the creativity and talent of local people”.

<https://filwoodcentre.org.uk/filwood-fantastic>



Good Stuff St Leonards

Good Stuff is based in St Leonards, East Sussex. St Leonards is a traditional English seaside town, which now has high levels of unemployment and deprivation. Local residents are often frustrated by 'incomers' moving from London as housing is more affordable, and this can create divided communities. Creativity is important in St Leonards, with many artists and makers living locally. There is also a large LGBTQ+ community. Good Stuff is overseen by local arts charity Home Live Art, and their programme aims to build trust, empathy and strong bonds across and between different groups of residents over time, and rediscover a sense of pride for the town.

<https://goodstuffinstlens.com>



Image: Good Stuff in St Leonards



Greater Creative Blackwell

Blackwell Parish in Derbyshire, once a thriving mining and railway parish, consists of four villages and a hamlet (Blackwell, Old Blackwell, Newton, Westhouses and Hilcote); even though the coal mines closed over thirty years ago, the impacts are still being felt today; there is a legacy of poor health, and those new jobs there are, are low skilled and low paid, with many working families holding down multiple jobs to get by. The Parish has little provision and opportunities to engage with, particularly with the arts.

Close to the M1 with excellent travel connections, Blackwell Parish has more recently seen an influx of commuters living in affordable housing on new estates. HS2 is scheduled to cut through the area and is a contentious issue for most residents. Each village/ hamlet is a caring, close knit community who tend to operate in silos, and - particularly amongst the more established residents - there is a strong sense of personal history. The once vast and proud industrial heritage sites are now in demise or being pulled down. The CCC project is led by Platform Thirty1, a local creative organisation. Their project vision is "To be a community-led, connected, playful and proud parish that pro-actively and creatively commemorates and celebrates its people and places".

www.facebook.com/GreaterCreative



Image: Dean Leivers



Hard Times Require Furious Dancing

Birmingham

Birchfield Big Local and Welsh House Farm Big Local are working together to lead this CCC project. Welsh House Farm estate is about four miles from Birmingham city centre, and poor quality housing and poor air quality are particular issues for local residents. Birchfield, on the other side of the city, is a similarly multicultural area, however one in which different communities can lead parallel lives, and where 45% of the population are under 24.

In both areas, there are many cultures and traditions represented within the community and a rich and diverse social history that links the area to other parts of the world including the Caribbean, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and many other diasporas. They describe their aims as "Hard Times Require Furious Dancing is taken from a poem by Alice Walker. Furious Dancing could mean many things but it has joy, intent and creativity at its heart. We are two communities intent on furious dancing in hard times in order to bring joy, create and make change."

www.facebook.com/CCCFuriousdance



Image: Dadirai Tsopo



Kensington Vision

Liverpool

Kensington and Fairfield is on the edge of Liverpool city centre. In contrast to the centre of the city, there is little in the way of social activity, investment or wealth in Kensington and Fairfield. The area is home to a mostly transient, and fast changing population, where male life expectancy is five years lower than the national average. The CCC project is led by Kensington Vision CIC who have already transformed part of Holt Road by operating a vegetarian café and community space, bike shop and repair project, and Liverpool Community Radio. The aims for their CCC work are to provide a platform for local information and democratic participation, and to use the power of community creativity to make positive change.

<http://l-c-r.co.uk>



Image: Andrew Davies, Local Trust





Nudge Community Builders Plymouth

Union Street is in the Stonehouse area of Plymouth, one of the main routes into the city that traditionally connected the naval docks with the city centre. It is a conservation area, with an array of architecturally distinctive buildings, and, on one side of the road, newly developed 'luxury' dockside apartments, and on the other side both long established and more recent social housing. Locally, Union Street is associated with antisocial behaviour and street drinking, and is the only part of the city with licensed sex trade activity. Many of the historic buildings have been empty and neglected for many years, contributing to the run down feel of the street. Local residents (like in many CCC areas) say that they feel judged by services and organisations because of where they live. Nudge Community Builders (who were recognised by Nesta and the Guardian as a New Radical) are leading the CCC project and their vision is "To bring joy and colour to Union Street in ways that strengthen our community and the local economy".

<https://nudge.community>



Image: Fotonow, Local Trust

Par Bay Dream Big Cornwall

Par Bay on the south coast of mid Cornwall is a Big Local area consisting of three distinct settlements; St Blazey, Par and Tywardreath. The main employer in the region has for many years been the china clay industry. This sector is, however, in rapid decline; large numbers of jobs have been shed, with few alternative sources of large-scale employment (with the notable exception of the Eden Project). Limited opportunities have historically meant that young people and local creatives have tended to leave the area, and some parts of Par Bay are only just maintaining, or even have declining populations. Poor housing is a particular issue, and many people are on low incomes or unemployed, higher even than the Cornwall average, which is itself amongst the highest in Britain. Their CCC projects are focused on people, place, culture and food; and aim to provide skills, build confidence and introduce creativity. There is an emphasis on intergenerational involvement, and their activities are focused on people who have previously been excluded, mainly for financial reasons, from being involved in creativity.

www.parbaycreatives.com



Image: Par Bay Dream Big





REMAKe Grimsby

Grimsby was once the centre of the fishing industry in England, and whilst fish processing factories are still important local employers, the town has experienced significant economic decline in the last thirty years. The East Marsh neighbourhood was built to house fishermen, literally on a marsh. Whilst local headlines focus on crime, anti social behaviour, poor housing and low expectations, East Marsh United, who lead the CCC programme, are working to turn things around and harness the vibrant community spirit of residents who want to make East Marsh a better place to live. They describe their vision as “We Proud East Marshians of the Revolutionary East Marsh Arts Kollektive (REMAKe) will work with and from the community to transform the whole of our community and our common spaces with passion, with creativity and with unfettered human expression to increase community pride, spirit and belonging: with the community, for the community, by the community”.

www.sunandmoonfestival.org



Image: Annabel McCourt

Tilting the Mirror

London

Peckham has a rich artistic and political heritage, home to notable community activists including Dr Harold Moody (physician and campaigner); Claudia Jones (mother of the Notting Hill Carnival); Sam King MBE (father of the Windrush Foundation, and the first Black Mayor of Southwark); and Sojourner Truth (American Abolitionist and women's rights activist). For the past two decades, this area of South East London has experienced substantial investment and regeneration, with an increasing number of creatives calling it their home – at the same time, inequalities are increasing and established communities are being displaced and marginalised. 71% of the Peckham population is comprised of those with heritage from various international diaspora, and the area has one of the youngest populations in the country. Young people are increasingly estranged from the wider community, whilst some older generations feel disconnected. Tilting the Mirror, co-led by Peckham Platform, is a “cross-generational, cross-cultural experience capturing changing Peckham; putting residents in positions of leadership through art based practice and platforming those who struggle to be heard in the process of regeneration”.

www.peckhamplatform.com



Image: Yemi Alade, Local Trust





Portland Inn Project Stoke-on-Trent

This project is centred on the Portland St Estate in Hanley, Stoke on Trent; a traditionally working class area built on pits and pots, with a strong sense of community. The area was earmarked for demolition in the Pathfinder scheme, which left many properties derelict and boarded up. In a radical approach to combat the lack of housing, 33 households moved to the estate in 2014 in the City Council's £1 housing scheme – which kick started positive improvements to the area. However, residual problems of anti social behaviour, drug dealing and drug and alcohol abuse remain, and the estate lacks any community assets – with the pub, shops and community centre still boarded up. The CCC project is led by the Portland Inn Project who have already secured the Community Asset Transfer of the disused Portland Inn, with plans to develop it as a community and creative hub. Their aims are to develop this community building as a key catalyst for change in the community, along with strengthening their organisation.

<https://theportlandinnproject.tumblr.com>

THE
PORTLAND
INN
PROJECT



Image: Marcus Way

Urban by Nature

London

This is a partnership between William Morris Big Local and Wood St Walls CIC based in Walthamstow in East London, working across two neighbourhoods. Both areas face similar challenges of social isolation and young people with heaps of potential but at risk of missing out on opportunities and lacking support to make good decisions. Walthamstow is going through significant change in its population and economy, with large scale housing developments and a growing array of creative and non-creative businesses competing for space and customers. The community is also densely populated, even for London, and comprises a diverse array of cultures and ethnicities. The area has a rich history of craft and social activism pioneered by William Morris and his contemporaries, and although there is still a lot of creative activity and interest locally, it varies in reach and audience, and opportunities are not always visible or well coordinated.

Urban by Nature's mission is to grow creative connections; working towards common goals with residents, artists, community groups, businesses, schools and colleges. Their priority is working with young people and organisations to inspire a new generation of young creative agents in Walthamstow to community-led action.

<http://wmbiglocal.org/urban-by-nature>
www.urbanbynature.co.uk



Image: Urban by Nature





Whitley Bay

Whitley Bay, ten miles from Newcastle Upon Tyne, was once a popular destination for holiday-makers from across the North East. Whilst crowds still flock to the beaches on sunny days, like many coastal towns it has struggled to replace the domestic tourism industry with other economic activity. It is a mixed area with a high concentration of practising artists, and comfortably off streets, alongside households that are significantly deprived. A high number of licensed premises and issues with the night time economy have contributed to Whitley Bay having three times the English average for reported anti-social behaviour. More recently a number of these premises have closed, and neglect by landlords has resulted in disused and boarded up properties. A large proportion of residents live in HMOs, temporary accommodation, and housing that needs repairs.

Despite these challenges, a recent survey demonstrated that residents value their sense of community more than any other aspect of living in the area. Whitley Bay Big Local leads the CCC activities along with Salto Arts, and the aim of the project is to “Establish Carnival as a self-sustaining celebration of Whitley Bay’s unique location, heritage and creativity; making the town a place to be proud of; and creating connections to collaborate, forge new ideas and learn new skills”.

www.whitleybaybiglocal.org



Image: Paul Norris, Local Trust

**What they
are doing**

03

Programmes designed with communities

All the Creative Civic Change (CCC) projects were funded for a six month development phase of conversations across their communities - and had an artist/facilitator to work with - to explore and discuss what was important to residents, and what changes and improvements they wanted to make to their local neighbourhood. Their project plans and activities are based on these conversations, and ongoing community decision-making shapes activities across the projects in a variety of different ways. A future report will explore the area of community leadership in more depth.

These development phase conversations were many and varied depending on the context of the place and the project, and all were based on this principle described by REMAKE in Grimsby:

“We outlawed the word ‘consultation’ in favour of ‘conversation’ and arranged for things to be happening (crafts, songs, stories and objects) where people were - on the market - and we simply talked to people”

Image: Nana Varveropoulou, Local Trust



A SERIES OF 'DOORSTEP LISTENINGS'

Hosting a survey via the Parish Newsletter

Creative workshops using mood boards, model making and cardboard townscapes

Artist led workshops in schools and community centres

In-depth interviews with older residents

A Meet & Eat for community partners

FACEBOOK GROUPS

Tablecloth conversations & community mapping

Informal gatherings in community spaces

On street interviews dressed in zebra and badger costumes

FLOWER BOMBING

Short term lease of a community shop with programme of creative workshops

Spring Day of activities including gardening, community clean up, bird feeder making, clay workshop and Northern Soul dance workshop

Visits to cultural venues and discussions

Cycling around the area on a branded tricycle

A focused month long conversation in two community hubs based on the provocation 'WHAT DO YOU WANT?'

Filmmaking with young people

Meetings with community groups

Meetings with other stakeholders such as the local authority, arts organisations, education and local businesses

VOK POPS

Pizza and chat sessions to discuss everyone's favourite films, music and books

APPROACHES INCLUDED:

Together, each of our communities set about creating plans and programmes that responded directly to community need. Whilst each area is taking a distinct approach, there are shared goals and ambitions that unite all our communities.

Celebrating local histories and stories, and shining a light on what makes this place special and distinctive is an important strand for a number of projects. At Greater Creative in Blackwell, Roots to Routes is a local history trail bringing to life the histories and people of the parish – a physical trail along with an app and website. A Textile Fayre in St Blazey in Par Bay is a reference to St Blaise – the patron saint of wool combers – and The Old Cornwall Society in Par Bay was funded to host local heritage walks. The potteries heritage in Portland Inn is being given new life with community built kilns and raku firing socials.

There isn't a lot of social infrastructure in many of the CCC areas, and projects are **animating, and in some cases creating and adapting, spaces** as hubs for creative and social activities. Portland Inn Project have re-purposed a shipping container as a creative community space, whilst Creative Kingswood & Hazel Leys' community shed will create a practical space and house equipment for developing new skills. REMAKE in Grimsby have a unit in their local covered market, and Nudge Community Builders are bringing back to life derelict buildings and unloved spaces along Union Street.

Many projects are **enriching and supporting existing events** rather than duplicating activity; in Whitley Bay, even more carnival clubs and workshops have been set up to contribute to the much loved community carnival that was resurrected by Whitley Bay Big Local; Field Day Festival in Corby has benefited from additional content; and in Birmingham, Hard Times Require Furious Dancing funded family activities to run alongside the established Birchfield Jazz Festival.



Image: Paul Norris, Local Trust



Improving the outdoor environment is a priority for lots of CCC projects. At Filwood Fantastic this has included residents working alongside designers and makers to design, manufacture and install a new 'Hollywood' style sign for Filwood Community Centre. At Creative Newington an unloved walkway beside the local primary school now features 'Alley Animals' designed and created during family art workshops, and 'Sitting Pretty' has transformed concrete benches outside the community centre with colourful mosaics based on themes decided by residents, and painstakingly designed and made by the weekly arts and crafts group. Kernow Youth in Par Bay created a mural exploring the topic of knife crime, and Urban by Nature created a mural with pupils from Woodside Primary school.

Programmes of **informal, regular, creative activities** provide much needed social, as well as creative benefits. REMAKE's Peace Choir has a core of 15 keen residents, Folk n Word is a series of open mic evenings for music, poetry and stories, and their writing group are active contributors to The Proud East Marshian newspaper, as well as presenting their work at a Christmas open mic session. In Whitley Bay, a series of taster workshops led by local artists included screen printing, song writing, Christmas decorations, collage, printing, ukulele and visible mending, and led to ongoing 'Crafternoons' and an active sewing group.

Supporting the local economy is important to a number of projects, particularly to Nudge Community Builders. As well as renovating buildings along Union Street that now host local groups and micro businesses, 79% of their first year budget was spent within a one mile radius. Creative West End and Filwood Fantastic both established a community market, and Urban by Nature are connecting with local businesses to provide opportunities for young people working alongside local creatives.



Image: Annabel McCourt

One of Kensington Vision's key activities is Liverpool Community Radio; their Avago training programme equips local people with radio broadcasting skills, culminating in them presenting station's lunchtime show. **Skills are a focus** in other projects too; at the Portland Inn Project young people learnt about song writing, beat making, sound recording and video in the process of creating a music video inspired by environmental issues, and their Fellowship (match funded by the EU social fund) involves training young people in ceramics and community organising as they develop the Portland Pigeon tile from prototype to product – with a planned launch at the Hepworth Wakefield Ceramics Fair.

Performances and events that bring communities together are a large part of CCC programmes. Residents developed and performed a Christmas Panto in Par Bay and Portland Inn, whilst REMAKE worked with New Perspectives Theatre Company to devise and present 'Scales' – a community play based on the fishing heritage of the East Marsh. Knowle West Fest in Filwood features local music acts alongside a Bristol based headliner chosen by the resident group leading this strand of activity; Lantern Parades in Par Bay and Filwood involve hundreds of residents making lanterns in the run up to the event. In Corby, Creative Kingswood & Hazel Leys organised a series of pop up campervan gigs in green spaces around the estate.

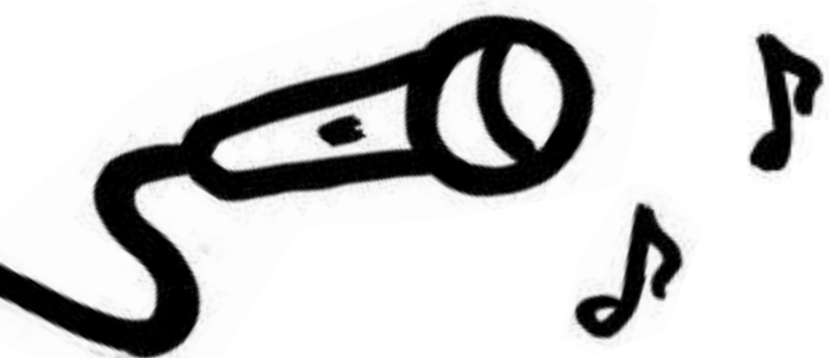


Image: Marcus Way, Local Trust





Trips and visits, both locally and further afield, have provided inspiration, research and discussion; The Golden Oldies group from Tilting the Mirror visited the Kara Walker and Olafur Eliasson art works at Tate Modern; for many in the group their first ever visit to the gallery. REMAKE's visual arts group visited Grimsby Town FC to look at their street art; Filwood Fantastic travelled to Marsh Farm in Luton, and Creative West End to Granby Market and Baltic Market in Liverpool, and Pop Brixton. Greater Creative's visit to 'Bring the Paint' in Leicester inspired their working group to make their plans to transform community assets bigger and bolder.

Projects are also **partnering with artists and arts organisations**. Celebrated photographer Vanley Burke is documenting Hard Times Require Furious Dancing's programme and mentoring local residents, and one of their schools residencies is in partnership with Birmingham Rep. Creative Newington have hosted Paines Plough's Roundabout theatre, and The Core at Corby Cube delivered a series of taster sessions on directing for Creative Kingswood & Hazel Leys. Nudge Community Builders commissioned local artists Wonderzoo to deliver door to door Valentines Day love poetry, and Andy Frost, chainsaw wood sculptor, demonstrated his craft in primary school playgrounds in Blackwell as part of the community decision-making process for the design and commission of three sculptures.



Image: Dean Leivers, Local Trust

What we have learned



The following reflections are from Creative Civic Change (CCC) project leads and their Critical Friends. All the projects have appointed a Critical Friend to work with them (funded directly and not from their individual activity budgets); someone who acts as a sounding board for their ideas and plans, who supports and challenges them, and helps to build the skills and confidence of residents to deliver the programme. Some Critical Friends are artists with a practice of co-creation, whilst others are specialists in community development.

Flexibility is key for community leadership and decision making

It can be challenging to find a regular meeting time that suits different people who want to be involved; being flexible with check ins, impromptu lunches and catch ups helped Filwood Fantastic keep in touch with members of their working group, whilst Tilting the Mirror's intergenerational groups couldn't find a time that suited both older and younger people so they used trips and a party to get together. Urban by Nature gather impromptu, as and when they want to and need to, and keep ideas and communication flowing via group chat on WhatsApp.

Not everyone wants a level of responsibility; Nudge Community Builders' working group changed their name to Nudge Sparks, which better reflected why they were involved, which was to be creative, rather than take on governance responsibilities.



Creative West End's Critical Friend noted:

I've learned that there are much more creative ways to govern than putting everyone in a box and imposing a constitution



You need to be pro-active if you want to create a truly representative and diverse community voice

Tilting the Mirror's Critical Friend reflected that whilst their working group is diverse, it definitely reflects people that are used to meeting structures and agendas, and their efforts to ensure it includes wider community members are ongoing.

Urban by Nature set-up a Youth Coordinator role shared with William Morris Big Local to ensure that their work is led by and for and with young people from the outset, and they have developed a partnership with their local college to extend their reach to more young people.

At Greater Creative in Blackwell, the voices of young people are changing the usual power dynamics of decision making in these communities. Their Critical Friend notes "Young people in the Working Group bring a positive energy and influence to the dynamic of the group. Their enthusiasm, motivation and optimism is energising when times are challenging".

Whitley Bay's Critical Friend adds:

"Creativity seems relatively easy to grow... Real resident and community leadership is harder to grow - it requires more attention and fertilising - including continued commitment from all the artists, agencies and professionals involved"



Image: Paul Norris, Local Trust

Ensure meetings are fun and creative

At Portland Inn Project, their bi-monthly meetings have become dinners – a chance to celebrate achievements and discuss projects, as well as make decisions.

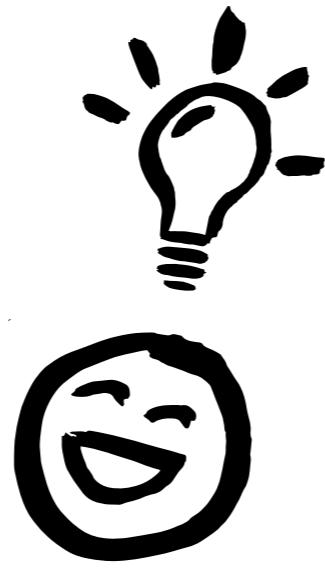
Working group meetings at Creative Kingswood & Hazel Leys include art materials, and the group have written their own poetry as part of the sessions.

Respond to the needs of people in your working group

Filwood Fantastic gave members of their working group diaries so they could keep track of meetings, events and workshops - some of their members had never needed one before.

Families that had joined the Portland Inn Project working group and become active and supportive project participants had to move out of the local area because of immigration and settlement issues. The project team kept in touch with them and they are still involved.

“At Portland Inn Project, their bi monthly meetings have become dinners – a chance to celebrate achievements, discuss projects as well as make decisions”





Don't underestimate project management

A number of CCC projects underestimated their 'back office' costs; understandably they wanted the maximum amount of funding possible to go on creative activities, but in some cases this resulted in delays, poor communication and lack of proper processes.

At the end of their development stage, Good Stuff in St Leonards reduced their activity strands from six to four and Urban by Nature realised that they could properly develop one business partnership rather than two, and organise fewer pop up events than they originally planned.

Ensure activities are hyper local

A principle across all of the CCC projects is that their activities take place in the heart of the local neighbourhood; whether this is a community centre in Filwood or Newington, a church hall in St Leonards, green spaces in Corby, a local market at REMAKE, primary schools in Birmingham and Blackwell, the high street, or even door to door at Nudge.



“A principle across all of the CCC projects is that their activities take place in the heart of the local neighbourhood”



Image: Nana Varveropoulou, Local Trust

Be aware of what else is happening in your area

Filwood Fantastic noted there was already a successful hip hop dance group in a neighbouring area so sign-posted young people to this rather than trying to compete.

In planning their free creative workshops, Whitley Bay were mindful of other providers in the area who were already providing paid-for activities, and the potential impacts on them.

Local artists and creatives may need support before they can get involved

Par Bay Dream Big realised that their local creative community needed more support around practical things such as budgeting, DBS checks, and insurance, as well as the principles of working in a co-designed, participatory way before they were 'funding ready'.

Kensington Vision's Test Bed projects also needed a re-think as the proposals they received weren't a high enough standard to fund.



Image: Paul Norris, Local Trust



Everything takes longer than you think

Greater Creative found that getting planning permission for their heritage trail took much longer than they anticipated; and the health and safety and legal implications of installing a new sign at the Filwood Community Centre slowed down Filwood Fantastic's ambitions. In Ramsgate, Creative Newington needed to manage residents' frustrations as their ideas and plans for a sensory garden in a sheltered housing block became mired in red tape at the Housing Association and associated PFI group.

Hard Times Require Furious Dancing had to fit around school planning cycles for their artists in residence programme, as well as coping with staff changes at the schools, and getting to grips with safeguarding requirements.

Urban by Nature's Critical Friend reflected that creating their action plan was relatively quick and easy, but implementing it was more complex and took more time than they thought.

Whilst Filwood Fantastic's Critical Friend commented "The best things come from humble and messy places. When reimagining some of the uses of Filwood Community Centre, we did a lot of consultation - with the community, the trustees, the employees. Some people wanted some things, and some wanted others. Gathering people together to share ideas and values is not as easy as one would think. It takes time to bring the team together, to iron out differences in approaches, and listen hard. There were some real highs and some difficult conversations. Some things worked and some did not. We have to remember that nothing really ever goes the way you envision and take that into consideration when doing community planned work. Things can take twice as long, but valuing everyone is very important".

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Don't underestimate the power of listening

Kensington Vision's Critical Friend notes "Don't be afraid of the slow burn, it takes time to make a change in a neighbourhood that has multiple and complex issues. Sometimes, just being really 'present', watching and listening is the key to true creative engagement. The art can come later, the creation of the 'space' to take part, that is caring and meaningful, really supports the shift to creative thinking".

Whilst Greater Creative's Critical Friend added "I have done a lot of listening, and have tried to refrain from 'contributing as part of the group' which doesn't always come easily because I also get excited by their discussions as the project develops".

Image: Nana Varveropoulou, Local Trust



Community engagement skills may be stretched into social care

The majority of CCC project workers are delivering what one Critical Friend described as 'unfunded mental health support' to people in their neighbourhood, and Critical Friends have noted how the weight of this falls on project staff. One expanded "As local authority funding for wellbeing services and social care diminishes, it is surrounding community projects and more civic-minded organisations who are plugging the gap in a more covert or subtle way. Incredibly vital, but not always acknowledged as such. And the burden on the team/staff can become immense as work can become relentless and 'out of hours'".

At Portland Inn Project cuts in local services meant that staff needed to develop skills in how to diffuse difficult situations and manage anti social behaviour, and many of the spaces used by CCC projects, such as the Clipper on Union Street and the community cafe in Kensington, are spaces where local residents can "drop in, be offered a cup of tea and have 10 minutes of uninterrupted attention about who you are and how you are" as one Critical Friend described.

"The majority of CCC project workers are delivering what one Critical Friend described as 'unfunded mental health support' to people in their neighbourhood"



Funders Learning

Community Leadership will look different in each place - don't try to define it!

We quickly learned that 'community leadership' was hard to pin down. As a project manager, your instinct is to create systems and structures that reflected a more professional management style but this quickly proved to be unhelpful. Community leadership takes on many different forms and is practiced in different ways. We have learned so much about how to collaborate from the CCC areas, whether its through community dinners at the Portland Inn Project, or integrating co-creation into every activity and events like in Creative Newington.



This work is slow - the three years of CCC funding is just part of a longer story for these communities

We set out to provide long term funding to counteract the often short term, project based funding that is common in the arts. A year into the programme and it is clear that three years is no time at all within community life. Whilst all our communities will do amazing things in the time they are given, true community leadership takes a long time to build. It is encouraging that all 15 communities see CCC as part of their story, and will all keep going long after the programme ends.

Consultation' is not a step in a project plan - it is an everyday lived experience for these community members and you have to trust them to come together in a way that will work for their community

There is beauty in the small things
- focus on the process not the outcomes

As funders, we have a tendency to celebrate the big flashy projects that are created thanks to our funding. Although there are loads of these to be proud of through CCC, whether it's Whitley Bay's Carnival or Filwood's Lantern Parade, some of the most impactful moments our communities have created may have been so small that they pass almost unnoticed.

A year in, there have been hundreds of small moments of human connection, community spirit, and kindness that have been enabled through CCC. People have found their voice, discovered new talents, made new friends. These little victories are hard to measure, but together create real change in a community that will sustain them long after the funding has been spent. Over the next few years, we will find new ways to collect these stories and celebrate them as much as they deserve to be.

Never underestimate people - the ambitions of these communities match any large institution

The ambition of each of our communities is staggering. Initially, we set out to provide funding to communities of between £50,000 - £300,000. Our assumption was that through the development stage of the programme, communities would design projects of different scales - some needing small grants, and others large. After only a few months of development, it was clear that every community was going to be applying for as much money as possible with each planning major programmes for long term, sustainable change for their areas.

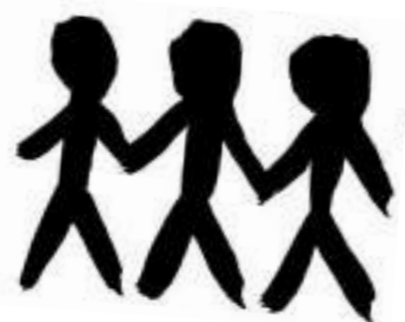



Image: Marcus Way, Local Trust

“A year in, there have been hundreds of small moments of human connection, community spirit, and kindness that have been enabled through CCC”





It took a long time for areas to trust that this programme was committed to community leadership at every level, and that we weren't going to impose expectations or leave them without support



It takes time to build trust - and it's an ongoing process

Trust is key at every level of the CCC programme, and it takes a long time to build. We set out to co-design every element of this programme with our communities, but in order for this to be successful, it was crucial to build trust with each of the areas first. After two years of working with these areas, we are in a good place, but it took time.

At the beginning of the programme, there was some scepticism towards our role as funders. Some areas had had negative experiences with funders setting the agenda and expectations for their work, others had no experience with funding at all. It took a long time for areas to trust that this programme was committed to community leadership at every level, and that we weren't going to impose expectations or leave them without support.

Hold yourselves to the same standard - everything about the programme should reflect the ethos of the programme

With CCC, we try to embody the ethos of community leadership with every element of the programme. With the volume of work involved in running a programme like this, it is often easier and quicker to go ahead and plan and deliver elements of the programme without consulting and collaborating with the areas involved, but we have learned that this can lead to elements of the programme feeling disconnected from its values.

We are always trying to find new ways to bring communities into these processes, whether it is commissioning them to design our learning reports, having them speak at conferences on our behalf, or shaping their own support offer. It is not always easy, and some things don't work, but at the end of the programme we will hope to have lots of examples of best practice to share.

Everyone is an expert

Another thing we learned early on in the process, is that everyone is an expert in something, and more often than not, all the expertise we need for the programme can be found within the group. Across the fifteen communities, we have an abundance of community leaders, designers, artists, creatives, accountants, project managers etc. In addition we have people with rich lived experience and an in depth knowledge of their community. Not all expertise is formal, and we have learned as much from those with lived experience, as we ever have from professionals we have encountered in the workplace.

In almost all cases, CCC areas have valued the support they have been given from other areas that have been through similar experiences, more than they have from any expert or professional we have brought in to provide support. We have learned to put as much time and resource into supporting this peer learning as we can.



Image: Nana Varveropoulou, Local Trust



What's next?

Creative Civic Change projects were well placed to respond positively and creatively to the challenges of COVID-19; the projects are rooted in their local neighbourhoods, they have established and trusted relationships, and they are already using creativity to address complex social issues. All have been busy delivering their programmes since the first lockdown and beyond; staying connected digitally and physically (yet safely) with residents, distributing creative packs, and commissioning local creatives to animate the neighbourhood.

The next Creative Civic Change report will explore in detail how the projects are responding to the situation of COVID-19; how activities and plans are changing (or not); the difference these creative activities are making to people's lives during the pandemic; and the impacts on community decision making.



Image: Nana Varveropoulou, Local Trust

Thank you

Enormous thanks to all the participants and funders of the Creative Civic Change projects for your contributions to this report. Any mistakes or omissions are the authors.

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<https://localtrust.org.uk/other-programmes/creative-civic-change>

