

Case  
study 4

CREATIVE  
AND PEOPLE  
PLACES

# Basic needs and creativity

Case Study written by [Kathryn Welch](#)

## **Creative People and Places in Lockdown: responses and learning**

Creative People and Places in Lockdown: responses and learning is a short series of Case Studies that explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CPP projects and how they responded. Each of the five Case Studies will explore a different theme and we will publish an accompanying reflective blog on our website, [www.creativepeopleplaces.org](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org), in December 2020.

The effects of COVID and lockdown starkly highlighted the divisions and inequalities in British society. With lives and health under threat, poor (or no) housing, inadequate food and loss of work meant that many people were struggling to meet even their most basic needs. Essential needs agencies and key workers fought to keep up with demand for food parcels, meet housing needs and provide debt and welfare advice.

Drawing on an earlier conversation with East Durham Creates, who are embedded within a charity (East Durham Trust) providing basic needs services, I was keen to explore how CPP Places had experienced their role in this context. As people struggle to meet their most basic needs, what is the role for creativity in communities?

## 1 Addressing the immediate and longer term effects of the crisis

Deeply connected to their communities, CPP Places were clear that they had a key role to play in helping people to cope with the effects of lockdown. Just as the impact of the virus for individuals was shaped by social and economic factors, the physical restrictions of lockdown sit side by side with a burgeoning crisis in mental health and emotional wellbeing:

**“Art in crisis or art in conflict... I think it’s essential, and I think that’s something we should really hold on to. Whenever there is a crisis - a pandemic, a conflict, an environmental disaster - food is essential, housing is essential, and they come as number 1, but they are not enough. Unless you want to step back at the end of the conflict and look at a society that has**

**been fed and housed but is completely destroyed emotionally - you need to have art and storytelling and creativity as part of the support that you’re giving to your communities”**

Saad, HOME Slough

Looking to the long term effects of the crisis, Places were deeply conscious of the ways that COVID will shape their communities for years to come. The CPP approach of working with, for and alongside communities was viewed as a vital tool in helping Places to cope with, adapt to, and recover from the effects of COVID:

**“Arts and creativity are one of the best tools to help people recover, learn, evolve from a crisis. And to do that from a perspective of co-creation means that you increase your chances to succeed in terms of impact in your communities, because they have been part in designing whatever responses you are offering”**

Saad, HOME Slough





Scrubs and thank you messages for the NHS, Fylde Coast Scrub Hub, supported by LeftCoast CPP



Above and top left: Scrubs, Fylde Coast Scrub Hub, supported by LeftCoast CPP

## 2 Creativity as urgently, practically useful

Whilst the focus for CPP Places is typically around finding joy and connectivity through creative activity (Made With Many's goal is 'to surprise, delight and inspire'), it's important to recognise that creative projects can also be deeply, practically useful - especially in a crisis. In Blackpool and Wyre, [LeftCoast CPP established a scrub hub](#) - a network of people sewing scrubs at home for NHS keyworkers. Led by Gillian Wood - theatre costume maker and artist in residence for Fleetwood, local people came together to make, package and deliver homemade scrubs. The

scrub hub gave Gillian a way to connect with the local community, and also offered a chance for people to be useful, to contribute something practical in a time of need, and to find value in dedicating their energy to an absorbing creative activity:

**“While the lockdown’s been on, with doing the sewing, the time has absolutely whizzed by. Once I start sewing I just sew and sew - I can be up until 1 o’clock, 2 o’clock in the morning. Once you get the bug everything else goes out the window. I’ve learned a lot; it’s been a challenge for me, because I’ve been doing patterns from scratch. They were appreciated very much by the lady who I did made-to-measure scrubs for.**

**Everyone’s done an awful lot. It’s been a good contribution that we’ve made. I think it’s been wonderful”**

**Paula, Fylde Coast Scrub Hub**

Reflecting on the wider impact of the Scrub Hub on creativity in the local community, Laura at LeftCoast CPP reflected that the domestic, home-based creativity that is so rich in the region is often undervalued, or not seen as especially skillful or artistic. Projects like the Scrub Hub - meeting a clear and urgent need - elevated domestic skills such as sewing, baking, crochet and quilting and attached a new value to them. In turn, this brought new people into the world of creativity and connection with local creative initiatives, helping drive a renewed sense of pride in skills that reside in the area.



District Liaison Officer Jo Gouldson from Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service and Sarah Brown from Made With Many **Made with Many**

### 3 Partnerships with essential needs agencies took a range of shapes

At the outset of lockdown, the need for safe, secure, adequate housing was high on the political agenda. Simultaneously, the level of reliance on food banks was higher than ever, and specialist food and housing agencies rose to meet these needs. Some CPP Places are already deeply embedded alongside these kinds of essential needs services. Where this was the case, aligning creative opportunities with essential needs support was a well trodden path, made easier by existing relationships and a shared base where everyone mucked-in to help meet rising demand:

**“[Based within East Durham Trust] we see day to day the impact of the crisis and understand the impact on their capacity. We could help relieve some of the extra work of adding in arts activities to their packs”**

Jess, East Durham Creates.

For other CPP Places, though, the crisis brought about new opportunities and partnerships. All Places were conscious of working sensitively alongside essential needs services at their busiest time, so in many cases responded to requests for creative provision from those on the front line:

**“And this was just as homeless people were moved into emergency accommodation. And probably three or four weeks after that, the homeless forum had sorted out some of the basic needs. They were being fed and support**

**workers were able to go and visit them, the infrastructure there was all in place. And then [the support worker] rang me to say, Helen, they’re really bored”**

Helen, Made with Many (Corby & Wellingborough)

Whilst Places such as East Durham Trust have been able to draw on their existing connections to respond quickly and relatively smoothly to the needs of lockdown, the Places without this preexisting local connection have developed intense and mutually beneficial partnerships. Whilst it remains to be seen how these partnerships will develop over the long term, in many cases COVID has illustrated the role of creativity in supporting those at the sharpest end of basic needs challenges, and the potential of working together to provide distraction, escapism and wellbeing support:

**“It makes you think why haven’t we worked with food banks before?”**

The Cultural Spring, South Tyneside and Sunderland



Volunteer with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service loading up Greetings From...packs as part of the distribution effort **Made with Many**

## 4 The impact of boredom shouldn't be underestimated

Boredom was a common theme raised and recognised by Places - addressing it was seen as vital in addressing the developing mental health crisis associated with prolonged lockdown. From homeless people newly re-housed in hotel rooms, to families living in cramped conditions with children at home, tensions, stress and boredom combined with the worries about COVID to create a pressing need for distraction. Arts packs - basic materials and activities delivered direct to people's homes - were rolled out by Places all across England to meet this need:



Greetings From art pack **Made with Many**



Michael Phillips from Places for People helping distribute Greetings From... packs on Queensway, **Made with Many**

**“For families at the minute, that may have lost income, maybe relied on food banks, a new pack of felt tip pens is not going to be very high up their shopping list. But we all know that if you’ve got kids, they are an invaluable resource. There are real, quite serious mental health problems that are coming out of this pandemic, and there is a real role for creativity to play in that. I think in terms of mental health, [with creative projects] you can kind of get lost in it and let your thoughts go away. And that’s the essential need of it. It’s a little bit of escapism, a little bit of distraction”**

Helen, **Made with Many** (Corby & Wellingborough)

And rather than abating as the early months of lockdown passed, Places were conscious of the continued need for support as the long grind of restrictions continue, and as sunny summer days pass into winter:

**“We’re very much at a point in this moment in time where we’re past that thing of doing what we can to survive a short lockdown. What we need to be doing is helping our people find a way of living with this and living with it over winter months when it’s cold and wet”**

Helen, **Made with Many** (Corby & Wellingborough)



Work by Gary Nicholson of Regeneration NE for The Butterfly Project, supported by The Cultural Spring

## 5 Creativity is essential in supporting mental health care during the crisis

Places recognised the importance of continuing creative support for those with mental health issues, and people with disabilities that left them more vulnerable to both the virus itself and the effects of loneliness and isolation. Artist Gary Nicholson of [Regeneration NE](#) was supported by The Cultural Spring in Sunderland and South Tyneside to create a series of collaborative online exhibitions, including an exhibition for World Mental Health Awareness Day:

**“Before all this chaos ensued, we had two regular weekly meetups. Lots of**

**people with mental health issues - depression, anxiety and all that sort of thing. So when lockdown happened, we still kept in contact via Facebook Messenger and text and phone calls and what have you... Just trying to keep everyone connected, you know - in the same community spirit - so it wasn't just you were forgotten about and left on your own at home”**

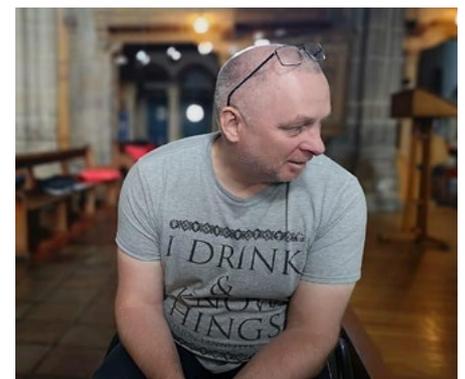
**Gary, Regeneration NE, supported by The Cultural Spring**

In some cases there were unexpected benefits to this more remote approach. One participant with anxiety found it easier to join online classes than to make it out of the house for in-person events, and some new participants and partnerships had connected with the group as they'd moved online. Gary - who is paraplegic - also spoke about

the benefits to his own wellbeing from the opportunity to support and encourage others to explore their creativity.

**“Because they're long days, when you sit at home, bored - there's only so much TV you can watch. But when you're being creative the time goes by really quickly”**

**Gary, Regeneration NE, supported by The Cultural Spring**



Gary Nicholson of Regeneration NE, supported by The Cultural Spring

## 6 Reassurance and familiarity when we are frightened and uncertain

As well as facing boredom and frustration, there was a significant level of fear and uncertainty experienced by people during lockdown. In Sunderland, The Cultural Spring were especially conscious of the isolation, uncertainty and fear experienced by women asylum seekers and refugees, to whom they were already connected via a partnership with [Sunderland Women's Art Group](#), run by Sangini and Friends of the Drop-In for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (FODI). For these women, lockdown compounded what were already frightening circumstances with regard to legal matters around their residency status.

Commissioning a series of online creative workshops, it was seen as especially important to work with two artists - Padma Rao and Miki Z - who were already well known to the women of the art group. This created a sense of familiarity, constancy and reassurance at a time when much else seemed uncertain:

**“We wanted the women to find solace from the harsh reality of the increasing impact of the lockdown. The creative activities proved healing and were therapeutic. Over the weeks the women gradually built their self-confidence through learning together. The women supported each other by helping each other with technology, such as**



Drawing workshop by Padma Rao and Miki Z, Sangini and FODI women's group, supported by The Cultural Spring

**how to operate Zoom, and celebrating each other's creativity by posting artwork online and on social media.”**

**Padma, artist with Sangini and Friends of the Drop-In for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (FODI), supported by The Cultural Spring.**

## 7 There will always be more need - but joy is what makes it all worthwhile

All Places had experienced immediate and desperate changes to the essential needs facing their communities. Food parcels were essential, as were better and more secure housing. As a population, as well as at the local level, we have never been more aware of our health, and our survival. These matters, though, were not the only things on our minds. Even at the height of the crisis, and even for those facing particular challenges in terms of their health or circumstances,

pure survival was not enough. Our communities needed companionship, reassurance, escapism. We urgently sought friendship, distraction, to be useful. For many, creativity was a route to all these needs:

**“Our job was to keep going. That was it. All of us looked at our phones, about 100 gazillion times a day. We were looking for news, we were looking for escape. We were looking for friendship, we were looking for comfort. We were looking for something to connect us with each other”**

**Jenny, Revoluton (Luton)**

As days turn to weeks, and weeks into months, creativity is helping communities to sustain their spirit, to connect with each other, to offer and receive support. Even - and perhaps especially - for those in the most difficult of circumstances, creativity can offer a moment of light. When times are tough, creativity offers a moment to lift the spirits, create a smile, and encourage us to spot the glimmers of hope in the most difficult of circumstances. As Saad of HOME Slough concludes, “joy is more than enough”.

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This Case Study was commissioned as part of the Creative People and Places National Peer Learning and Communications programme.

All Creative People and Places (CPP) projects work together as a network and participate in the National Peer Learning & Communications Programme (NPL&C), funded by Arts Council England since 2013. Shaped by the needs and aspirations of the network, the NPL&C programme aims to share learning that comes out of all CPP projects throughout the network, and works in tandem with Arts Council England to share CPP learning both within the arts and cultural sector and beyond.

Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme (CPP) is about more people taking the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in arts and culture experiences in the places where they live. There are 33 projects, each located in a place where people are least likely to engage with arts and culture. Arts Council England have committed £108 million to the programme so far, covering 33 Projects, 33 Places, 30 consortia and 45 local authorities. Since 2013, there have been 4.5 million engagements with the CPP programme<sup>1</sup> and 86% of people who participate in CPP<sup>2</sup> weren't previously engaging regularly with arts and culture<sup>3</sup>.

[www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk)

[www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places/creative-people-and-places-projects](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places/creative-people-and-places-projects)

<sup>1</sup> This only includes physical engagements - previous figures may also include digital engagements. Figure subject to change as data validation is still ongoing.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated by The Audience Agency using postcode data for 2017-19.

<sup>3</sup> As classified by The Audience Agency's [Audience Spectrum](#) segmentation system.



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