

Supporting  
**Everyday  
Creativity**

-RESOURCES-

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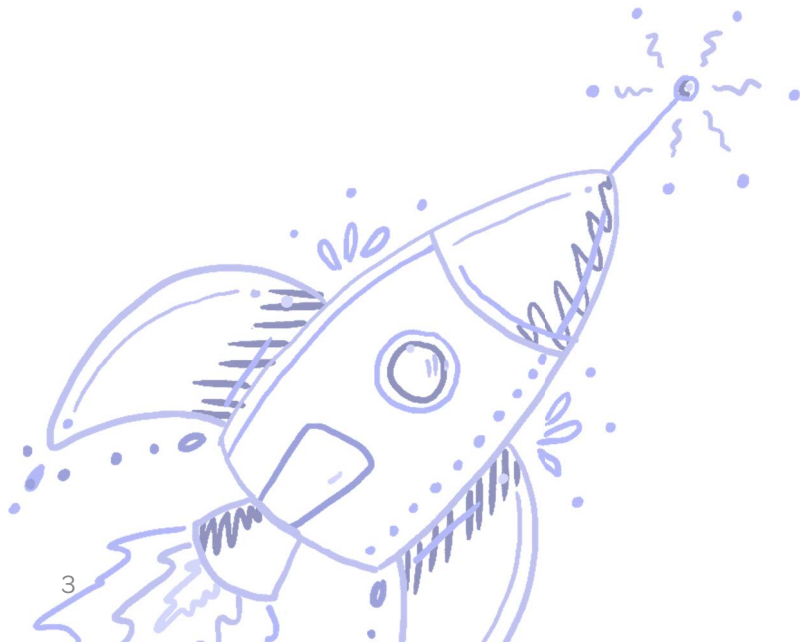
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# Foreword

This resource was made for you and your organisation if you are thinking about doing more to support “everyday creativity”. Commissioned by Arts Council England, it is based on research which aimed to answer the question: what can organisations do to help build “a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish” as described in The Arts Council’s “Let’s Create” strategy.

In it, we share highlights and stories from our research to give you the insight, inspiration and confidence to work with everyday creatives and help nurture and encourage creativity in your community.



## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The resource is in 2 parts:

### PART 1

*Understanding Everyday Creativity* offers insight into what people do, how they do it and why. It might help you to think about what your organisation has to give and what you might gain. It includes an introduction based on our recent research, a “map” and case studies from community groups.

### PART 2

*Supporting Everyday Creativity* focuses more specifically on what organisations can – and perhaps can’t – do to support. It includes a summary of the advice and insights we uncovered in our research, case studies of organisations who are pioneering in the field, stories from everyday creatives, and a practical framework including tips and hints.

## With Thanks

Our research and this resource have been greatly aided by the inspiration, wisdom and generosity of our informal steering group (the teams at **Creative Lives, 64 Million Artists, Fun Palaces, Crafts Council, Libraries Connected**) and by colleagues at **Arts Council England**. We are also grateful to the creatives and libraries who shared their stories and the organisations who took part in interviews to form our case studies:

**Anna Taylor**, Critical Engagement, In-Situ

**Deirdre Figueiredo**, Director, Craftspace

**Helen Neal**, Business Development Manager, National Federation of Women's Institutes

**Ithalia Forel**, Director of Human Resources, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Movema

**Mark Gibbs**, Coventry Men's Shed

**Miriam Storey**, Senior Library Manager, Eltham Library, Royal Greenwich Libraries

**Najma Khalid**, Director, Women's Chai Project

**Seonaid Murray**, Outreach Officer, The Black Box, Belfast

**Sarah Christie and Lisa Howarth**, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

**Tony O'Hare and Grace Walsh**, Folk around Fishponds

**TransFolke**

Photo: Craftspace, 4600 Gifts,

Birmingham 2022 Festival.

Photo Credit: Ahsen Sayeed



## PART 1: *Understanding Everyday Creativity*

Over and over in our research, people told us that the best sort of support organisations can give grows out of mutual understanding and a reciprocal relationship. In this section, we offer insight into what people do, how they do it and why, to help you think about how your organisation could contribute.



### *Elation & Achievement, Pleasure & Surprise:* **What is Everyday Creativity?**

People in the cultural sector have been using this term in recent years to get away from what are often seen as unhelpful phrases like “amateur”, “voluntary arts” and to recognise that we need to widen our narrow understanding about people’s creative lives. For clarity, let’s say that we have used it here to mean: anything any of us does that we might describe as creative for our own enjoyment or fulfilment.

Even that definition seems restrictive, however, as one important concept of everyday creativity is that each of us can and should define our own creativity in our own way and in our own words. This emerges from the thinking and writing of US psychologist and psychiatrist Dr Ruth Richards who first coined the term in the late 1980s. In her academic work and self-help books, she makes explicit the link between creativity and wellbeing, celebrating everyday creativity as the innovation we bring to all aspects of our lives. She advocates that we become more aware of our own creative processes and consciously employ them to help us thrive, in terms of problem-solving, personal growth, and mental health.

*“Everyday creativity, as a construct, is not, as some think, confined to the trivia of life. This is an important misunderstanding. It concerns almost anything, anytime to which any one brings originality in an everyday context, including in major projects.”*

The [Everyday Creativity Research Network](#), established in June 2022, describe it as:

*“characterised by day-to-day activities that are understood in the broadest terms as being both novel and useful...” incorporating both original thinking – or “little “c” creativity” as they call it - and taking part in creative acts and production– “big “c” creativity”.*

In 2015, three UK organisations whose mission is to “support arts and culture with by and for everyone” - 64 Million Artists, Voluntary Arts (now Creative Lives) and Fun Palaces – formed a grassroots cultural coalition to champion the importance of everyday creativity more specifically within a cultural ecology. 64 Million Artists also led research with cultural professionals to:

*“explore our understanding of everyday creativity, the conditions under which it thrives, how it can play a central role”*

Their [2016 report](#) is an important foundation for our research and this resource.

They use the term in a slightly narrower way than Ruth Richards. Within this research, everyday creativity is about self-directed and self-organised activities that are not mediated by creative professionals or institutions.

But don't be put off if you are a professional or work in an organisation! Our research shows that many people are hungry for opportunities to get creative in all sorts of settings. Just bear in mind that they are on their own creative journey and eager to pursue their interests and passions in their own way.

Photo: Folk around Fishponds event

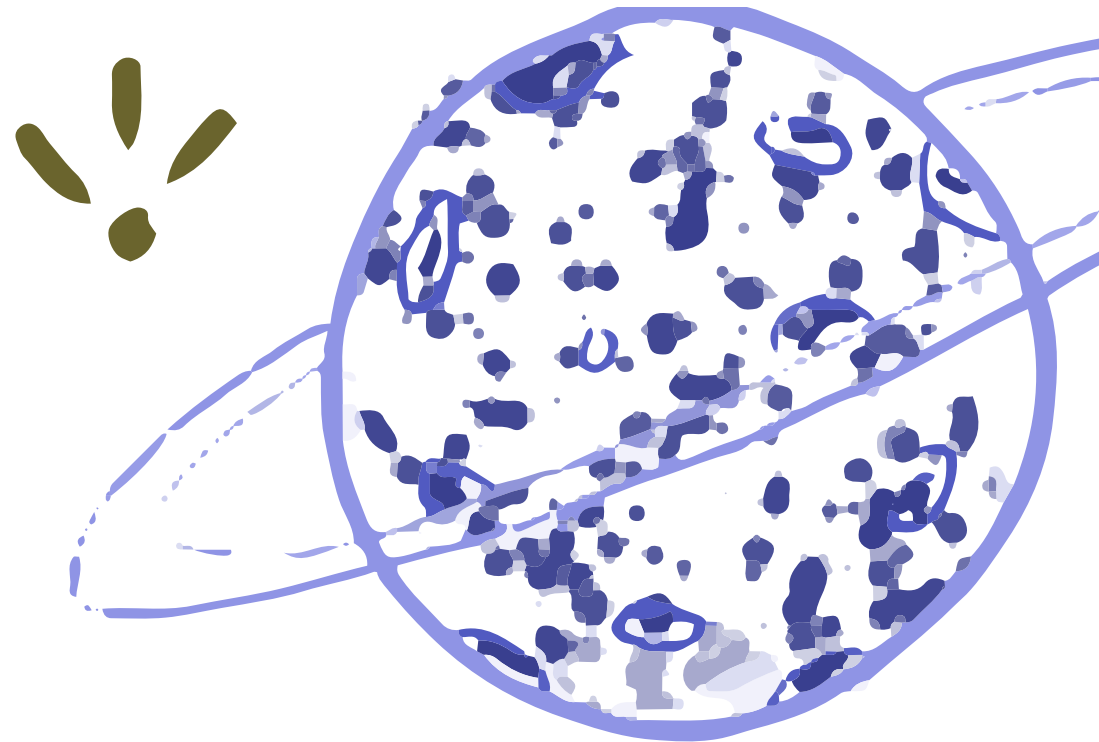


## What Everyday Creativity is NOT

In this sense then, what professional organisations provide is not strictly everyday creativity unless the impetus – and the activities – come from an individual or group from outside, on their own terms. However brilliant, inclusive and rewarding a professionally-orchestrated community arts project is, it falls outside the principles of everyday creativity.

As you will see from the case studies, however, some organisations take a role in encouraging and enabling their community to take the reins and have developed special skills and processes accordingly. So while everyday creativity should not be mistaken for, nor conflated with, participatory arts, participatory governance, co-creation or co-curation per se, those organisations who are confident and able in these practices are likely to find it easier to adapt their approach to work alongside everyday creatives.

In this study, we also left out thinking about creativity in a formal educational setting as beyond its scope. We fully acknowledge the importance of encouraging self-expression in school as part of a life-long journey of everyday creativity – and of the potential for organisations to play a central role in a creatively impoverished education system. In fact, many people in our research talked about the importance of childhood experiences in kindling their creative interests, perhaps warranting fuller exploration.



## Who are the Everyday Creatives?

Our research suggests that the majority of us – 85% - recognise and “do” everyday creativity<sup>1</sup>.

We asked a broad and representative sample of people about a long list of activities<sup>2</sup>. It turns out that practice is for the most part informal and happens at home, as and when. Many of us also connect with others in more or less formalised ways, from self-organising online communities to highly structured groups, classes, activities...

People do most things – especially craft and writing - alone and at home, while some other activities - making food, performing – lend themselves more readily to company - most often with others from the same household. People were more likely to go outside the home to dance, sing in a choir, make music or theatre and to discuss arts and culture. About a quarter of us do an incredible variety – up to 10 different activities - on a regular basis<sup>3</sup>. It is helpful to bear in mind, though, that many everyday creatives blur the distinctions between types of activity, rather than defining specific artforms or areas of practice as we are used to in the cultural sector.

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- 1 Cultural Participation Monitor, Wave 7, The Audience Agency (Autumn 2022)
  - 2 The Audience Agency’s Cultural Participation Monitor is a nationwide longitudinal (ongoing) panel survey of changing views about participating in creative and cultural activities. Samples are set up to be representative of the UK population, by age, ethnicity, region, gender and [Audience Spectrum](#).
  - 3 Cultural Participation Monitor, Wave 7, The Audience Agency (Autumn 2022)

Photo: Coventry Men’s Shed, Art Activity.





Everyday Creatives are as diverse as the population. We noticed some of the most significant differences in tastes and interests between generations and life stages. Younger people, aged under 35, were a lot more likely to say they engage in everyday creativity in general - with particularly higher than average participation in fashion and style (64% compared with 29% overall), gaming (67% compared with 34% overall) and visual arts (57% compared with 27% overall). They were also more likely to use social media to enhance their experience (40% compared with only 18% overall).

People with young families also engaged at higher levels across all thirteen types of activity, especially music, dancing, other performing arts, film, fashion, craft and gaming. Use of the internet as part of everyday creativity was also higher for both families and younger people than for the population overall.

Interestingly, it seems that involvement has actually risen – by at least 5% - since before the pandemic<sup>4</sup>. What all this suggests is that there is a strong future trend towards everyday creativity.

Beyond the stats, we invited everyday creatives to tell us about their personal experiences in their own words. These stories showed us more blurred definitions – like the fuzzy line between being a paid professional or otherwise. We discovered many creative professionals practise in an “everyday” context, just for joy, while some people who earn a living in other ways were also ambitious to earn through their creativity.

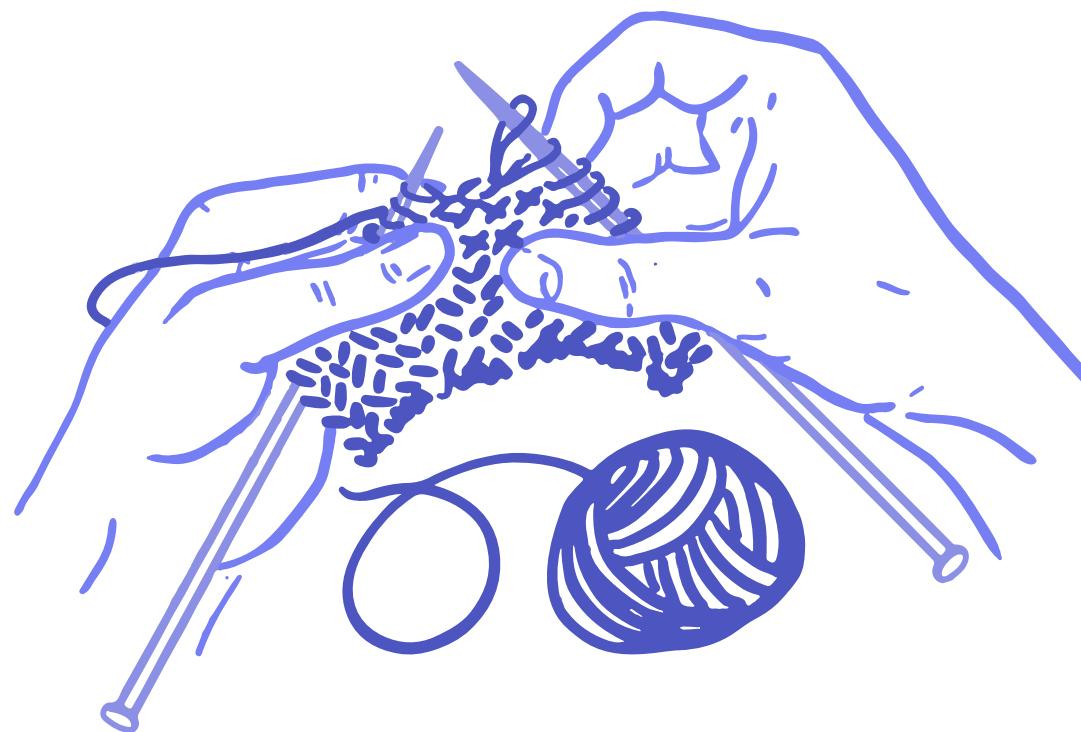


4 Cultural Participation Monitor, Wave 7, The Audience Agency (Autumn 2022)

We also talked to people who were organisers. There is great diversity here too, but important common themes include the fact that most organisers are incredibly committed but also incredibly busy and time-poor. Most have a day-job, many are active across many different areas – and always short of resources. When asked what they most need, it often came down to things that can save time or money, small contributions of grants or specialist skills and advice.

All these stories offer a rich seam of insight and we have included some of them to give you a taste of the wide range of emotions, motivations and approaches involved.

We also asked people what would encourage them to do more – or to get more out of – everyday creativity. Their answers gave us important hints and clues as to what kinds of support organisations could offer.



## What is the Value of Everyday Creativity?

We might expect that the value any of us attribute to everyday creativity is as individual, unique and personal as our experience. You will get a clear sense of this by reading the stories included in this resource.

That said, there is a considerable body of research that seeks to identify and articulate value at a more universal level, in terms of individual psychology or community benefit. We looked at over 100 academic studies of everyday creativity. The majority focused on understanding the impact on the wellbeing of individuals (recently through the pandemic), while a few explored the impact on communities, or overarching social or economic value.

A common thread across many studies is the observation that what everyday creatives prize most is an emotional feel-good factor, usually kindled by the intrinsic pleasure of creative self-expression, sometimes stoked by connection to a wider community, particularly peer networks. Several researchers have been able to demonstrate a clear correlation between everyday creativity, positive emotional states and stronger mental health.

There is also good evidence that whole communities can benefit from the connections made through everyday creativity, especially outside the home – where it can broker greater cohesion, forge a common sense of identity, even pave the way towards more active citizenship.

For many researchers, respecting and promoting everyday creativity was critical to rebalancing power away from cultural institutions in a move towards greater cultural democracy. That is, an environment in which communities define their own culture and make decisions about its resourcing, availability and governance.

If your organisation is thinking about supporting everyday creativity as part of its social purpose, you might find it useful to read more about its value and impact in the full Everyday Creativity Digest created with Centre for Cultural Value or take a look at some of the impact studies in the further reading section.



## Drivers and Barriers to Everyday Creativity

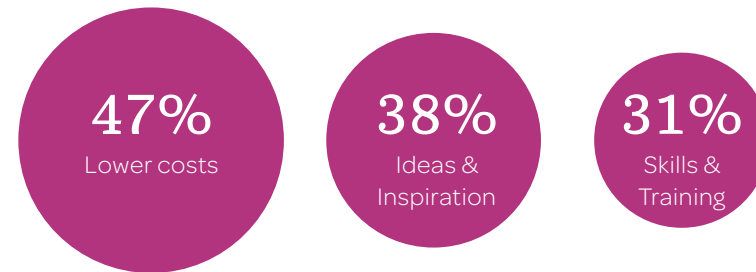
Our research suggests that, while there are many and diverse reasons that people enjoy doing creative activities, they mostly fall into 2 distinct categories. One set of benefits is about self-expression, where everyday creativity is an outlet for expressing and exploring ideas, opinions or feelings, processing and sharing experiences, on your own terms. The other relates to the social benefits of activities - the friendships and communities which form around a common interest, the joy of making with others.

In their 2016 research, 64 Million Artists stressed that people valued “process over product” “Consistently we heard that it’s not about what you did (or made) but about who you did it with, what you felt, how it affected you”

We also asked people why they tried something for the first time: making new friends or learning new skills were the top-scoring reasons. From The Stories (see below), we learned that most people’s creative habits formed early in life and that the encouragement of others – family, teachers and friends was critically important. For those who started later, the invitation and encouragement of a friend was often the catalyst.

We also discovered a range of factors which prevent people with an interest from doing more creative activities. Money and time, especially, are of course important factors, with working age women most likely to say it was difficult to justify the time. But people also experience other physical and psychological barriers: having no-one to do things with and not knowing where to start were factors which featured large in our and other qualitative research.

### TOP 3 THINGS THAT WOULD HELP TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH THEIR CREATIVE ACTIVITIES:<sup>5</sup>



In the population survey, we asked people what the top three things would help to support their creative activities: overall, the answers were: lower costs, ideas and inspiration, and help with skills/training (by 47%, 38%, 31% respectively). There were differences by type of activity, however

- Those doing visual arts, crafts and fashion tended to want support with materials and resources.
- Those doing film and audio and performing arts tended to want more help with spaces to do their activity, as well as access to technology.
- Earning money or turning the activity into a career was more often picked by those who did writing or visual arts.
- People doing dancing and discussions around arts and culture tended to want more support with finding peers.
- Only one in five people said they didn’t want any additional support of any kind.

We will return to these issues and the ways in which organisations can help in Part 2.

<sup>5</sup> Footnote, Cultural Participation Monitor, Wave 7, The Audience Agency (Autumn 2022)

## Why Should Organisations Get Involved?

The pandemic accelerated a growing interest in creative participation. The rise and rise of TV programmes like Sewing Bee, Bake Off and Strictly are both a symptom and a cause. There is clearly a growing “market” for such activity and one in which professional organisations – cultural institutions, employers, public organisations – are potentially well-placed to make a difference.

The desire to bring value to your community in new ways may be an important driver for your organisation wanting to get involved in everyday creativity. It is definitely not the only benefit. When we spoke to organisations pioneering in this field, they told us of the many, sometimes surprising, benefits they had gained. They also told us how their ideas about what they had to give and gain had changed over time.

The long list of gains include building a more nuanced and multi-layered understanding of their community, staff development in many new and regenerative ways, being repositioned in their community, growing as a needed social enterprise. In fact, several organisations told us that these relationships acted as a kind of ideas incubator, prompting new practice, content, enabling small-scale experimentation, and importantly replenishing artists and other staff. The longer term the investment in their relationships with everyday creatives and their networks, the better the returns.

## Placemaking & Community Building

There is strong evidence that everyday creativity is an important aspect of the way communities are formed and then shape the places in which they live. Research from the Understanding Everyday Participation (UEP) project, and by Nick Ewbank Associates (NEA) shows that the way public spaces and amenities are used by different communities can help to shape both people’s sense of common identity and foster a sense of ownership and belonging, strongly linked to wellbeing.

Cultural events and initiatives with a strongly regenerative, place-based mission have accordingly moved towards the facilitation of everyday creativity. It has, for example, been a feature of recent cities of culture, the London Boroughs of Culture and of the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme. Although it is hard to track the long-term impacts of such activity, learning from the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme suggests, ‘change is possible by working with people not on them, involving non-arts partners and taking an asset-based approach’.<sup>6</sup>

We delve more deeply into the role cultural and other organisations have to play in part 2.



<sup>6</sup> Mark Robinson, Thinking Practice, ‘FASTER, BUT SLOWER SLOWER, BUT FASTER’ Creative People and Places Learning 2016: 3.

*Whatever You're Working On,  
Whatever You'd Like to...*  
**A Star-Map of Everyday Creativity**

To help widen our horizons, we have created a map, based on our research, of the vast universe of creative activities people fill their lives with.

If you are thinking of offering your help, think about what you might have to offer at the new frontiers as well as within the universe you know.

*Artforms...*



**Places  
and spaces**

- |                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| Homes                        | Venues           |
| Cafes                        | Parks            |
| Pubs                         | Businesses       |
| Community centres            | Hospitals        |
| Libraries                    | Prisons          |
| Schools                      | Hackspaces       |
| Universities                 | Allotments       |
| Care homes                   | Religious spaces |
| Arts, culture, heritage orgs | Youth clubs      |
|                              | Streets          |

**Digital platforms**

- |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| Facebook  | YouTube   |
| Twitter   | Goodreads |
| Instagram | Forums    |
| Reddit    | 4chan     |
| Tumblr    | Roblox    |
| TikTok    | Minecraft |
| Discord   | Etsy      |
| Twitch    | Meetup    |



## Literature

Writing (novels, poetry, fanfic, memoir...)  
Poetry slams, reciting poetry  
Betaing  
Writing groups, workshops, retreats  
Zine making  
National Novel Writing Month  
Interactive fiction

## Craft

Knitting	Pottery
Crochet	Models (model railway, dollhouses, military etc)
Quilting	
Latchhook	
Sewing	
Designing patterns	

## Heritage

Re-enactments  
Historic costume  
Industrial heritage fandom (rail, maritime, etc)  
Restoration/decoration of heritage properties  
Historical fiction

## Games

Board game design	Role Playing Games
Video game design	Warhammer
Coding	Streaming
Interactive fiction	In-game building
LARPing	

## Cultural criticism

Film clubs  
Book clubs  
Reviews  
Meta  
Fan forums  
Podcasting  
Art appreciation

## Festivals

Mela  
Carnivals  
Festivals  
Religious holidays  
Secular holidays

## Fashion

Fashion design  
Hair  
Makeup  
Nail art  
Drag  
Cosplay  
Outfit of the Day

## Volunteering

Moderating  
Docents  
Trustees  
Crowdsourcing  
Teaching

## Performing arts

Amateur dramatics	Ballroom dancing
Improv	Morris dancing
Comedy	Magic
Dance classes	Circus arts
Dance performances	Poledancing
Dancing in clubs	Spoken word
Pantomime	

## Bricolage

Scrapbooking  
Bullet journaling  
Collecting  
Creating photo albums  
Organising/Konndoing

## Music

Orchestras	Composing
Ensembles	Filking
Bands	Recording
Brass bands	Producing
Singing (alone, choirs, karaoke)	Streaming

## Natural world

Gardening  
Garden design  
Allotments  
Bonsai  
Flower arranging



Everyday creativity is radically diverse, individual, and inclusive of a wide range of communities of practice, identity, and place (both physical and digital). It covers both traditional and non-traditional arts, culture, heritage and craft, as well as a diversity of leisure and entertainment activities that are generally not considered part of institutionalised 'culture' at all.

We recognise that everyday creativity is pretty much un-chartable and that this is a star-map, fading to infinity. There is no doubt that many other galaxies out there exist. Our aim was to generate a wide sense of possibility.

Most everyday creativity lies beyond our range, out of view to the casual observer – and perhaps even to the participant! The most overlooked and undervalued forms of creativity are those that take place within home and family, without outside recognition. A teenager doing their makeup, a mother telling a story to her children, a pensioner working on his garden, a man making a special dinner for his husband. These activities are often not defined as 'creative,' but can be expressions of creativity.



## Groups & Organisations

Most noticeable perhaps are the kinds of activities that take place in groups in the community: an art or dance class, a book club or writing group, an amateur dramatics group, a Morris dancing side a choir or brass band. These groups can be self-organising (in some cases meeting within private homes), facilitated by charities (which may be arts organisations themselves) or offered commercially. A lot of facilitated creativity also takes place in groups that are not themselves 'creative' groups, such as those providing support for mental health or activities for older people.

Large national organisations – from the Guides and Woodcraft Folk to the Women's Institute and University of the Third Age – are probably some of the most prolific enablers of everyday creativity – all operating at the local, regional, national and international levels. Libraries, as we demonstrate below, support in a number of ways and local authorities also do a lot, often providing a dizzying – though not terribly consistent – range of support from adult education classes to funding community festivals and a whole bunch of other community-led ideas in something of a postcode lottery.

These traditional forms of everyday creativity are most likely to be visible to policymakers and to the funded arts sector – and therefore to prompt interventions.

Photo: Women's Chai Project, Oldham.





## Digital Disruption

The universe of everyday creativity in 2023 is not the same as it was a few decades ago. Many forms of everyday creativity might seem familiar to people two thousand years ago: sculpting, cooking, writing, sewing, playing games. But technology has changed the ways that creativity is expressed and shared, and the communities it supports.

Digital platforms have made it easier to organise. Communities of interest can arise naturally on platforms like Reddit or Tumblr (as they did earlier on LiveJournal or Usenet) without being formally constituted, while platforms such as MeetUp offer a similar ease for in-person or Zoom groups.

The meteoric rise of TikTok has created a new platform – and format – for sharing digital creativity. Digitally mediated everyday creativity includes both born-digital creativity (such as creating interactive fiction or digital art) and more traditional forms of creativity. For example, the knitting site Ravelry has more than 9m registered accounts and 1m monthly active users, while fanfiction communities are equally popular, with the Archive of Our Own having 5m registered users.

Everyday creativity can embrace the hyperlocal nature of the street party or the neighbourhood allotment. But it also includes those who travel across the country for a writing retreat or a role playing weekend - and of course encompasses digital spaces.

Internationally, digital platforms mean that deep bonds can arise between people who live in different countries and may never have met one another in person, and these communities are equally important to those who belong to them.



## Professional or Everyday?

The blurring of boundaries between professional and amateur also complicates the territory of everyday creativity. Artists with day jobs have always existed – and here too, digital platforms have allowed new business models to take hold. The fanfic writer who accepts tips via ko-fi; the fan artist who takes commissions; the streamer or YouTube creator with a small viewership; the blogger with a Patreon account... are these professionals or amateurs? The rise of ‘side hustle’ culture means that getting paid – if only a little bit – for doing what you love has become a perfectly normal aspiration.

“*I really enjoy lots of different creative activities in my spare time including drawing, and being able to illustrate for different opportunities alongside my main job is a rewarding past time*

(GABY COPEMAN, ILLUSTRATOR OF THIS RESOURCE)

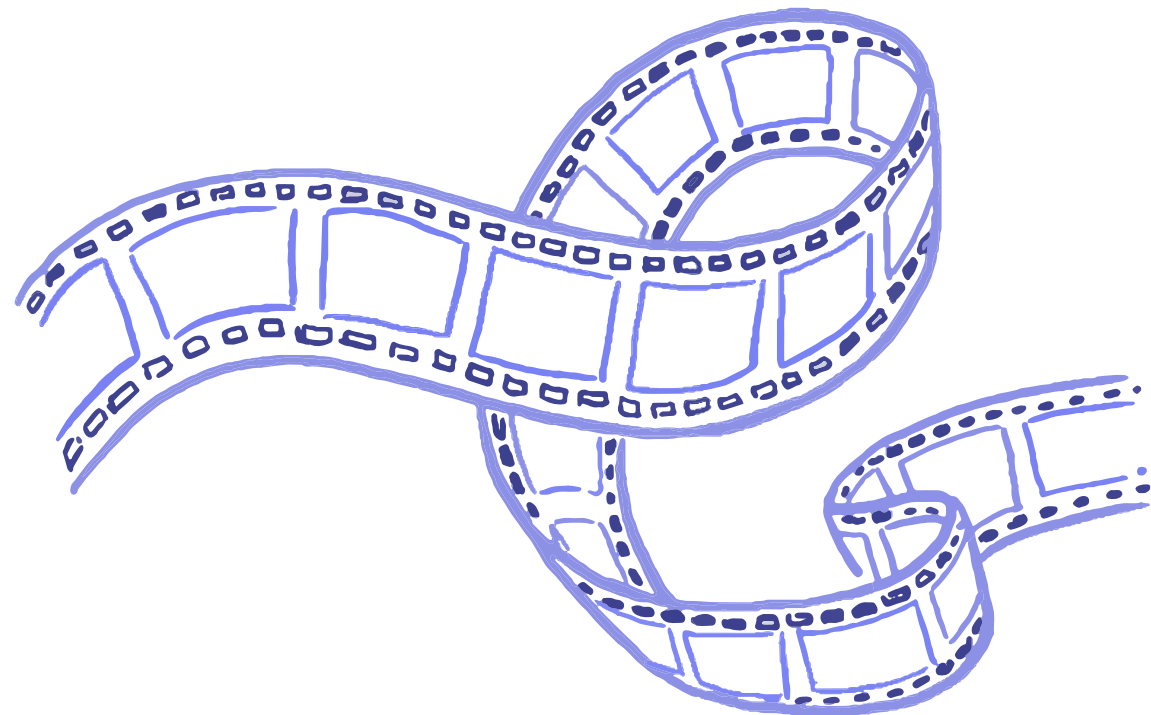
The liminal space between professional and amateur is mediated differently in different art forms and communities. For example, Folk Around Fishponds provide a platform for beginning performers and semi-professionals as equal participants in the same folk night. In the literary world, despite a significant divide between professional and aspiring authors, writer development agencies proceed on the basis that many of their clients do aspire to be published. Not all pursuits work in a similar way, however.

Although developing skills is not a focus for everyone, many creative people want to progress in their practice, and a small minority aim to become professionals. Having access to progression routes is important for some people, increasing their sense of achievement and encouraging them to find the practice rewarding, and stay with it over the longer term.

## Connectors & Catalysts

A wide range of organisations support everyday creativity: from grassroots groups run by and for those they serve, to arts organisations aiming to support local communities, to umbrella groups such as Creative Lives and 64 Million Artists that exist to champion and enable everyday creativity at a national level.

“Organisers” – as we call them here – those active, passionate people who get involved by connecting and co-ordinating people and activities – are critical in the starscape. The next section delves into the work of organisers to provide inspiration into some of the ways cultural organisations can support them to support others.



## *We Just Do it Together:* **Stories of Creative Groups**

The social pleasures of everyday creativity are for some people the most important aspect, so self-organising groups and networks are an essential part of the fabric. Collaborating with groups may be the most obvious connection by which your organisation can get involved.

Some common themes emerge from these stories. Groups have a clear sense of purpose and direction. They are not short of ideas or commitment and prioritise creativity and community. They are light on admin and lack straight-forward resources – space, time, money, a few key organisational skills, occasional connections in the right places. They also want respect, reciprocity and recognition.

Image: Artwork by Transfolk



## TRANSFOLKE, FOLKESTONE

Organised by two friends who felt socially isolated, TransFolke invite Trans people and their allies to bring their creative work or interests to a space in Folkestone. From knitting to music making, group members, who mainly join through word of mouth, drop into sessions at a cafe who offer the space on a donation basis. Having the space to come together with people with similar lived experiences has increased mental wellbeing amongst members, with people's creative practice serving as a means of connection.

TransFolke are keen to collaborate with other groups and organisations as a way of being recognised as part of the wider community. However, it is essential for those organisations to avoid tokenism and be aligned with TransFolke's principles and values. For example, venues should have gender neutral toilets. Other useful support would include materials and a space to store them, payment for their time, and advice around governance.

“

*“We started out with the principle of, bring whatever you're working on, or whatever you'd like to work with. We'll just do it together. Not as a way to produce anything necessarily but it facilitates connection ... It's not about being fantastic artists, it's about expression, connection and seeing the value in what we do together”*

## COVENTRY MEN'S SHED

Coventry Men's Shed is a locally-embedded group for men aged 30+. The project initially started as a cooking session before evolving into a “Men's Shed” where members work on a range of activities from arts and crafts to woodwork and model making. The group hires a room at Rose Community Centre for a reduced rate, with members donating £3 per session. Recovery and mental health services often refer members to the project, which provides 'peer to peer support.'



Coventry Men's Shed are approached by cultural organisations to work on specific projects. This 'can get the guys out of their comfort zones ... visiting different places and trying new things' and builds the resources of the Shed. They say that these projects work best when the framework is flexible and takes into consideration the needs and interests of the group, for example, delivered at times that are suitable for members – preferably when members meet in the Shed – and with their input on what creative practice and subject they would find interesting.

“

*“We did one project and I felt like I had my hands tied behind my back ... these [pre-planned arts] projects can sometimes be restrictive. On other occasions, it has been really good ... given us resources ... and has been flexible to our needs. I always ask, how is this going to benefit the guys I'm working with?”*

The long-term ambition of the group is to have their own space which would enable them to grow and offer more activities. Therefore, business support in terms of setting up as their 'own entity' would be beneficial. In the short term, having access to small pots of funding for resources, offered on a flexible basis would help. Donations, materials and resources, and opportunities to collaborate on projects that are free of charge, flexible and offer something members are interested in and consulted on would also be of benefit.

## FOLK AROUND FISHPONDS, BRISTOL

Folk Around Fishponds is an acoustic folk club run by live music enthusiasts. Twice a month it runs folk nights in an upstairs room at a pub in the Fishponds area of Bristol, at which anyone – from beginners to professionals – is welcome to get up and perform. All attendees are asked to contribute £2 towards room hire. Occasionally Folk Around Fishponds also runs ticketed guest nights with paid professional artists.

For some attendees, it's a transition from singing in their front room, a gentle step into performing in public. Others are professional or semi-professionals for whom Folk Around Fishponds is part of their practice as artists, an opportunity to spend a relaxed evening among like-minded people or perhaps try out new material. But everyone performs on a level playing field, whatever their talent.

“We're casually in control, because it's a way of being fair to people as best you can... The way you're being encouraged is part of the folk tradition. It's not about whether that person's the best performer in the room – it's that they have the floor.”

Folk Around Fishponds depends on finding suitable venues for its folk nights: a welcoming pub with a quiet room away from the bar. Useful support would involve a small amount of funding to buy equipment, particularly lights, and storage space at the pub. Although most people discover Folk Around Fishponds through word of mouth and flyers at other folk clubs, the organisers are interested in the idea of a central national listing platform to make discovery easier.



## WOMEN'S CHAI PROJECT, OLDHAM

Women's CHAI Project stands for Care, Help and Inspire and is delivered across Oldham by founder Najma Khalid, who felt that women of South Asian heritage were 'often marginalised', particularly homemakers who lacked social contact outside of their family settings. Groups are aimed at women – predominantly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage and where English is a second language – and delivered in the familiar setting of the school at a time when members drop their children off. The groups are free to attend and are funded by schools who offer room hire and facilitator fees to CHAI.

A range of activities engage members based on their interests and skills, and this builds towards members co-creating programmes, sharing ownership and developing projects that are relevant and of interest to them. Local funding is often sought where there is a social/topical relevance. For example, groups created a healthy Asian inspired cookbook to raise awareness of diabetes, funded by Oldham Council and Public Health England, have developed plays, murals and taken part in fundraising treks.

“We use all kinds of arts activities alongside gardening, advocacy, cooking. We don't just do one thing. The key thing for us is that we're working on something together and drawing on different people's likes and skills”

The Women's CHAI project value long term, mutually beneficial partnerships in the local area and authentic opportunities to collaborate – they are wary about being approached as a 'tick box exercise'.

Having access to small pots of funding to develop their project ideas would be beneficial and support from larger organisations to develop larger scale projects. Facilitators are paid for sessions via schools but not for other calls on their time, which brings challenges when they are working on developing collaborative projects. They say it is really helpful to factor in additional time into project planning, think about efficiencies and even better if some budget is available to cover facilitators' time.

“It's easy for people from bigger organisations to get to events and go to meetings. They sometimes forget that we're doing this on our own and in our own time”



Photo: Women's Chai Project, Oldham

## WOMEN'S INSTITUTE, NATIONAL

The Women's Institute is a community movement that started in 1915 and today is the largest women's organisation in the UK. Local Women's Institutes (WIs) are charitable organisations in their own right, organised into federations which are part of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI). Today, the WI has over 180,000 members across 5500 WIs in England, Wales and the Channel Islands.

Because each grassroots WI is self-governing, they're diverse in their activities – some WIs focus on national campaigns and community work, some run craft, sports or reading clubs, some meet in pubs to have a glass of wine and chat. Singing is a popular activity, although as Helen Neal (Education - Business Development Manager, NFWI) notes, "we find many members sing more for fun, rather than as a regular choir that performs. So it may be that members come at it from more of a mental health perspective."

**“** *"A key element of the WI is social interaction. If you ask the members who went to a craft evening, what did they enjoy the most, they'll say, we had a really good laugh. We like to talk. It's that relaxed, non-judgmental, safe environment."*

Centrally, the NFWI offers education and training for members on topics ranging from public speaking and governance to craft, film and painting. Although these skills have always been at the heart of the WI, its digital offer was transformed by the pandemic, opening up new possibilities for women wanting to enhance their learning. A particular success was an online skills sharing partnership with BA Textiles students at the Chelsea College of Arts. Since 2020, the WI has had over 140,000 participants attend over 2,200 craft, arts, exercise, leisure and hobby-focused online courses through its new digital platform 'Denman at Home'.

"Creativity will always remain in the heart of the WI," says Helen Neal, whether that involves knitting blankets for babies in hospitals, yarn bombing local benches, or using craft projects to support its No More Violence against Women campaign.

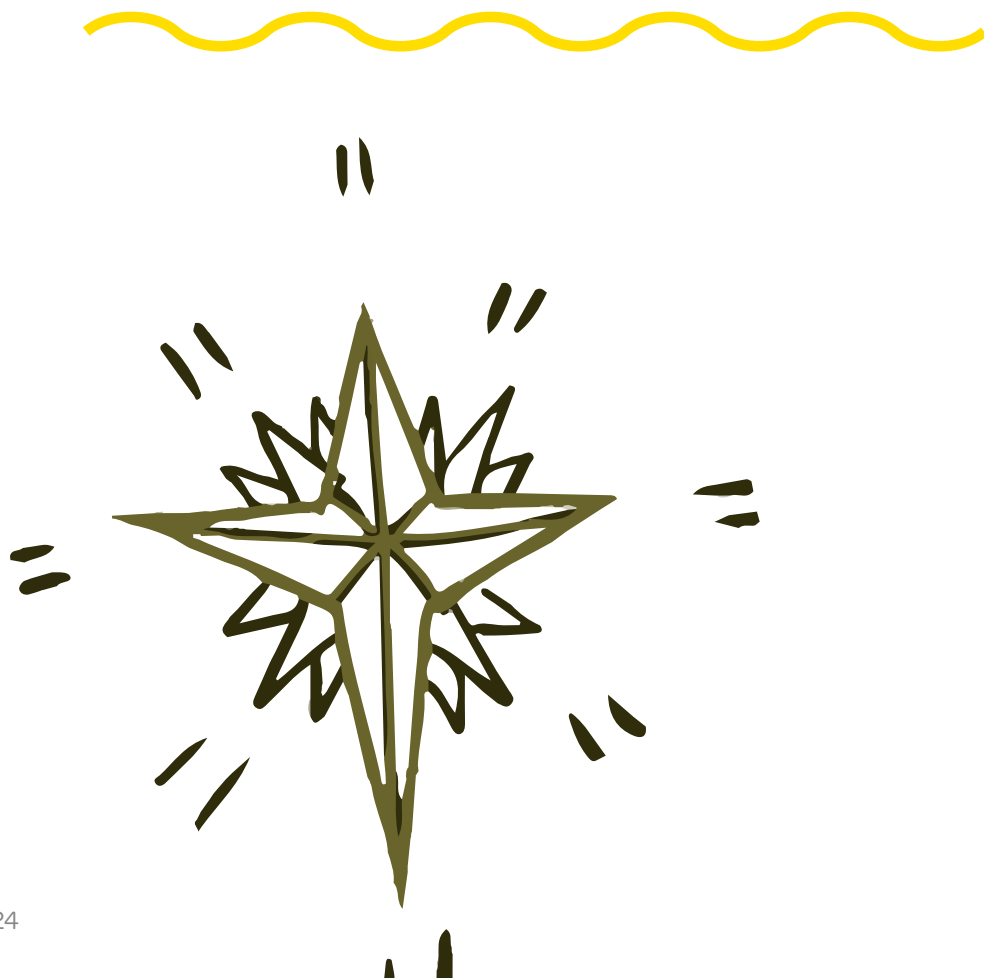
**“** *"No one's judged for what they know, or what they don't know. And that environment really empowers women to come forward and learn and ask."*



Peckham WI by Bilal Seyhan

## PART 2: *Supporting Everyday Creativity*

In this section, we explore the practical and deliverable approaches organisations can take to support everyday creativity.



### *“No More Lady Bountiful...”* **How organisations can help**

Our findings show that everyday creatives are active managers of their own creative lives, whether as an individual or as part of a group or network. If your organisation wants to get involved, this is perhaps the most important principle you can keep in mind: people are in control of their own everyday creativity. People know what they enjoy, what they value, what they want to do next and, mostly, how they are going to make it happen. In this mode, they are not passive cultural consumers looking for pre-made “provision” and this has implications for the kinds of support professional (cultural) organisations can offer – and the way in which it is offered.

As we have noted, supporting “everyday creativity” is not the same as offering opportunities to participate or co-create, though these practices might usefully be in the mix. Fundamentally, the power balance is different. Supporting everyday creativity probably means taking a backseat rather than driving or even co-piloting. It means asking: what can we do to help?

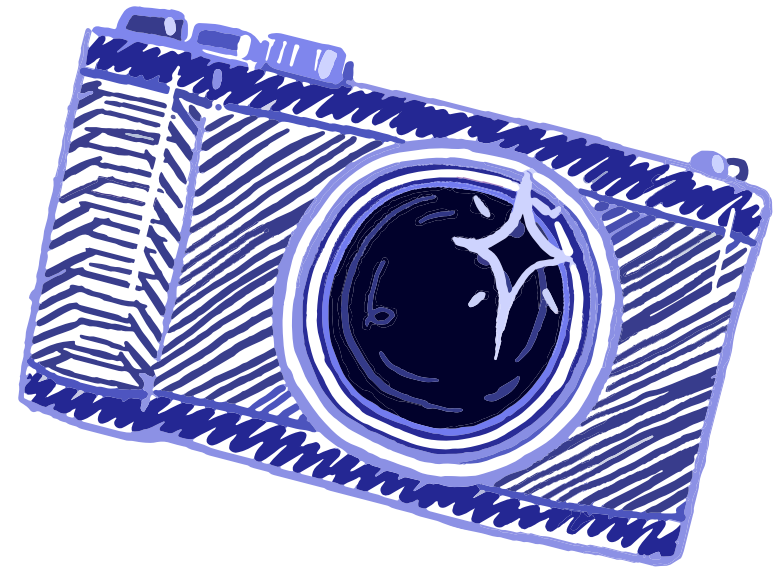
Throughout our research, we kept asking the question: what would help you do more, get more out of your creative activity? This is what we learnt.



## Meeting the Needs of Everyday Creatives

We collected stories from people about what would help and saw the same things repeated. We've groups them as:

- A** Validation
- B** Connections
- C** Practical Support
- D** Navigation



### **A** VALIDATION

a golden thread through many stories, people seek validation and encouragement for their work. Some of these needs are met by peers and critical friends but also by finding a platform for celebration and showcasing.

*An example might be offering exhibition or showcasing opportunities, perhaps with a group or for individuals.*

### **B** CONNECTIONS

being part of a community linked by a passion is among the chief pleasures listed by everyday creatives. Coming together with friends or meeting new people is one of the major benefits. Peers and collaborators are important not just for encouragement but as sources of inspiration, ideas, information. Lone creatives are often seeking places and channels for connection.

*Some organisations host and support networking for local creatives, for example.*

## C PRACTICAL SUPPORT

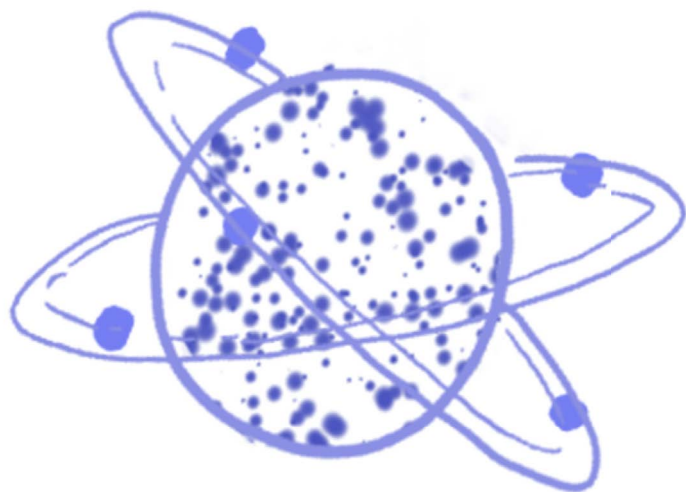
spaces, materials, practical know-how, money, time – everyday creatives – especially groups – are short of all of them. Small amounts of money are important: remember, the boundary between paid and voluntary is very blurry, some people are working towards a paid portfolio.

*Some of the most valued examples people gave were access to free spaces and very small grants*

## D NAVIGATION

although less pressing and evident than other areas, we noticed that groups and individuals also had common navigational needs – including in relation to what cultural and other organisations have to offer. This relates to the support and resources available, funding and how to get it, potential partnerships, research for advocacy and so on. People are also in search of ideas and inspiration. Again, this knowledge is taken for granted by professionals but can be usefully shared.

*This could include directories and asset maps- like those offered by Creative Lives and Fun Palaces, or the highly-valued resource packs that organisations sent out in COVID lockdowns*



People rarely if ever mention the need for artistic support or instruction from professional artists and creatives. That said, lone/ at-home creatives in some disciplines put classes and workshops high up their wishlists, while some group organisers are hungry for regular content and creative collaboration. Overall, however, what our research suggests is that there is a role for professional creatives but not necessarily the one they are used to playing.

People also experience barriers, stopping them from pursuing their creative interests - and significant differences between barriers to different types of activity.

## Stories of Everyday Creatives

What makes everyday creatives tick and what kinds of support could you offer?

Here we offer a selection of personal stories that link to the four themes we identified - Validation, Connections, Practical Support, Navigation.

### *The Creative Outlet I Really Need:* **Creative People**

#### **ALAN, SUSSEX:**

**PAINTER AND MODEL-MAKER,**

I have been painting and model making for many years. I was influenced by my father's creativity. I am home based but also do voluntary work in an arts studio working with people with learning disabilities.

I organise activities for this group of people.

This creative activity gives me pleasure and satisfaction and provides social contacts. I had easy access to affordable arts-based activities in my early years. Affordable and accessible venues to display work with others [...] would be of benefit.



● **Validation:** Looking for access to venues to display work.

#### **LUKE AND LIAM, CLITHEROE:**

**GAMERS**

My name is Luke and I'm 14. I enjoy gaming. I mainly do shooter games like Fortnite and building games like Roblox and Minecraft. I also enjoy story games like God of War. I play games on a TV through the Internet or done through PlayStation network... I invite my friends through calls on an app called Discord or through my PlayStation party chat. What I get out of it is fun and determination to not give up in hard games. I have fun with my friends and build huge structures. I started gaming because of my Dad when I first played on the Wii. At the time it was amazing and we really enjoyed Wii Sports and Super Mario together. I would say gaming builds a deeper bond of friendship with people. It makes it fun for both sides. It would help me if we all had the same type of consoles as it means you cannot chat directly and it is always a struggle to organise plans.

My name is Liam, I'm 14 years of age, my hobbies are gaming and art. On my ps4, I play games like Mortal Kombat 11, Fortnite, Gran-Turismo 7, The sims 4, Lego games, Roblox and Minecraft. It is done through the PlayStation network. I sometimes organise events with my friends on different games and I'm in charge of our Roblox world. I get enjoyability, communication with friends, and interactivity. My dad started gaming for me. The first console I ever used was the Wii. It was really fun to use (especially Mario Kart 8). It helps me to connect with people because you can find new friends online (but it's risky) or if you don't catch up with someone, you can communicate with them through the game. To get more value out of gaming, I would like to try new experiences with friends I don't usually game with.



● **Connections:** Looking for connections in safe online spaces.



## RAY, BELFAST:

POET, ALLROUNDER,

I write poems. This gives me a creative outlet that I really need and feel I'm lacking. I've recently started to be more disciplined about writing as I really enjoy it but need to make time for it.

I also love reading poetry and have attended a few poetry readings this year. I read poems for family and friends and sometimes connect with other poets. I also collect records and have an Instagram account for sharing photos and information on my record collection. I connect with some people on Instagram through love of music.

I also like photography and have a camera with detachable lenses that I enjoy experimenting with using the manual settings. There is something satisfying about getting a good shot not using a phone or automatic settings. All of these activities are organised by myself, although I have attended a short writing group in the past and would like to do more of this or start my own writing group for myself and others.

● **Practical Support:** Looking to go to the next level.

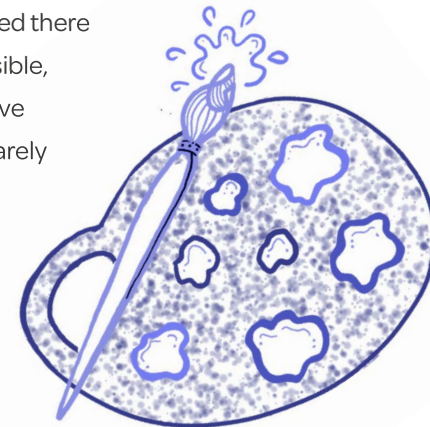
## ANONYMOUS:

ARTIST-CRAFTER:

I'm disabled, in chronic pain, largely housebound and often bedbound. I have a range of arts and activities I enjoy that vary depending on my pain levels, mobility and materials available. These include painting, nature art, poetry, decoupage, playing ukulele and listening to music online. Bedbound Crafts I do include zine making, collage, jewellery making, journalling, knitting, origami, paper cutting and sketching, particularly zentangles. When I can sit up at a table, crafts include papier-mâché sculpture using kitchen towel and glue, making 3D paint and dried flower/grass landscapes, blowing eggs and painting them, recycled crafting and making floral garlands and wreaths. I use the Heritage Crafts Association Red List to find new crafts to learn. Crafting helps me make gifts for friends and connect with other artists when I share my creations on social media (though much of the time, I keep the art to myself - it's about pain relief and mental health benefits more than validation).

In an ideal world, I'd love to create free quarterly bedbound crafting packs to help others ease their pain through art, with a connected pen pal 'club' but money and energy make this hard to do. Crafting material swap hubs would also help make arts and crafts more accessible to people on low budgets, as many disabled people are. It would be great if more creative events were available online too - when the pandemic started there were so many more creative things that were accessible, from shows to creative classes, but many people have stopped doing this now, forgetting that some of us rarely or never get to leave the house.

● **Connections:**  
Looking for more online opportunities and connections.





## KEVIN, SE LONDON:

### ARTIST-MAKER

I'm a middle-aged man, I've always been interested in art and making things but went through a long period after leaving school right into my twenties when the creative juices weren't flowing - which I put down to having the worst job I ever had.

I began making my own cards in my late twenties and have continued to do so to this day. I have several ideas which I work through one year at a time. The 2020 lockdown Christmas card was extra special. I knew it would take ages so I started in March and gradually embellished each one more and more during the year whenever I was in the mood. As it happened I had had my loft opened up the year before in 2019 so I had a dedicated creative space. It was my sanctuary and my refuge, and still is.

The new landlord at a local pub is keen to promote artistic activity which is very helpful as one of the main barriers to creativity is affordable, preferably free venues that are outside the influence of the local council who are very controlling.

**Practical Support:** Looking for independent spaces.

## LOKIFAN, LONDON:

### WRITER

I'm a 32-year-old cis woman; I'm bisexual, white, I'm from London, and I teach English as a foreign language. My main creative activity is writing. That's a combination of writing stories (whether original or fanfic) and writing 'roleplay', where I co-write fanfiction with a friend. He writes from the perspective of one character, and I write from the perspective of another, and we make the story together.

I mostly just write and post my stories online myself, but I also take part in organised activity. For example, I write for festivals and zines. I enjoy it, it's a fun hobby, and helps me meet others and connect with people through fandom - people comment on my stories, or I comment on theirs, and we sign up for particular events. It makes me feel valuable when other people comment or leave kudos to say they enjoyed my work - I get an email from the Archive Of Our Own, a fanfiction archive, every day with some 'kudos' (likes) for various stories, left by readers.

**Validation:** Looking for encouragement and critical feedback from peers.

**Connections:** Looking for connections within like-minded community.

**“** *I enjoy it, it's a fun hobby, and helps me meet others and connect with people... it makes me feel valuable when other people comment to say they enjoyed my work*

## ANONYMOUS:

### CRAFTER

I'm in my 50s from an Asian background but born and raised here. My mother was skilled in the 'homely' arts i.e. knitting, dress-making, embroidery, tapestry and cooking but pressure was put on me to succeed academically and she passed down none of her skills to me apart from knitting. Unfortunately, I am nowhere near as expert as she was and I think I would have been able to tackle more ambitious projects now if I had been guided and supported as a child. However, in the last four years or so, knitting has become an intermittent but satisfying hobby for me, thanks to the support, drive, acceptance and encouragement of the Knit Your Socks Off group in Slough - a beautiful, non-judgmental community - and I have pushed myself further than ever because of them. It's an escape from the everyday, a sense of elation and achievement after learning a new piece or completing making an item and pleasure and surprise that my doing these things - which were viewed as frivolous or something else I had to succeed at - has worth and brings joy to others.

● **Validation:** Values support and encouragement from community.

## AMANDA, READING:

### MAKER

Originally from New Zealand, I'm a mother in my 50s working on a freelance basis from home. Arts and culture have always been important to me and form some of my earliest happy memories. My parents encouraged us to paint, draw, dance, take photos, put on plays and make our Christmas presents. My mother taught me to sew as a young child, which led to me making my own clothes and eventually running a bespoke tie business. It was so satisfying seeing people wearing my designs with pride. I've always enjoyed visiting galleries, museums, festivals and other arts events. They're an incredible source of inspiration. Recently, the Platinum Jubilee Street Party was a catalyst for me and my daughter (and the rest of our street) to create outfits, decorations, games and a giant commemorative 'picture' frame. There are many more classes and creative learning opportunities available now online, but it doesn't replace the benefit of meeting people in person. Now that I have more free time, I want to develop my ceramics skills and take art classes.

● **Navigation:** Looking for opportunities to develop skills.



## ANONYMOUS:

### WRITER-MUSICIAN

I am a 24 year-old man based in Glasgow and working in the music sector while studying for a degree. When I have time I like to write both poetry and prose. This is something I've always been interested in but wasn't able to make a habit of until I met other people who shared my interests, even though I tend to write alone, knowing that there are other people I can share my creativity with makes my work much more focussed. I attend workshops and readings every now and again. Sometimes I share my own work, but often come just to listen and support my friends. Having safe spaces (whether formal or informal) to share our work helps build a sense of community.

● **Connections:** Values safe spaces to share work with others.



## Supporting in the Right Spirit

As we noted, input from professional creatives is far from top of the list of things everyday creatives say they need. In fact, we were distressed to hear some real horror stories – one organiser actually said they had been “brutalised” by the patronising, high-handed approach from a cultural organisation with whom they were trying to build a relationship; deep offence was caused by an insistence on the distinction of legitimate “art” as being defined by what professional artists do.

“*People in our group do what they do for pleasure, not to impress the world. They are creative, full of ideas and don't need “artists' approval”*”<sup>7</sup>

This sentiment echoes throughout 64 Million Artists' research which observes just how misguided and off-putting the prevailing, professional mindset can be when it assumes:

“*striving towards excellence is more important than just having a go... that if you are not talented then your engagement is as an audience member, not as a creative citizen in your own right*”<sup>8</sup>

Some everyday creativity groups and networks are wary of working with professional (cultural and other) organisations in general.

Organisers talked about being on the receiving end of condescending attitudes, about being appropriated to boost community credentials, about being regarded as a pipeline for recruitment, audience development or free labour, about cynical short-term association, good for optics but not much more. These feelings of inequality are irritated by the knowledge that professional organisations appear to have plenty of resources while community groups are cash-strapped and unpaid. Some felt in competition with professional organisations for funding, membership, donations, audiences.

Many had however had positive experiences, collaborating on fruitful and rewarding projects which led to often unexpected benefits for both organisation and group. And when not offered in a patronising way, the respect, understanding and encouragement of professional creatives can clearly be a vital tonic, as observed in the learnings from the Creative People and Places Programme (CPP).

Time and time again, people talked about the importance of long-term relationships, aligned values and transparent aims, of learning together and building mutual respect. Organisers particularly appreciated support with practical challenges like doing funding applications. Organisers talked about how benefit tended to increase “once we got to know each other”.

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7 Interviewee

8 64 Million Artists Everyday Creativity Report

## Give and Gain?

All of this suggests that organisations interested in supporting everyday creativity should think hard both about what they might have to give and what they might hope to gain.

Our research suggests that professional organisations get real value when they invest well and over time. Your organisation may not have the bandwidth to do this. In Amanda's story above, she acknowledged that cultural institutions were a "an incredible source of inspiration" – this may be all your organisation can or should contribute. You could think about making what your organisation does more accessible and visible to the interested everyday creatives in your community – and leave it at that.

If you want to go further however, think about what assets and skills you have or might need and can afford to invest. Good intentions on their own can be disappointing. You may be very busy but chances are, organisers are busier still – and not being paid.

In terms of gains, be careful of assuming that grassroots groups are a ready pipeline of participants, volunteers or audiences. Organisers are competitive about their members and protective of their time and interests. Ask yourself whether you're prepared to flip the script and see yourself as a pipeline of participants for grassroots groups! All the groups we talked valued a spirit of reciprocity.

*Ask yourselves how might supporting everyday creativity support your overall strategy. How realistic – and mutually desirable – are your objectives?*

Craftspace, Drag Declares Emergency digital exhibition.

Image, Art Matters Now & Lady Kitt.





*“Making tea & moving furniture...”*

## Getting Practical

So what are the practical steps you might want to take?

Start by assuming that you don't know much about what your community needs and that you need to spend some time getting to know them. Most of the organisations that we talked to who are supporting everyday creativity advocated having an open door, being visibly available and spending time just catching up with local organisers and chatting to interested participants in classes etc. “No conversation is wasted” as the inspirational Eltham Library say. Your “community” could be global and digitally connected but the same principles apply – join networks, have conversations, become part of that community. In other words, start from a place of empathy and mutual understanding.

Continue by assuming that you will need to adapt and flex what you do and how you do it. Continue in a state of empathy and mutual understanding.

## Meeting People Where They Are

If there was one piece of practical advice all our interviewees agreed about, it was this. “Meeting people where they are” is strongly advised as a means to develop a more reciprocal way of working and to avoid “taking over” in unhelpful ways. It is meant in both a literal sense – contributing where people actually practise – and a more figurative one – starting with the interests and ideas everyday creatives have already identified.

You could start with your local authority. Some have good contacts and directories while libraries and community centres are often thriving hubs for groups and workshops, many of them great incubators of everyday creativity. Libraries often support a diverse range of community-led activities from knit and natters, ukulele and lego clubs to local heritage projects.

## Supporting Groups, Connectors & Catalysts

From a practical perspective, the approaches you might apply for already formed groups and networks are likely to be a little different from those for individuals. As we have noted, existing groups prefer to work in ongoing, mutually beneficial partnerships.

This does not necessarily mean creating large-scale complex projects together and certainly not on a regular basis. Valuable relationships can be quite light-touch. As noted, most groups have simple survival needs you may be able to supply. Access to accessible, appropriate and affordable spaces was the number one need rated by groups in Creative Lives' recent survey. Offering spaces – actual and virtual – may be one of the most useful things you can do. If it is, take an active interest – don't just treat groups as hires - help promote, broker and celebrate their activities.

Groups have a lot of expenses. Easily accessed, low-friction micro-grants were among the most popular forms of support organisers were looking for. They also want help with management processes they don't have specialist skills and interests in – marketing, legal (from GDPR to charity law), governance, funding.

Creative Lives offers a wealth of useful advice, peer-support and awards opportunities, a comprehensive one-stop shop for organised groups and networks. Their resources are a good introduction.

Fun Palaces supports in a completely different way - offering a framework to enable people to get together and make things happen. Their toolkit, platform and showcase has been developed very much WITH their users. Their commitment to rigorous and inclusive evaluation might well be one reason for their incredible growth.

You can see how both Creative Lives and Fun Palaces have shaped solutions specific to the needs we talked about earlier: validation, connections, practical resources and navigation.

Groups are often held back from being able to scale and progress through lack of these practical resources, and partnerships can bring value in a multi-layered way. And it is not just this transactional support that partnerships bring. Offering your encouragement, interest and being a platform for celebration are part of the package, although the way in which you approach this requires sensitivity and reciprocity.

In Situ and Movema – both below – have developed processes to support the development of new ideas in their communities. Being embedded, present and helpful has led to the development of a range of diverse collaborative projects.



Photo: Community Assembly, This is Nelson,  
Image: Diane Muldowney. (An In-Situ collaboration)

## Supporting Individuals

You may prefer to try to engage with individuals who are not currently involved in groups that support their everyday creativity. If you start from this basis, you may be taking on the role that some groups take. For example, you may act as a convenor - meeting those needs for connection by bringing people together.



Heydays at Leeds Playhouse has been doing this for over 20 years, for example, offering older people a platform to share their creative skills and knowledge; it's important to note that Heydays is steered by an Advisory Group of members. When Southwark Park Galleries got their shiny new makeover, this leading contemporary space did not drop their commitment to showcasing and supporting everyday creativity, but further incorporated it into their new plan.

But lone creatives may also be looking for a stronger invitation to participate, albeit on their own terms. You can also offer a platform and a framework. 64 Million Artists' make the invitation to get involved in original and engaging ways that respect participants capacity for self-expression. Their brilliant January Challenge, for example, strengthens and amplifies DIY activities in a loose framework and offers a showcasing platform which connects people together in a more engaging and communitarian way than Instagram can. Craftspace's Eco Drag Challenge – explored in a case study below – provides a framework for creatives to make their own drag costumes out of recycled materials and an opportunity to showcase these as part of a collective at Birmingham Pride.

Don't be put off offering classes and workshops, however – our research shows this is a need – but do look for opportunities to develop your programme and approach for and with your everyday creative users – like Black Box Projects do in the case study below.

Think about when to step back and when to offer support. If you're being invited to share your practice or asked to support with finding training opportunities and progression routes, then there might be relevant aspects of your programme or networks you can offer. However, as we've stressed, this isn't about you taking the lead or creating a 'participant pipeline'.

## Value The Relationship As Well As The Output: Case studies from Cultural Organisations

### IN SITU, PENDLE

In Situ are a practitioner-led organisation and Arts Council England funded “NPO” who work with communities in Pendle, Lancashire. For many years In-Situ operated from Brierfield Library before moving to their own premises. Projects are nestled in community settings, such as women’s circles, youth-led venue takeovers including in a Morrison’s underground carpark, neighbourhood performances, interventions, “Talkaoke” conversations (in partnership with People Speak) and community food growing. They often start with and where people are already actively doing things.

Existing in the community allows the team of practitioners to co-create work with individuals and groups in a particularly situated way, guided by a Code of Ethics which outlines their ethical arts engagement with individuals and groups. Relationships are developed and maintained on an ongoing basis, with opportunities for people to connect with more structured projects such as their Artist in Residence programme intersecting with this continuum. This ‘slow and open ended process’ privileges relationship building for ‘its own sake’, where ‘conversations often turn into ‘bigger ideas’.

“If you have a particular project to bring a group of people together around, don’t imagine that that’s the end. Where does it go next? There’s value in the relationship aspects of that, as well as the outcome”

The leadership model at In Situ is fluid, with practitioners responding to the local landscape and contributing to creative aspects of the programme on an equal basis. A dedicated ‘reading week’ provides staff with an opportunity to absorb themselves in a new area of creative practice. Providing this space enriches the team’s work on an individual and collective basis, with project ideas often being adopted into core areas of delivery.

“Last year we had our first reading week. Each member of the team developed an area of interest that they’d like to work on. It’ll feed into the programme in all different types of ways. Things people started, fed into our thinking. When the team are valued in that way, it’s transferred to the team. It was out of the office. People could propose whatever they’d like to do. There was a small amount of budget.”



The Summit, with Remodel Mcr, Image: Huckleberry Films (An In-Situ collaboration)

## BLACK BOX PROJECTS, BELFAST

Black Box is a multidisciplinary arts venue programming concerts, comedy, storytelling and music. Black Box Projects is a strand of community activity formed by people who identify as being disabled or as having a learning disability. The programme is curated with group members who programme monthly club nights, arts-based activities including writing, visual art, protest and advocacy, a music group and various drop-in sessions.

Artists are invited to collaborate with groups and in these instances sharing practice is reciprocal. Artists follow an etiquette that values all group members' contributions to the creative workshop process. This creates a more meaningful, shared experience for group members and visiting artists alike.

“It's not performer and observer. A musician may be invited in to play something, but then the group share too. There's a balance”

Black Box create a space for disabled people to explore and share their creativity. Supporting opportunities for groups to collaborate on projects, inspired by people's individual areas of interest has resulted in a range of creative and personal outcomes. Although the emphasis is on 'process over product', the group value having 'something tactile at the end'.

“

“One group member that we have, he loves to create repetitive patterns over and over, those kind of mindfulness patterns ... We've had this book made ... I think there's something about kind of noticing that - and the volunteer team are really good at that - that is what this person loves to do. We can, if possible, give that person an opportunity to work on that in more detail”



## MOVEMA, LIVERPOOL & BRISTOL

Movema, established in 2009, is an award-winning world dance company run by four female artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, based and working in Liverpool & Bristol areas. Movema 'celebrate diversity through dance', producing outdoor events, festival performances, parades and participatory projects, alongside supporting a range of professional development opportunities. Movema run community-based projects and drop-in dance classes for people of all ages and backgrounds, with many classes offered for free. Some of their work might be described as participatory, but some is more towards the enabling everyday creativity end of the spectrum.

'Unlock the Box' is Movema's six-year project that engages children and young people from Liverpool and Knowsley who have been affected by poor health and economic problems. The programme has provided a range of dance activities including workshops, holiday clubs, coming together days, performances, leadership opportunities, online and video projects.

These programmes have all been developed through Movema's distinctive approach to creative 'consultation'. Using dance, food and celebration to create a fun and engaging space for groups and individuals to connect, they explore issues facing the community through asking, 'how can Movema help?'. The approach, driven less by a pre-fabricated programme and more of an open invitation, means that individuals and partner groups shape activities authentically in tune with their interests and needs.



*"We bring our partners together ... the charities we work with support adults, community groups, schools, our participants. We bring those parties together to have fun. And then during that time, there will be performances, both from the local community and our professionals and there will be food. Within that, [we ask] ... open questions to make sure that we're designing our programmes from the ground up"*

## ELTHAM LIBRARY, GREENWICH

“*You have to really have a belief in the creativity of people. People are innate creators*”

Eltham library was founded in 1906, it is funded by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and run by GLL under the brand name Better. The library is run by paid staff who manage a diverse programme of activities. Alongside delivering core library activities, staff encourage members of the community to bring their ideas to the space and work to support their projects or group activities. Examples include community-led reading groups, poetry events, projects that support groups to connect with schools with library support and a Crochet and Natter group - all of which have a 'ripple effect' on engagement and the building of connections. In these instances, groups are in control of their sessions and staff see their role as 'making space' for things to happen.

“*Unless you're willing to make tea and move furniture, what role are you playing?*”

Library Manager, Miriam, notes how overturning perceptions about what a library service is and can be is an ongoing challenge, and therefore nurturing relationships externally is vital. Attending events in the community and having a presence outside of the library is an ongoing practice, which does not always yield immediate results. However, 'no conversation is wasted' as these build towards the library's reputation as a space that is open and inviting of other people's creative ideas.

“We need to reframe what creativity is. Creativity presents itself in such a wide range of ways. Everyday Creativity is about the things we do everyday.

That's not necessarily things on a grand scale. You might not be able to go to the opera everyday but you might be able to listen to it on the radio or come to the library and read a book about it. That's creative. I led a canvas making workshop on Saturday. I'm not trained as an artist and got asked 'what's your artistic background?' but we all have an artistic connection and all those people created something. It's about rethinking how we can access creativity on a daily basis on our terms”.

Creating practical ways and platforms for individuals and groups to showcase their work is frequently requested and therefore the library is in the process of developing a permanent community gallery wall and sourcing display cabinets. Where this has been the case, exhibits have 'opened up all sorts of conversations about creativity'.



Crochet and Natter group, Eltham Library

## CRAFTSPACE, BIRMINGHAM

Craftspace is a charity creating opportunities to see, make and be curious about contemporary craft. Based in Birmingham and working collaboratively regionally, nationally and internationally, Craftspace build relationships between artists, people and organisations and encourage the sharing of ideas, skills and knowledge. Their programmes encourage making in a range of contexts, including the home. Their Craft in Common programme launched during lockdown proved popular amongst a range of makers looking for ideas and inspiration and is a format Craftspace have been keen to continue to explore.

Craftspace's 'Drag declares Emergency' demonstrates how everyday creativity can provide a conduit for exploring intersectionality in terms of identity, but also the intersections between public and private space and our creative identities and practices. Through a resource produced by artist, Lady Kitt, the project is engaging queer creatives, often hidden in public spaces, to draw on their community's historic and contemporary crafting skills to take part in the #ecodragchallenge, using everyday, recycled materials to make costumes and props. As part of the project, local queer creatives and the wider public are also invited to come together in person to make costumes to participate in Birmingham Pride 2023. The symbol of coming together to make and then showcase their creativity and identity in a public space is an important way for this community to take ownership of space and celebrate their culture.

Craftspace's 4600 Gifts project for the Birmingham 2022 Festival is a strong example of the ways in which everyday creativity can be used to foster connection and cooperation in public spaces. Provided with materials and tools, 4600 Gifts invited the people of Birmingham to 'mass make' sessions in the City Centre to create gifts for the athletes of the Commonwealth Games.



Craftspace 4600 Gifts, Birmingham 2022 Festival.

Photo credit: Hayley Salter



## ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

In 2025, Rotherham will become the first Children’s Capital of Culture and it’s already working to get ready. Rotherham’s cultural strategy – created by the local Cultural Partnership Board – sees culture as “an innate part of our lives,” with a wide range of creative activities “having equal importance within a collective cultural life.” Its plans for the Children’s Capital of Culture were shaped primarily by local children and young people, along with a wide range of collaborators including 64 Million Artists, who worked as creative producers on the project from 2019 to 2022.

“Our frontline work with children, young people and families is about taking part in and enjoying and being comfortable with things, or maybe having a go and not liking it. Finding out what you like. People have really pressing practical needs around transport and childcare and cost of living, which are vital, but there’s also a special place for creative practice.”

Rotherham Council expects the Children’s Capital of Culture to result in tangible economic opportunities for the borough and its residents, helping young people to gain skills, knowledge and experience in the creative industries. Therefore, while many of the activities linked to the Capital of Culture will involve everyday creativity, it is also heavily linked to improving education and employment outcomes through skills development, mentoring and work placements.

Last year, Rotherham Council ran Challenge Rotherham, linked with the 64 Million Artists’ January Challenge. It aimed to create quick challenges to spark everyday creativity in local people. Learnings from the project were that in-person, on-the-ground interaction with local creative groups was necessary to develop reach – simply publicising the challenge on social media wasn’t enough.

Barriers to everyday creativity in Rotherham include infrastructural issues: a lack of public transport makes it difficult to access the town centre. Consultations show that young people want to engage in person, not through digital, so participation needs to happen hyperlocally. Another issue is that small community groups often lack the skills and resources to win funding – there’s a need for simpler processes alongside new community grant and commissioning models.

“We find children saying, ‘I’m not creative.’ I think it starts in late primary school. We want people to have a continued relationship to creativity, rather than feeling like it’s something that you do when you’re little, and then it stops.”

## *Flexible To Our Needs:* Things to think about

### Principles

These 3Rs are based on our conversations with everyday creatives and connectors and might provide a helpful framework for developing your plans.



#### **RELATE:**

Meet people where they are. Get to know the community and what matters to them. Build relationships which change and last.



#### **RESPECT:**

Give credit and offer encouragement. Recognise what is valued. Value people's time, commitment and difference.



#### **RECIPROCATE:**

Think carefully and creatively about what you can give and what you can gain. Base relationships on mutual need. Review and renew together.

## 20 Questions to ask yourself

This is far from a planning blue-print, rather a checklist of questions based on suggestions from the people who took part in our research.

### INSIDE YOUR ORGANISATION

1. Thinking as broadly as you can, what assets does your organisation have to offer? How will you find out which of these has value?
2. What do you want out of your engagement? To be transparent, how could and should it benefit your institution?
3. What values and approaches are important and will affect who you want to work with and how?
4. Are you the right person/organisation to be doing this? What should your role be? This might be about convening or supporting others rather than leading.
5. Which creative communities might you be interested in supporting and why?
6. How will you involve everyone in your organisation so they can understand and support your commitment to Everyday Creativity?

### ABOUT THE EVERYDAY CREATIVES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

7. Who can you talk to in order to find out more about grassroots activity in your area (local community or community of practice)? Start with your own staff, partners, local contacts; how could you signal your interest further afield?
8. How could you get more insight? Perhaps participating in activities yourselves?
9. What groups are there and what do they need? Are there any obvious gaps?

## PLANNING & RESOURCING

10. How can you involve everyday creatives in designing services and activities in a mutually beneficial way?
11. What can you give back? Could you remunerate volunteers? Could you share other resources?
12. What barriers – time, money, materials, transport, childcare “no-one to go with”, “not sure where to start” – could you help to address?
13. Do you need to involve everyday creative partners and participants in decision-making ongoing? If so what model could work?
14. Who could you collaborate with? What benefits can you increase by working with other cultural/ local organisations and partners in your area?



## COMMUNICATING

15. Have you used plain language? Check for “insider” artspeak, jargon, officialese and ambiguous terms.
16. What benefits and experiences are people looking for? They might be different from the ones you might be used to promoting – the fun, and joy of taking part, of doing it with others are prime.

## EVALUATING AND DEVELOPING

17. How will you evaluate/learn from your work?
18. Can you do it WITH your everyday creative partners and participants?
19. How will you make changes along the way if needed?
20. How will you share?

## 10 things your organisation can do (& practical steps to do them):

### 1. THINK IT THROUGH

- This may be a new area of work for you. Dedicate some time to preparing how you plan to support and consider how this work could positively affect your whole organisation in its thinking and approach.
- Appoint one person or a small group in your organisation as “everyday creativity” researcher(s) or champion(s). There will be people across your organisation with a range of interests so think beyond participation and marketing teams.
- Consider what assets you can offer as an organisation – space, materials etc. What might a writer or dancer or group need to support their practice?
- Create a directory of opportunities your organisation has to offer – lots of groups say they don’t know what mainstream arts organisations offer.
- Consider the processes that need to be put in place – for example, if you plan to offer space; prizes for group fundraising initiatives; or materials for local creatives – establishing a system and a main point of contact or a ‘Champion’ will be crucial for managing support and relationships.
- Build a list of local groups and organisations – think laterally, there will be more than you think! Start with your local authority, community newsletters, social media channels and Creative Lives’ [Creativity Map](#).
- Get in touch with your local authority arts development officer or equivalent to see how your organisation can support any wider cultural strategies around everyday creativity.
- Don’t forget the 3 Rs: Relate, Respect, Reciprocate. Do your plans follow these principles? Relate – are your plans based on conversations? Respect – do they consider people’s needs and issues? Reciprocate – what do you need to give back?

### 2. GET COLLEAGUES AND NETWORKS ON BOARD

- Get wider staff, trustees and volunteers onboard with the importance of this work in supporting the wider creative and cultural ecology.
- We know that active ‘everyday creatives’ often take part in multiple activities. Who else in your team could help? Draw on the knowledge and networks of staff and volunteers as they may be involved in other creative activities elsewhere.
- Forming a group of everyday champions – to act as advisers, researchers and possibly first point of contact – this might also help with internal advocacy.
- Recruit one or some everyday creative connectors on your Board.

### 3. BE A LOCAL RESOURCE

- Share your assets. Consider offering spaces at low / no cost or lending equipment. Think about tours and talks and back-office advice e.g. fundraising, occasional ticketing services etc.
- Post your offer on a Facebook page and other social media channels. Check out The Albany's [For Creatives](#) page for inspiration.
- Deliver an annual event or Open Day to showcase what you can offer and listen to people's needs and suggestions.
- Be a hub – where groups can congregate and cross-fertilise.
- Invite groups and individuals to be part of a social media group where you – and they – can share information about spaces to use, materials, opportunities to share their work, places on training courses etc. This isn't about promoting your wider offer, it's a mechanism to support groups and make connections.
- Advertise for groups. Think about how you could usefully use your own platforms to support recruitment for local groups.

### 4. BE PRESENT, BE OPEN

- Work with groups and individuals to find out what might be useful to them. There might be specific areas of support needed locally.
- Build relationships for their own sake. Attend local events and spend time in community spaces to grow your connections with group organisers and creatives.
- If you don't already, join a group yourself and encourage others to join too.
- Don't think "us and them" – most of us are everyday creatives – even if we have different areas of interest.

### 5. BE A PLATFORM

- We've seen how important validation is to 'everyday creatives', so think about how you can support groups and individuals in this area.
- Create a space or platform to share and celebrate the work of 'everyday creatives'. This could be a community gallery, a digital space, a showcase event, a page on your website. Check out Southwark Gallery's Community Exhibitions for inspiration.
- Running competitions can be a way of engaging local creatives and showing their work. Co-create opportunities with groups and individuals to ensure competitions are attractive and meet their interests and needs i.e. time and commitment etc.

### 6. CREATE A FRAMEWORK

- We know that 'everyday creatives' are on the lookout for ideas and inspiration. Experiment with challenges that invite creativity and the sharing of people's work or contributions as part of a community. Check out 64 Million Artists' [January Challenge](#) or Craft Space's [Eco Drag Challenge](#) for inspiration.
- Explore the work of Fun Palaces, and the organisations on their 'map' that offer their space up for others to take the lead. Check out the [Maker Stories](#) for inspiration.

## 7. BE A SUPPORT

- Organisers are often time pressed and in need of support. Therefore, adding to their workload is not the aim. Rather, think how you can make things easier for them around communications and the best methods for them to be in touch.
- If offering space to groups, firstly ensure that you keep to your commitment and that the space is suitable for their needs when they arrive.
- Make admin and organising easier for groups if they decide to connect with other areas of your programme – from booking tickets to providing group-friendly information.
- Offer time and space for peer networking among group-organisers.
- Celebrate and recognise their achievements, for example by offering free tickets, coffee and prizes or by taking an interest in their events and activities.

## 8. BE 'EVERYDAY CREATIVE' FRIENDLY

- Engaging with everyday creatives shouldn't happen in a silo or feel like an extra piece of work. Explore what people in your own organisation need. Encourage, support and celebrate your team's everyday creativity.
- Consider opportunities for staff to further their interests, whether that's supporting time for personal projects or encouraging people to engage in activities during breaks at work.
- Create showcase opportunities and encourage people to share their experiences as part of staff engagement, meetings or away days.

## 9. USE WHAT'S THERE

- Explore what's already out there. There are lots of organisations already working in this space. Don't compete, collaborate – or signpost people to existing resources.
- Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Think through the assets you have and test what might be useful.

## 10. LISTEN AND REVIEW

- Listen to feedback into what's been useful and not useful to better respond to people's needs and interests.
- Reflect on any challenges that have emerged in terms of practicalities and ways these can be ironed out.
- Reflect on the impact that your approach has had on your organisation with staff.
- If you've worked on a project/ programme in partnership with a group, involve them in the evaluation and share the learning. Can you co-design and co-deliver the evaluation plan?

## About this resource

Arts Council England commissioned The Audience Agency in partnership with the Centre for Cultural Value, to conduct research on everyday creativity, with the goal of helping both ACE and the extended cultural and creative sector to find ways to enable and promote creativity across the UK.

Arts Council England's 2020-2030 strategy, Let's Create, aims to build "a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish." Its first outcome, Creative People, aims to ensure that "everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life." Between 2021 and 2024, the Delivery Plan commits Arts Council England to supporting high-quality applications that address (among others):

- Supporting people at all stages of their lives to design, develop and increase their participation in high-quality creative activities
- Promoting creative opportunities in the local community to people at all stages of their lives
- Developing and improving pathways towards careers in the creative industries <sup>9</sup>

As well as a summary report to Arts Council England containing policy recommendations, we were asked to create this resource targeted at the cultural sector and other organisations who might be able to support and encourage everyday creativity. It aims to bring our recommendations alive through inspiring case studies, real-life stories of everyday creativity, and practical advice for organisations that want to become more involved in everyday creativity.

During this research, we have kept in mind the extreme diversity of everyday

creativity, including many forms of activity that are not easily visible to policymakers or the funded arts sector. We are conscious that many have been ignored or "spoken for" in the past, disempowered in relation to traditional arts institutions and those create arts and culture policy. Wherever possible we have taken a co-creative approach, highlighting the voices of those who take part in, or directly contribute to enabling, everyday creativity. We have invited respondents to define their engagement in their own way(s) and to share their experiences in their own words.



<sup>9</sup> Arts Council England, Let's Create Delivery Plan 2021-2024



## About The Audience Agency

The Audience Agency is the national charity for research and development in cultural and creative engagement and participation. We help cultural organisations and agencies better serve their communities by listening to them, working with them, planning for them, learning from them.

## About Centre for Cultural Value

The Centre for Cultural Value help improve lives by creating a shared understanding of the differences that arts, culture, heritage and screen make to people and society. We want cultural policy and practice to be based on rigorous research and evaluation to build a more diverse, equitable and regenerative cultural sector.

## Our sources and research have included:

- Advice and direction from an informal advisory group of organisations specialising in everyday creativity: a series of workshops, discussions and interviews with practitioners.
- Extensive desk research and literature review, linked to development of a Research Digest with Centre for Cultural Value.
- Voluntary sector research – review of websites and other resources for non-arts organisations supporting everyday creativity and interviews with selected organisers.
- Interviews with 20 group organisers.
- Interviews with 10 professional organisations supporting everyday creativity.
- A digital storytelling study, collecting qualitative insights from everyday creatives. We had over 100 responses. You can see a further selection [here](#).
- A population survey (wave 7 of the Cultural Participation Monitor)
- A survey of library practitioners with Libraries Connected.

## Further Reading and Resources

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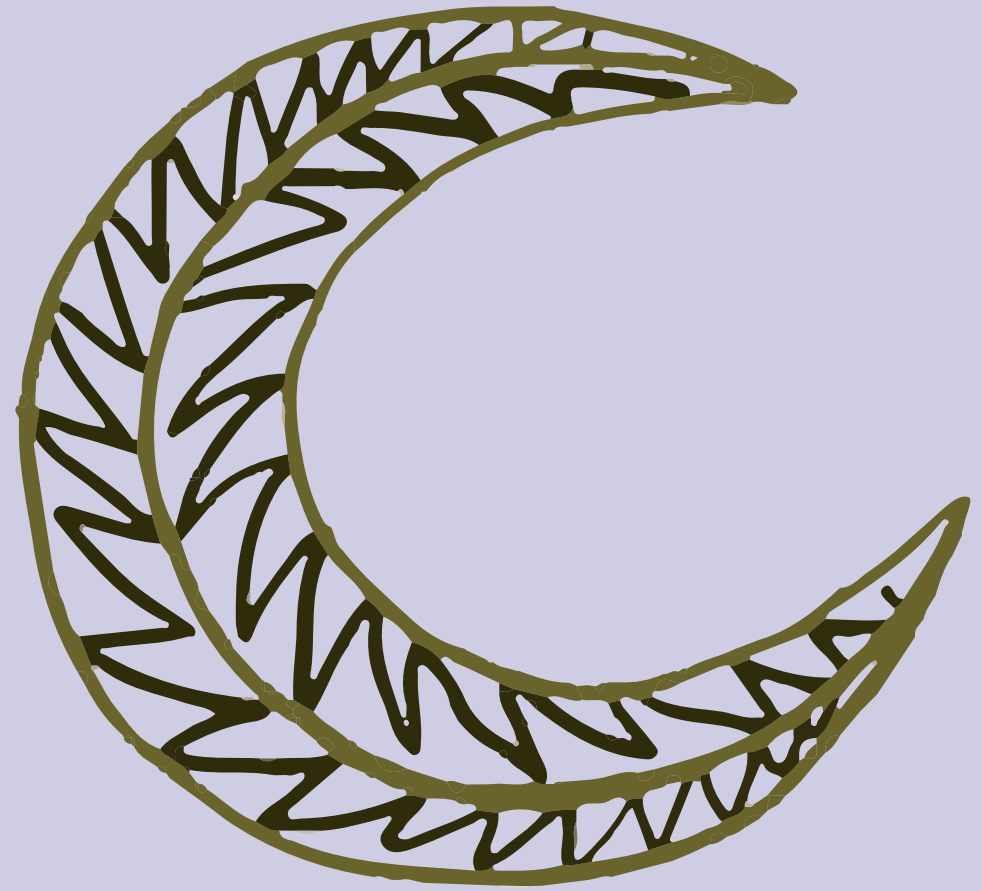
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