

Case  
study **1**

CREATIVE  
AND PEOPLE  
PLACES

# Working with artists through lockdown

Case Study written by [Kathryn Welch](#)

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

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

The 33 Places funded by the Arts Council England's Creative People and Places (CPP) programme are no strangers to working hand in hand with their local community. Nonetheless, lockdown created an immediate and profound shift - both in the needs facing their communities and in Places' ability to respond. Many Places saw their established community networks reorientate their energy to focus on immediate and basic needs. Simultaneously, their networks of artists and creative collaborators faced new and frightening challenges, as work fell away and income dropped or disappeared overnight.

In order to support more people to take a lead in choosing, creating and taking part in arts and culture

experiences in their local area, Places needed to rethink how they could work alongside artists, as well as with communities. Artist and talent development is not - in itself - a feature of the Programme, but the process of co-creation with communities often sees CPPs working closely with artists to develop their practice and deliver on community decision-making. Lockdown challenged many Places to test new ways of working with artists to continue to achieve communities' creative aspirations.

As the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis passes, and Places take a moment to catch their breath, we've been reflecting on the process of working with artists over the past six months:

## 1 Flexible opportunities are needed to cope with fast-changing environments

The early phases of lockdown saw Places navigating a fast-moving, uncertain environment. There was a need for Places to rethink delivery plans and to reconsider how their funding might best be used to support communities. For Places typically accustomed to designing projects slowly, collaboratively, and in consultation with partners, the rapidly-changing context made this approach more difficult. In the early days, challenges arose from making plans - only to see the national context change within days and render those plans unfeasible.



Click Therapy: Lockdown and Easing MarketPlace



Click Therapy: Lockdown and Easing  
MarketPlace

**“There was a real contrast between the speed society was changing, and the time it takes to work in an ethical way alongside communities”**

Seed, CPP Sedgemoor

Many Places sought to balance a thoughtful, responsible and co-created ethos with the need to move at speed - to provide nourishing creative activity in a time of uncertainty and unhappiness, to support the local creative ecosystem and to sustain relationships with local people. In an environment where the rules changed day by day, as well as week to week, CPPs’ deep understanding of their communities and adaptable approach to delivery meant that many were well placed to respond.

**“We had to think on our feet - to scrap the plan we had, and change course completely.”**

Right Up Our Street, CPP  
Doncaster

**“We were looking to support a possibility - not a predetermined outcome or impact”**

Heart of Glass, CPP St Helens



## 2 Embracing uncertainty enabled meaningful collaboration between artists, communities and Places

In the uncertain context of lockdown, CPPs reached out to help artists to reimagine how they could work with and for communities. Many Places developed microcommissions with flexible terms, focused on helping artists to explore, adapt and test their practice. Others offered commissions focused on research and development, designed to create thinking space, or to incubate new ideas – creating new spaces and building connections to help artists engage meaningfully with communities.

MarketPlace, CPP Fenland and Forest Heath, designed a two-part process that invited artists to come forward with ‘Inklings’ - a germ of an idea - and receive support to work



in a collaborative way with the CPP team, community members and other artists. This approach allowed money to reach artists quickly, whilst retaining the co-creation ethos and allowing time and space for the whole team to learn to navigate the new national context.

**“They’ve been supportive in that they support the process of making connections, having conversations, and exploring how things might work - which is a tricky old business. They’ve been very patient, very keen, very clear, very supportive”**

Stuart Mullins, supported by  
MarketPlace, CPP Fenland  
and Forest Heath

Investing directly in local artists brought new partnerships and stakeholders to the table, as artists drew on their local connections to realise their creative aspirations. This approach recognises artists as community members, rather than as external agents delivering for communities.

**“It’s interesting because a number of the ‘inklings’ projects have changed quite a lot since the initial conversation we had with the artist - simply because the environment changed, week by week. The level of flexibility has been massive, but it’s a really interesting way to work, it’s been really creatively exciting”**

MarketPlace, CPP Fenland and Forest Heath

**“The opportunity with MarketPlace came at just the right time, giving me the chance to focus on a short, community-focused project, flex my creative muscles, and work collaboratively with two musicians to build a series of workshops based around music and creativity.”**

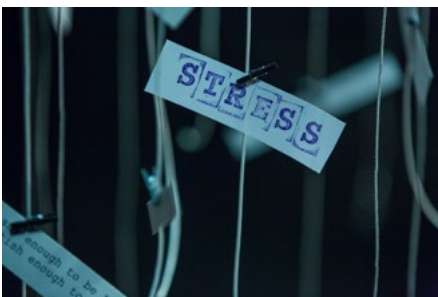
Leanne Moden, Poet and Workshop Facilitator, supported by MarketPlace, CPP Fenland and Forest Heath

The practicalities of designing a sensitive and proportionate process of responding to a commission was emphasised by all Places. It was seen as a vital factor in creating the circumstances that made it possible for artists to come forward at such a challenging time. Keeping the scale

of commissions relatively modest was felt to have enabled more artists to respond, without the pressure of a larger project.

**“We needed to offer things [to artists] that weren’t just a promise”**

Creative People & Places Hounslow



Above: **Identity Crisis** Take Be Told Theatre. Photo: Cristina Schek

### 3 Developing artist relationships is a long-term investment in the future of a place

Many Places recognised that success in their long-term vision ultimately relies on a diverse and thriving creative ecosystem - one where communities can partner with artists who understand the local context, who can tailor their work to suit the local environment, and who have genuine and trusting relationships with local communities. This can be especially pertinent to CPP Places, which are often affected by locally-born artists moving away to progress their careers.

**“When we were locked down all of my work - like everybody else - virtually stopped overnight. And then**

**I saw a callout from Right Up Our Street in Doncaster looking at new ways to work during lockdown. I work all over and I live in Doncaster, but I don't work in Doncaster a great deal - and I really want to work in Doncaster more. So it kind of felt like a perfect opportunity”**

**Wayne Sables, Quarantine Creates, supported by Right Up Our Street, CPP Doncaster**

In Hounslow, microcommissions prioritised local artists - helping them to develop their skills at working in a socially-engaged way, and to explore how their lived understanding of the hyper-local environment might help them create work that was especially relevant. During lockdown, of course, locally-based artists had the additional advantage of being able to feasibly (and legally) deliver ‘real life’ creative opportunities in local communities - whilst those artists based further afield were more reliant on an exclusively digital offer.

### 4 Trusting relationships can maximise impact in a crisis

At Heart of Glass, CPP St Helens, existing warm connections with local authorities and arts organisations made it possible to work quickly - and to realise partnerships in new ways - to maximise the support available to artists in the early phases of lockdown. An initial commitment of money from the CPP toward artist microcommissions was quickly matched by local partners. The nimble, responsive approach of the CPP enabled a distinctive and sizable commitment to be collaboratively agreed, and the scale expanded from 10 to 51 commissions within just a few days. Furthermore, the existing good reputation of the CPP enabled them to negotiate a trusting, light touch approach to the awarding of microcommissions that enabled a growing project to be managed within the constraints of furlough and lockdown.

**“We've all been able to be more equal, more honest, more sensitive. We've all been a bit more human”**

**MarketPlace, CPP Fenland and Forest Heath**



Above: The Council of Kindness meeting, part of project **Donctopia**, led by Richard Hurford, Sharon Richards and Andrew Loretto. Right Up Our Street

## 5 CPP Places bring a radically generous approach to their partnerships with artists

**“It’s about how best to deploy our funding to enable as much work as possible to go forward”**

Right Up Our Street, CPP Doncaster

Places described a real sense of care toward the artists they worked alongside, and in many cases went to additional efforts to help sustain their initiatives to help them continue to connect with communities over the long term. At Right Up Our Street, Project Leads collated and shared data, write ups, transcripts and case studies with funded artists, with the



Above: August Charles performing his debut single **Take Me Away**, part of project **All Eyes on Culture**, led by artist Charlotte Felters. Right Up Our Street



Left: Stills from two film-vignettes created by artist James Locker, part of project **Thoughts Formed**, Right Up Our Street

specific intention of helping them present a strong case to funders for enabling them to continue to develop the approaches and initiatives begun during lockdown. As many artists they partnered with were relatively new to working in a socially-engaged way, many Project Leads found that they could offer practical and impactful support in areas such as evaluation, data collection, consent and collaborative working.

**“Working relationships with artists have felt more intimate, including greater need to check in on how people are on a personal level in the context of lockdown”**

Museums Northumberland bait, CPP South East Northumberland

Whilst this approach is at the heart of much community development activity, its application in an arts context is distinctive. It sees commissioners - those traditionally in a position of power - bring a humble and pragmatic approach to making the best investment in a community as a whole.

**“It’s started a train of thought about the processes we use in the future”**

Creative People & Places Hounslow

## 6 The future will bring different challenges again

The reflective, learning-oriented approach of CPP Places has enabled them to test new ways facilitating relationships between artists, communities, audiences and participants. That said, we should be cautious of drawing simple conclusions from unprecedented times, and thoughtful reflection with Project Leads also identified the challenges and limitations of applying learning in a blanket way to the new circumstances we will no doubt face in the months ahead.

**“We should be talking about testing, piloting, starting things, not ‘achieving big change’”**

**Creative Scene, CPP West Yorkshire**

Whilst the crisis may have seen important and necessary changes to working practices, the ethos at the heart of CPP Places - to enable communities to realise the creative activity they most want to see in their area - has been at the heart of it all. As such, Places are emerging from lockdown with new insights about the role that artists can play in building deep and trusting local relationships, generating ideas with and alongside communities, and adapting flexibly to deliver creative activity in uncertain, fast-moving and difficult circumstances.



Bedroom Isolation Self Portrait with Brother Artist: Keren Sequeira

**Watch this story in the accompanying short video created by video editor Eirene Wallace.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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