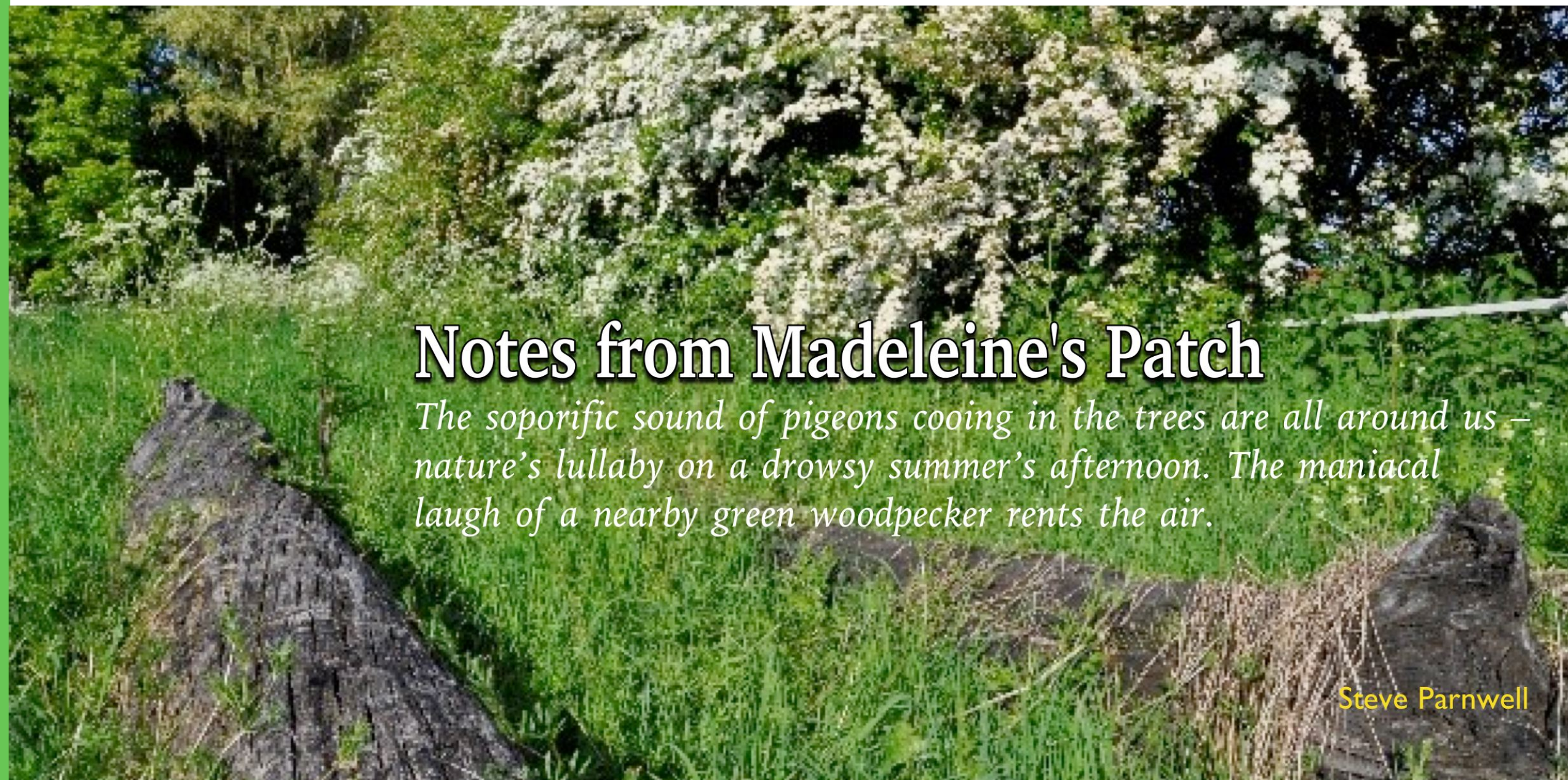


# MarketPlace case study: Writing the Landscape



## Notes from Madeleine's Patch

*The soporific sound of pigeons cooing in the trees are all around us – nature's lullaby on a drowsy summer's afternoon. The maniacal laugh of a nearby green woodpecker rents the air.*

Steve Parnwell

### What is the MarketPlace offer?

MarketPlace is about culture, community and creative conversation in Fenland and the Forest Heath area of West Suffolk. MarketPlace operates within and around the seven market towns of Wisbech, March, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Brandon, Whittlesey and Chatteris. MarketPlace utilises a delivery model of on the ground Creative Agents to provide in-person support and visibility. Through this, it connects and nurtures:

- partnership development,
- community advocates and leaders,
- project delivery,
- community research,
- new creative and artistic experiences,
- artists' ability to meet the needs of local audiences.

When COVID-19 hit and a national lockdown began in March 2020 maintaining community connections, the art infrastructure and support creative opportunities to still happen were the priorities. MarketPlace transferred their way of working into a decisive and clear commissioning model. This tiered commissioning model, 'Creative Conversations in Isolation', enables a culturally democratic leadership approach that has empowered their influence with partners and enabled community groups to have a more direct influence in programming while supporting artists to take risks and deliver new ideas with local relevance and audience focus.

'Writing the Landscape' was one of these new commissions with writer, Bel Greenwood to help local people explore their connection to their local landscape through creative writing. Find out more about the experience and read excerpts from their writing.



SOW  
Engagement  
Connection

"It's about generating a sense of imaginative connection with the landscape – they have a very strong relationship with the landscape and I want them to generate a successful collection of work. I hope I'm building confidence in people in their own stories and starting them off on an adventure."

- Bel Greenwood, writer



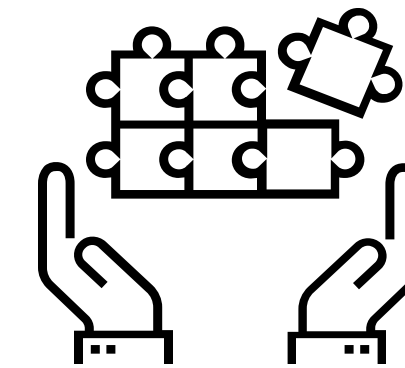
# Case Study: Writing the Landscape

Writer Bel Greenwood was commissioned to host a series of creative writing Zoom workshops to explore people's new found connections to their local environment.



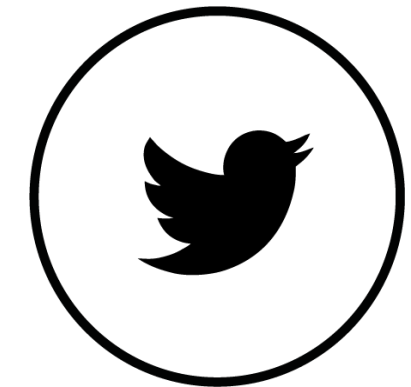
1191

FACEBOOK



9

PARTICIPANTS



4417

TWITTER

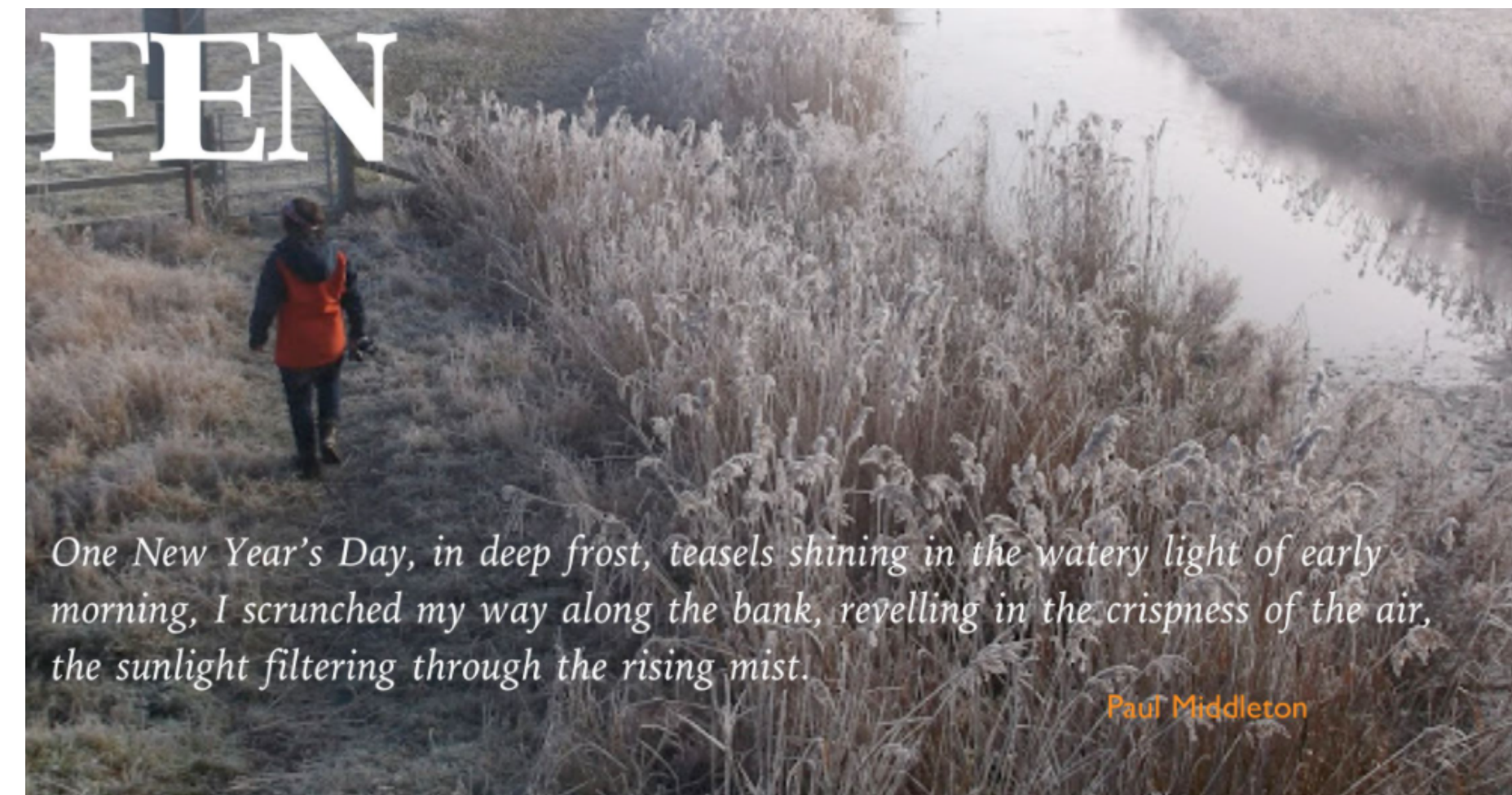
Recognising an increase in people's connections to their local environment, this commission was a way to develop interest and community audiences connected to this theme. This commission aligns with current partnership interests in the Fen landscape becoming a recognised biosphere.

Recruitment for participants was undertaken through new relationships with the Cambridgeshire Geological Society and via existing networks.

The group had mixed previous writing experience from academic papers and books to one creative writer. Their passion for the natural environment unified the group.

Each workshop consisted of a combination of surprising writing challenges, opportunity to collaborate and share, and the experience of having a professional writer critique and support edits in work produced.





Key outcomes for the group were to improve their skills in writing creatively through their connection to the landscape and to support them to increase their confidence in sharing their work publicly.

**"They've definitely written before - they are so invested in the subject matter. They don't want it to end. They've enjoyed being together at this time...they like each other. It's been a good group experience. They've been very honest - in a good group you feel safe enough to share and they got to know each other one deeper level."**  
- Bel Greenwood, writer

A safe workshop environment is a key to building this confidence outside of this circle, into the public realm. As a new group, this type of security and trust takes time.

**"They've warmed up to each other over time - people are looking serious and they're looking at how it's going, but they have a generosity as they've gotten to know each other a bit more. There have been sad moments, laughter, and the writing has improved through it all. Because they are so able, loads of work have been generating."**  
- Bel Greenwood, writer

The creative outputs from the workshops are now being shared on a project blog, and the project became extended at the desire of the group to continue, as they explore the future of the group and what's next.

**The lone winter hare  
Crouches in the wet stubble  
White coat blends with falling snow**

**Irridescent fly  
Buzzes in my face right now  
I swat - say good-bye**

**Moon rising over Fen  
Cold glow in the western sky  
Dyes the grass silver**

**- Barbara Grafton**



## Participant experience

As a newly formed group, it was important to understand the journey of the participants in actively choosing to participate in a series of Zoom workshops and the impact of the 11 members. Seven of the group provided feedback upon their experience. Four members stated a desire to reconnect with and explore creative writing as their main motivator for attending, and the remaining three were intrigued, inspired and curious by the title of the project and the connection to nature.



### What 3 words would you use to describe your experience?

### Describe your connection to the Fens in 3 words

Self awareness

Yes - honed my writing skills, triggered my memories and became thoroughly immersed in the peat.

I've gained confidence. I've learned how different others' responses and interpretations can be, and how they spark new ideas and ways of looking at things for me.

Mutual encouragement to try different styles of writing. Useful links to follow up. Confidence to write and respond to immediate stimulus e.g. use of a pebble in one session

Learnt I need to take time out. Liking being in a group focused on the same thing. History of fens. Environmental knowledge from others.

That my creative writing muscle is not atrophied. That I still love writing. That I can make time for writing. That Zoom can be a fun & bonding space for like-minded people. How quickly the group came together to share work & ourselves.

How to construct inspirational ideas in news ways. 'Triggers' work extremely well. I have learned much about the style of work I would like to develop in the future. Friendly atmosphere in the group made for a great experience. A balance all round.

Inspirational and enjoyable were the most used words to describe their experience of the project, with a sense of history being the defining connection behind their relationship with the Fens. As a group, the experience of the workshops taught them practical writing skills and techniques but also allowed them to learn something of themselves as they developed confidence in a group experience of being honest and vulnerable in writing.

"Long, and low, and loud, a bit like a cow.

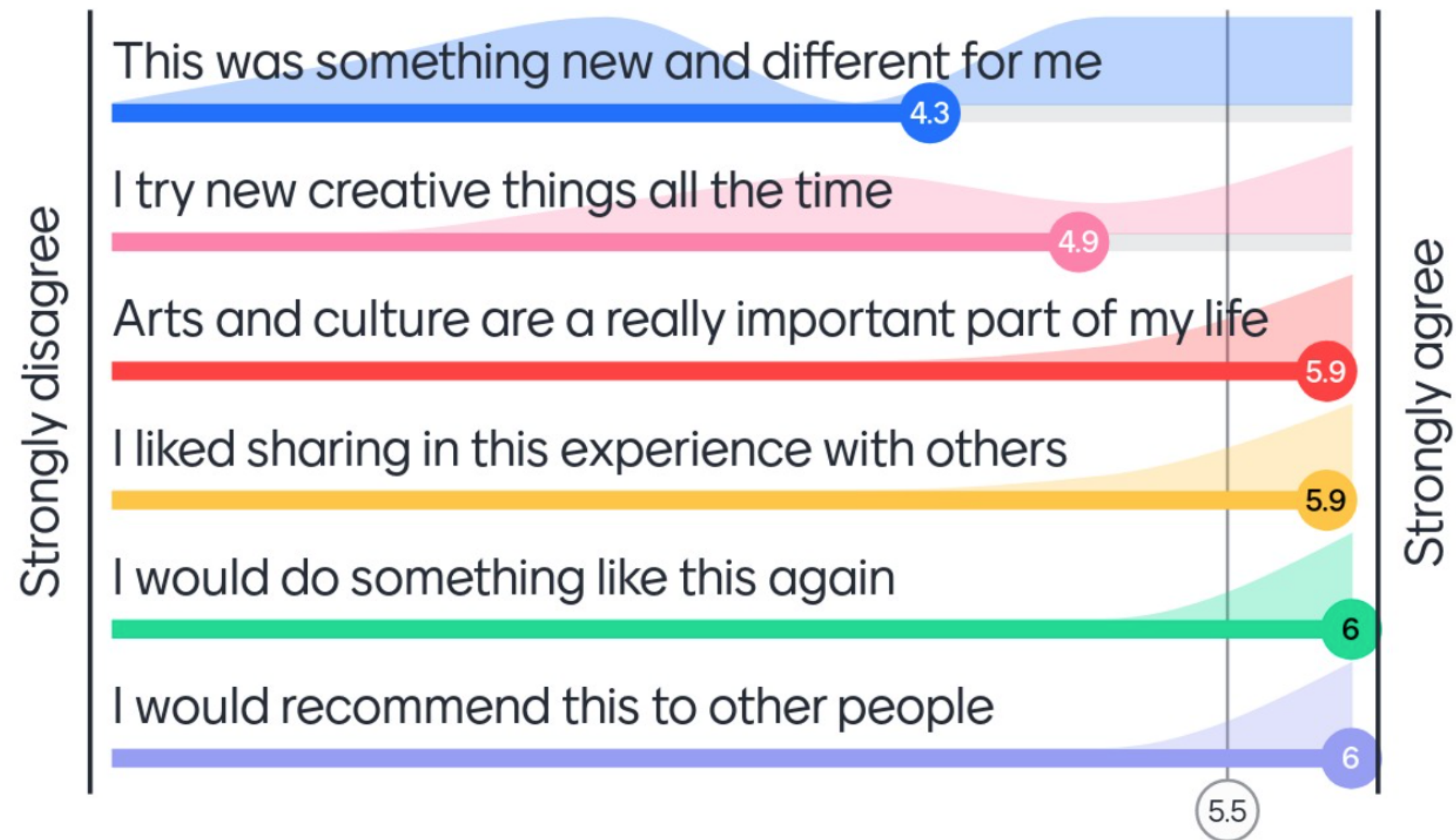
It attracted the attention of the adults who'd just emerged from the back door.

The nearer they came, the higher-pitched the noise became, until they were upon us, all questions, and worry, and anger, and blame."

-Excerpt from 'Getting into a Scrape' by Simone Chalkley



As individuals, none of the participants overtly expressed that they had joined to improve their well being or sense of connection. However, these benefits are often realised from new shared experiences. Participants were provided with a series of statements for them to express the extent to which they agreed with them, and these statements reflected wellbeing indicators and cultural capital to assess how much they value arts and culture.



The values show the average rating amongst the group. Whilst this was somewhat of a new cultural experience for the group, they are active cultural and creative engagers. The quality of delivery reflects a positive shared experience with a group of previously unknown to each other participants that would like to do more and recommend the project further.

## Next steps

The group have continued with ongoing workshops and recognise that part of the success of the project is the group dynamic and size. Sustainability of such groups is challenging and as they develop their own skills and confidence this will see the group start to formalise a quorum for how they will continue. Ambitions of publishing, continued thematic work and peer-reviewing each other are points they are considering for the future.

## How, if at all, has being involved in the project inspired you?

**"Entirely!"**

**"Given me the confidence to continue writing in a freer way and try different approaches. The positive and constructive feedback from Bel has been central to this for me."**

**"New concepts to write about, new challenges outside normal experiences."**

**"To become more involved in my personal creative writing. To think more about how to approach climate change, environment, politics."**

**"I am inspired to write more short pieces, especially as I am always being asked to contribute to blogs. And, maybe, it's time to write that book!"**

**"It's inspired me to get on with my walking blog and feel more encouraged to include more creative non-fiction as well as a memoir."**

**"Massively! Inspired me to continue Life Writing for a family history project."**



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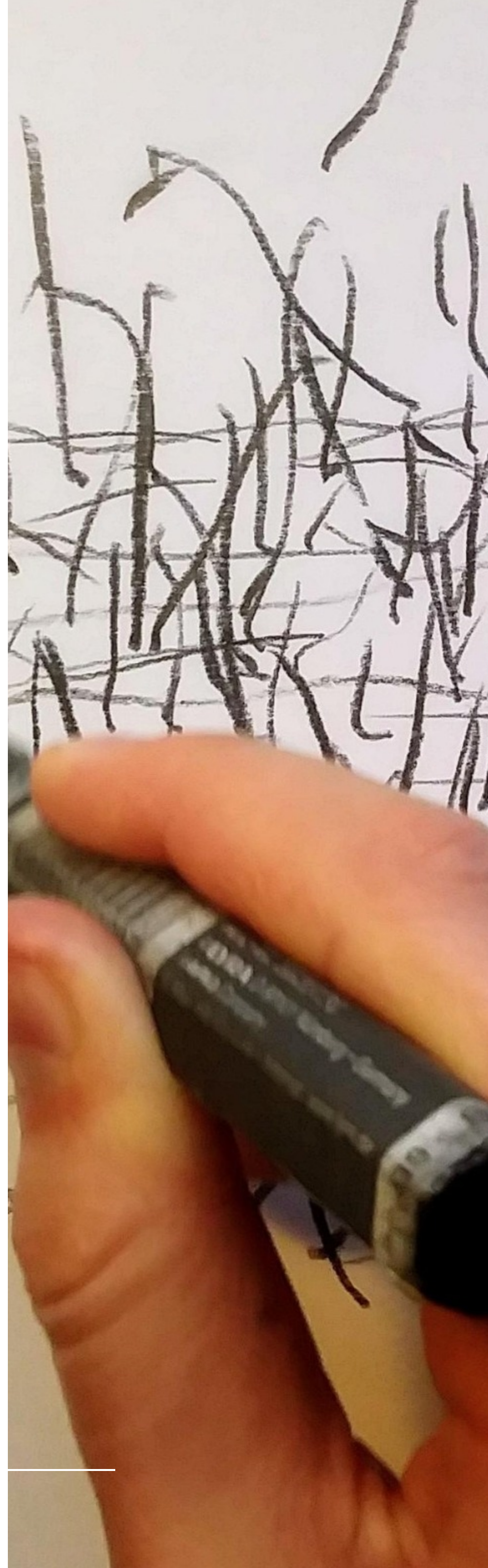
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[www.cppmarketplace.co.uk](http://www.cppmarketplace.co.uk)



Photography and writing credits to:

- Participants and artists from the projects



We Are Frilly is founded on the principles of process-driven participatory practices that extend from co-designing on a project level, strategic planning and cultural accountability through creative evaluation.

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