

BOSTIN NEWS



WELCOME TO BOSTIN NEWS

In this edition of Bostin News, we've taken the opportunity to spotlight the multitude of projects that have centred around individuals, a theme that has been central to the recent endeavours of local artists and creatives over the past year.

Creative Black Country is rooted in the local community and consistently places people at the core of our projects through collaborative efforts and thoughtful design. In the past year, a diverse array of portrait projects has emerged, firmly placing individuals and their 'fizzogs' as the primary focal points.

Perhaps prompted by the aftermath of the pandemic and our shared unusual experiences, the surge in photography projects has underscored a growing desire for connection.

Within this trend, we've relished observing the distinct approaches and artistic styles applied to portraiture, each reflecting how people wish to be seen.

Our commissioned creatives have cultivated meaningful connections across various communities, harnessing outdoor spaces and unconventional venues to facilitate workshops and sessions.

We are thrilled to witness the ingenious ways in which people come together in unexpected locations, where the realms of creativity, art, and performance seamlessly converge.

ENTER

A collaboration between Creative Black Country and Katurvillia Nellie

Following a successful pilot project during 2022 CBC is delighted to be working with our partners in Germany, *Katurvillia Nellie*, once again after receiving funding from the *Cultural Bridge* programme to further develop our bilateral artistic partnership.

The programme supports intercultural exchange and dialogue in the field of participative arts and culture. Since launching in 2021, it has enabled 44 organisations that place communities at the heart of their work to build and develop new partnerships that allow exploration and exchange of practice between Germany and the UK.

The 2023-2024 programme will support 15 partnerships between UK and German-based organisations who've been awarded funding to develop cultural projects exploring issues facing communities across both countries.

The themes that emerged out of the interactions with the local communities of the

Black Country and the town of Lörrach in Germany last year included environmental interests and shared concerns about climate change that linked our neighbourhoods and daily lives. ENTER will allow us to explore these themes further with young people in both places, particularly those who might live in less advantaged areas or whose voice is often unheard.

The project will develop over the next few months and has so far seen young people from Lörrach visit the Black Country with an exchange visit taking place in the autumn. We'll be sharing more on our website as participants begin to create work during the project.

Cultural Bridge is a collaboration between *Arts Council England*, the *Arts Council of Northern Ireland*, *British Council*, *Creative Scotland*, *Fonds Soziokultur*, *Goethe-Institut London* and *Wales Arts International / Arts Council of Wales*.

Find out more about the programme at Cultural-bridge.info



CBC Landmark Project

DESI PUBS

From West Bromwich to Venice, London, and now Scotland, The Red Lion Desi Pub sign is on show once again.

It's the project that keeps on going; Desi Pubs was one of our first Landmark initiatives and it continues to capture people's imagination. During July *The National Galleries of Scotland* launched *Grayson Perry's* latest exhibition 'Grayson Perry / Smash Hits' in which the pub sign hangs amongst many collected objects by the artist from around the country.

It follows the Channel 4 series *The Full English*, when Grayson visited the desi pub and interviewed The Red Lion landlord *Satnam Pawar* about the pub sign. The handcrafted sign is one of seven that was designed by leading British artist *Hardeep Pandhal* and commissioned by *Creative Black Country* and *New Art Exchange* in 2016.

"I'm still surprised at how much interest the Desi pub artwork receives; we have welcomed guests from all over the world who have visited the pub because of how we worked with CBC to share these stories." Said Satnam.

You can see more about the Desi Pubs project on our website at creativeblackcountry.co.uk/desi-pubs



CBC Partnership Project

WORKPLACE WELLBEING CREATIVE WORKSHOPS

CBC enjoyed a lovely day with the staff at *Paycare* in *Wolverhampton* delivering our new initiative; *Workplace Wellbeing Creative Workshops*.

Giving people time away from their laptops/desks to be creative and express themselves can

be so beneficial; just an hour of creativity can help people feel more energised, relaxed and focused.

Guided by artist *Sarah Goudie*, the groups started individually on a small scale and then began working collaboratively. At first, the participants said they

couldn't draw or be creative but after a short time, they were all producing wonderful creations.

"Everyone left in a better mood than when they arrived."

Yvonne Gregory, our Fundraising Manager, added: "You could see people gradually relax and start

to express themselves so they could continue their working day with an improved sense of well-being."

If this is something you or your workplace would like to try, please contact yvonne@creativeblackcountry.co.uk for a chat.



Creative Black Country and The Space

Image: Dee Patel

A PARTNERSHIP EXPANDING GREAT DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

Creative Black Country and The Space have announced a unique partnership that is designed to offer a range of creative development support to artists across the Black Country.

Speaking at the *Digital Culture Talks 2023* at the *University of Wolverhampton*, *Fiona Morris*, CEO and Creative Director at *The Space*, and *Parminder Donsanjh*, Creative Director at *Creative Black Country* unveiled plans for the strategic collaboration which will include a programme of creative content and skills development support for individuals from the Black Country region.

Artists, creatives and community members will be invited to submit their ideas for a small-scale digital project. Successful applicants

will be supported by a team of professionals to develop their project and bring their stories to life digitally. Workshops and webinars will also take place, encouraging applicants with an idea for a story, a character, or an approach to apply.

"Stories are powerful when told through multiple ways, and the region has old and new narratives to share beyond the Black Country. We are looking forward to exploring how we extend great storytelling onto digital platforms."

- *Parminder commented.*

"Creative Black Country does such great work across Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton and

we're both excited and delighted to be working with them.

The collaboration will help open up new ways for people and communities to access, participate in and share their voices and experiences digitally."

- *Fiona commented.*

CBC previously collaborated with *The Space* on our Landmark project *100 Masters* which celebrated contemporary creative citizens and craftspeople to inspire the pioneers of tomorrow.

A series of short videos created as part of the project achieved over 10 million views online and the work went on to win a *European Youth Award*.

For *The Space*, the partnership forms part of a programme designed to identify new talent and provide mentoring, commissions, production and distribution support to artists in *Dudley*, *Walsall*, *Wolverhampton* and *Sandwell*.

Further information on the type of support available will be issued in soon. Please make sure you are signed up to our email newsletter which you can do by scanning the QR code below or by visiting our website.



“Amazing! I feel re-energised for this afternoon but really mindful and zen at the same time.”



Dudley Creates started as a Creative Black Country commissioned cultural programme designed to make possible a diverse and locally relevant programme of high-quality creative participation opportunities for local communities across Dudley Borough. The programme included a range of multi-disciplinary arts and creative projects from High Street portraiture and filmmaking to puppetry making and processions on parks, and animated poetry sessions via Zoom.

Over 18 months two of CBC's Associate Producers, *Kerry* and *Laura*, worked closely with the wider Creative Black Country team alongside local people, to design and commission a number of high-quality participatory projects.

During 2022 the project also benefited from a partnership with *Dudley MBC* who asked us to support local people to produce creative projects across the Borough. A *Summer of Creativity* coincided with the *Birmingham Commonwealth Games* activities and offered to kickstart a new legacy of cultural activity going forward.

Kerry and *Laura* asked *CoLab Dudley* to support elements of the project while researcher, *Jo Orchard-Webb*, assisted in helping us bring together key findings and learning.

We wanted to share some of the things learnt while undertaking the project. Dudley Creates has developed and morphed in surprising ways; now we are working alongside *Dudley CVS*, via the *CoLab Dudley* platform, to help with **Dudley's Cultural Compact** so that we can continue to support the wider cultural ecosystem to thrive in future years.



Images: Black Country Collage Club session - Do Fest / Netherton Creative Map - Summer of Creativity / Rick Sanders - Do Fest / Sound Abound - Summer of Creativity

WHAT WE LEARNT FROM THE CREATIVE PROGRAMMING

By speaking to participants, artists and producers we know that Dudley Creates enabled:

- Community and local artists to co-create and co-produce via a diverse range of mediums
- Further development of local community cultural capabilities, creative skills and confidence
- Local artist social practice development and peer learning
- New relationships and creative collaborations (with ripples for future cultural production)
- A wide range of mental health and well-being benefits - specifically in relation to overcoming isolation, accessibility and health anxiety barriers to cultural participation and co-production

Dudley Creates reminded us of the power of arts in reimagining spaces and places, and how communities value them. In this instance working deeply in place helped to:

- Unlock new creative interactions with spaces such as nature reserves, community gardens and canals, allowing them to be viewed by local people and artists as important cultural assets
- Enable participants to reclaim uncared-for public spaces that had previously felt unwelcoming and unsafe like subways, tunnels and caverns
- Connect to non-arts spaces, like High Streets, libraries, and shopping centres, as important places of everyday cultural co-creation and cultural identity.

With thanks to *Jo Orchard-Webb* for the words across these 4 pages that are a small extract from the research and learning of the Dudley Creates programme.

From cultural programme to a 100 year strategy in action

DUDLEY CREATES LESSONS IN PLACE BASED PROGRAMMING



WHY THIS WORK IS IMPORTANT TO PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES IN DUDLEY AND ACROSS THE BLACK COUNTRY?

Art and culture are integral to our lives. It can help us understand each other better, support our well-being, help tackle social injustice and contribute significantly to the economy. It can make the places and neighbourhoods we live in feel special and unique, giving them an identity of their own, and it can bring people together when they most need it.

The Dudley Creates programme enabled significant socio-cultural value in terms of new relationships developed during co-creation, which participants described as critical for their mental health following the isolation and loneliness experienced during the pandemic.

The collective and collaborative element that ran through the design of the majority of the projects was important to participants who expressed joy in creating together. Whether that co-creation was walking together, weaving together, listening together, singing together, or stitching together - the relational quality of these experiences of co-creation enhanced their cultural capability by unlocking 'power with' through collaboration.

The relational and collaborative focus helped to:

- Introduce new local artistic partnerships and initiatives
- Support new funding applications for scaling-up pilot experiments
- Start new local community creative group meet-ups
- Support further community requests for project follow-up sessions, iterations and extensions of these projects in new locations in the borough
- Enhance practice development and creative confidence in artists and participants alike
- Support the legacy of an ecological approach taken by CBC to weave together different projects, programmes and resources that continues to encourage collaboration and cultural potential across the Dudley cultural ecosystem

Artists were enabled to develop social practice capabilities in new spaces, with new art forms, alongside new communities, within the context of shifting government health policy and health risks, extreme weather events, and growing barriers to accessibility and participation owing to social and economic consequences of increased financial precarity.



Images: We Are Makers - Dudley Time Rebels / More Than Human High Street - Summer of Creativity / Radio Public - Dudley Time Rebels / Time to Make - Dudley Time Rebels

From cultural programme to a 100 year strategy in action

DEVELOPING KEY THEMES FOR A CULTURAL STRATEGY

When the Dudley Creates projects were programmed it was during the **global pandemic**, the **early worsening of the cost of living crisis**, and during a **summer of climate emergency-related extreme weather events**.

To develop a strategy that is both meaningful and achievable amidst rapidly changing and uncertain contexts we are adopting an ecological approach to the cultural sector in Dudley borough. A nurturing and relational approach that supports many cultural opportunities and increases cultural democracy for all.

The learning shines an honest light on the challenges as well as the potential for local artists and creatives of developing a social practice rooted in place. More generally, Dudley Creates illustrates the evolving and adaptive role of cultural infrastructure like *Arts Council England's Creative People and Places* (of which CBC is part) in creating conditions for wider and deeper cultural engagement and co-creation by communities in the context of crises.

The **Dudley Creates programme offers valuable lessons in terms of some of the conditions needed for realising greater cultural democracy and a flourishing local cultural ecosystem in the Dudley borough**. These lessons are important for local cultural ecosystem creatives, communities, guardians, collaborators and stewards in informing their different roles within the stewardship of a flourishing local ecosystem.

A STRATEGY ROOTED IN PLACE

Instead of 'Dudley's Cultural Strategy' we felt that 'Dudley Creates' continued to describe what we hope to achieve: **a long-term vision of a programme rooted in place, designed by local cultural producers, working with mostly local artists, alongside local communities exploring together what it means to co-create in Dudley borough**.

The programme highlighted many aspects of working in place including the specificity of experience in convening in local everyday spaces (High Street, shopping centres, parks); convening in unusual non-arts spaces (tunnels, caverns, canals, nature reserves); being inspired by the materiality of local places, and how that relates to local histories, memories, stories, local knowledge and identities; and it meant exploring sensory and embodied experiences of place (via walking, singing, sensing, and touching).

Dudley doesn't have a wealth of art galleries, museums, cultural spaces and buildings like our neighbouring cities so it is important that we can illustrate the powerful agency of cultural activities in the production of space and reimagining narratives of place.

These **new spatial imaginaries are critical in terms of freedom to co-create culture, and so the possibility of realising cultural democracy. They reframe who creates and who gets to interact with ideas of permission, ownership and responsibility.**

These ideas and democratising cultural practices by local artists and participants expand who occupies space, and the agency they feel in that space. In this way, they go some way to disrupt manifestations of oppression that are expressed in the absence of a sense of permission, or sense of welcome, or feelings of safety, belonging, or solidarity. This helps introduce a diverse range of people, creative activities and modes of cultural production that disrupt the usual ownership and power of cultural activity.

HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT THE STRATEGY IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR DUDLEY?

A flexible, experimentation approach, with a focus on building relationships and opportunities for creative collaboration, was key to how Dudley Creates held open spaces for a greater diversity of culture-making by local communities and local artists. We'll continue this approach as the strategy takes shape.

Using an ecological framework Dudley Creates learning helps us begin to articulate examples of local vital signs for a flourishing cultural ecosystem and greater cultural democracy in Dudley borough. The aligning and creating interconnection between the programme, the Dudley Council-funded Summer of Creativity, and the CoLab Dudley-supported Time Rebels projects show further evidence of an ecological approach to cultural programming.

The following **local 'vital signs' help us to see how to support and nurture artists, creatives, communities and organisations to support a thriving ecosystem.**

These 'Vital Signs' are just some of the indicators that we believe signal a flourishing cultural ecosystem.

An ecological approach

Ecological approach to cultural sector stewardship including practices that encourage connection across cultural programmes, resource streams, and diverse cultural practices.

Experiment and design

An explicit valuing of experimentation and iterative design approaches to create space for the evolution of project ideas.

Artist to non-arts collaborations

New artist to non-arts collaborator relationships (e.g. librarians, teachers, wardens, council officers) that are critical to quality social practice and wider cultural participation.

Greater cultural capability focus

Greater cultural capability focus means communities across the borough have increased freedom and opportunity to co-create culture in a diversity of forms.

Shared learning in the open

People in the ecosystem learning together and making what they discover available widely. Celebrating cultural activity and opportunities as a way to make the ecosystem visible to itself.

Recognise potential

Be explicit in paying attention to the plurality and interconnectedness of existing and potential cultural activity and opportunities in the borough.

Non arts spaces as arts spaces

Non arts spaces as places of cultural production and local assets 'reframed' as valuable cultural resources.

Trusted connections

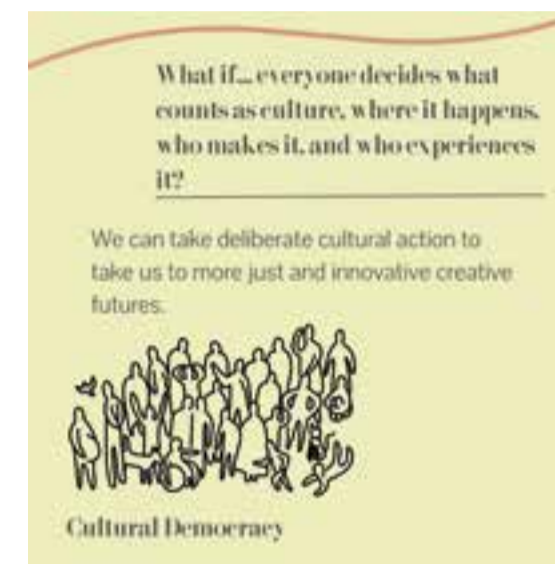
New trusted connections woven between local artists and creative communities resulting in greater community and artist cultural co-production activity and cultural capability.

Artist to artist collaborations

New artist to artist collaborations resulting in sharing of skills, knowledge, and co-creation of new creative initiatives and enterprises.

Place based focus

Place based practice building trusting relationships with local collaborators and communities, convening informed by local knowledges, stories, cultural spaces, cultural artefacts, histories and futures.



Starting from a different place to travel together to different futures

5 Key Ideas

The 'five ideas' to the left offer powerful practices, tools and tactics which can be used to overcome barriers experienced by local people and communities who would like thriving cultural lives.

They will help us to create the conditions that enable people to take cultural and creative action which contributes to regenerative futures and restoring our relationship with nature.

Each idea starts with a 'What if...' question to help spark imagination and find solutions to the cultural emergency. They are inspired by the work of Rob Hopkins and his book 'From What Is to What If' as well as his Podcast.

To accompany each idea we also offer a set of 'Navigation tools'. Navigation tools help us talk, design and plan together. They help us think about other people, consider future generations and look after the planet. They make us aware of things around us and will indicate to us if we are being mindful of wider considerations other than our own. You can download the navigation tools at dudleycreates.net.



Every season CoLab Dudley invites you to their space on Dudley High Street for the Cultural Collaborators Gatherings where you can see, listen, learn and take part in events that help you have a say in the culture you want to see. Visit dudleycreates.net/events for dates.



What next...

We're thrilled that what initially started as a year-long programme is now becoming a people-led, place-based, evolving strategy in action.

Like the programme, the strategy will morph and change as creatives and communities come together to shape it.

Currently, CoLab Dudley is taking the lead on supporting the Compact; working with a cohort of Cultural Collaborators who look to the future of the borough to support projects, events, plans and ideas with local communities.

The Cultural Collaborators are currently experimenting and co-creating projects with local people thanks to a National Lottery Project Grant from Arts Council England.

This isn't a strategy that starts and then stops in a few years - instead, it will continue to evolve, and be shaped by local communities and creatives - offering guiding tools and ideas for local people to shape their future cultural landscape.

Dudley Creates is being funded by Arts Council England, and supported by Dudley CVS, Creative Black Country and Dudley's Cultural Collaborators.

You can keep up-to-date, find out how to get involved in ongoing projects and experiments, read more research and see when events are taking place by visiting dudleycreates.net.



CRAFTING DUDLEY

A Dudley Creates Project. Words: Laura Dicken

What do you get when you bring together the *Dudley Peoples Archive*, the wonderful *Growing Up In Dudley* project, a stack of linen squares, an ambitious, creative community facilitator and a welcoming space at *CoLab Dudley*? You get a beautiful, unique, 40-piece community quilt and a very happy group of participants who continue to stitch, chatter and laugh to this very day.

Crafting Dudley was a wonderfully unique project that effortlessly wove together (pun intended) archive photographs, craft, local stories and a heartwarming chain of connection. Led by *David O'Coy* and facilitated by *Jan Norton* the team were excited to reach out to local people via Facebook pages, personal networks and emails asking for folks to share photographs and stories of Dudley that meant something to them.

A group came together every week to submit their own images and collectively discuss and choose images from the archive that they all felt told a meaningful story of community and place. These images, when printed onto the linen squares, were distributed between members of the group to be embroidered, crafted and decorated. Some of the squares were also sent to local care homes along with packs of embroidery kits where residents were encouraged to sew, paint and decorate the squares using any technique that they felt drawn to.

The group of participants who met regularly in person (post lockdown), who now go by the name *A Stitch In Time*, would gather weekly at *CoLab Dudley*, an experimental lab space on *Dudley High Street*. Artist *Jan* would facilitate these sessions where the attendees would chatter, connect and create squares for the quilt using a variety of techniques. *Jan* felt it was important to have a very open,

artistic approach rather than just utilising traditional embroidery so that what was being made could be inclusive to people's skill, vision and dexterity levels. She recalls that "there was absolutely no pressure to do anything in a particular way". During these sessions, *Jan* herself felt that her creative confidence grew by exploring a way of expression that she hadn't revisited for decades and she has since gone on to study for a BA in Fine Art at *Wolverhampton University*.

The group was a lifeline for some members; many of whom were navigating loss, grief, loneliness and health issues. A sense of purpose, altruism and pride in their home brought much joy and relief. One participant recalls "It was just so nice to actually come together after such a horrible time, to come together and actually meet with like-minded people and to start up a purposeful project. I mean, it's done us all the world of good mentally, it's put us all in a better place."

Another adds "I felt like I was part of a new group of people. And whilst in one aspect, making for other people feels nice and good,

what we were getting as well were stories of the Black Country, and some people knew the backstory of the photo or could reminisce about the type of things we did when we were younger. It was like a web of connection. It was the fun and just the pleasure of sitting together making, we built on that."

David comments on how collaborative, democratic and socially aware the whole process was and how relaxing and inviting the sessions at *CoLab Dudley* were. His favourite memory of the project was finally seeing the finished piece, assembled by *Jan* and another participant, displayed for the first time and being in awe of the actual size of the assembled quilt. He adds that he spent a lot of time chatting with some of the many visitors to the exhibition about the wonderful memories this special quilt evoked for so many people. The quilt continues to be exhibited both digitally online and physically in local spaces and the *Stitch In Time* group are currently working on self-initiated projects adding to the rich tapestry of craft and culture in *Dudley*. dudleypeoplesarchive.com



100 FACES OF BRIERLEY HILL



Throughout the summer, a team of creatives have been popping up in various spots along *Brierley Hill High Street*, aiming to capture a modern depiction of the town's residents.

Facilitated by creative *Becky Thompson*, along with photographer *Kelly Hadley* and filmmaker *Paul Stringer*, the team have been conducting portrait sessions and gathering narratives, creating an archive that delves into why *Brierley Hill* holds a unique place in people's affections.

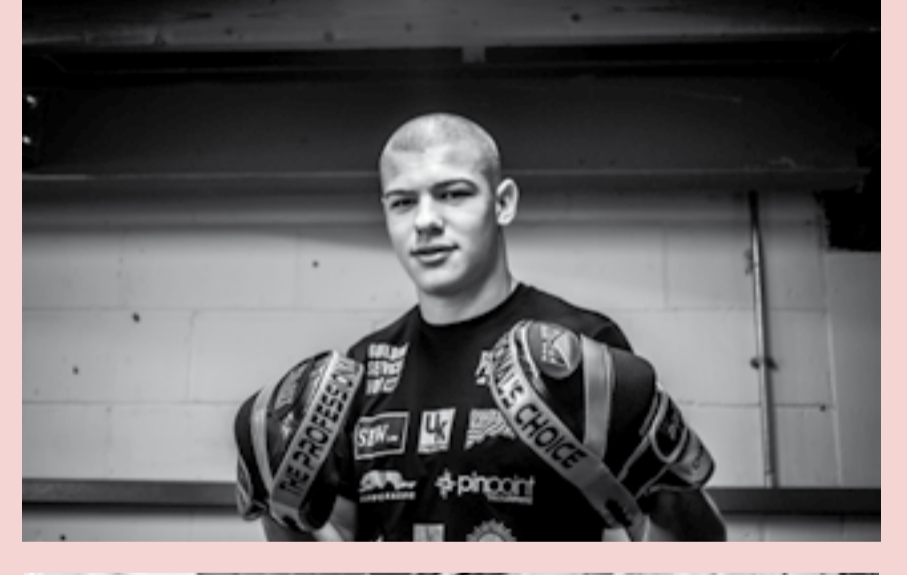
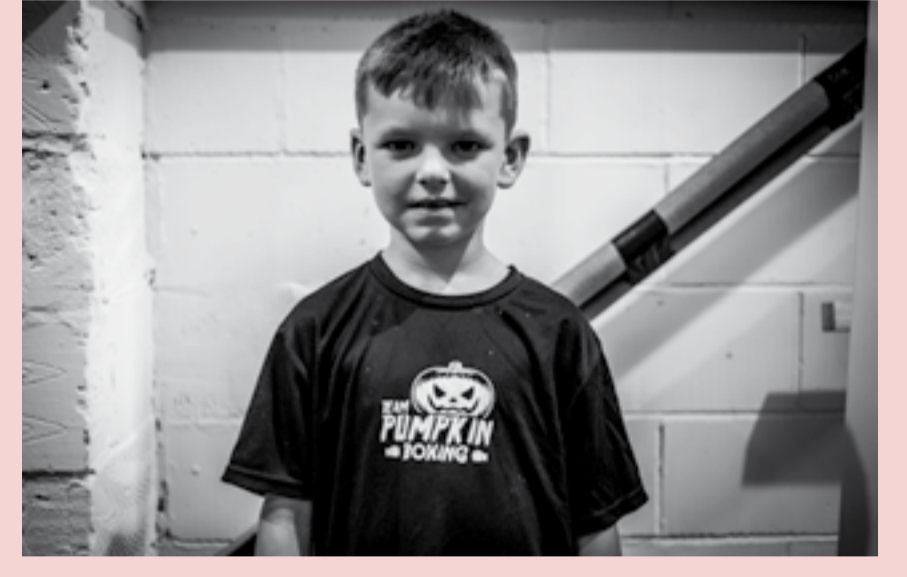
A total of 100 individuals (and a handful of pets) have been immortalised through the portraits.

The images and the film will be a central component of an exhibition hosted at the *Market*, showcased on screens within the *Briar Rose*, and featured in a special event at the *Brierley Hill Civic* on September 10th as part of *Heritage Week*.

100 Faces of *Brierley Hill* was commissioned by the *Brierley Hill Cultural Consortium* and supported by *Historic England* as part of the *Heritage Action Zone* initiative that is taking place in the town centre.

#100FacesOfBrierleyHill team:
 Photographer - *Kelly Hadley*
 Filmmaker - *Paul Stringer*
 Creative Facilitator - *Becky Thompson*
 Creative Producer - *Kerry O'Coy*

Follow on Instagram:
 @100facesofbrierleyhill

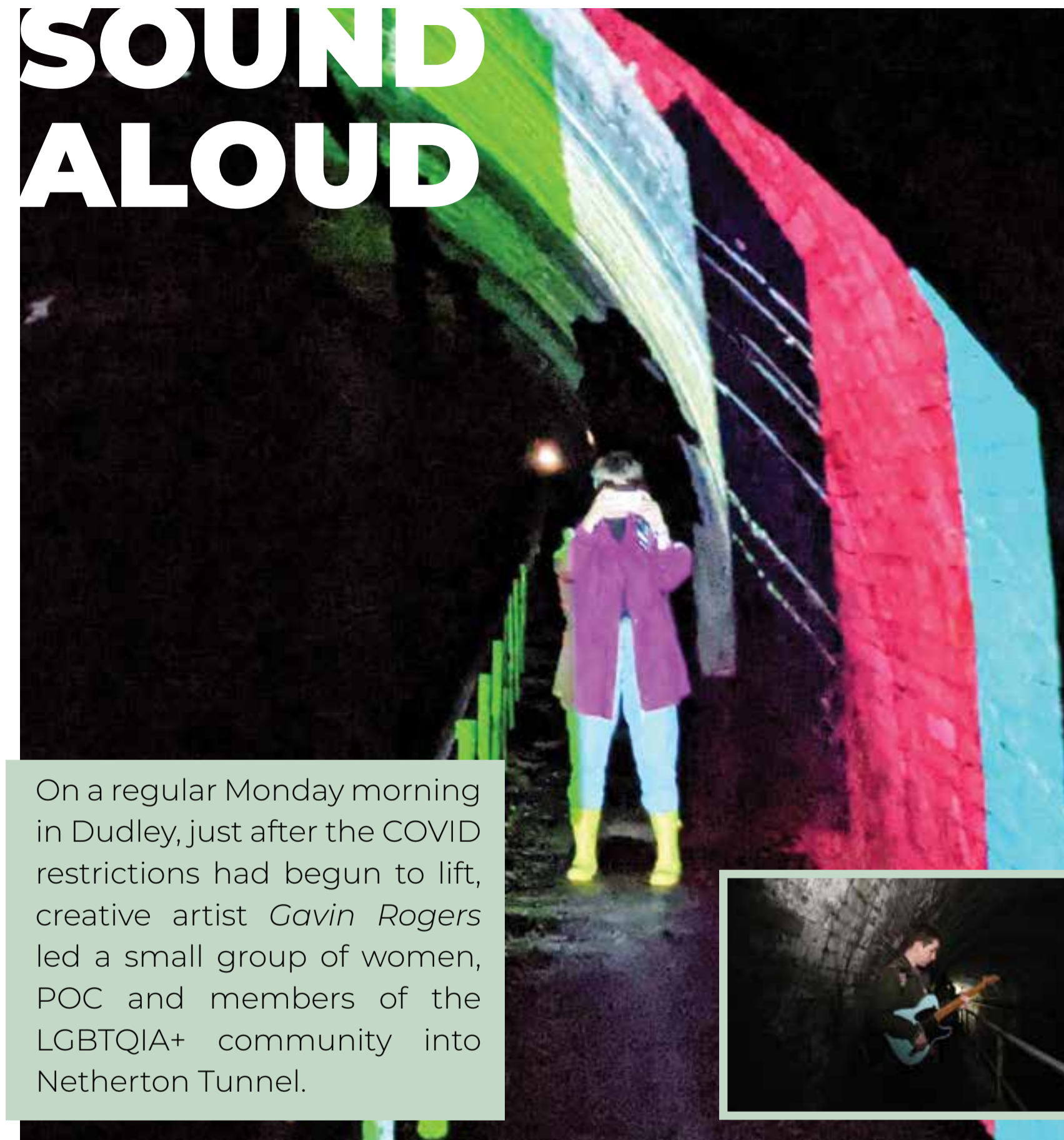








SOUND ALOUD



On a regular Monday morning in Dudley, just after the COVID restrictions had begun to lift, creative artist *Gavin Rogers* led a small group of women, POC and members of the LGBTQIA+ community into Netherton Tunnel.

A Dudley Creates Project. Words by Laura Dicken

The Victorian Tunnel is almost 3km in length and stretches along the canal and beneath Dudley. A space originally built by and for men so horses and boats could support trade and industry. A place, at the time of construction, not at all intended for the diverse folks in this inclusive group.

Gavin worked in collaboration with another local artist and researcher, *Emily Warner*, to begin to understand and adapt to the space before inviting the group of participants to join them.

Gavin and Emily used a method called 'empathy mapping' to respond to the tunnel, coming to terms with the claustrophobic, damp environment and noting the effects it had on their emotions and bodies. Through this exploration and their ongoing conversations, the artists found ways to make this dark, initially uninviting place not only safe but inspirational and the perfect

place for co-creation when the participants arrived.

One of the participants, *Jennifer*, explained that the group was initially nervous and slightly wary of the daunting space. One participant was even very scared of the dark and felt that they were unable to go into the darkest parts of the tunnel. The artists and other participants were so committed to the collaborative process they co-created a method to 'pass the sound along' the space meaning that no one was in a position that made them feel uncomfortable.

Standing in line, around 10 meters apart, along the length of the tunnel the participants were asked to try a technique Gavin called 'deep listening'. The participants were invited to listen to the individual to the left and right of them and use their voices to respond to each other in order to pass sounds down the length of the tunnel. Magically the echo

from the beginning to the end of the space was around 7 seconds, meaning that several notes could be carried through the entirety of the tunnel using this technique. Through the imaginations and creativity of the group, a place that originally felt ominous was being actively re-imagined with sound, voice, lights and torches as somewhere that could be uplifting and positive, even playful and childlike.

Gavin commented that: "Making sounds and being in silence together in this place that initially felt hostile was an incredible bonding and uplifting experience".

The open brief from Dudley Creates allowed Gavin, Emily and the participants to be responsive to the tunnel and each other which opened up the possibility to create something incredibly unique and special. Participant *Jennifer* recalls that

although apprehensive at the beginning she soon "felt like *Mariah Carey singing in a tunnel under Dudley*". A collection of tracks made throughout Sound Aloud are available to listen to on Soundcloud and one was even played in a local nightclub. *Jennifer* has the tracks on her phone and regularly listens to them to brighten her mood and remember the joyfulness of the project. The tunnel and the tracks now feel like a safe space that spark happy memories.

Several of the participants commented that although they were strangers at the start of the Sound Aloud project by the end they felt like a unit, a choir and as one describes the group "the tunnel tribe". They had each used their voices as individuals and collaboratively as a collective which lead to them finding beautiful connections to their creativity, to place and to each other.

ON THE HIGH STREET



It's great to see creative projects springing up in unconventional spaces so when we put a call out for a high street residency we were excited to see what photographer *David Rowan* and filmmaker *Joseph Potts* had planned when they chose Halesowen as the destination to base themselves.

Assisted by recently-graduated photographer *Kelly Hadley*, they aptly titled their Dudley Creates undertaking 'On the High Street' and commandeered an unoccupied retail space within the *Cornbow Centre*, fashioning it into a photography and film studio.

David experimented with hyper-real portraits and

Joseph captured people's stories. They hosted a weekend exhibition of the photographic prints and projected video extracts which you can see on our website.

The project was supported by Dudley Creates on behalf of Creative Black Country. The shop unit was generously supported by the Cornbow Centre Management.





PHIL LOACH

Born in Kates Hill, Dudley, and educated at the Sir Gilbert Claughton School, Stourbridge College of Art and Leicester College of Art, where he studied photography, Phil began his career in newspapers on the Dudley Herald.

He later moved to the County Express in Stourbridge, where he became chief photographer, before spending several years as a freelancer.

During his illustrious career spanning over four decades, Phil captured a vast array of events and people across the Black Country, north Worcestershire, and south Staffordshire regions. From sports events to politics, from joyous celebrations to heart-wrenching disasters, he documented the history of the region through his lens.



CAPTURING THE PAST



NICK HEDGES

Nick Hedges photography showcases the industrial heritage at the heart of the Black Country.

Born in Bromsgrove, 1943, Hedges studied photography at Birmingham College of Art during 1965-1968, and worked with Birmingham Housing Trust on an exhibition about the city's terribly housed residents.

From 1968 – 1972 he was commissioned by the housing charity Shelter to document the harsh living conditions that people in poverty were forced to live in. The photographs formed a body of work called 'Make Life Worth Living' and was used to help Shelter campaign better for those in poverty. He then consequently worked in London for Shelter as a photographer and researcher, producing numerous exhibitions and publications.

He returned to the Midlands to complete a 2 year photographic documentary project of factory work. Between 1976 and 1978 Nick documented workers at Bilston Steelworks (and Birchley Rolling Mills in Oldbury) the workers became the subjects of Nick Hedges' photographic observation of working life. The photographs were published as a book 'Born to Work' in 1982 and depict stark images of factory life in the Black Country.

Depicted in these photographs is a working class culture – an industrial workplace commonality – with its own shared history and values. As well as the Born To Work book, the project was also exhibited widely to critical acclaim.

CAPTURING NOW



MARTA KOCHANEK

Marta Kochanek was commissioned by the Dudley Peoples Archive to bring a fresh and contemporary eye to the *Growing Up In Dudley* project by creating a new body of work photographing Dudley people in a series of striking portraits.

After learning from Annie Leibovitz, one of the world's most reputable portrait photographers, Marta's practice mainly focuses on people. With an award winning portfolio and a personable approach to work alongside the relationships she builds, Marta has been busy photographing people across the region over the past few years building a stunning portfolio of modern Black Country life.



PORTRAIT OF A PLACE

"I couldn't have predicted any of the work that was made. Some people wrote poems, some made animations, some people read other people's poems - by the nature of having many people working together, we were all responding to each other and that was a unique experience." Artist Sarah Taylor Silverwood was delighted and surprised by the wonderful outcomes of A Portrait Of A Place.

poem before the project Steve is now a published poet! "I sent my final poem to everyone to have a look at it, I was really proud! I've carried on writing poems since and even had one included in a local magazine!"

He recalls how the workshops helped him through a particularly tough time. "I'd actually got Covid at the time of the animation workshop, so I was just stuck in my room on my own and at that point, I was just ready to jump on anything that came along that would get me using my brain."

Sarah adopted a very DIY approach to the animation workshops, sharing techniques and processes that could be done easily at home with very little equipment. During his isolation due to Covid Steve spent many hours creating drawings by hand to animate his poem. A process he feels significantly bolstered his sense of self-worth.

"When I watched my video for the first time I just thought, 'Oh my god, I've created that', to me, it looked really professional and I just

thought I've written this poem that people might like, or at the very least relate to, and then there's this really good, professional video of it now too. I just went from sitting on my own in my bedroom to knocking out a pretty professional piece of work. All the support we got throughout was just amazing."

Sarah shares that her own creative practice was also changed through the delivery of A Portrait Of A Place:

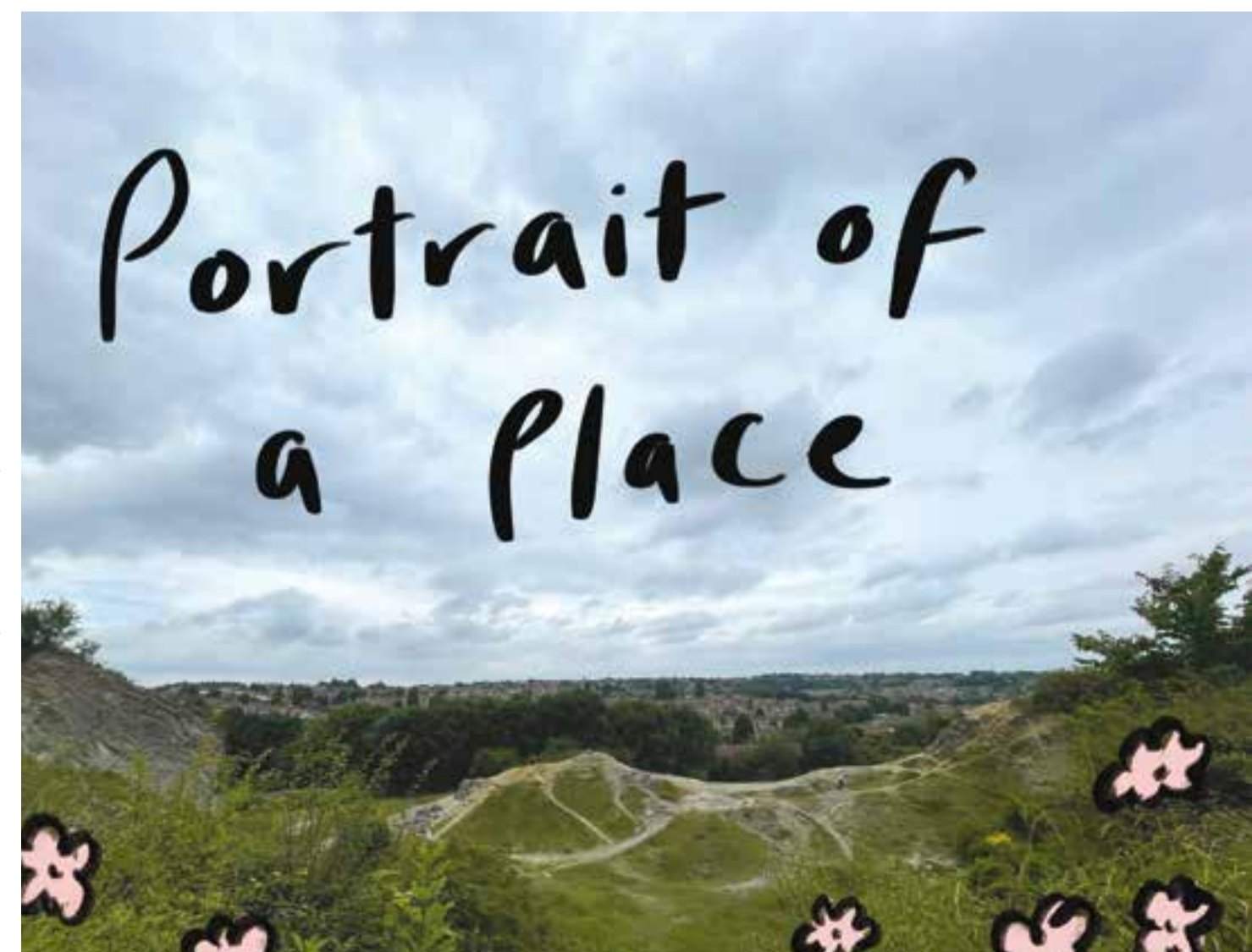
"I like to see things visually, and Nafeesa's process included getting us to cut up poems. This editing process made me think about writing differently. Also by slowing down and working through some very analogue animation setups, it allowed you to

keep surprising yourself with what was created."

The artists both learnt a lot about Dudley through the work of the participants:

"I thought we might focus on Dudley in the present day, but actually, the process of writing allowed us to talk about memories of the place. People brought up things like the feeling of being a child at the zoo or the walk to school."

The highlight of the project for Sarah was seeing the group reading their poetry aloud for the first time. The growing confidence of members of the group led to the culmination of A Portrait Of A Place which was an online community screening of the fantastic short film. On reflection, Sarah observes: "It was great to have the belief in our idea (from Dudley Creates), that we could make something so exciting when we weren't totally sure what would happen when we brought these different disciplines together!"



Be completely upfront about what you can do, what you're comfortable with, what you don't want to do, and you'll find that people find opportunities for you.

I was particularly interested in speaking to people because that's something I'm not used to doing. I was really looking to broaden my horizons and get used to socialising and speaking with people. And that was my goal and it's gone really well.

Be yourself... the more you relax and be yourself, the more you'll learn. And you will learn without even realising it.

For people who are thinking about volunteering I'd say just go for it with an open mind. It is a good taster session of what is expected of you.

The way to get the most out of volunteering is to... delve deep. Let yourself go. Don't feel you have to be a specific way.

I wanted to get into volunteering because after I left uni I was really missing being around creative people and being in a creative environment.



WHY VOLUNTEER

What do a freelance photographer and filmmaker, the front-of-house manager at a theatre, a touring company general manager, an art gallery visitor assistant supervisor, and a museum outreach manager all have in common?

Well, apart from the fact they are all making a living in the arts, culture, and heritage that they love here in the Black Country, they ALL began their career journeys by volunteering.

People often ask, 'What's the point of volunteering? What can it do for me? The list of job roles above gives you some idea of how it can kick-start careers, but how can it do that exactly?

It gives you the chance to learn new skills, find out what you are good at, and discover what you love, (it can help you discover what you DON'T like doing too. Always useful before you commit to a long-term career choice).

Fresh out of education? It will jazz up your CV and make it stand out from the crowd.

If you've had a career break it can get you back in touch with what's going on in the creative sector you want to work in, informing you about new skills you need to develop.

It helps you network. The next big opportunity might be found after a friendly chat with someone you would never have met going down a more conventional route. It's surprising who you meet volunteering.

It gives you a chance to share the skills you already have, but that you might not get to use in your day-to-day life or current job.

It's not just about careers either, it can lead to some great friendships and it's fun (mostly!)

Of course, it's not all 'wine and roses', but as someone who began their own creative career through volunteering, I think the positives outweigh the negatives by quite some way.

There are many ways you can volunteer in arts and culture in the Black Country, whether you want to do something regular and long-term or whether you'd prefer a one-off opportunity. Museums, art galleries, theatres, and festivals - all regularly look for volunteers. It might be stewarding an event or helping with digital marketing; perhaps they need a friendly face to welcome visitors or someone who will help catalogue a new collection. The opportunities are varied and come at all times of the year.

Right now, Creative Black Country is helping support volunteering in the creative sector with a pilot project, funded by the Volunteering Futures fund, that continues until March 2024. Already, volunteers have supported this year's *Wolverhampton Literature Festival*, gaining experience at *WCRFM* (Wolverhampton Community Radio), *Wolverhampton Art Gallery*, *Bantock House* and *Arena Theatre*.

The project is also helping *Wightwick Manor* and the *Stourbridge Glass Museum* make their volunteering opportunities more accessible to people who are deaf and hard of hearing, making their visitor experiences more accessible too.

Inspired? Check out the Volunteering Futures page on the CBC website, or email fiona@creativeblackcountry.co.uk.



We asked some of our volunteers and partner organisations to share their advice. You can see the 'Volunteer Stories' videos on our homepage at creativeblackcountry.co.uk.

I was hoping to meet new people, to get to know the creative industry that is available in the West Midlands and also gain experience and first hand knowledge of how to handle equipment... I'm happy to say that I've exceeded what I thought I was able to do.

Taking on volunteers allows organisations to share knowledge and experience with young creatives, giving them opportunities to engage in real life work which can then lead them moving into other volunteering opportunities or into paid employment in the industry.

It has helped me develop my skills in terms of teamwork and communicating with other people.

Don't be scared. Just show up and it can take you to opportunities that you aren't even aware of when you leave school or uni...

CBC EVENTS

Where can you go for circus skills fun, nature-inspired screen printing, live music, Japanese Hapa-Zome making and creative conversations?

CBC's Summer Social was in full inky, juggling, balancing, flower pressing swing as we invited a cohort of our current and past partners, creative commissioned projects and folks who are interested in making the Black Country a cultural hotspot to join us at The Rock Church in Walsall to share, connect and chat.

Make sure you join our mailing list and get on the list for our future events.



Creative Communities

CBC SUPPORT

If you have an idea for a creative project that involves people in your community we'd love to hear from you. Creative Communities is here to help co-create new work that is relevant to your community, and will take place right here in the Black Country.

It's up to you what you'd like to do. You can try out a new craft skill, set up a choir, or start a garden gallery with your neighbours. Perhaps you want to produce a set of how-to guides and virtual workshops, create a photography exhibition online, or start a creative writing and storytelling group - all the ideas come from you.

What matters is that you are involved in the design of the project, involved in making it happen, and that it reaches people who may not normally get the chance to take part in this kind of creative opportunity.

Get in touch with our Creative Advisors in your area:

Dudley – Laura Dicken

laura@creativeblackcountry.co.uk

Sandwell + Walsall – Richard Franks

richard@creativeblackcountry.co.uk

Wolverhampton – Nelson Douglas

nelson@creativeblackcountry.co.uk

All images on this page by Dee Patel except Puppet Safari (above) courtesy of System of Strings.



Tips from CBC's blog page

TIPS FROM THE ARTS COUNCIL

Did you know that the way you can apply for an Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grant is being updated?

During autumn '23 Arts Council England will be improving the application form and supporting guidance to make the fund more accessible and easier to complete for everyone.

We hosted a workshop recently and received some great tips from Arts Council England staff that will be useful for anyone interested in applying for a project grant.

You can read more at our blog page: creativeblackcountry.co.uk/blog/

Making the most of the Black Country through arts, culture and creativity

Creative Black Country (CBC) is a National Portfolio Organisation funded by Arts Council England through the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme to engage audiences in areas where evidence shows people are less likely to take part in publicly funded arts and culture.

CBC work with communities in **Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall** and **Wolverhampton** to explore and develop new creative projects with local people in the places where they live.

We hope that you have been inspired by the stories in this this edition of Bostin News. If you would like to know more about our projects, get involved or start something creative with your community then get in touch:

info@creativeblackcountry.co.uk

To find out more and join our mailing list visit creativeblackcountry.co.uk

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