

CREATE TO CONNECT

A CASE STUDY

Let's #CreateToConnect

At [64 Million Artists](#) we believe that everyone is creative, and that when we are creative it has a positive impact on our lives and the world around us. We run national creativity programmes by crowdsourcing fun, quick and accessible daily prompts that invite people to 'do, think and share' within a supportive online community.

COVID-19 presented sudden and unexpected challenges that many of us have never had to navigate before. Scary times often make us want to retreat but [our recent data](#) shows that when we create it can be an opening up for connection and can significantly improve our mental health and wellbeing. We have been working to support our growing community with these programmes, designed to keep us connected, curious and creative in uncertain times.

User led programming

In April, we launched a free, unfunded, two-week trial programme called '[Create to Connect](#).' With archives of creative challenges and the digital infrastructure in place, we were well placed to quickly mobilise and deliver a high quality, engaging experience for participants. Within a few days, 5365 people signed up to receive daily prompts via email. By May, we had 6665 sign ups, with thousands more accessing challenges via community connectors and online via social media.

The trial was an opportunity in which to spark conversations and gather feedback from the community around what would be helpful moving forwards. We surveyed participants, ran Twitter polls, and set up conversations with partners around what they were looking to offer, how we could support each other and how we could ensure we were reaching and including offline and vulnerable audiences. 78 community leaders (notably mental health and wellbeing groups, councils, care homes, schools, libraries and hospitals) emailed us to request further information after this survey.

In this time we applied for and received emergency ACE funding, enabling us to commit to the next steps for the programme.

70%

Showed interest in downloading resource packs to help them deliver the challenges in a range of settings

70%

Showed interest in joining volunteer-led Whatsapp groups to share their challenges with others

COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY



The two week trial paved the way for a month long, co-curated programme throughout May made with, by and for the 64 Million Artists community. 31 partners around the UK set creative challenges inspired by their work and their service users or beneficiaries. Partners included representation from across the public, social care and cultural sectors such as schools, libraries, care homes, theatres, museums, charities and youth groups.

As we entered lockdown, there was a surge of online activity and comment. It felt important not to rush to create something 'new,' rather to curate something collaborative, grounded in our clinical research and in the experiences of our partners. Several of our partners were already delivering creative interventions for wellbeing and connection. For example, YoungMinds were running a blog series on creating your own 'self soothe' box. Their challenge was inspired by this - encouraging participants to create their own box alongside the young people YoungMinds work with. The Shpresa Programme, a youth club for Albanian students in London, set us a challenge to say 'Thank you' to someone in a different language, inspired by their gratitude programme with their young people.

Some partners chose to work with their beneficiaries to create their challenges. For example, Contact Manchester put out a call to their young artists, London Youth designed their challenge in (Zoom) session with young people. Often, partners animated their challenges with live social streams and Zoom workshops.

Some challenges invited participants to contribute to a collective artwork. For example, It's Not Your Birthday, But... challenged us to create a 'Mundane Memoir' - a 10*10 piece of paper that captured life in lockdown. They collected hundreds of responses that will form a tapestry-style snapshot of our different experiences, to be hung in libraries post lockdown.

You can find all of the challenges [here](#).

"AS A RESULT OF BEING PART OF THIS, WE HAD A SURGE OF VOLUNTEERS SIGN-UP TO ONE OF OUR INITIATIVES, MEANING WE COULD LINK THEM UP WITH CARE HOMES TO SHARE MESSAGES OF SUPPORT, ARTWORK AND POEMS. THEREFORE A GREAT DEAL OF PEOPLE BENEFITTED INDIRECTLY AS WELL AS THOSE WHO RECEIVED POSTCARDS CREATED FOR OUR DAY'S CHALLENGE."

Arts in Care Homes

CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Distributed facilitation

We use a distributed facilitation model in all of our work, working with community connectors to help them work with their own groups and communities to ensure relevance and sustainability. We created tailored distribution packs, giving community leaders, schools and families the resources to activate accessible creativity and local connections. These were sent to those that requested it, and made available for free download on our website. As well as all of the challenges ahead of time it contained tips for facilitating a simple creative session online, and methods for offline distribution. It remains an active resource for leaders to swap around, adapt, edit, play with and use in a way that works for them and their communities.

We coordinated 5 volunteer-led Whatsapp groups alongside the programme that invited new groups to share their challenge responses and lockdown experiences. Feedback suggests that this was a great way to connect and share with new friends, adding a quality to the experience that felt exciting and rewarding.

Online sharing

The online community that builds up around challenge programmes is significant. There are nearly 5000 members of our chatty Facebook group, who hit the 'like' button 24,691 times on others #CreateToConnect posts over May. The group, as well as our Twitter and Instagram feed, is a source of comfort and creative inspiration to many, who find ways to support and encourage each other with the challenges. Participants might use challenges to explore and share adverse experiences such as bereavement, chronic conditions, disability or poor mental health. The boost in wellbeing is often attributed to the mindful act of completing a daily challenge, a sense of accomplishment, pride and surprise when completing or observing challenges within a supportive community.

"IT WAS IN THE LITTLE THINGS - "OH YOU FEEL THAT TOO" "I HAD THAT" - EVEN "SNAP" WHEN RESULTS TURNED OUT SIMILAR...HAVING A FOCUS AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE CREATIVE EVERYDAY REALLY HELPED ME. I ALSO FOUND SOME OF THE CHALLENGES MORE DIFFICULT AND LEARNT THAT I CAN DO ANYTHING, SO HAS IMPROVED MY SELF ESTEEM SOMEWHAT."

Whatsapp group member

Online meets offline

Online is also where we get to hear about the amazing things that the challenges inspire offline. Throughout May, we heard about Youth group leaders translating the challenges for ESOL participants. Teachers sent notebooks, pens, glue and magazines to students alongside printed challenge PDF's. Coordinators pinned up challenge posters in hospital wards, in prisons, in care homes. One participant called Fran started this bus stop gallery at the beginning of May. Everyday she posted the challenges up, and encouraged people to take away ideas and leave their own contributions.

In total there were 6665 sign ups, with further reach estimated via the packs, our distribution partners, our website for creative activities dothinkshare.com, and our social media feeds. 99.3% of those surveyed reported a positive impact on their wellbeing, and that it had inspired their creativity.



“RECEIVING THE DAILY EMAILS, IDEAS AND INFORMATION ABOUT ARTS ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS PROVIDED A LINK TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD DURING LOCKDOWN”

Challenge participant