



## LONG COVID CREATIVE SUPPORT PROGRAMME

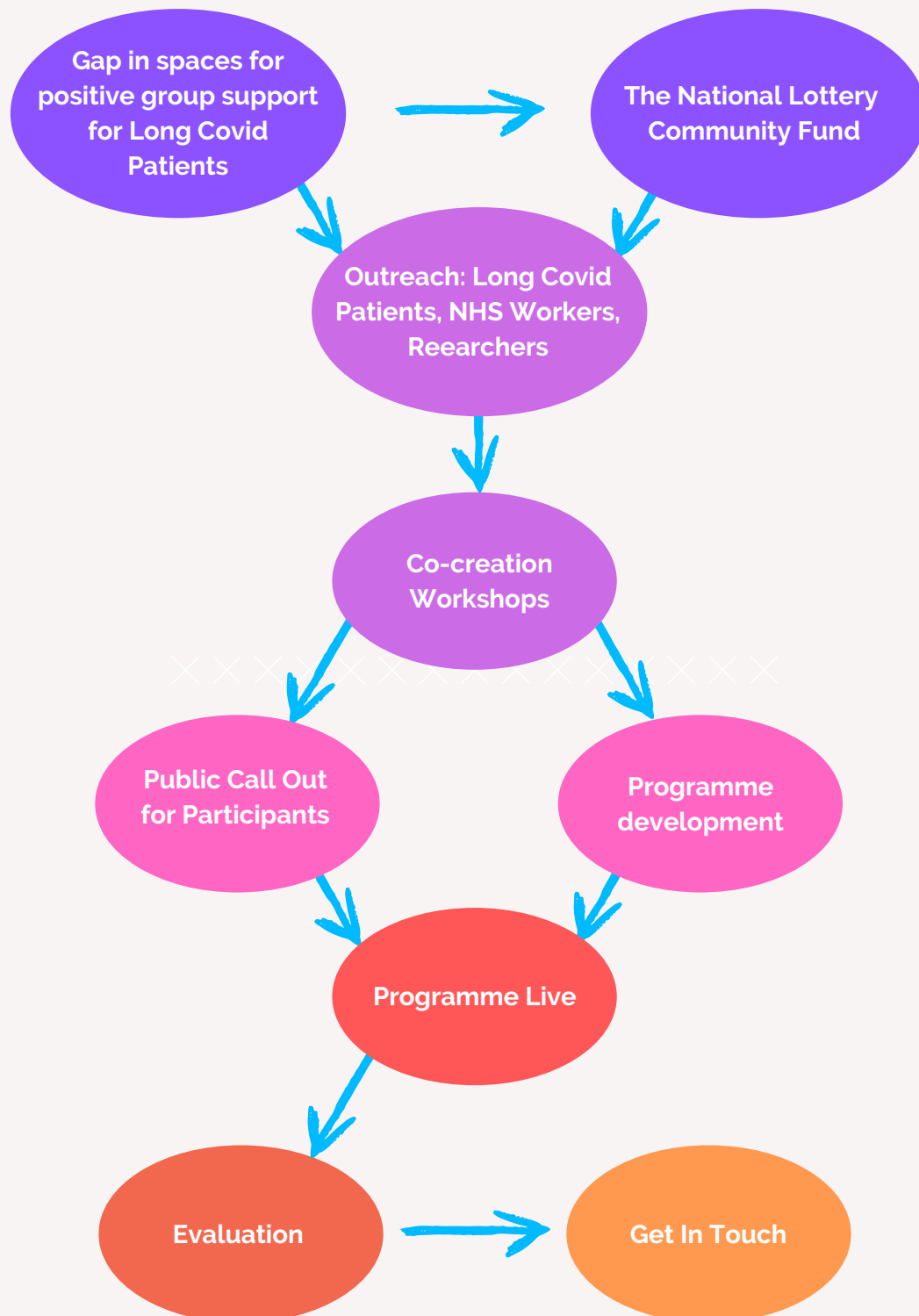
### **INTRODUCTION**

Connect to Create is a 28 day creative support programme for those with ongoing symptoms and long term effects of Covid-19.

In 2020 our CEO, Jo Hunter, experienced 6 months of chronic fatigue, chest pain and breathlessness as a result of Covid-19, and after consulting with other Long Covid patients through Facebook groups found that there was a gap in spaces set up for positive group support. With funding received from The National Lottery Community Fund, we set up this pilot online support programme for those with Long Covid to connect through creativity and provide a space for honest reflections and positive encouragement in a safe, relaxed environment.

This report demonstrates the structure and explores the impact of the pilot programme, and acts as an invitation to the reader to reflect on the potential in creative participation, and consider how you could work with 64 Million Artists to support Long Covid patients in your environment.

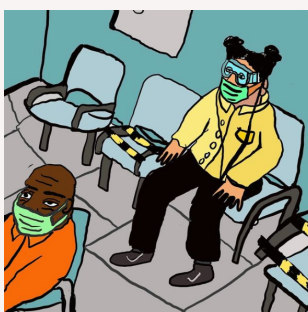
# PROJECT STRUCTURE



## OUR APPROACH

At 64 Million Artists we champion everyday creativity and believe that when we use this creativity we can make positive changes in our lives and the world around us. We work with schools, universities, cities, workplaces, cultural institutions and health and government bodies. The key areas we work in are; co-creation, policy & research and challenge programmes; championing cultural democracy and exploring the links between creativity and wellbeing within each avenue. We have previously undertaken successful clinical research with UCL to show a link between creative support groups and positive impacts on mental health.

---



Connect to Create was co-designed with Monique Jackson, artist, Long Covid advocate and creator of the 'Still Ill Corona Diary' - a visual journal of Monique's experience falling ill with Covid 19 in March 2020 and ongoing symptoms. Find out more about Monique's work [here](#).



## OUR APPROACH

Our challenge programmes are made for, with and by the different communities we work with. Approaching this pilot programme, we had conversations with Long Covid patients and health researchers, consulting on symptoms, levels of energy and activities they could manage. To further identify needs and processes that would build a programme beneficial to the community, we set up a series of co-creation workshops with Long Covid Patients working within the NHS and researchers. These workshops were led by Monique Jackson and through creative exercises and discussion we explored how participants might like to connect and take part in a creative support programme.

### **KEY THEMES FROM THE CO-CREATION SESSIONS:**

Sharing  
to Heal

Gentle  
Stimulation

New  
Perspectives

Paying attention  
to the body

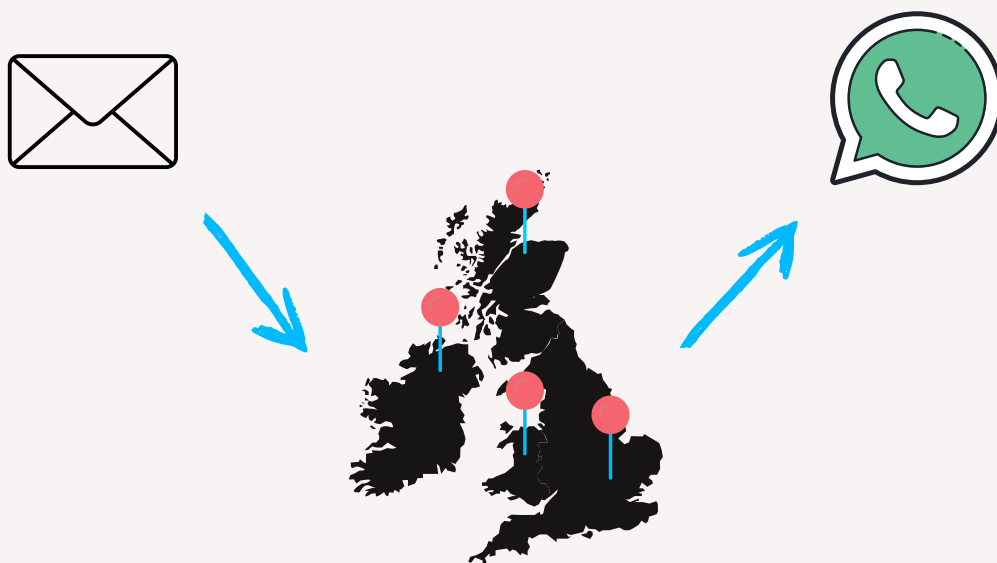


CONNECT  
TO CREATE



## THE PROGRAMME

Drawing on these themes we developed the framework of Connect to Create - taking shape as a 28 day support programme with **groups set up via WhatsApp as a place to connect through creativity**. A platform for participants to make positive points of connection, to boost mood and strengthen resilience.



**100 people across the UK** (and a few beyond) signed up via a public call out. 73 were allocated to new WhatsApp groups with 8 - 10 participants in each, with some specifically for NHS staff. 13 signed up to take part in existing WhatsApp support groups and 15 took part individually. **Over the 28 day period a creative prompt was released each day**, sent via email to each participant, with the choice to share their responses and connect in the WhatsApp groups that had been set up in.



## THE PROGRAMME

Curated by Monique Jackson and Jo Hunter, the prompts were informed by the themes that arose in the co-creation sessions. Simple, accessible and gentle creative activities that could be done within 5 - 10 minutes. Participants were encouraged to spend as little or as long as they liked doing, thinking and sharing, creating at a pace that worked for them.



### Example Activity by Monique Jackson

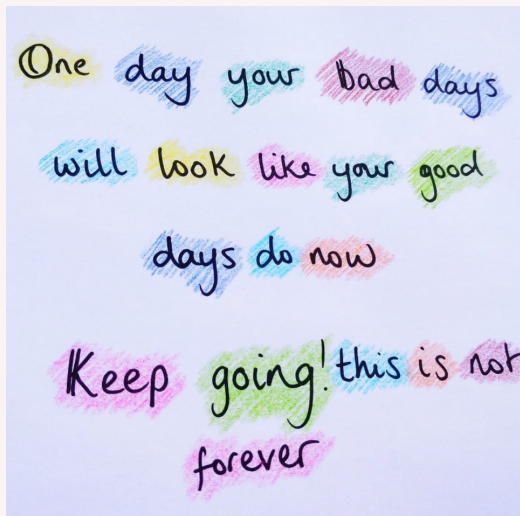
**Where can you find examples of nature or the natural world near you? Can you hear birdsong? Can you feel a breeze through your window?**

**Once you have decided on your example, capture what you find. You could take a photo, a sound recording or draw the scene - then write a sentence about how you feel connected with nature.**

Throughout the 28 days we remained open to feedback from participants and were able to shape the programme to changing needs. Alongside the creative activities we ran Introductory and closing Zoom sessions. A space for those that were able to join to connect in a larger group, share experiences and reflect on their journey with the programme and its impacts.



# PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

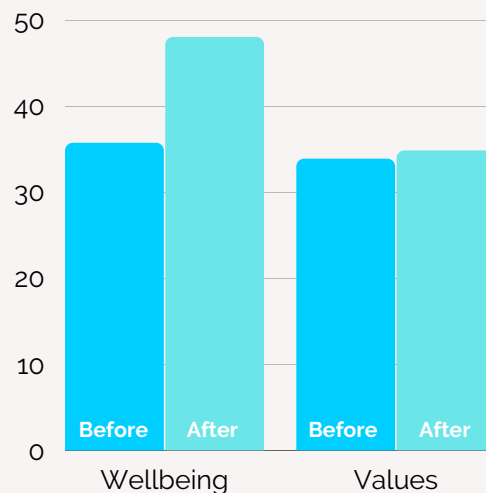


CONNECT  
TO CREATE

## IMPACT

To measure the impact of Connect to Create, a questionnaire was completed by participants both before and after the programme. The questionnaire included the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and the Valuing Questionnaire, designed to measure how consistently participants have been living with self-determined values.

Results show us that **wellbeing improved** after taking part in the programme and values remained the same, see graph below.



Feedback from participants in our experience survey covered:

- **Not feeling alone**
- **Connecting to others with Long Covid**
- **Feeling part of something and sense of achievement**
- **Being creative without judgement or pressure**
- **Mindfulness & Reflection**



## IMPACT

"Calming.  
Purpose.  
Proud of self."

"When you can't travel much outside your house, it's really nice to be able to find connection and to channel creativity. For me, it added **a sense of achievement to my day and gave me permission to do something for myself that was just about fun or relaxation.** I enjoyed how relatable others' creations were to my own Long Covid experience. Even **when I didn't have the energy to complete a task, I'd spend time thinking of the possibilities, which was uplifting in itself.**"

"When I took part I knew that others understood what I was going through... I tried a lot of different activities, some things I had not known I would enjoy and surprised myself when I did try it. **When I took part I felt well supported. I could share how I was feeling without being judged.**"

"Thank you for giving me something to look forward to and taking the brain work out of **finding ways to process through creativity.** It's helped!"

CONNECT  
TO CREATE

## NEXT STEPS

With the feedback and learnings from this programme, we hope to roll out the programme again in the future to wider groups across the UK.

**Would you like to run a Long Covid Support Programme in your community or workplace? We'd love to hear from you.**

**Get in touch at [yashoda@64millionartists.com](mailto:yashoda@64millionartists.com)**

.....

Special thanks to Monique Jackson, Professor Trudie Chandler of Kings College London and Dr Sharon Taylor of Imperial College London.

Connect to Create: Long Covid Creative Support Programme was supported by The National Lottery Community Fund.