

The Cultural Spring



Annual Review

April 2020 - March 2021



Adapting Our Activities

OUR ambitious plans for 2020-2021, the first year of Phase Three of The Cultural Spring, were drawn up before the Covid pandemic changed the world.

Restrictions imposed because of the pandemic meant we could not deliver our programmes, workshops and activities in the way we'd done during the previous six years.

But we were determined to continue with our mission of increasing the number of people taking part in arts activities in Sunderland and South Tyneside. We'd just have to do it differently!

So, with the help of our artists, the support of valued community champions and stakeholders, and the encouragement of our core partners and steering group, we moved the vast majority of our activity online and came up with new ways of communicating and engaging with audiences.

Our first commission of 2020 and of Phase Three, Staying Connected, was a way of exploring how we could do that.



Emma Horsman and Emma Scarr delivering craft packs

People from our communities were involved in choosing five artists who would find new ways of connecting people to arts and culture. Our artists and their research and development projects were:

- Gary Nicholson - The Super Human Art Project. This project, aimed specifically at disabled participants, asked people to create a self-portrait of themselves as a Super Hero, with special powers and a suitable name.
- Claire Finlay - Claire created craft kits and dropped them off to individuals. She then delivered creative craft workshops via a digital platform.
- Katy Weir - An Anthem for Lives Less Ordinary. This was a celebration of Sunderland, part epic poem, part spoken word, part song and part Zoom celebration.
- Corinne Kilvington – Theatre Space North East's Corinne ran a range of online theatre skills workshops.
- Carol Cooke – This project involves South Shields writer and broadcaster Carol creating an archive of lockdown writing, recordings, photos, videos and sounds.

Because people could complete them in their own homes, art activity craft packs became a staple of our 2020-21 programme and we were financially supported by partners such as Sunderland Council and South Tyneside Council in their provision.

Nine artists or creative companies produced several thousand art activity packs on our behalf, all of which were brilliant and thoroughly enjoyed by recipients. Once made, we worked with community organisations such as youth groups, church groups and housing organisations to distribute the packs. These included Ryhope CA, Youth Almighty, Doxford's Box Project, gentoo, Hebburn Helps, South Tyneside Homes, Age Concern Tyneside South (AC-TS), The Sue Hedley Nursery School, Clegwell and Hartleyburn CA.



Emma Horsman delivers packs to the Box Youth Project in Doxford

As a carer I need an outlet and, for me, crafting is it. The craft is also easy enough for my relative with dementia to join in too. I pre-cut all the scenery, so they were able to piece some bits together to make their own cards.

While work on commissioning, creating, distributing and delivering our packs continued throughout the year, we worked with artists on other projects.

In Ryhope, for instance, we are working with writer and illustrator Liz Million and Ryhope Community Centre on a booklet about life in the village during lockdown. The project was supported by Sunderland City Council's East Area Committee and Arts Council England, and the booklet included residents' poems, drawings and stories.

We partnered with Sunderland Libraries and the city council to produce and promote two online storytime and arts activity sessions – hosting videos on our Facebook page which reached hundreds of people.

Meanwhile, we adapted our popular Your Art programme to look for ways to reach people who were particularly isolated because of the Covid crisis. Our Your Art programmes work with community groups to help them organise or lead arts activity in the areas. We appointed Your Art Community Connectors to work with three organisations to develop their ideas. Writer Carol Cooke worked with Regeneration North East to develop their Butterfly Project. Carol also worked with Sunderland MIND on the creation of a youth drama group, while Jackie Nixon helped the Just Let Your Soul Grow project at Thompson Park Community Garden in Sunderland. Jackie also worked with Into the Spotlight, a community music group who brought cheer to residential and care homes by socially-distanced performances, often from car parks.

Our Phase 3 wards are Hebburn North, Hebburn South and Primrose in South Tyneside and Ryhope, Doxford and Silksworth in Sunderland. However, because much of our activity and programmes have gone online, we have been working more fully across both areas during the last year.



In November last year we launched a free online winter workshop programme which featured creative writing, singing and crafts. We extended the programme in January with the addition of further online workshops, again with support from Sunderland City Council's East Area Committee and Arts Council England. The free workshops were run with artist Pui Lee (Awesome Artists), We Make Culture (adult songwriting sessions), artist Sue Loughlin (animal face portraits); Curiosity Creative (podcasting) and tutor Sinead Livingston (Folking Around the World).

Our Spring/Summer programme of workshops was launched at the end of March 2021 and included some new activities for participants, alongside some tried and tested sessions. These new workshops introduced salt dough making, creating insect hotels and 'plabric' making workshops.

Like the seasonal programmes that had gone before it, our Spring/Summer programme was online, run via Zoom calls. However, we were conscious that many people living in Sunderland and South Tyneside do not have access to the internet.

So at the beginning of 2021 we introduced a series of workshops for those keen to take part in arts activity, but for whatever reason couldn't access our online programmes.

In Sunderland this 'non-digital' activity included a postal art project run by Kerry Cook, from The Art Room Sunderland, and Front Street Songs, a socially-distanced performance project run by Laura Brewis at We Make Culture.

In South Tyneside artist Beth J. Ross also ran a project based on postcard exchange.



Conscious that Covid had increased feelings of loneliness and isolation, we joined other Creative People and Places projects in launching a programme aimed at connecting people and communities. We worked with partners and artists to deliver a series of free workshops to keep people busy and combat any feelings of loneliness or isolation. The aim of our programme was to:

- Help people feel more connected
- Reduce social isolation
- Bring people together



Gary Nicholson and Kathryn Barnett from Regeneration North East with some of their activity packs

Bringing people together was also the theme of another new idea for 2020 – our Community Conversations. These are monthly hour-long sessions in which artists, creative organisations and community groups get the chance to talk to an audience about a specific activity or event. Our guest speakers have so far included Ilina Mitchell of Wunderbar who spoke about the Opera Helps project, Diane Gray, of Hive Radio who spoke about the Radio Storytellers Group and Doorstep Poet Rowan McCabe.

Rowan also delivered a series of popular workshops, supported by South Tyneside Libraries and The Word, in order to prove his theory that anyone can write a poem.

New Faces

During the past year, our former University of Sunderland intern Iam Burn joined us as our Data and Admin co-ordinator, while Si Beckwith, a popular regular on the region's comedy scene, joined us as our new Audience Development and Engagement Officer.



Iam Burn



Si Beckwith

In the meantime, two Sunderland College students, Troy Pashley, 17, and Bethany Potter, 17, began year-long placements with us. Their roles are to promote the project across Sunderland and South Tyneside, particularly among younger people.

Charitable Status

In September 2020, The Cultural Spring was granted charitable status, which will enable us to look for wider funding to support our work.

The Future

We hope to resume face-to-face workshops and activity at local venues in our communities as soon as it safe to do so. We also hope to resume our Go and See opportunities for people living within our wards to go out and see work in the local area and further afield. In the meantime, we'll be continuing to offer our online sessions and craft packs.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

The Cultural Spring is part of Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme (CPP). Creative People and Places 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. ACE has 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 and 86% of people who participate in CPP weren't previously engaging regularly with arts and culture.

We work in Sunderland and South Tyneside and our core partners are University of Sunderland, The Customs House, Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust, Sangini, a women's health organisation which operates in both boroughs and The Cultural Spring Charity, which joined in January 2021.

Keep In Touch

We publish a monthly newsletter. If you would like to receive a copy, email us at info@theculturalspring.org.uk.

You can also keep up to date with what we're doing through our social media channels:

Twitter: [@Cultural_Spring](https://twitter.com/Cultural_Spring)

Facebook: facebook.com/culturalspring

Instagram: [@theculturalspring](https://www.instagram.com/theculturalspring)

Or through our website www.theculturalspring.org.uk



Artists we've worked with 2020-2021

Carol Cooke
Katy Weir
Corinne Kilvington
Claire Finlay
Regeneration NE CIC
Williby Rocs
Katie Taylor
The Singing Elf
Kath Price
ARTventurers
Angela Reed
Kerry Cook / The Art Room Sunderland
Amanda Quinn
Sinead Livingstone
Eleanor Matthews
Sue Loughlin
Pui Lee
Sunderland Library Services
James Whitman
Pauline Taylor
Curiosity Creative (Alex Henry & Dominic Smith)
Timothy and Austin
Beth J Ross
We Make Culture
Jo Howell
Kirsten Luckins
Catherine Scott
Rowan McCabe

Case Studies

Gary Nicholson, Director, Regeneration North East, a disability-led Community Interest Company using art to support people's mental and physical well-being.

I've created a couple of projects with The Cultural Spring and thoroughly enjoyed them both.

The first piece was The Super Human Art Project where we worked with disabled people in Sunderland and South Tyneside to produce self-portraits with super human qualities.

Super Humans was an online project, funded through a Cultural Spring #StayConnected research and development commission and ran from spring to early summer 2020. The project culminated in an online art exhibition.

The people at Cultural Spring were a pleasure to work with, and we then went on to work on our Butterfly Project, which was funded through The Cultural Spring's popular Your Art programme. For this second project, we asked participants to create butterflies, using different arts and crafts techniques. Again, the project culminated in a virtual exhibition, which started in October 2020.

Both projects had great feedback and were important ways for people to keep in touch and engaged during lockdown. People with disabilities, particularly those who were shielding, felt particularly isolated during the lockdowns and the projects were a way of people keeping in touch and feeling connected.

It was lovely to see them sharing images, encouraging and helping each other.

The impact on me as an artist was also really positive – keeping me busy and providing paid work.

I'm now working on another project with The Cultural Spring, providing colouring books for those who are still feeling isolated.

I've found The Cultural Spring a great organisation to work with and all of the projects interesting and engaging.



Gary Nicholson from Regeneration North East



Angela Reed's craft packs

Shelley Fowler, a Youth and Community Worker at Youth Almighty Project (YAP), which works in Silksworth, Farringdon, Barnes and Plains Farm in Sunderland.

YAP manages four buildings across the West Area of Sunderland, providing activities and services for the whole community, five days a week as well as providing evening youth provision for young people six nights a week.

Before lockdown we'd been working with several groups on projects to reduce social isolation. This work became more important when the lockdowns began in March 2020.

We've been working with The Cultural Spring on distributing some of their arts activity packs among young people, and others, we work with. They're a way of us connecting with them, and them engaging in activity.

The embroidery packs went down very well and we had requests for more packs. The planter packs were also very popular.

The packs helped keeping people busy during a difficult time and also helped people feel connected with others.

We also worked with The Cultural Spring and the singer Kayley Cares – she performed at our online women's group on Thursdays and went down very well, with a lot of people joining in.

We have a good working relationship with The Cultural Spring and are already planning future projects with them.

* The Cultural Spring has worked with local artists to produce thousands of arts activity packs since the lockdowns began – Youth Almighty is one of the organisations who've helped us distribute the packs. Other community groups who've helped include Blue Watch Youth Group, Ryhope Community Centre, CHANCE, Young Asian Voices, Gentoo, The Box Youth Project, City Life Church, Hebburn Helps, South Tyneside Homes, Age Concern Tyneside South (AC-TS), The Sue Hedley Nursery School, Clegwell and Hartleyburn CA.

John Edwards, a Scout leader who worked in finance before he retired. He has participated in two Cultural Spring projects.

I've been on a couple of Cultural Spring workshop programmes – Folking Around the World and Rowan McCabe's poetry project – and I've also attended a Community Conversation.

I'd seen Folking Around the World mentioned on Facebook so attended the online sessions and really enjoyed them. A friend who works for Sunderland Culture was speaking at a Community Conversation so I attended that event and it was there I heard about Rowan's poetry course.

I wasn't a poetry fan at all, but thought it sounded interesting and thought 'why not have a go at it?'

To be honest, I still wasn't sure if it was for me after a couple of sessions but I decided to carry on, and I'm so pleased that I did.

The course finished after seven weeks, but I've continued to write and I took part in the follow-up Ten Minutes To evening with Rowan and some of the other participants. I was fourth out of five people who read out our work.

I was very pleasantly surprised at the positive feedback I received afterwards. A lot of my family had logged into the session – relations living in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Portugal – and my daughter who lives in the next street.

My cousin helps out at a community radio station and he asked me to read out my poem at a poetry corner section in a show.

My enjoyment has taken me by surprise – a couple of weeks into Rowan's course and I was listening to what other people had written and thought I'd never reach their standard. Eventually I got into the swing of it and had some lovely feedback from others in the sessions.

Rowan is such a good tutor. He's relaxed, friendly and very encouraging. He always has something positive to say.

I really enjoyed Folking Around the World too. It was interesting finding out about other cultures through song, although some were difficult to learn because of the languages.

I've been very reluctant to go out during lockdown so the Cultural Spring workshops and sessions have been important to me. They were a great way of connecting to people.

I was always more mathematical at school, so the arts weren't an interest of mine, but now I'm writing poetry and visiting The Cultural Spring website to see what else I can try.

I've already signed up for the second round of Folking Around the World.



"I'VE BECOME QUITE ISOLATED DURING LOCKDOWN AS I'M PROTECTING A VULNERABLE RELATIVE WHO LIVES WITH ME. THE WORKSHOPS ARE LOVELY AS I GET TO INTERACT WITH OTHER LIKE MINDED PEOPLE AS WELL AS LEARNING NEW CRAFTS. THANK YOU SO MUCH X"

 /CULTURALSPRING
 @THECULTURALSPRING
 @CULTURAL_SPRING



APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021



4,000
Participants

That is 80 single double decker buses (or holes in Blackburn, Lancashire according to The Beatles).



"I would just like to say that The Cultural Spring were excellent in all aspects."

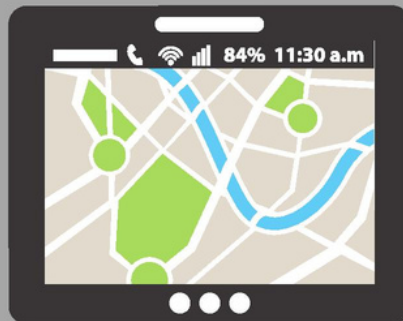
Participants

41% of participants had never taken part in an activity with The Cultural Spring before.



Areas

We had the same number of participants from South Tyneside and Sunderland - a 50/50 split.



"There is no pressure to achieve beyond what you are capable of and no pressure to share your work. Encouragement and support all the way through."



99% of participants said they would recommend our activities to other people.

"Being creative is great therapy, as it channels your brain and mind off yourself, and the present circumstances (COVID-19) and on to the creative activity, which stops the tension and anxiety from taking over your life."