



c.
curious
minds

FROM CURIOUS IN A CRISIS TO CURIOUS IN RECOVERY

INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

This report tells the story of how Curious Minds responded to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We reflect on how we repurposed our resources as quickly as we could to respond to the crisis facing the cultural education workforce.

It has been a time of learning and, despite the challenges, of discovering new ways to define what it means to be a Sector Support Organisation (SSO).

It has also been a period in which the value of the cultural education workforce has been brought into sharper focus, along with its vulnerabilities.

Curious Minds is grateful to all the funders whose generosity and understanding enabled us to respond to the developing circumstances with flexibility, creativity and curiosity.



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

Bridge Organisation
Working with Arts Council England
to connect young people with great
art and culture

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OUR RESPONSE: A TIMELINE

MARCH

APRIL

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

- Launched our '**Bridging the Gap**' (BtG) bursary scheme.
- Began intelligence gathering.

- Allocated bursaries through BtG. Supported Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Odd Arts and a Rochdale collaborative to send Creative Kits to children and young people.

- Led a series of online conversations exploring how we can deliver **socially distanced arts subjects**.
- Delivered a programme of free online professional development **webinars** for the wider cultural education workforce – bringing in multi-sector expertise and advice via expert guest presenters.

- Launched Bubble Up. Commissions were awarded to artists and community groups to form doorstep delivery partnerships in five neighbourhoods.
- Worked in partnership with Arts Council England and Local Cultural Education Partnerships to deliver 'Let's Create' kits across nine areas.

- 170 11 year olds joined Bubble Up clubs where they live.

BRIDGING THE GAP

– RAPID RESPONSE BURSARIES

OUR APPROACH

Our immediate priority, as the region's sector support organisation, was to ensure that the cultural education sector should be able to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis in as strong a position as possible. It was immediately apparent that some national-level initiatives would prove either inaccessible or arrive too late for many grassroots and freelance workers. 'Bridging the Gap' was our first response.

We offered bursaries to freelancers and small or community-based arts organisations outside the Arts Council England National Portfolio. This money aimed to allow those in the cultural education community the space for their own development, and a small financial incentive that 'bridged the gap' between crisis point and the receipt of any emergency grants or funding.

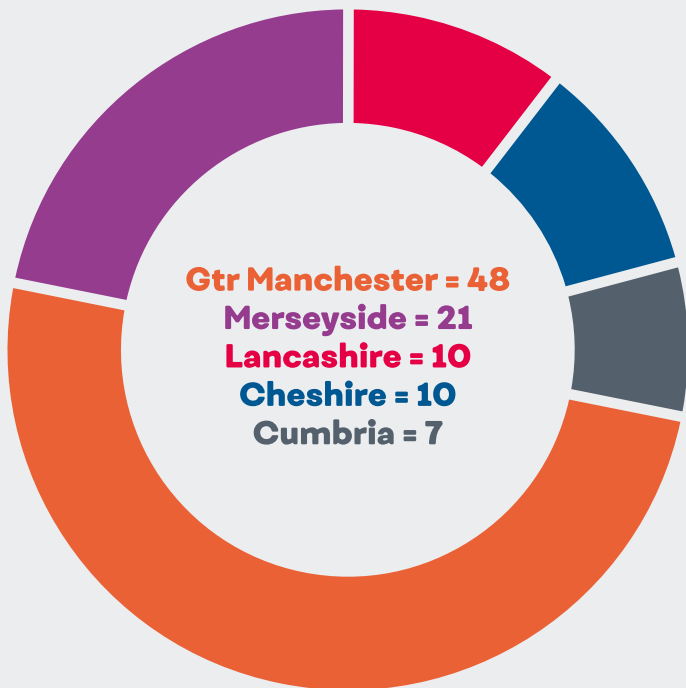
We provided every successful applicant with a 'coach' to support them and curated an online catalogue of free continuing professional development and learning (CDPL) opportunities.

Thanks to the generous support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation we were able to rapidly allocate 96 Bridging the Gap Bursaries to support the cultural education workforce.

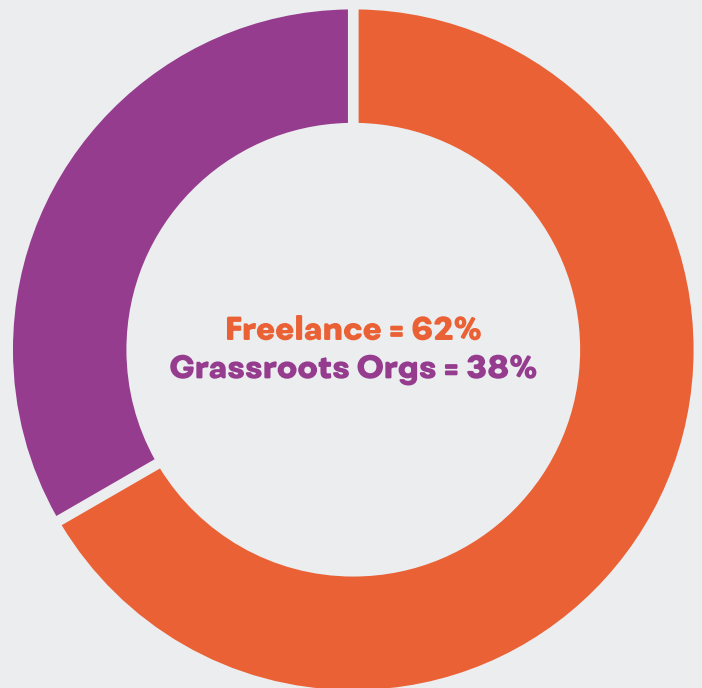
£100,000

ALLOCATED TO **96** APPLICANTS

OVER **170** APPLICATIONS
ON THE VERY FIRST DAY



**Regional Spread Of BtG
Bursaries & Support**



**Distribution Of BtG
Bursaries & Support**

£80K OF ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND &
£20K OF PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION
FUNDING

CASE STUDY:

BRIDGING THE GAP

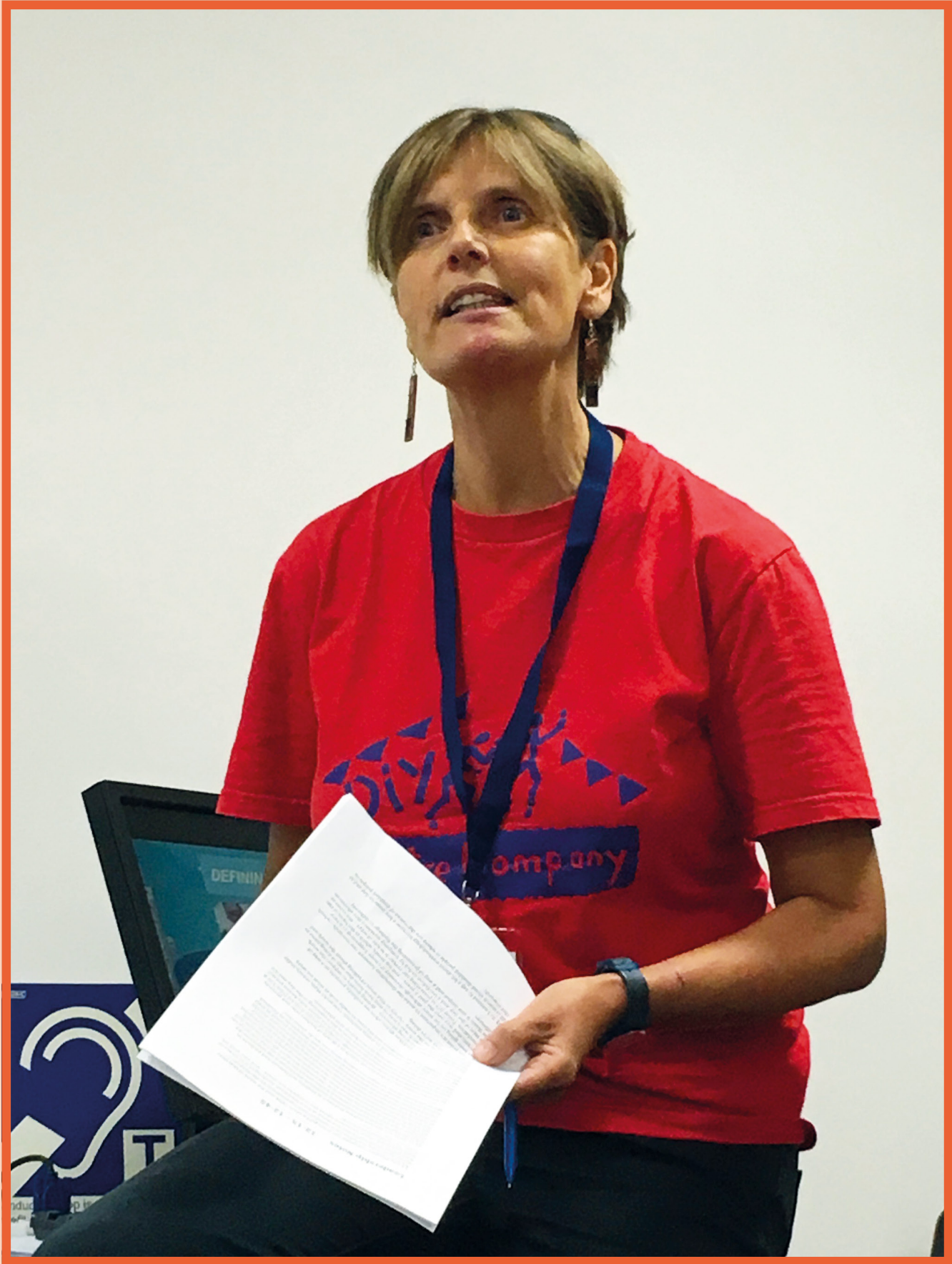
DIY Theatre, in Salford, is an established Learning Disability Theatre Company that delivers highly valued work with both young people and adults. Director, Sue Caudle, explained that DIY's funding is predominantly linked to project delivery.

So when the Emergency Lockdown was announced, Sue needed to quickly pivot her operating model. She began renegotiating with funders to deliver sessions online and to send resource packs through the post. With earned income unavailable,

covering the immediate cost of overheads was a big challenge. The Bridging the Gap bursary cash arrived quickly and relieved some anxiety whilst Sue was looking into other funding options.

She was clear that she wanted to use the time the bursary afforded to develop the skills she would need for this new form of online engagement, as well as to work out strategies for how to deliver in future. In particular, she was keen to talk to other drama or theatre providers to find out how they were adapting.

As a result of conversations with her Curious Minds CPDL coach Emma, the idea to convene art-form specific online discussion groups was developed. This led to the series of sessions 'Delivering the Arts in a Socially Distanced World'.



“The bursary... allowed us to develop ourselves in discovering new ways of working which, in turn, meant the work we have done since the beginning of the pandemic has been of better quality and has reached more young people and families.”

Clem, BtG Bursary Recipient

“The bursary afforded me a moment to take a breath. I’ve been able to invest in CPD that will stand me in good stead moving forwards and will impact and shape my future projects. Thank you.”

Lisa, BtG Bursary Recipient

ADVOCACY & INTELLIGENCE SHARING

OUR APPROACH

Our active dialogue with freelance practitioners and grassroots organisations meant we were able to gather evidence of need, at speed, for submission to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Parliamentary Committee's inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors. We were also able to share this intelligence with Arts Council England, which was at that time formulating its own emergency response. Curious Minds' CEO, Derri Burdon, also contributed to high-level roundtable discussions, making the case for 'root-to-tip' support to protect the arts education ecosystem.

In September 2020, Curious Minds collaborated with other organisations in

400
ATTENDEES
ACROSS THE
SIX 'SOCIALLY
DISTANCED
ARTS' SESSIONS

the National Bridge Network to survey school leaders. This research provided a snapshot of the threats and opportunities that face the cultural education sector in the coming academic year.

We also hosted a series of art-form specific facilitated online sessions, at which both education and arts professionals discussed how meaningful learning and engagement can be delivered in a 'socially distanced' way.

“I have found the opportunity to discuss [these] issues rewarding. As a small organisation/ individual worker, it can be difficult to find appropriate forums or networks, which offer support.”
Discussion Event Attendee



LINKS TO OUR LEARNING & INTELLIGENCE

**CURIOUS MINDS .ORG; A MESSAGE FROM
THE GRASS ROOTS**

**CURIOUS MINDS .ORG; NATIONAL
SCHOOLS SURVEY FINDINGS**

CURIOUS MINDS .ORG; RESOURCES

CURIOUS IN A CRISIS CPD WEBINARS

OUR APPROACH

Curious Minds listened to the cultural education workforce as they told us about the gaps in their skills and knowledge that threatened their survival in the new world of socially-distanced delivery.

We reached out to those on furlough from larger organisations. We also commissioned partners who we knew had particular expertise that many would find valuable.

Our volunteers brought expertise from their time working for employers across a wide and varied range of sectors. These included:

- Bruntwood;
- The RSA;
- The Lowry Theatre;
- Counterculture;
- Events Northern; and
- TiPP

With their help, we were able to deliver a range of online and free professional development webinars.

8 WEBINARS ATTENDED BY 276 PROFESSIONALS

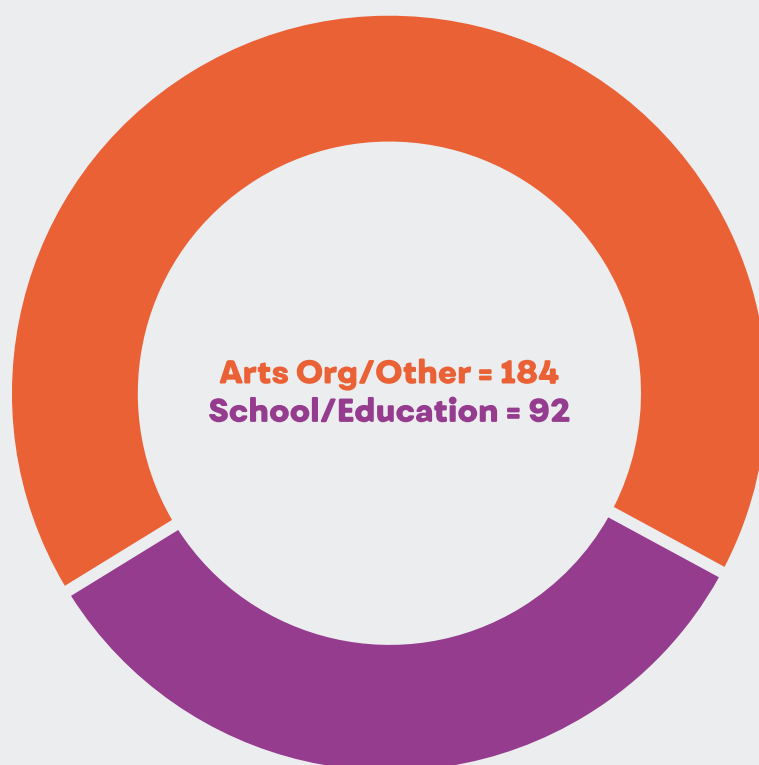
"I was able to learn about areas outside my usual sphere as a freelance practitioner, eg web law and intellectual property"

Viv, webinar participant

TOPICS WE COVERED

- Writing a Funding Bid
- A Beginner's Guide to Web Law
- A Beginner's Guide to Intellectual Property Law
- A Beginner's Guide to Marketing Strategies
- A Beginner's Guide to Creating your Online Events
- A Beginner's Guide to Safeguarding Online
- A Beginner's Guide to Understanding Your Impact
- A Beginner's Guide to Social Media Marketing

WHO DID WE HELP?



Webinar Participant Sector Demographics

FESTIVAL OF HOPE

A YOUTH-LED COORDINATED CELEBRATION OF HOPE & HERITAGE ACROSS THE NORTH WEST

Festival of Hope 2020 was delivered through a network of five partner 'hub' museums. It is part of our Hope Streets programme funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and delivered in partnership with Blaze Arts.

Many Museums responded to the Emergency Lockdown by pausing community engagement activities. The Blaze Young Producers were not ready to shelve their plans; quickly suggesting ways to make their festival viable despite the restrictions in place. With resilience, tenacity and perseverance, they pivoted enthusiastically towards online, distanced delivery. Buoyed by their hopeful spirit, museum staff followed their lead.

Regular planning meetings moved online, as the Young Producers collaborated with Festival experts and museum leads to plan, commission and deliver 40 unique and imaginative 'events'.

The young people told us how this regular connection with others gave them a sense of purpose; rescuing their wellbeing in the context of school and college closures and work lost to zero-hours contracts.

Explore the Festival site at:

**FESTIVAL OF
HOPE.CO.UK**

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Youth Focus North West
- Blaze Arts
- Museums Development North West

MUSEUM HUBS

- The Atkinson, Southport
- Bolton Museum
- Tullie House, Carlisle
- Chester West And Chester Museums
- Lancashire Museums (Clitheroe and Padiham)



LET'S CREATE & CREATIVE KITS

OUR APPROACH

Digital inequality was a theme on many people's minds. We felt a call to action. Curious Minds began to identify partnerships that were addressing this area of need with the creation and distribution of creative packs or kits direct to the doorsteps of families in need. Early on, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), a Rochdale partnership and Odd Arts had led the way and begun to organise and bring together support in several local areas to target struggling families and provide creative resources (amongst other types of support) and Curious Minds was happy to contribute.

This was also beginning to happen elsewhere in the country. At a national level, Arts Council England, members of the

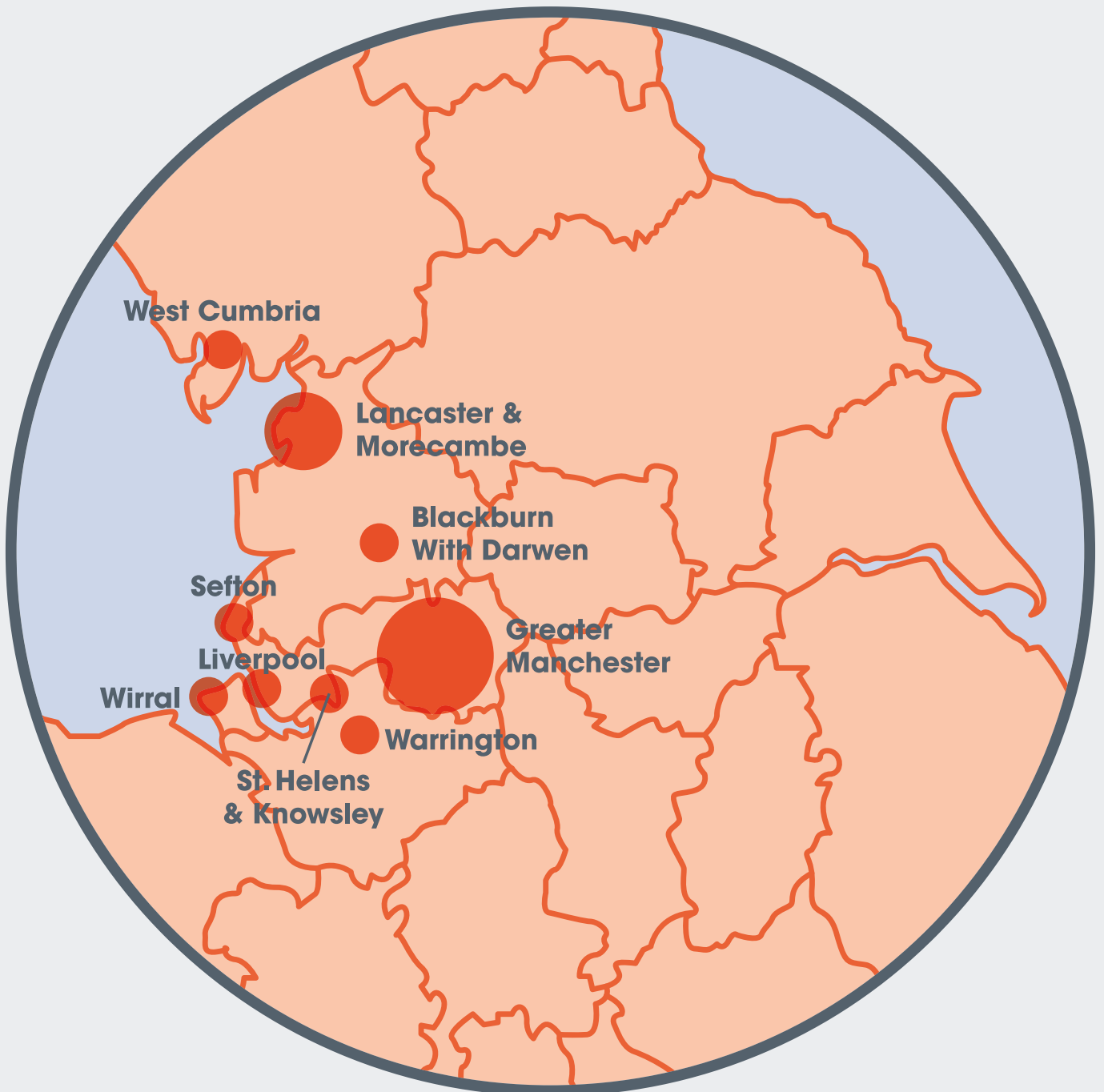


National Bridge Network and Craft Council also began to collaborate on an initiative that would see Let's Create 'art packs', filled with resources, sent out to children across the country.



In the North West, we opened the Let's Create initiative to Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) across the wider region, who had not benefitted from the joined-up approach in GMCA. More recently we have also entered into a co-investment relationship with YoungMcr to tackle digital inequality across the Greater Manchester youth sector.

LET'S CREATE PARTICIPATING AREAS



LET'S CREATE KITS SENT OUT

**PHASE 1, IN GREATER MANCHESTER
COMBINED AUTHORITY & ROCHDALE**

28,000

**OVERALL (WITH CO-INVESTMENT
FROM CURIOUS MINDS)**

**PHASE 2, VIA LOCAL CULTURAL
EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS**

2,800

PACKS DISTRIBUTED ACROSS NINE AREAS

**"THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE GET LEFT
BEHIND WHEN YOU'RE LOCKED DOWN"**

**A BLOG ABOUT GMCA ACTIVITY TO
COORDINATE PACKS FOR CHILDREN.**

BUBBLE UP

– DOORSTEP DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

OUR APPROACH

Bubble Up is an initiative that places cultural education as a driver of post-lockdown recovery and renewal. It was designed to nurture new forms of artistic partnership and collaboration at hyper-local level, for the benefit of children transitioning to secondary school following 5 months of lockdown.

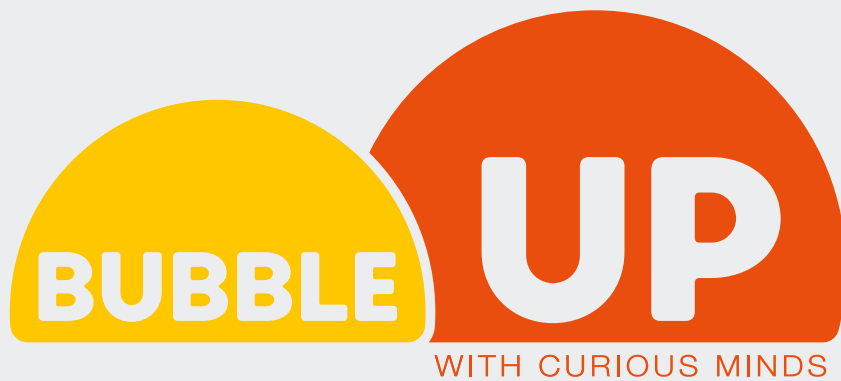
The purpose of the Bubble Up commissioning model is to put money directly in the hands of grass-roots artists, with the belief that they have the knowledge and experience to empower recovery in their local neighbourhoods.

COMMISSIONING THE PILOT

After a competitive application process, Curious Minds initially offered 17 commissions, worth £2,200 each, to community-facing organisations and freelance teaching artists. These successful applicants would work in partnerships, forming five neighbourhood-level 'Doorstep Delivery Bubbles' to deliver extra-curricular cultural learning clubs for children who were transitioning to secondary school in September 2020.

ROUNDS TWO & THREE

Thanks to generous support of The Esmée Fairburn Foundation, and following the success and popularity of the pilot phase, we were able to extend this programme to a second and third phase of commissioning. These phases would expand the geographical reach of the project into new neighbourhoods and would see activities running through the Autumn term.

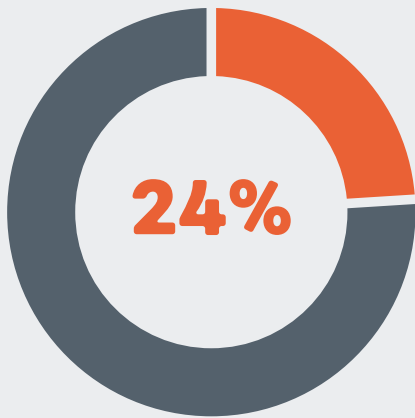


**BUBBLE UP
HAS SO FAR
RECEIVED 280
EXPRESSIONS
OF INTEREST,
AWARDING
74 COMMISSIONS
& CREATING
28 DOORSTEP
BUBBLES.**

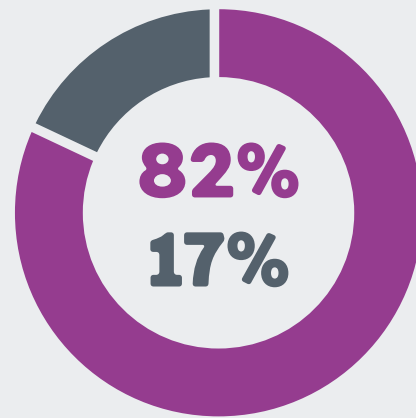




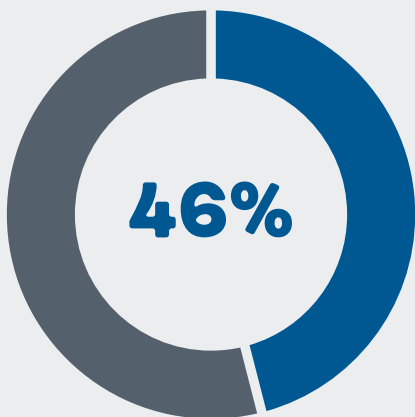
WHO OUR SUPPORT HAS REACHED



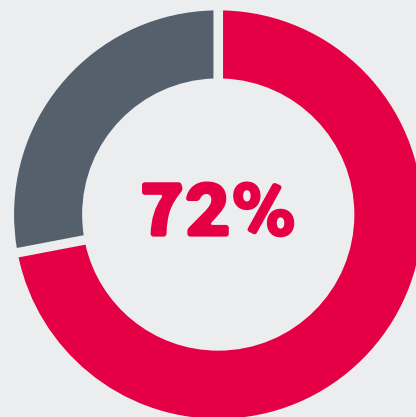
of commissions went to those who may experience racism including people of South Asian & Black African heritage*



Community arts organisations
Freelance practitioners



of commissions went to the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally



of commissions went to the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally

* Artists and Organisations were in reality asked if they identified as BAME or BAME led orgs. In direct response to Inc Arts' #BAMEOver [Statement for the UK](#) we have now stopped using the term BAME. In future we will be more specific when we ask people about their lived experience and cultural identity as part of our commitment to growing the diversity of the cultural education workforce.

CASE STUDY:

BUBBLE UP GORTON

In Gorton, Manchester, three local arts practitioners applied to take part in the Bubble Up pilot phase, forming a single Doorstep Delivery Bubble – Boom Bap & Breaks, Breakdance Manchester and Creative City England CIC. Together, they developed a series of summer holiday cultural learning clubs, which were specifically designed to help Year 7s transition to secondary school after lockdown.

“The Bubble Up programme has impacted positively on me as a freelancer. I was able to plan and deliver a project very quickly, which meant I was able to start earning an income again.

The project has also helped connect me with other local organisations who have similar goals but use different methods. I’ve benefitted from the opportunity to collaborate and have immediately benefitted from widening my network.

Learn more about
the Gorton Doorstep

Delivery Bubble:

BUBBLE UP
GORTON

It has been challenging to deliver with ‘bubbles’ under the new Covid-19 regulations, but I’ve realised these challenges can be overcome and that the work is still feasible. Bubble Up has helped me to develop new methods in my practice and workshop delivery that I can use in future activities. I’ve developed my practice around risk assessment for example.

Being commissioned to deliver Bubble Up has also enabled me to help other freelancers, by providing them with paid work as part of this project. I’ve been inspired to develop future project ideas in response to similar opportunities in the local area.”

Adil Khan – DJ KhanFu (Boom Bap & Breaks)





“It’s been interesting working with Beth from Creative Cities and KhanFu from Boom Bop and Breaks; having to pull our organisations together to then create a creative bubble that allows young people to explore many artistic disciplines. It’s the new way of thinking about organisational cohesion.”

Edenamiuki Aiguobasinmwin, Director of Breakdance Manchester

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