

# MarketPlace case study: Tea and Tasters and going digital



## What is the MarketPlace offer?

MarketPlace is about culture, community and creative conversation in Fenland and the Forest Heath area of West Suffolk. MarketPlace operates within and around the seven market towns of Wisbech, March, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Brandon, Whittlesey and Chatteris. MarketPlace utilises a delivery model of on the ground Creative Agents to provide in-person support and visibility. Through this, it connects and nurtures:

- partnership development,
- community advocates and leaders,
- project delivery,
- community research,
- new creative and artistic experiences,
- artists' ability to meet the needs of local audiences.

MarketPlace has been developing a relationship with The Barleycorn Cafe in Middenhall over the last few years and a need to tackle loneliness and create new shared experiences for local people resulted in a series of artist taster sessions to inform a longer project with their artist of choice.

Providing ways to bring new creative and artistic experiences across the MarketPlace town's meant that the impact of COVID-19 on the project resulted in the workshops being one of the first MarketPlace projects to move online during the first national lockdown

Find out the difference this project has made and the challenges of delivering online as we all adjusted to doing more things online.

SHOW  
Innovation  
Criticality

# Tea and Tasters and going digital

The Barleycorn Cafe in Mildenhall is only three years old but as a hub in the community decided to start a Meet-up Monday group to tackle loneliness and isolation by offering a free cuppa and a place to chat and meet people. Working with owner Shelby and a group of regular Meet Up Monday members a taster arts programme was established to reach new audiences, create new art opportunities locally and increase well being.

**Developing a relationship with The Barleycorn Cafe has been an investment of Creative Agent time, in order to create art opportunities that respond to the needs of the community.**

The Meet-Up Monday group had been established for a year before this series of taster sessions were delivered in November 2019. Creative Agent Ali cultivated relationships with the group's core members and met many of the revolving members.

Within this group, which met to combat loneliness, isolation and grief, creative outlets were provided for the purpose of expression, connection and shared experience. That shared experience enabled greater outcomes for the participants.

**"As a venue owner, Shelby is very keen to see community things happen – she does it in a very generous way – she has a business there but is keen to test out ideas. She sees it as a route in for people to meet up and be signposted to other activities."**

- Ali, Creative Agent

A co-designed approach was taken to develop a longer-term programme of activity. A series of taster workshops were delivered with different artists for the group to choose one they would like to work with the longer term.

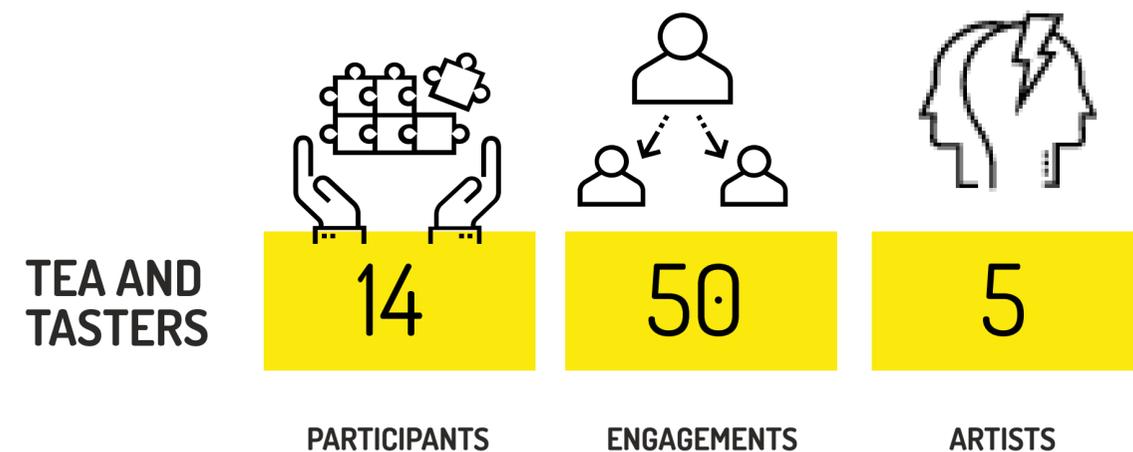
These workshops included:

- creative journalling
- singing
- printmaking
- ceramics
- expressive drawing

Minimising the risk of participation drop outs for specific artforms, the group were not told what they would be trying out each week.

**"I didn't tell them what artform it was each week so they would take it at face value after week one or two they enjoyed the mystery."**

-Ali, Creative Agent



### Participant experience: excellent Art

To capture the groups' reflections on the different art forms and the quality of their engagement experience we used Arts Council participatory quality metrics to inform a discussion with the group about the next steps for the project.

Of the 14 different group members, 71% participated in a reflection session. They were given a series of statements to record the extent to which they agreed with them.

**Artists responded well to the needs of the group - 70% completely agreed**

**I was treated as an equal - 90% completely agreed**

**I felt my contribution mattered - 70% completely agreed**

**It felt like a real artistic experience - 80% completely agreed**

**It felt like I could be myself - 80% completely agreed**

**I was amazed by what we achieved - 60% completely agreed**

**I feel more able to express myself creatively - 50% completely agreed**

**I got to know people who are different to me - 80% completely agreed**

**I feel motivated to do more creative things - 90% completely agreed**

**The project opened up new opportunities to me - 60% completely agreed**

### Participant impact

All attendees, except for one member of the group, experienced at least one new art form. For one attendee all of the artforms were a new experience. The one creative group member who had tried the activities before remarked that undertaking these as part of a community was a new experience.

Sharing in activities with other people and feeling a part of something is a key indicator of improved well being which is a positive outcome for this group.

**"Watching them as a group they have new members all the time – they gel really well together and the tasters have helped create another layer of richness with their relationships with each other. The sessions have brought out more conversations within the theme of their stories – their confidence and willingness to share and take part has been a wonderful leap from the first one where they were very nervous about what was going to happen. They are taking ownership and responsibility of what happens next and it's building their confidence." – Ali, Creative Agent**

**"That it was lovely to work as a group, any apprehension, uncertainty I had fallen away. It was fun, even if I felt out of my comfort zone." – Nicole, participant**

The ability to experience a range of art forms and have shared new experiences ensured that participants would find something to be inspired by as part of the project.

**"The project is a really positive idea to encourage expression not otherwise realised." – Margaret, participant**

**"Opening your mind to new experiences. Being inspired!" – Maureen, participant**

## ART JOURNALLING

4. Art Journaling.  
Therapeutic & enjoyable, was good for me, I enjoyed searching for things that said something to me, about me.

enjoyable session. something I do at home. Minimal apparatus required and easy to create an art project.

No. 2  
No specific training at the beginning. Did not know what was expected of me. Although I could see the therapeutic benefits!

I enjoyed the Art Journaling - I think it could work well in collaboration with other art work shops.

I enjoyed doing this, and it was good to personalise our interests. It would be good to make souvenir memories.

Art journaling not my thing - may be more relevant with a definite theme in mind and purpose, like a scrapbook. Didn't feel it was presented in a

## SINGING

Singing - couldn't go from what I'd heard I'd love it! Also the best for bringing us all together. Singing is v. uplifting & v. good for the lungs!

Singing - wasn't able to attend but sounds a great group session to explore/enjoy. So good and uplifting! 1st choice

Singing OK ~~add it~~ to supplement Art Journaling.

Singing would be great, I didn't make the class, but I would have loved it. I'm sure.

The singing was uplifting and enjoyable but I'm not sure whether it has legs for a longer project.

a great session, uplifting and totally absorbing. Fantastic! A great group session. **No 1**

## PRINTMAKING

Printing  
The stencils were of different thicknesses so made printing v. difficult. I'd hoped to actually make my own stencil. Didn't like muddy background.

Other types of printing. ~~and printing~~ lino cuts - not templates. Silkscreen etching stiles.

have enjoyed making my own lino/stencil more.

I enjoyed the printing but the start took too long with the instructions. I think it needed more time.

3. I enjoyed it, but time consuming. Bit messy, need to understand/learn quantity of paint etc to produce a print that was what I intended, not smudged (Lino printing)

5) This printing was interesting - new experience. Not enough time to explore cutting but had potential. - but quite complex for a taster, rather than a session.

## EXPRESSIVE DRAWING

W.K.I Charcoal.  
The Artist was good but I didn't like the group drawing bit.

Charcoal - like clean pictures, not the messy ones that we finished up with. Would like to try water colour.

Session 1.  
Charcoal/pastels - Good as individual + joint collaboration. was good - refreshing. Progressing to...

The mask making was great for expressing yourself. enjoyed the delivery and it would make a good project.

1. Collaborative drawing was OK, not too sure on expressive on my own.

## CERAMICS

Pottery because I'm a "lino" the discipline is the best for me & I could repeat it - whole.

enjoyable session idea of making a ceramic plaque to make a mural a good idea but not for me.

Not to my taste, although enjoyed trying

I thought what I made wasn't very good but I did enjoy it. The Artist was very good with the whole group.

working with clay was exciting and allowed us to express ourselves - if we did a bigger project I would worry about the logistics of firing & glazing.

More practical. teach what to do with clay - plaques, pots etc. Contact Drew for firing. Statue making.

With a vulnerable group of participants, the role of the Creative Agent provides a support mechanism for both the artist and participants as they explore delicate issues and mental health through the works they are creating.

The short taster sessions were a challenge for the artists who had to pitch their art form in a single session for a mixed ability group, in a small space. That and the delivery environment were factors for consideration of the art forms they wanted to continue with, and the contrast in preferences amongst group members sparked conversations which put the group's needs over individuals.

**"With a full group space was limited and cramped but as singing has minimal equipment more people can be accommodated comfortably" - Kathryn, participant**

Being able to experience a range of artforms enabled the group to try new things and explore how they might want to pursue any of them further.

"They are a diverse group of abilities and ages. We were testing out something they have control and collaboration in. They were really careful to make constructive criticism and there were things they needed to ask- if we choose this artist with the theme that we're looking at with our story, what are we going to get out of this as well? And they started to consider each other in the decision making."

- Ali, Creative Agent

The decision to not disclose the activity for each session was proven to be a positive decision given the response to the singing sessions:

"They all adored the singing. I felt uplifted because when they came into the room if they could have shrunk and walked backwards and pretended they weren't there... they were horrified it was singing. She was such a great and enthusiastic voice coach, she was just so giving that by the end of it they were singing 'Bring Me Sunshine' - a very positive vibe came from it and it gave them the confidence that they could do something like this."

- Ali, Creative Agent

'Uplifted' became a universal phrase to describe their experience with the singing taster and one other participant stated that missing this session was regret because of the group's positivity from the experience.

The group decided to pursue additional singing sessions alongside holding a longer creative journaling project using a democratic vote.

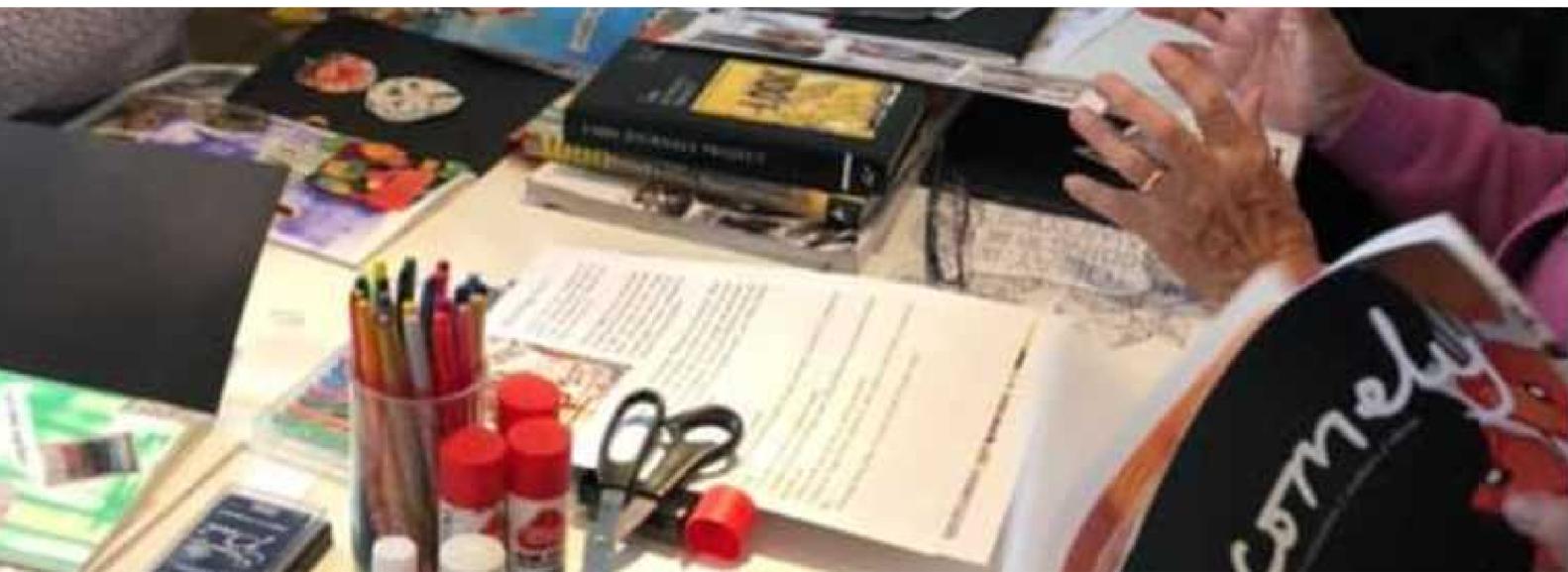
"They have chosen to journal. There was a general fear because they didn't understand it but there was an excitement have a go at it through the written word, mood boards and the conversation; they thought that this would be a lovely thing to have as a 'Meet-Up Monday Journal'. They want extended workshops to create a page about who they are - part tourist information that sits in the café; 'The Barleycorn Journal' that has a life beyond the sessions.' - Ali, Creative Agent

"Journaling (surprised her most). it was therapeutic for me, I enjoyed searching for materials that said this is me, I like this!"

- Nicole, participant

The plans for additional journaling workshops were curtailed by the pandemic. This resulted in a commission for mixed media artist Marian Savill to produce four online tutorials to journal from home, using resources you would find around the house.

Extending the commission in this way was a means of continuing to maintain the group's connectivity, manage further isolation for this vulnerable group and transition activity into digital outputs in a meaningful way.



## ART JOURNALLING WITH MARIAN SAVILL



11

EVENT ATTENDEES



319

VIEWS



5

VIDEOS

This commission was initially developed as an experience for the Meet Up Mondays group to continue their journaling activity with Marian, during the first national lockdown through April - May 2020.

Marian was commissioned to make a series of four workshop tutorials and an introductory promo video. The tutorials cover how to make a book, creating backgrounds, adding text and embellishing your journal.

To mirror in-person experiences, the videos were launched weekly, on a Monday at 10 am, within a Facebook event on the CPP MarketPlace account and the Barleycorn Facebook page.

This purpose of launching the videos in this way was to maintain the routine of the group and to encourage a shared experience, inviting them all to watch and participate at the same time.

After each session participants were encouraged to invite friends and share photos of their creations via social media, tagging their posts.

Tutorials were accompanied by digital downloads to provide a range of resources and access points.

Engagement within the Facebook event itself was low with 38 likes/hearts across the six posts, three positive comments and tags of friends to view the posts.

Greater post engagement was established from the Barleycorn Facebook feed posts. Their tutorial posts were shared 33 times and they had 66 likes and hearts across their eight posts.

The challenges which arose from people engaging with the event reinforces that despite both Facebook accounts hosting the event, digital confidence and digital literacy is low.

Visibility of engagement online appears low at a surface level, due to the lack of dialogue or sharing of work. However, it emphasises low digital social skills; particularly for the older demographic of participants.

Engaging in this way was new for all stakeholders and provided a model of learning for the team and future online delivery.



# Action learning

Recognising that the global pandemic has challenged artists to pivot how they work and deliver activity means we have reflected upon the experiences of artists working in new ways, whilst delivering a quality creative experience and remaining audience focussed.

This was a new way of working for Marian who was partnered with a member of the Creative Collective, and local filmmaker and producer, David Johnson to create the journalling tutorials.

This meant developing a new skill set, working in collaboration and creating a digital product that would replicate 40-minute workshops in the space of a 15-minute tutorial video.

This was a new type of commission for MarketPlace and the team were eager to learn about the production process between artist and editor to support more artists in creating online content,

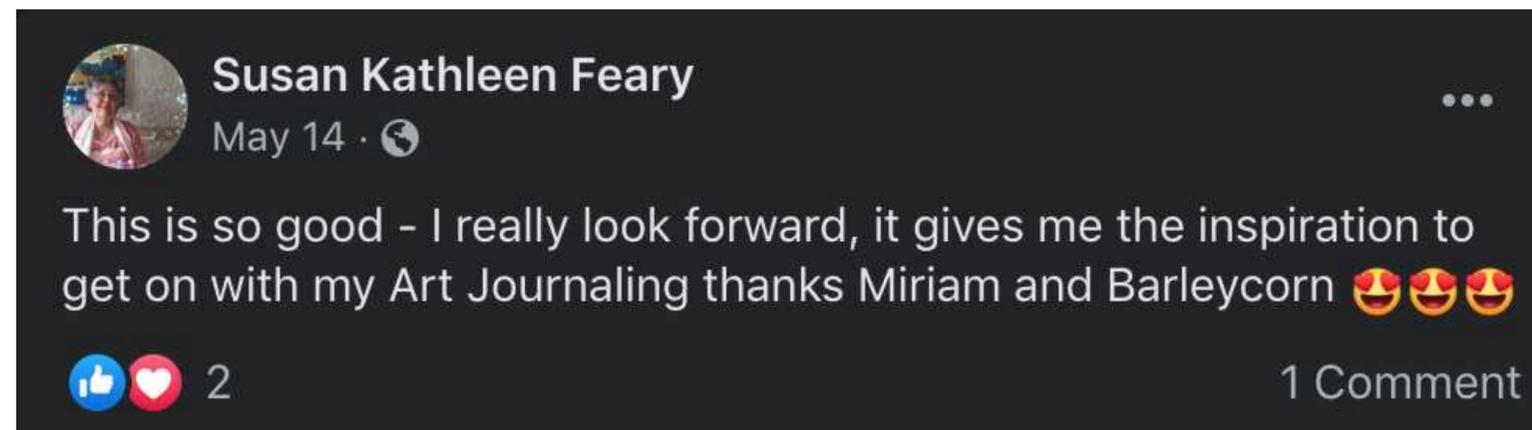
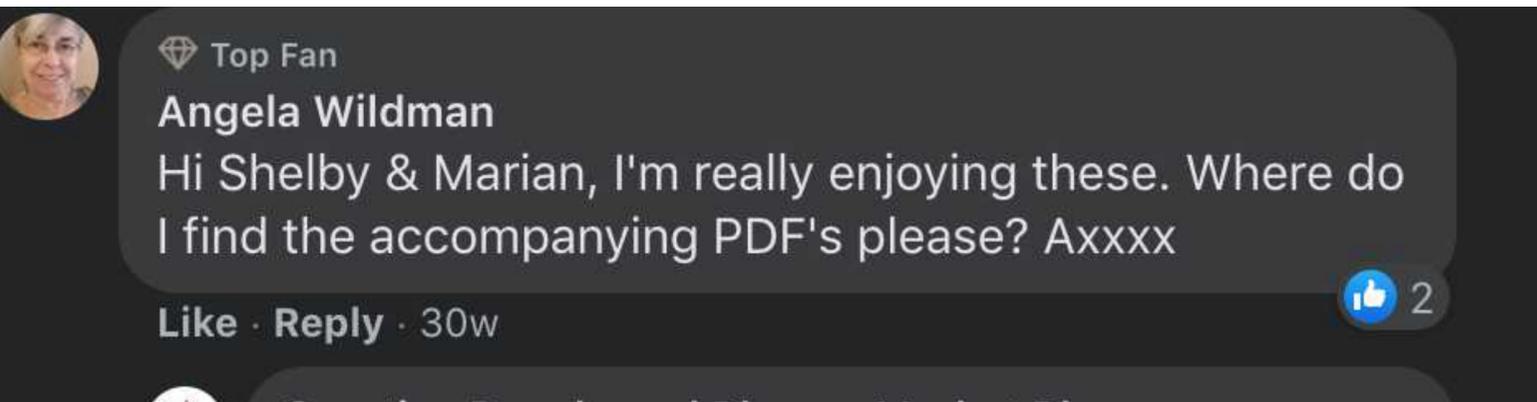
**"I did four different versions of... Was it four? I did elastic band, folded... yeah, I did four different versions of different styles of books they can make. And then just a little intro as well at the beginning of just me. But it does add up, I'm worried it's going to be a bit long" - Marian during the production of the first tutorial**

As a mixed media participatory artist, Marian is used to delivering in-person and providing options for workshop attendees to fully engage in a personalised experience.

Translating these instincts into short, accessible videos that mirror online engagement habits, resulting in an accompanying PDFs to be able to support engagement between the launch of each tutorial video. This was established through active and reflective zoom meet-ups between the Creative Agents and Marian and David.

Working through the process collectively enabled the team to manage and reassure expectations of outputs, the value of the artist's time for the fee and refine the process.

**"I do watch other videos of people doing similar. And I've got a friend actually who has a YouTube channel and she does a lot of mixed media art tutorials. So I've been chatting to her as well. But her setup's more professional, I've only got my phone and my iPad that I can do my videos on. But having had this chat, I feel I can do a better job for next week. But that doesn't make me very happy about this week's." - Marian reflecting on peer examples**



**Key Learning:**

**1. Storyboarding tutorials from the beginning help to manage time, shots needed and video production needs**

**2. Having a clear, simple and accessible way to engage is necessary**

"Confusion with the Facebook event and posting them on the discussion page – people had trouble finding the link, too many steps to it"

- Alice, MarketPlace Communications

**3. Online content needs a promotion and marketing strategy that is owned by all partners, with clear actions**

"We set this with a set audience in mind but we had no plan for how the cafe was going to nurture those Facebook posts and generate more interest to share"

- Ali Creative Agent

**4. Ensuring content is accessible**

**5. Undertake example research to inform structure and transitions**

"Having a quick look at what was out there, I was refining as we went on and I've made changes so the first 3 looks the last one." - David, video producer

**6. Consider your audience in the aesthetic and delivery style**

"Marian's presentation style is really engaging and quite natural - David

You're a real natural presenter and one thing we did want was your chatty approach" - Colin, Creative Agent

**7. Plan upload and transferring of file time within the timescales as well as the infrastructure and technology to undertake the task**

Supporting Marian through the process enabled the team to ensure the end audience and their experience wasn't lost in the process of adapting to and delivering the technical elements of a video tutorial format.

**"If you're thinking about people, they're doing something for the first time, and they'll want the really interesting bit as well, what you're doing Marian, it's about that kind of content and showing the ideas of what's filling the manuals. So in a way, it's about being able to go through one and for that to be really clear and simple. And then again, it's like that enhanced level and refer to the other things that you could do. That kind of makes it accessible to all then, doesn't it? Because you might lose the power of that if it's too much explanation."**

**- Ali, Creative Agent - supporting the video content development**

Streamlining processes and establishing a framework for this type of activity became a key point of learning for the commission. Reflecting upon the commission requires a different perspective on the development of digital content creation versus an in-person workshop.

The team recognised that key steps were considered out of order, as they adapted to project planning in a different landscape. As the first set of online tutorial workshops, this commission established the learning curve for the team and other pilot online tutorials.

**"This is now a model to work with to do other things in the future and we're getting the series subtitled to make it more accessible" - Lorna, Creative Manager**

The experience on this commission informed the management of the Art and the Fens commission.

**"Having learned from this experience, I'm asking Kaitlin to bring it down to a honed focus. I wouldn't have thought of that without this experience" - Colin, Creative Agent**

Improvements were considered to project structure to consider the routines and interest levels of audience members in their new normals. This included additional taster content between videos to boost the consistency of content and increase creative making opportunities for audience members. The change in appetites for digital content and the availability of opportunities globally meant that targeting hyper-local audiences had greater potential in a competing marketplace of global cultural institutions delivering accessible opportunities.

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Photography credits to:

- Marian Savill
- Ali Atkins
- Participants from the projects



We Are Frilly is founded on the principles of process-driven participatory practices that extend from co-designing on a project level, strategic planning and cultural accountability through creative evaluation.

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