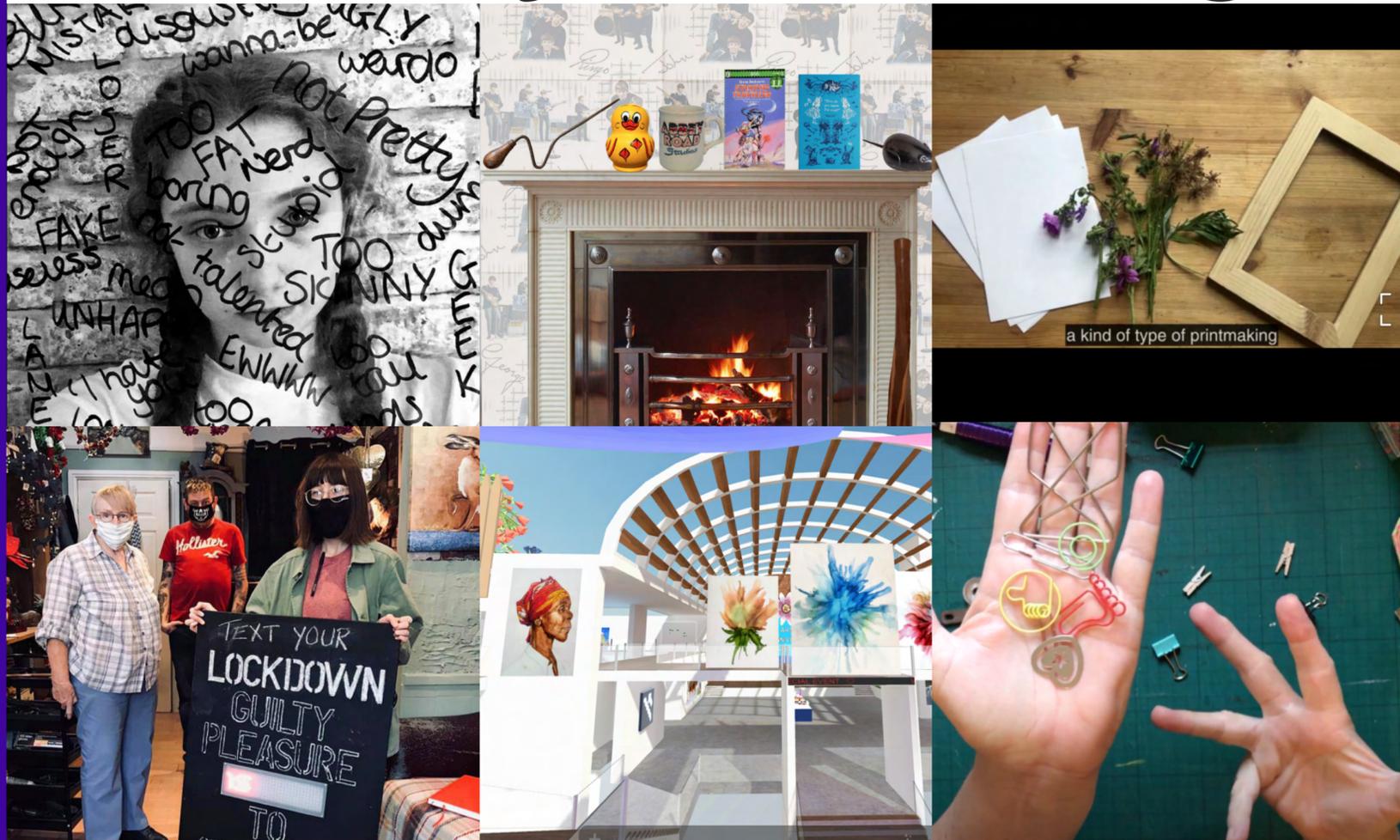


# MarketPlace case study: new skills for new ways of working



## 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 always worked in partnership to provide support and skills development for artists and local organisations to improve the arts ecology of Fenland and Forest Heath.

Throughout 2020 the impact of Covid-19 and national lockdown restrictions on local communities, artists and organisations meant that new ways of working and supporting artists in applying for funding for activity was a priority.

This case study looks at the type of commission support and skills development offered and the difference this has made from participant feedback.

# New skills for new ways of working

**An ongoing partnership delivery of artist training has been identified as more crucial this year than in previous years. Developing local infrastructure is essential to the long term success of MarketPlace, particularly with a focus on digital skills and connectivity.**

**The purpose of this activity is to grow and ensure artists have the skills to engage audiences and deliver relevant programming that is accessible and of high quality. The investment made in a two-tiered artist commissioning process was an important outcome for ensuring the security of arts employment and testing new digital programming with audiences, that could flex to their needs and national restrictions.**

## Creative Conversations in Isolation Impact on Artists

The MarketPlace team amongst their CPP colleagues recognised a need to provide opportunities for local audiences to engage in creative and cultural opportunities during the first national lockdown. They also identified a need to be an integral part in supporting the local arts economy and freelance artists in a meaningful way for their communities whilst honouring their artistic ideas.

Marketplace developed the 'Creative Conversation in Isolation' two-tiered commission. Artists were invited to submit ideas that could then be funded as an 'Inkling' to be developed into a working project idea after an advice surgery session with the MarketPlace team.

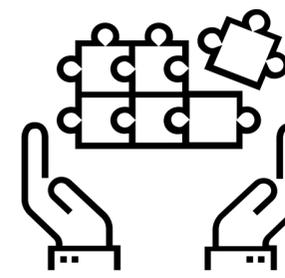
This enabled artists to gain direct support and insight to make their ideas audience focussed with their time being valued financially. Upon approval of their delivery plan submission, the project would be funded at the 'Connect' level to engage communities in the activity.

Of the 19 projects commissioned this year, seven were commissioned directly at Connect level as their project plan was fully formed, ten of the projects have moved from Inkling to Connect and 2 projects are still in the Inkling development phase. Of the commissions, ten were funded within the first lockdown. These artists reflected upon the impact of the commission on their current employment, stability and new ways of working. This commission alongside a measuring digital impact training day enables the development of local capacity to grow at the same time as the audience appetite for this type of cultural content.



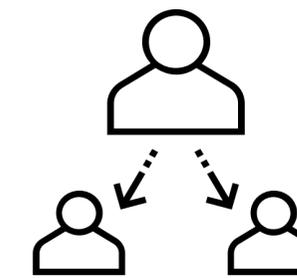
19

ARTIST COMMISSIONS



40

PARTICIPANTS



1

TRAINING

## New ways of working

For 50% of the first 10 commissions the challenge of transitioning online was a new point of skills development for them. A further 40% cited learning and utilising specific apps and programmes to enable the digital transition of their work and the final 10% saw the opportunity work with the expertise of the team in nurturing community relationships as a point of learning.

**"I want to look at how those who do not have easy access to technology are coping though and consider whether taking part in a creative project could support their mental health. I have limited experience of using technology to create artworks, having previously focused on working face to face with the community, and this project could develop my knowledge of software applications such as Photoshop. This would add a different perspective to my work moving forward, not only for this project but for others that I would like to focus upon in the future"**  
 - Leanne Moden

**"For me, working remotely using WhatsApp is a completely new way to lead an art session. Zoom is fairly new to me too, having started working with it during lockdown for other projects. This commission feels very significant as it means I can continue my community arts practice in a connected way, using technology as a bridge to run outdoors arts practice safely under restrictions."**  
 - Genieve Rudd

For 60% of the applicants having mentoring support and feedback was welcomed as they embarked on a new skill set and particular requests for digital training support were made through a desire to deliver quality cultural experiences.

**"I do feel that I lack self-confidence and self-belief. Sometimes things are said to me which make me doubt my worth"**  
 - Regina Rey

### Challenges

The accessibility and connectivity of technology were key concerns of 80% of the artists.

Additional challenges were the quality of the content and the experience and the GDPR of data management with creative digital content by and from participants.

As practitioners used to in-person delivery they felt that building up the trust and connection and managing the level of engagement would be challenging online.

**"I hope the group can find a place to work in that has a phone signal!"** - Genieve Rudd

**"There may also be issues regarding the technology that produce further complications to the project.....I think that the process of transferring the images that the community submit into a new piece of work will present some challenges for me but I am keen to try this. I will also need to consider how I manage and store personal information, such as names and email addresses, by GDPR"**  
 - Michelle Brace

### Financial security

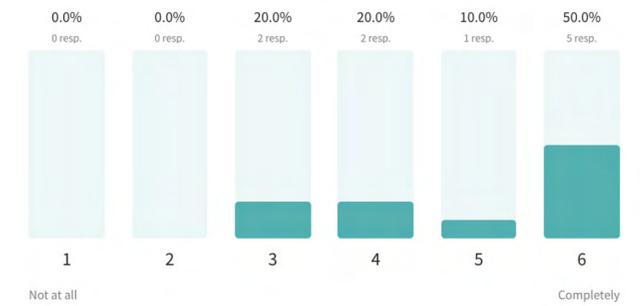
Enabling the sustainability of the local arts ecology is an important outcome for the MarketPlace. The artists were asked to what extent the commission was assisting them in their financial security at this time and why.

**"I have seen a 25%-50% decrease in income when I did a month-by-month comparison to this time last year."** - Artist

To what extent does this commission help with your financial security at this time?

10 out of 10 answered

4.9 Average rating



**"When the lockdown started in March 2020, I lost over 50% of my freelance projects - this project will help support me to pay my rent for at least"** - Artist

The impact of these commissions at a time when all work had been cancelled or postponed cannot be underestimated.

All artists stated a loss of income, some ranging from anywhere to 25%-75%.

The training needs they all identified echoed the importance of investing in local skills development to sustain opportunities for communities to continue to engage in and experience art.

### Culture 24 Digital training for artists

**Continuing a successful training offer from Phase 2 Year 1, MarketPlace partnered with Culture 24 to deliver digital training for artists and community leaders.**

Digital upskilling has increased in priority for MarketPlace internally and across their networks. The activity that has taken place this year has shown a willingness to persevere with technology to engage but has also identified frustrations and difficulties in digital accessibility. Digital inclusion combined with data poverty is increasing national issues around encouragement of digital engagement opportunities.

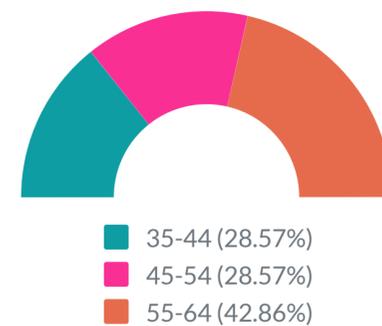
Culture 24 has provided distance digital training in measuring digital success for artists and local community leaders.

Embedding and planning a digital element and understanding how to measure the success of it for funders is a new area for many local groups and artists in engaging their audiences traditionally reached in person.

### Impact and outcomes for 'Measuring Digital Success'

There was a 50/50 split in the gender of participants, with 50% of White British ethnic origin and 50% White other, and one participant considered themselves part of the LGBTQ+ community.

#### Age of Participants



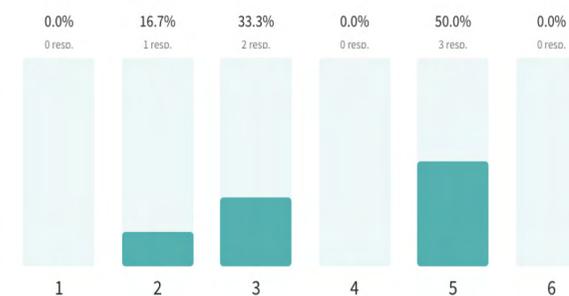
There were mixed expectations from the content of the workshop as it had been tailored to respond to the current climate.

The nature of online Zoom courses over an hour makes engagement challenging when coupled with misaligned expectations of the content and the target audience of the learning being shared.

On a scale of 1 - 6 how engaged would you say you were?

6 out of 6 answered

★ 3.8 Average rating



Despite the mixed engagement scores, 66% stated they would continue to use the skills they had learned that day moving forwards.

**"I'm going to reassess my website design based on the passing comment about knowing which audiences use which platforms" - Anon**

**"I will engage more on social media and looking into statistics on Mailchimp"- Anon**

**"I am more clear about using measurements for digital success and implementing this already."-Anon**

Marketing and distribution of content were key outcomes they were hoping to learn from the training and they felt that measuring digital success was for more established organisations or individuals in receipt of grant funding.

**"A greater understanding of the need to focus clearly on what we want to measure and keep that list short." - Artist**

**"It was a very informative and participatory workshop. Great information, support and interaction." - Artist**

MarketPlace is part of the Creative People and Places programme developed by Arts Council England with support from National Lottery funds:



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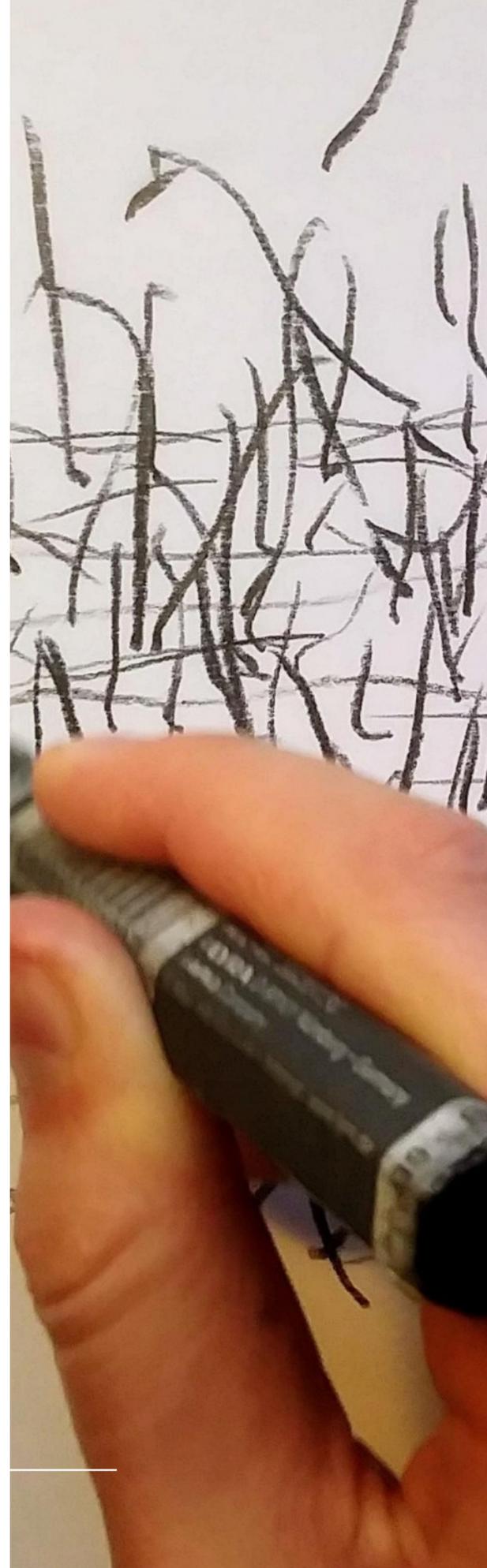
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[www.cppmarketplace.co.uk](http://www.cppmarketplace.co.uk)



Photography credits to:

- Colin Stevens
- Ali Atkins
- Participants and artists 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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