Make/Shift

Evaluation Report

July 2024

Written by Ruth Melville with Catherine Doran and Rebecca Ranson

MAKE/SHIFT

RMR

About this Report

Make/Shift, based in Amber Valley, Derbyshire, is part of the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme.

Make/Shift began in April 2022 with a development year including consultation and staff team recruitment. The programme fully started in April 2023.

This report explores the first year of delivery, covering April 2023 to March 2024. Make/Shift is funded by Arts Council England (ACE), and hosted by the University of Derby.

To better reflect both Make/Shift's ideas and values, we adopt their "ecological language" in this Report. This is discussed in the Landscape chapter.

Our Report is split into four chapters – described below – and eight sections:

- **Landscape** contains two parts – Bedrock and Soil – which set the context for Amber Valley, the Creative People and Places programme, and the evaluation – then move on to talk about how Make/Shift is supporting the growth of the ecology through its approach and programme. (Sections 1 and 2)
- **Seeds** explores how Make/Shift has tended local seeds to make Amber Valley grow and flourish through four case studies (Sections 3 to 6 inclusive).
- **Meadow** presents early evidence answering Arts Council England's three core questions for CPPs – considering audience reach (Section 7), the approach to quality (Section 8), and understanding what works (Section 9).
- **Conclusions** sums up the outcomes this year and presents recommendations for the ongoing programme.

In addition, the **Appendices** contains the Story of Change for the project and links to other resources available from https://rmresearch.uk/makeshift-appendices/

Credits

This evaluation was produced by RMR, embedded evaluation and strategic development specialists.

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Photographs and graphics: Used with kind permission of Make/Shift – photographs by Pictoria, Luke Galloway and the Make/Shift Team.

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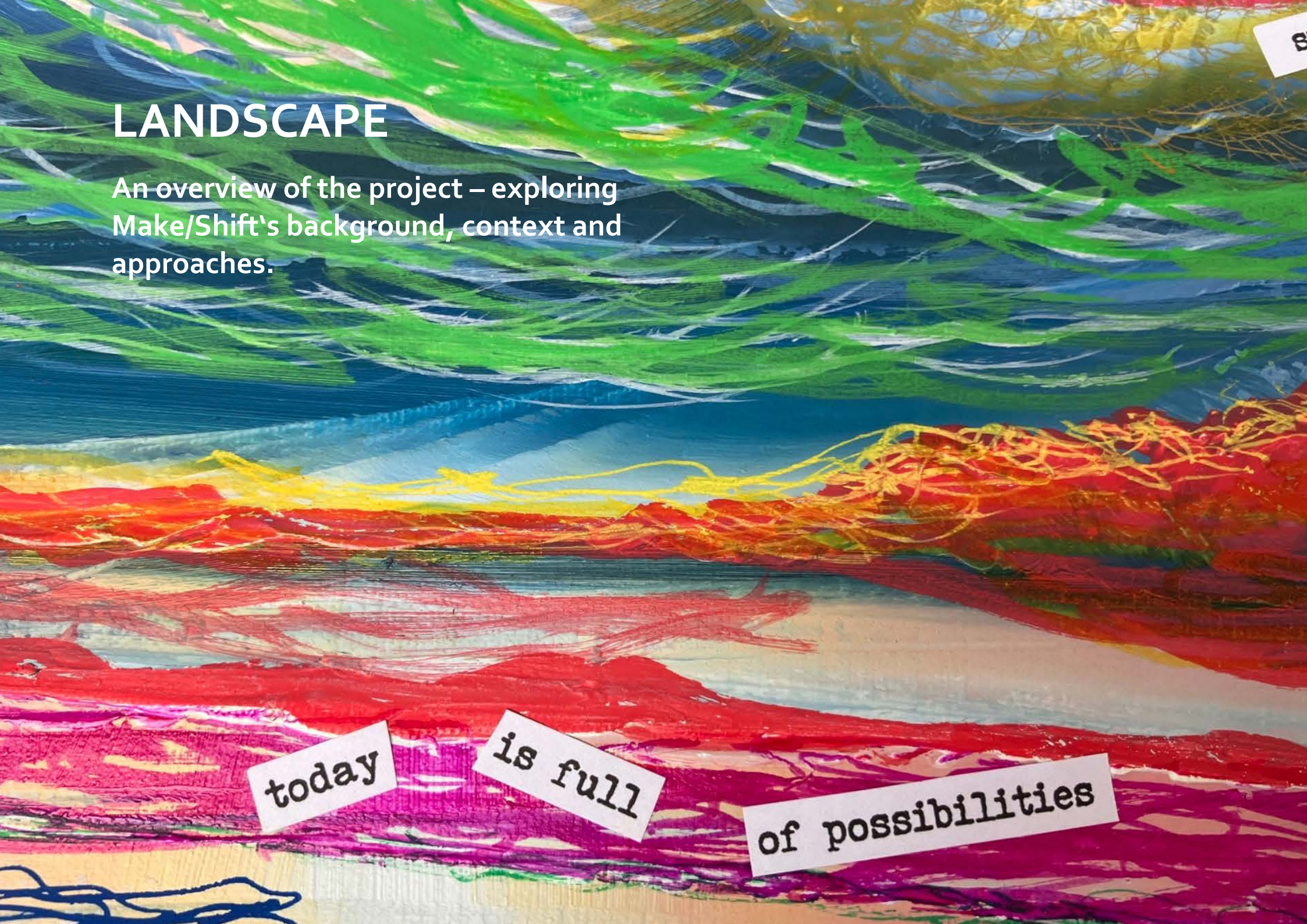
LANDSCAPE

An overview of the project – exploring Make/Shift's background, context and approaches.



1. Bedrock

Background and context for the project.

This introductory section covers the assets and challenges of the Amber Valley, and Creative People and Places programmes, as well as the structure of Make/Shift that forms the bedrock which the programme needs to build on and shift.

About Amber Valley

Amber Valley district in Derbyshire, East Midlands, with a population of 126,944[1], up 3.2% in the last 10 years[2]. 51% of the population are female, 59% are between the ages of 18 and 64, 19% identify as disabled in some way and 97% identify as White British[3].

It has a strong history of making, from medieval nail-making in Belper, to the modern-day, renowned Denby pottery. Today it is still full of people with ideas and energy, who might not talk about what they do as 'arts and culture', but from initial contacts made within the project are making and creating both physical items and connections.

There are strong U3A groups across the area, and a variety of local clubs and community organisations, with Make/Shift's Understory work uncovering 516 organisations and 1,620 links. For example, Tracey – dispirited by a job she didn't enjoy – hired a church hall on her day off and started to teach textile crafts. Participants started texting asking, "Are we going to have another one?" "How are you going to do another one?" and "I need to do another one". She recognised the value it had to them, and that "[I] might have something here that I could work with". As a result, Tracey left work and committed to starting a sewing/craft group. She made building alterations to her premisses to facilitate this and thus "Sew Lovely was born five years ago".

Similarly there are people in the Swannick Men's Shed who enjoy making, sharing skills and supporting others to make and members of South Normanton and District Amateur Radio Club have built radios to share news and friendship across the world.[4]

The area also faces challenges. Unemployment rates are 3.3%, slightly lower than the average for England of 3.9%[5]. Those living in Amber Valley are significantly less likely to hold a degree or equivalent qualification (30.0%) than the average for England (43.2%). 13% of all households in Amber Valley are lone pensioner households, and 6% are lone parents, meaning many households are at risk of experiencing loneliness or isolation.

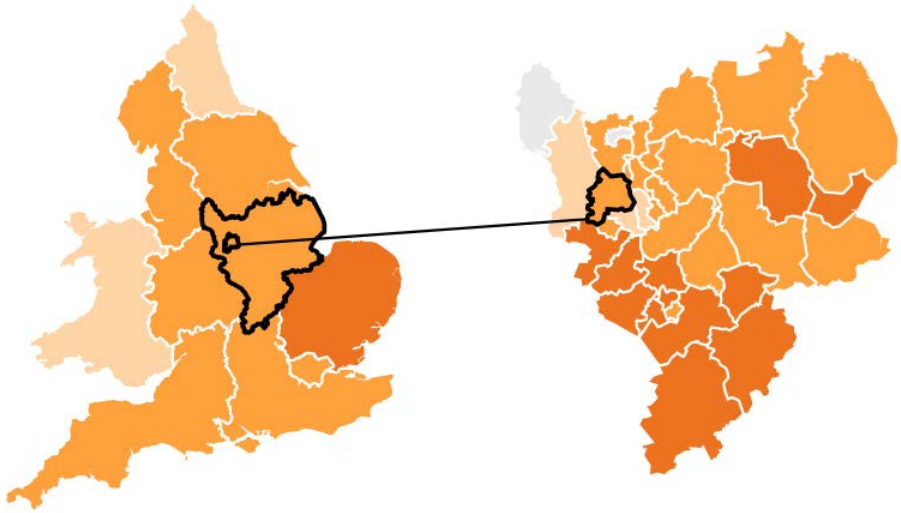


Figure 1: Amber Valley location. Source ONS Census 2021

Set in beautiful rolling countryside, geographical barriers separate the districts of Amber Valley. This leads to rural areas, particularly in the west of the region, being less well served by road and rail networks. While Amber Valley as a whole has less people living in the most deprived areas (4%) than England on average (10%), areas to the east of Amber Valley are more densely populated, which correlates with higher levels of deprivation.

Traditional measures of arts engagement in Amber Valley are considerably lower than the average for England, with far more people less likely to engage in the arts in Amber Valley (92%) than England (74%) on average, although these are widely recognised not to capture all types of cultural engagement, particularly everyday cultural activity which doesn't tend to be funded by Arts Council England.[6]

About Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places[7] (CPP) is an Arts Council England (ACE) funding programme which aims to engage new people in the arts through commissioning projects in areas of low arts engagement.

CPPs focus on engaging new audiences with an offer which is excellent in terms of process and product, through building new and unusual partnerships beyond the arts.

About Make/Shift

Make/Shift want Amber Valley to be:

> **A place full of makers, where everyone's creativity matters.**
>
> Make/Shift website

Their approach is based on an Asset-Based Community Development model, where neighbourhoods are seen as **"pivotal units of societal change"**[8]. This celebration of the strength of communities to carry out the change they want to see in their local area is the core of what Make/Shift are about.

The current Make/Shift delivery team is made up of Creative Producer Rachel Smith, Assistant Producer Iona Davies-Schofield and Creative Community Builder Rebecca Morris-Buck, as for the entirety of 2023-4 there is currently an empty post meaning the team is managing on lower capacity than planned.

Make/Shift are supported by their Consortium made up of Amber Valley CVS[9], Derbyshire Wildlife Trust[10], Derby Museums[11], U3A[12] and University of Derby[13].

Central to their work is the fostering and growth of networks and collaborations. To this end, Make/Shift have developed a number of key delivery partnerships this year. These include Platform Thirty1[14],Infinite Wellbeing CIC[15], Maison Foo[16] and Grow Outside[17] – all based in or close to the Amber Valley.

Make/Shift seek to unite their communities with these networks and partners - making new connections and fostering growth of these through three core levels of participation:

- **Friends** – Neighbours who attend, participate, support, enjoy, champion and get involved with activities generated by the network and invite their friends and neighbours along too.
- **Collaborators** – Makers, creators & doers working with Make/Shift to create platforms (content, gatherings events, spaces, tools and more) which invite people to get involved.
- **Decision Makers** – Stewards, co-creators and guides shaping the strategy and direction of projects, how resources are allocated and inviting collaborators to get involved.

About ecosystem thinking

Nature is key to Make/Shift's thinking. It provides a way of thinking (and speaking) about everything.

This is reflected in the core values and throughout the Business Plan - in both the key beliefs and principles.

> **We will use nature as a model and mentor to re-imagine how we are being, doing and learning together. Learning from more than human ways of organising, to help untangle ourselves from dominant stories and systems that keep us trapped in solutions that aren't working.**
>
> Make/Shift Business Plan

We can see this manifested in a number of ways:

- Considering each set of connections not as hierarchical or standalone, but as a set of ecologies so that "Make/Shift as an ecology of people and resources that supports people to take collective action, rather than as a project itself." Business Plan
- Working with partners who are directly involved with the natural world. The Consortium includes Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and Grow Outside are a key delivery partner.
- Thinking that focuses on (emergent) systems and interconnectedness. Make/Shift draws inspiration from work (Donna Meadow, Berkana Institute) that thinks about "how/where to intervene in complex "living" systems to enable beneficial change."

- Having an aim to enhance sense of connectedness with nature.
- In the use of a "ecological language", rich in words and phrases from ecology and nature (weave, interconnected, seeds). This is both concrete and poetic.

The evaluation builds on this approach, considering assets, interconnectedness and the Story of Change and this Report echo nature and ecology in language and design.

Our evaluation

The evaluation runs until the end of this phase and we recognise that it will take a lot longer for any impacts to show. As a result, we look at emerging outcomes and leading indicators of change – which give a sense of the differences that might happen later down the line.

We have worked closely with Make/Shift this year to co-create and embed evaluation processes which fit with their principles and way of working, and which work for the people of the Amber Valley.

This started with developing the Make/Shift Story of Change (please see **Appendices**) which outlines how the programme intends to work, and the differences it aims to make within an ecosystem approach. Data gathering included observations, interviews and reflective workshops – being very present in the area and getting to know the local makers and connectors.

We also recognise that Make/Shift, like all CPPs have a very heavy monitoring and evaluation burden, which can easily get in the way of planning and reflection time, and also impact on the enjoyment and engagement of local people in the programme unless well managed. We are working with Make/Shift to design more creative ways to gather monitoring data including trialling a VR approach to data collection.

2. Soil

How is Make/Shift preparing and enriching the 'soil'?

Every place has its assets, but they can be hidden away and overlooked.

Here we outline Make/Shift's approach to exploring, meeting, listening and discovering, then working with local activators to develop projects and potential. We cover the approach, aims and activity of the Make/Shift programme in 2023-24.

It feels great to sit around the table and meet new people that I wouldn't have met otherwise.

Complete strangers have become friends and shared stories with each other, while creating artistic masterpieces!

Makers in Residence participant, via survey

What was the delivery?

Make/Shift collaborated with 30 local groups, artists and organisation to host a range of more than 60 activities, events and workshops, inviting 3000 people to get making, connecting and shifting in 20 different venues across Amber Valley. Delivery included:

MAKE

Creating opportunities for neighbours to meet and make on their doorstep, building confidence to get creative and supporting people to unleash their inner maker.

- **Makers in Residence –** A year-long collaboration with two creative partners and two community partners to create space for artists and neighbours to meet, make and share (see Section 5).
- **Designer in Residence –** Six month residency to develop and share the visual identity of Make/Shift, including four community workshops, a new website and six pieces of bespoke artwork, as part of digital brand assets.
- **People Make Amber Valley –** Art installation featuring 350 intricately designed figurines created by school pupils, nursing homes, community groups. To be displayed in the entrance to Ripley Town Hall to celebrate 50 years of Amber Valley.

CONNECT

Bringing people together in new ways, activating new relationships and collaborations and supporting people to try new things together.

- **Conversations** – A wide range of meetings and open conversations with people, groups, organisations from across Amber Valley, listening, sensemaking, developing understanding, building trust, and sharing ideas.
- **Storyteller in Residence** – A 12-month residency to collect and share stories about the extraordinary power of everyday making (see Section 3). In depth story collecting with four community groups, leading to The Golden Glue Awards celebration event (see Section 4).
- **Make/Shift Socials** – Monthly social events hosted by different local organisations with making workshops, food and conversation (see Section 6).
- **Over a Brew** – Facilitated conversations bringing together different collaborators and culminating in three short films.
- **Trips and Visits** – Visits to Timber Festival, Brassed off at Derby Theatre and to Museum of Making with Community Groups.

SHIFT

Testing new ways of working and learning together, which shift more power and resources to communities to make decisions, take action and make change together in the places they call home.

- **Understory**[18] – digital mapping tool used to create Amber Valley Understory Map – a network map featuring 550 community groups and mapping how they are connected. Developed through a series of workshops with 60 local groups.
- **Open Collective**[19] – legal and financial toolbox for grassroots groups, supporting fundraising + legal status + money management for communities that allows communities and institutions to work together in more equitable ways**.**

These resulted in:

- 2,592 engagements across Amber Valley
- 150 maker packs: 50 doodle packs, 50 tote bag printing packs and 50 zine making packs – distributed in partnership with Alfreton Library and Salcare Heanor
- 75 local organisations, creatives and community activists involved in mapping 516 organisations and 1,620 links through Understory commission
- 60 workshops
- 30 local collaborators involved in delivering work
- 27 artists engaged, 15 who live in Amber Valley
- 20 local venues throughout Amber Valley
- 5 reflective and informative blogs
- 4 films
- 2 installations

SEEDS

Case studies that show how Make/Shift have enabled creativity in Amber Valley.

Make/Shift, like any Creative People and Places project, is explicitly an action research project.

This means that everything is an exploration – a chance to do things differently and see which approaches work.

For this reason, it isn't necessarily helpful to define short term outcomes and simply check whether these are achieved. We also need to consider the longer-term goal, and the ways of delivering and working with communities which work to move towards that.

This fits with our approach as we have always designed evaluations which take into account the principles and approaches used within delivery – as well as the outcomes achieved. This allows us to understand what it about the delivery of a project that makes the difference.

Our work with Make/Shift takes this further, explicitly focusing on the approaches used and the underlying principles – as much as the outcomes achieved.

This section presents four case studies that shine a light on and consider the ways in which Make/Shift's approaches and principles play a role in moving towards the ultimate goals. Within each of these we explicitly consider the approaches used, as well as noting outcomes to date. From this we draw out the learnings to date – at this early stage of the project.

Later reports will revisit some of these projects with case studies that layer the learning on which approaches work over the lifetime of the programme.

3. Storyteller in Residence

Exploring the making that already exists within Amber Valley.

> Storytelling is something that people forget. And it's often lost, because people don't realise that they have a story to tell.
>
> Ian Pringle, Listening Shelf Audio, partner to Maison Foo

About the Project

This was a six month storytelling residency working with three community groups to collect and share stories. The aims of the project were to:

- Make visible the making that already occurs within people's everyday lives.
- Find and hear the stories of those people who might not necessarily consider themselves as creative.
- Retell and amplify the stories back to the communities.
- Generate a feeling of agency in communities and pride in what they do.

Project Activity

- 6 month residency to collect and share stories.
- 15 sessions.
- 4 community groups.
- Produced in collaboration with Maison Foo[20].

Beth Sheldon (Maison Foo) and Ian Pringle (Listening Shelf Audio, working with Maison Foo) worked with three groups:

- Swanwick Men's Shed, a community building project for people to gain new skills or put their existing skills to work.
- Sew Lovely, *a* social crafting and sewing group.
- South Normanton, Alfreton, and District Amateur Radio Club (SNADARC), a group for radio amateurs, short wave listeners and radio enthusiasts.

Beth went to see the groups wherever they met up, and after three visits started a photographic and audio collection of participants' stories.

She was joined by Ian, interviewing participants and editing these down. They produced two versions of the story tapes from each group as a means of sharing the stories with the groups and also the wider public. One was 20 to 25 minutes long, the second much shorter (3 to 4 minutes).

Two characters were gradually developed, Valerie and her husband Trev, to reflect certain characteristics of the groups and their participants. And through *Valerie's Gallery* – "a listening gallery sharing stories that celebrate the extraordinary power of everyday making in our local communities"[21] – the stories were presented.

Valerie and Trev evolved through a process of meeting people, absorbing their personalities or interests, and learning more about the groups. Valerie reflected back to people elements of their stories, but also allow Beth to explore things that she as a young woman artist couldn't.

For example, Valerie's brightly coloured patchwork jacket reflected the crafts made at Sew Lovely – and the banter that always happens within that group is embodied in Valerie's character.

The group discussed Valerie with Beth as the character was being (co-) created - so when they met her at the Golden Glues Awards (see below), they felt like they were in on the joke. Trev was also partly co-created – his reserved nature and love of details reflecting those taking part in Men's Shed.

> **[Valerie] is a bit lonely but wants to build community – she's on a mission… And it's almost like she's… a microcosm of… what they [the groups] are.**
>
> Beth, Mason Foo

From this project, other events have arisen:

- The **Golden Glue Awards** was a celebration of the groups involved in the Storyteller In Residence project plus others who had worked with Make/Shift in the first year and was hosted by Val and Trev (see below).
- The development of **Val & Friends Community Living Room**, a pop-up 'home from home' used as vehicle for sharing the stories and running craft workshops.

Approaches

Make/Shift's deep relational and process-led approach played out in this project through taking the following approaches:

Surfacing people's stories

Storytelling was chosen as an appropriate methodology because it was important to listen to, and bring to the fore, the stories and experiences of the people involved in the groups.

Connecting people to their inner maker

Talking and starting conversations were key. Particularly about what mattered to people in the groups, enabling them to connect to their inner maker and build emotional connections.

Maison Foo were selected as the core partner because their work embraced improvisation. This flexible and responsive approach created the right conditions for rich conversations and new ideas to emerge – accepting the need to change and adapt to circumstances.

Seeing yourself and your creativity in others

Part of the thinking behind the project was if people see other people like themselves being celebrated for being creative, they might identify with them. Through this identification, they then want to engage in creativity themselves.

Outcomes

For group members

People became storytellers

Through taking the time to build relationships and trust, people were willing to share personal stories. Their openness **was quite astonishing**[22] and they were keen to share what the group meant to them and their wellbeing.

> **[It was an] opportunity to consolidate their understanding of the benefits they receive from what they do… [and hearing your story back] creates a better sense of your own story.**

And the sharing of a story, and the wisdom it may contain, itself had meaning:

> **[It is] powerful to recognise that you are able to pass on knowledge and experiences that will make a difference to others**
>
> Ian, Listening Shelf Audio

Overcoming isolation, improving wellbeing, building community

Members of the groups were moved to hear the stories of other people in their groups.

> **It's good to talk, share, [and know] I'm not alone!**
>
> Comment from Audience survey

The stories from all three groups talked about the importance of the group for people's mental health and a strong sense of community.

Men's Shed described how, following bereavement, members have talk of the group as being **my family now**.

A participant in Sew Lovely attended the group **for the chatting to people as well as all the crafts that they do** and described the group as a form of **therapy**.

A member of SNADARC said **if you need something doing, there's always somebody [in the group] that can help.**

Developing a sense of worth

Investing the time and effort to develop the Valery and Trev characters to retell the groups' stories validated what the groups were doing and they felt more visible.

It was also valuable when thinking about future funding – by getting people talking about the positive impacts of being a member, these could then be articulated to funders .

Developing confidence to run workshops

The groups are now going out with the Val & Friends Community Living Room to deliver workshops to the general public. They attended an event in Ripley where the Sew Lovely were making Val's Pal's badges and Men In Sheds were making birdboxes.

Additionally, Men In Sheds joined Make/Shift and Valerie at the Timber Festival to deliver the same workshop. This was significant as it was somewhere members would never have gone before.

For the artists and Make/Shift

Time and space for the work to develop and evolve in an organic way

While a slow pace was essential for building trust between the artist and the groups, it also allowed the artist the opportunity to focus on the 'process' as much as the output.

Traditionally, funding and delivery of arts projects is quite prescriptive, with pressure on delivery causing anxiety. By focusing on the process, it allowed the artists the time and space to meet people and see what happened in an organic way without undue pressure.

New ways to talk about creativity

Make/Shift now have a set of stories they can use to help model and shift conversations around the value of creativity and the role of everyday making and creativity in people's lives. As a whole, the project has been a validation of Make/Shift's approach and way of working.

> **We have so much learning and content now which can help us create really compelling, values-led invitations for more people to get involved and to feel part of what we're creating**
>
> Rachel Smith, Creative Director, Make/Shift

Learnings

- **Slow and organic is essential for trust.** The slow build up and organic way of working was invaluable to building relationships and developing trust.
- **A flexible framework.** Perhaps sometimes this open-ended way of working can feel like its drifting. Maybe it would be useful to have a loose, flexible framework to give an underlying structure and direction.
- **"Let's have a go".** Learning to feel safe in the unknown and embracing the possibility of failure creates an opportunity. Whilst it can feel uncomfortable, it opens a space to trust instincts and to lean into the messiness.

> **So far it has been a success, and this way of working is really paying off**
>
> Beth, Maison Foo

- **Surfacing the deep work.** This way of working – deep relational and process-led – can feel quite invisible at the beginning. There may be a need to think creatively about how it can be made more visible as part of sharing and developing the skills needed for this type of practice.

4. The Golden Glue Awards

Celebrating community makers who are sticking the community together.

> [C]omedy, cake and a serving of homemade sparkle in this spoof awards ceremony, hosted by local mischief makers Maison Foo Theatre.
>
> Make/Shift website[23]

About the Project

The Golden Glue Awards was an event that brought together friends and collaborators in a celebration of (almost) a year of Make/Shift.

Project Activity

- One day - 12 November 2023
- 80 attendees
- 4 Golden Glue Awards presented
- Produced in collaboration with Maison Foo and Infinite Wellbeing[24]

The Awards developed out of the Storyteller-In-Residence project – and was primarily a celebration of the groups that had taken part in that project.

There were three aims for the Awards:

- Celebrate the power of everyday making and creativity in people's lives.
- Celebrate and connecting communities.
- Illustrate Make/Shift's relational approach to working and what it could deliver.

The Awards was a live performance of the stories collected from the groups and they were at the centre of the event. Their families and friends were invited, along with other groups and organisations who had been involved in Make/Shift over the previous six months.

The focus of the day was not promoting Make/Shift but rather people's creativity. It was also a way to highlight, and talk about, the importance of using a 'relational model': working in this way – slow and making time to build relationships - and the need to invest in it.

The format was a spoof awards ceremony, hosted by Val and Trev, the characters developed by Maison Foo through the Storyteller-In-Residence project. Groups won a Golden Glue Award – a Pritt Stick mounted on a wooden block and sprayed gold and made by the Men's Shed, one of the Storyteller-in-Residence partners. This was an acknowledgment of the way they were using 'making' as a means of 'sticking their communities together'.

Val (played by Beth from Maison Foo) recounted the (sometimes emotional) stories through a mixture of comedy and sensitive narration. Following the awards ceremony, there was an hour-long 'Over a Brew' – a 'making and meeting' session where people took part in different craft activities, chatted and engaged in creative ways of gathering evaluation feedback including stickers on the wall and a Virtual Reality feedback 'game' run as part of the evaluation.

Outcomes

A welcome sense of celebration

In their feedback people reflected on how great it was to gather together and share people's stories. Attendees were pleasantly surprised by the energy, enthusiasm and excited buzz in the room.

> **Well, we've had a thoroughly enjoyable day and its refreshing to know what's happening in the community. There're so many bad things happening in the world it's refreshing to come and enjoy something like this**
>
> SNADARC (one of the 'awardees') member, Golden Glue Awards film

A sense of validation

Everyone attending seemed very proud to be involved. Those receiving awards enjoyed being appreciated – both by others and those within their own organisations. This was particularly true where perhaps they normally got little recognition or had limited visibility.

> **The ladies at Sew Lovely […] were getting very emotional because Tracy who runs it, I don't think she realises what she does […] It was nice for her get recognition at the Golden Glues**
>
> Golden Glue attendee

Building connections

The event was an opportunity for different people to meet, share stories and create connections. People were able to find common ground, help one another – or just become aware of other projects.

> **I found myself crying listening to the stories of the Men's Shed. It's nice that men have somewhere to go to, and I didn't know that was there**
>
> Sew Lovely Member

Showcasing Make/Shift's way of working

Whilst the Awards weren't about 'marketing' Make/Shift, they were a way to explain its methods and demonstrating impact.

> **It's not just a case of, oh, yeah, we'll do this thing and then move on. It's about keeping everyone on a journey with you and growing up and seeing what can happen.**
>
> Platform Thirty1

Learnings

- **Creating advocates.** Make/Shift now has some real advocates for its work in those who attended. They understand more about what the project is doing and what its delivered. Being part of Make/Shift's network – and being keen to take the ways of working forward in their communities – creates the potential for new projects, ideas and developments.
- **Showcasing the value of a relational approach**. Even though it requires lots of energy and care to nurture and grow, it can work, and the Storyteller-in-Residence project demonstrated this. The 'Award Ceremony' allowed people to understand the model and Make/Shift to build momentum in further developing the model.
- **The usefulness of a celebration and sharing.** The Awards brought people together to have fun, praise the work that's been done, share stories and connect. Thus, it provides a template going forwards – such events may be useful again at points where people need to be galvanised.

5. Makers in Residence

Exploring how to create opportunities for connection through making.

> [It's] one of those [projects] that on the surface it looks like two inches wide, but actually, it's a mile deep
>
> Jodes, Platform Thirty1, Salcare Makers in Residence Project Lead

About the project

The Makers in Residence strand came out of a wish to:

- Build connections between local organisations – with strong roots in the towns of Heanor and Alfreton – and creative organisations
- Create opportunities for connection through making.
- Allow Make/Shift itself to have a more of a presence in these communities.

Heanor and Alfreton were chosen as they had been identified as focus areas in the Business Plan. In addition, the local partners, Salcare – a domestic violence refuge – and Alfreton Library already had positive relationships in their communities and were interested to work with Make/Shift.

Locally-based creative organisations No Jobs in the Arts and Platform Thirty1 were included as partners. The latter had worked with Make/Shift to develop the overall concept from the start.

Alfreton Library wanted to find a way to attract more people – particularly young people – into their building and to be seen as a useful civic venue. Make/Shift paired them with No Jobs in the Arts as they are passionate about zines. They worked with the library to create a pop-up Zine Library in their main entrance space – which was then used to display community made zines, created through a series of monthly drop-in zine making workshops with different Midlands-based artists.

Salcare[25] were excited by both the practice and the opportunities to build on Platform Thirty1's previous work – in particular their work in Women's Refuges and bring it into their HQ. Salcare provide support and wraparound services for women who have experienced and are escaping domestic abuse situations. Therefore, they work with people who are often unlikely to have access to creative activities in the community.

Platform Thirty1 identified two experienced locally-based artists who became 'Makers in Residence', based at Salcare every Friday, running drop in creative activities for residents.

Project Activity

Platform Thirty1 | Salcare collaboration: 3 lots of 8-weekly sessions, with two artists, and there is one more lot of 8 sessions currently running. 25 participant sessions with 152 attendees.

No Jobs in the Arts | Alfreton Library collaboration: 6 workshops, 75 participants

Those who attended rated the sessions highly for inclusion (100%), experimentation (86%) and local networks (79%).

150 creative kits distributed in Amber Valley.

Outcomes

For participants

For community members attending the Makers sessions:

- People were gradually **prepared to have a go** – in both residencies, needing support to do that. When they did, they had fun and wanted more.

[although it can be hard to get passing people to join in]…anyone that sits down, nobody ever gets up after a minute and [they stay] for the next, say, hour or two hours. Because …they realize … how cathartic it is, how relaxing it is, how enjoyable it is. And just the simple, simple joy of making something

NJITA, Interview

- It **ignited curiosity** and showed people what creativity and an artist-led creative offer could look like:

A person with SEN [said] that they've attended a 'colouring group' and things but they expressed that they hadn't done anything as freeform and open as what we were doing in terms of the materials we were sharing … often libraries do have a colouring station. However, it was very kind of stripped back seat, some odd supply of crayons and some basic kind of printed paper. But I suppose by coming in and delivering this workshop, we came armed with a variety of creative materials that branched out a little bit more than what's traditionally provided in their spaces.

NJITA, Interview

- At Salcare, **people came back repeatedly** and gradually **got more confident in making** and effectively **seeing themselves as makers** or able to make things.
- There were **definitely moments of social connection** – even at the drop-in workshops in the library. This was a strong feature of the work with Salcare, connecting both with other participants, and also with the artists themselves.

One lady shared that she was really nervous about coming to the table to join in. A couple of sessions later, she talked about this with a young girl who was struggling with her mental health and wasn't sure whether she could join in or not. She did then join the table and the two women chatted for the whole session.

Maker in Residence, via interview

- Connections deepened with the support of the artist facilitation, meaning some really **difficult conversations were had and connections made**.

For partners

In terms of outcomes that build partnerships:

- Salcare in particular can **see the value of this sort of work to achieve their aims** and are keen for it to continue.
- Alfreton Library is supporting the continued hosting of the Zine Library and is talking to Make/Shift about potential future work.
- There is evidence of a **shift in organisational thinking** at least one of the arts organisations involved. No Jobs in the Arts had a strong belief in the potential of community-led practice but were unsure how to go about this while retaining their focus on developing artists in the region. The experience of working as a Maker in Residence – and the support from Rachel – allowed them to reflect on their plans, and trial different small moments of engagement and different artists' practices. It helped them see potential in shifting to enable further work with Amber Valley and similar communities.

I think it's worth saying that me and Ryan have done quite a bit of debriefing ourselves around this project. And Make/Shift, [through] the funding and support that we've had, has allowed us to trial project formats that we haven't had a chance to do before in terms of resources and, and things like that. So it's definitely been a learning opportunity for us as well.

NJITA, interview

Approaches

How did the Make/Shift approach work?

Making

Making acted as an anchor point for engagement. In both settings, the artists noted that initially people took a while to come over and interact. But once they did the act of making – and *making together* – acted as a focus and a way into enjoyment (at Alfreton Library) and/or deeper connection (at Salcare).

Connecting – person to person

Personal connection came out of skilled facilitation. The artists supported people to engage and connect with each other, not just the activity. Connections were also built by spending time together and from regular activity.

Platform Thirty1 were careful in choosing Wendy and Sally to be the artists in residence on this project because of their style and approach, as well as their previous experience. It required their expertise, thoughtfulness and ability to adapt for what was very much a pilot project.

They had worked as a team before and, having worked in refuges, had an understanding of how vulnerable people could be. They appreciated that it was a pilot and a space to test and learn – fitting with the action learning approach of CPPs. They found the setting of Salcare particularly interesting. Previously they had worked explicitly in refuges where people live – and thus it was 'their own home space'. For these workshops, held in the Salcare café, the space it felt 'owned' by the participants, but was not 'their home'.

They recognised the need to take time and give people space to make the first move. Sometimes it took "weeks and weeks and weeks" to get people to join in – but this was achieved by making things easy and friendly.

> **We've had people there that have been shaking, absolutely shaking… [if they don't come] we have a laugh and a joke … and say [to them] 'No, not this week, but I'll get you another day!'.**
>
> Maker in Residence, via interview

There was a recognition of the need for consent. People were given the space to walk away if and when they felt like it. There was no sense at all of coercion or a requirement to stay and finish work. The artists' sensitivity around this – and other aspects of working in this sort of setting – were particularly important to Salcare staff in their feedback.

It was clear that once people had taken that first step to come over and start making, it was often the connecting which was most important for them. Wendy and Sally shared the example of someone opening up about a particularly significant personal challenge as they were making at the session. This caused another participant to share her story and similarly significant experience, and…

> **…They then had that bond between them, and they were talking for maybe 15,20 minutes, so each of those through just a conversation had found somebody that they could connect with.**
>
> Maker in Residence, via interview

Connecting – building relationships between potential partners

There were a number of challenges working with an organisation for which a creative project was not their main goal:

Time: This way of working is heavily based on relationships and 'making time' for these to form. This can be hard for projects with a fixed timescale, particularly when working with organisations for which creative activity of this sort cannot ever be the immediate priority. This was evident in the time it took to set up the relationship, the shifts in staffing and who had time to be involved.

Space: There was a need to fit around the space needs of the organisation's 'main role'. In this case, as it was in the Salcare HQ, this involved fitting space for the sessions in between café, warehouse and charity shop activities. Initially Wendy and Sally understood that they would be based in the café, then the warehouse, then back to the café and charity shop. The artists' skills and flexibility were key in keeping things going – the space they were in changed every week, depending on what else was happening and even as furniture was sold.

> **We've been sat at the table, and we've had to move the table because they've sold the sofa that's next to us! And we've ended up helping them carry the blooming settee out!**
>
> Maker in Residence, via interview

They also had to adapt to the space in terms of the sessions they ran. They could not do arts activities which make too much mess or had to pack up each week after the session. However, as a result of

their flexibility and patience, they have built relationships with Salcare workers:

> **We were just two randoms coming in…we made sure we learnt all their names, the staff's names, and now they come and join in the sessions. And if they find something, if something comes into the charity shop, we'll get a bag of fabric from them. Or…a bag of hair bobbles or something that they think, 'Oh, this would be good for the craft leaders'.**
>
> Maker in Residence, via interview

Resourcing: Most Salcare staff are project funded and have other priorities. There is a need for significant input in building these more strategic relationships beyond the artist-staff-participants and into the organisations. However, Salcare is very keen that the workshops continue. This is not something which Make/Shift can fund on an ongoing basis, but they are looking for funding to continue the work as a partnership between Salcare and Wendy and Sally.

Potential: The potential for this approach to deliver on wider Salcare aims is clear in how it has galvanised involvement from Salcare participants and volunteers.

> **Fridays have become really popular for not only the residents who visit the 'one stop shop' to access the panty, charity shop and community cafe and services in the building, but also for many volunteers at Salcare too who participate during their volunteering hours and outside these commitments too. The sessions have become a place where people involved feel a sense of connection to others and with the making for themselves. They return weekly for the ritual and the shared experience.**
>
> Jodes, Platform Thirty1,Salcare Makers in Residence Project Lead

Learnings

- A slow build up and **taking the time to develop the relationships is invaluable** – you need to build trust.
- It **takes a long time to embed this sort of work** so there's a need to 'hold your nerve' over the short term to see long-term results.
- **Being active in building relationships is vital**. This needs time and expertise.
- **Recognising that you are entering other people's 'space'** and respecting this really supports relationships.
- **Good facilitation is essential**. The style and experience of those facilitating the relationship and the direct connection to the community are vitally important. Facilitators need to be friendly, relaxed, low key and accessible.
- **Communication matters**. Ensuring sessions are appropriately advertised – with clarity about what they are for, for how long and what the future plans are – really helps people to feel comfortable engaging.

6. Make/Shift Socials

Bringing local organisations and connectors together through making and connecting

> It's very fulfilling to connect with people in this local area, especially as there isn't all that much here so it's been great to make connections and feel 'not so alone!' in being an artist in this area.
>
> Post-event survey feedback

About the project

Socials came out of the 'discovery stage' of Make/Shift and was part of 'making visible' the assets of the Amber Valley. The purpose was to create a space to get to know people, tap into knowledge, share information and build relationships.

It was structured as a series of networking events – specifically offering different organisations the chance to host socials. This was "an interesting way of us getting to know each organisation's way of working" (Make/Shift Director, interview). It was also about testing out a 'nominations model' (see below).

The core partner organisations were Grow Outside, Fleet Arts and Platform Thirty1 – with the latter taking the co-design lead with Make/Shift.

These three organisations were chosen in part to give 'nature', 'community' and 'creativity' focuses, and were involved in the design of the socials. Each hosted events and decided on the format of the meeting – with a focus on conversation, making and food.

The Nominations Model

These were invite-only events. They started with each core organisation "nominating 3 or 4 people that they thought would be interesting to have as part of the conversation , and that might not always feel comfortable coming to something like that".

The idea being the nominated people might not have thought an arts-focused event was for them. However, if specifically invited by someone they knew they may attend – thus having the opportunity for their voice to be heard and new connections made.

Following on from the first social these invitees then nominated others to attend the next event. This produced "generations" of invitees and an ever-expanding network.

Project Activities

- 5 x socials.
- 60 organisations reached.
- Each had 3 elements: making, food, social.
- Ran May to December 2023.
- Those who attended rated the socials highly for inclusion (89%), experimentation (77%), local networks (73%) and curiosity (73%).
- 4 generations: With people inviting new people each session, by the end there were 4th 'generation' invitees – creating an ever-expanding network.

Outcomes

Surveying the landscape

It became clear that very few people knew each other and there was a lack of cross-sector networking across Amber Valley.

The result of the Socials has been a greater understanding across different sectors of what is happening in Amber Valley and opportunities have arisen for organisations to work together.

For example:

- Artists and groups have discovered new venues that they might be able to use in future.
- Make/Shift has begun to develop a deeper understanding of Amber Valley
- Socials have sparked curiosity about Make/Shift and what it is all about.

What was apparent was that people were attending for several different reasons:

- For light touch networking.
- To engage in 'really meaty conversations about changing the world'.
- To 'learn new skills and actually do something more practical'.

Connecting

The main outcome from the Socials was a chance for groups and organisations with multiple different focuses to meet each other and see commonality.

In the Impacts and Insight survey, everyone felt they'd interacted with new people, whatever their overall views were.

Given the lack of existing connections (identified in the feedback), this recognition of the existence of other groups and people with similar ways of seeing things is a strong outcome.

It will directly feed into the core Make/Shift outcome of

Be part of a network that has resources to thrive which is used to shift power to a grassroots level

and may feed into

Recognise their role in developing creativity

and

Recognise the value of arts and culture for making change

Make/Shift is understandably at an early stage with the Socials. However, people discovering each other across Amber Valley comes up in the feedback from every session:

> **Realising that there were more creative projects, people, organisations and groups doing forward thinking work than I realised in the amber valley area.**

> **Finding out that this great long-term project is going on nearby and there are so many people with a similar ethos and similar projects ripe for collaboration.**
>
> Post-event survey feedback

Valuing people

Furthermore, there was a strong positive response to being paid expenses for time in attending, very rare at networking events.

> **And the fee was very nice as often there is a feeling of unpaid labour at networking events.**
>
> Post-event survey feedback

People noted feeling valued which will feed into shifting perspectives.

Getting people involved

There were outcomes at an individual level in terms of **'having a go'** and some **igniting of curiosity** from taking part/ being made to take part in unfamiliar creative activities:

> **How much I enjoyed Zine Making - such a positive experience!**
>
> **Arranging the cut flowers was very special. It was great to see the creativity of others coming out in so many different ways.**
>
> **[What I found challenging?] Singing in Mexican!**
>
> Post-event survey feedback

The sense of 'being made to take part' clearly comes up in feedback. In particular, there was one event where clearly more thought was needed about how to integrate 'creating' with the fundamental aim of getting to know people:

> **I think everyone in the room was past a foundation level of communication skills, so the exercise - whilst amusing - was laboured and not at level for the people in the room.**
>
> Post-event survey feedback

Shifting perceptions

There was recognition of the value of working in a different way, which seems to have **shifted perspective** on what is possible:

> **I really enjoyed your refreshing creative approach to holding the day, it being a non-traditional networking event was refreshing and felt like bringing something new to the area.**
>
> Post-event survey feedback

Testing and learning

Make/Shift as a team and with their partners did get a **chance to test** which approaches work. They took the feedback process seriously and reflected after two socials how to adapt to the responses.

This thinking has fed into the several collaborative spaces which sit within the 2024-26 programme, including the Co-Lab and the Creative Agents.

Moving forward, there will be:

- Quarterly networking events
- Opportunities for peer mentoring through the Creative Agents programme
- A more "ideas generating" platform via the Mover, Shakers and Community Makers programme.

Approaches

How did the Make/Shift approach work?

Start with the strengths

Recognise and make visible the assets which already exist around the Amber Valley.

Co-designing and delivering with locally based organisations, and hosting in different venues engaged existing connections. This meant even the first workshop had a sense of having the right people there.

This built on the existing strengths of the area – its connectors – and made them visible to each other and others.

No one negatively commented on the make-up of this workshop despite invitees having come from three different invitation routes.

It had the further benefit that **Make/Shift didn't need to be the centre of any event, but could join in** with all the other organisations. It demonstrated they weren't trying to take leadership - but were also willing to take time to get to know people properly.

Weave from the inside out

Start small and grow through the ideas, hopes and ambitions of those involved.

Inviting attenders to suggest further people to invite certainly worked and most people suggested a few others to invite. This meant that 60 people in total attended the socials. They came coming from a range of organisations with different focuses (community, creative, wellbeing, environmental etc).

There was a focus on 'starting small' with a sense this was more important than other outcomes:

> **One of the outcomes was showing that Make/Shift are going to work in different ways … it's like modelling that. We don't know exactly what we're going to get out of the socials. But we know that we're willing to try it and see what happens when people come together.**
>
> Sam, Platform Thirty1, Co-design partner organisation

Design to distribute

Decentralising power and resources, encouraging rich interconnections and offering decision making to everyone.

The design of the Socials was clearly meant to distribute leadership, power and resources.

There are several elements that worked well and show this desire for decentralisation:

- **Paying expenses for attendees' time** was welcomed.
- Co-design and delivery by partner organisations – rather than Make/Shift directly planning and running them
- Inviting each attendee to suggest new people, shows the intentions.
- Contacts were shared after each session meaning that people could directly follow up with people they had met.

However, not having fully managed to implement this principle has led to one of the identified challenges:

- **Lack of clarity over the purpose of the sessions** is raised by participants again and again. It seems to lead to a sense of lack of power in the process and a confusion around intent.

Moving at the speed of trust

Recognise that relationships take time and patience, building safe spaces.

Make/Shift undoubtedly believes in this and it is a core part of their approach. However within the Socials, there were several issues which arose from not making enough time available.

- Repeated feedback talked about **sessions feeling too busy, lunch and other networking time not given the time needed**.
- There was also felt to be a **need for more sessions, so the trust within the group could be built up over time**, and the **lack of clarity over what the next stages were** didn't help this.

Learning from Nature

Using nature as a model to reimagine how we organise and approach.

The way people welcomed meeting in the unusual setting of the Butterfly Garden shows they saw a value to this that they might not have expected.

However, this needs to not overemphasise structures, but take a more organic approach, for example, it was clear from feedback that the initial plan of the three parts, and including 'a creative workshop' didn't work when implemented over-literally. Instead the sessions which worked adapted and built on this as a framework, not a rigid requirement.

Using creativity as a way to get people talking, particularly those who were less up for standing up and speaking was very effective when facilitated well.

> **I liked how there was a craft activity so people who were a bit more shy could ease into the conversations more slowly whilst focusing on craft.**
>
> Participant feedback

> **Meeting over making was a great ice breaker and a way for us to communicate and relate in a more connected way to each other.**
>
> Participant feedback

But in at least one case this wasn't the case, leading to a clear sense of unease.

Furthermore, there seems to have been **too much of a sense from the session leads that there was a need to have plenty of creative activity** – which again led to discomfort and a sense of being rushed.

Although there was reflection and a chance to adjust this during the delivery, it doesn't seem to have positively affected the later sessions. Design for the future needs to build on what did work and learn from what didn't.

Learnings

- **Using making as a way of bringing people together** and sharing really worked.
- **Creating as a group allows communication** –this worked better than working alone or when you can't talk to others.
- **Showing you value people's time** through offering a fee to attend is appreciated.
- **The value of Make/Shift not being the lead**, or even 'at the centre' of an event, but part of the network
- **The benefits of building a network and reaching new people through direct invitation by others** – people are more likely to attend and those who've attended become stronger parts of the network
- **The importance of making time to get to know people** – not feeling the need to 'fill the sessions' and running things for longer – or making clear what happens next – so people can get to know each other.
- **All facilitators understand and follow the Make/Shift principles** so people don't feel uncomfortable or 'forced' into activities.
- **Ensure the purpose and opportunities are communicated before, throughout and afterwards** so people feel able to input and share what they got out of it.

MEADOW

Evidence answering Arts Council England's three core research questions for Creative People and Places.

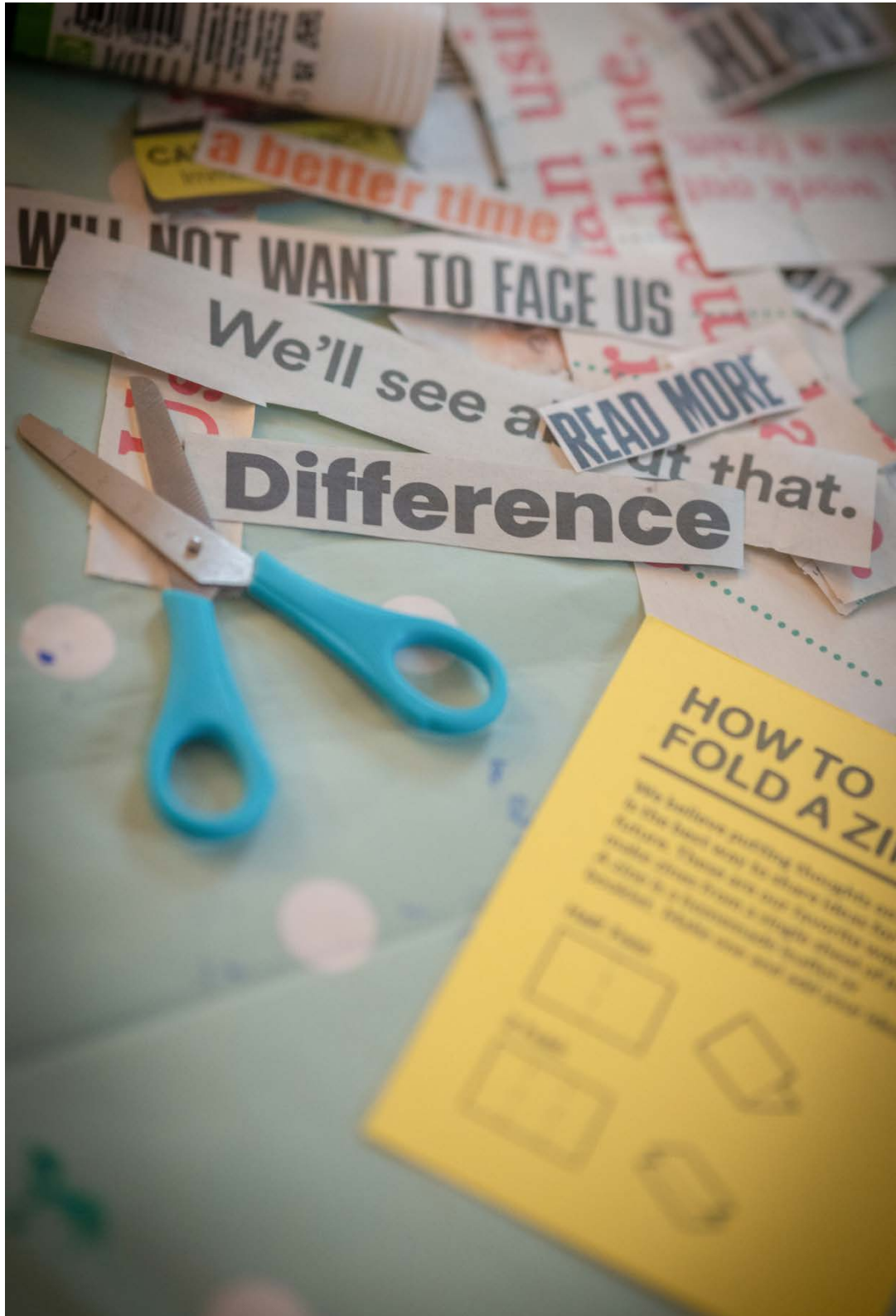
This is an incredibly early stage to make any conclusions about the 'flowers' which might bloom from all the work done through Make/Shift.

However we can look for indications – 'sprouts' of small change, in activity, attitudes and experiences as leading indicators of what is likely to be the outcomes longer term.

The analysis here is drawn from across the programme. We recognise that the terms used within these questions don't completely fit with the values and approaches Make/Shift has adopted, but there is a need to clearly articulate outcomes in a range of different 'languages' to suit all funders and stakeholders.

These three sections answer Arts Council England Research Questions:

- Q1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by creativity and culture and what are the most effective ways to achieve this?
- Q2: What approaches enable us to deliver on our aspiration for excellence both in the process of community engagement and the creative and cultural experiences on offer?
- Q3: What else are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?



7. Reaching and inspiring

Here we discuss the extent to which Make/Shift are reaching and inspiring audiences to answer ACE research question 1:

> Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by creativity and culture and what are the most effective ways to achieve this?

We find that:

- Make/Shift are reaching into all areas of the Amber Valley, including reaching into the more deprived areas of the district.
- Audiences and participants alike say they want to see and experience more after events.
- Make/Shift have put considerable effort into considering how to reach into all communities in an accessible way, including working through local organisations, thinking about physical access and signage and language to make all feel welcome and included.

Who did Make/Shift reach?

Data note: As very little quantitative data was collected this year the data for a lot of this section comes from a minority of events, so is very small, compared to overall engagements, and also may well be biased towards events where it felt easier to ask this sort of data, rather than the in depth work with communities which led up to them. Thus it is hard to build an accurate picture of who Make/Shift engaged with and caution needs to be exercised in relying too heavily on this data.

Geographically

Make/Shift have engaged people from all over Amber Valley, and into the wider region.

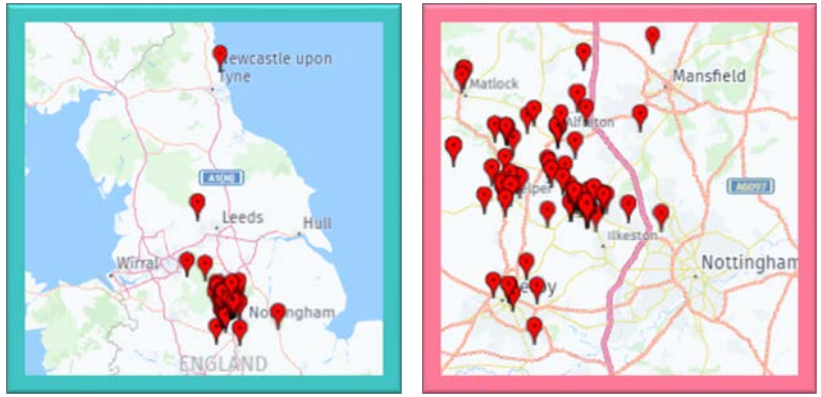


Figure 2: Map of Make/Shift audiences, regional and local view. Base = 86 postcodes.

Make/Shift have reached 19 out of 22 wards in Amber Valley this year – that's 86%. The chart here shows they are reaching an even distribution of areas across Amber Valley. The three remaining wards yet to be reached are Kilburn, Denby and Holbrook, Somercotes and South West Parishes, but as per above, this may be an issue with the data.

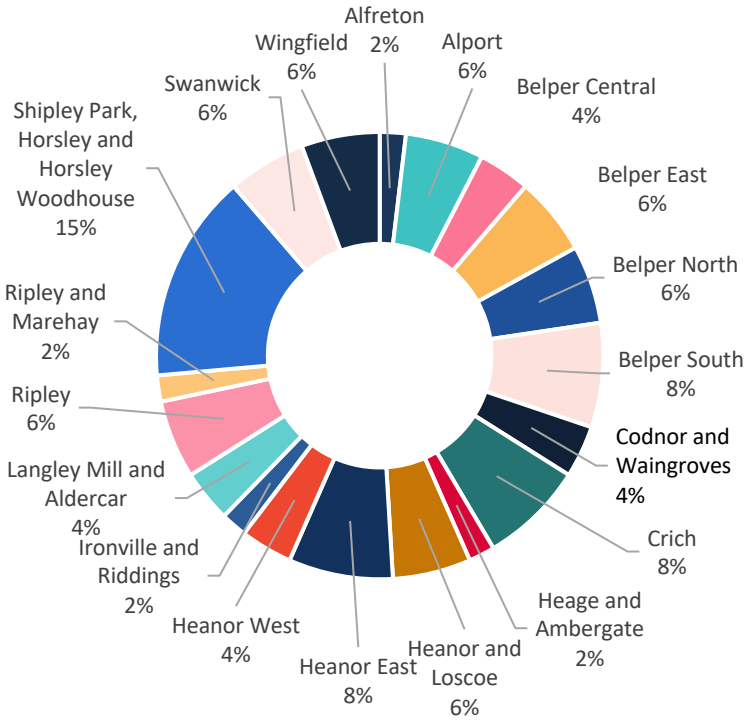


Figure 3: Reach across Amber Valley wards by audience and participant postcode. Base = 53

Based on likelihood to engage in the arts

We use postcode analysis to get an understanding of people's likelihood of arts and culture engagement. Using audience postcodes matched to the Indices of Deprivation (IMD) we look at the levels of deprivation for Make/Shift engagements this year, compared with those for the Amber Valley and England populations as a whole. Typically, those from areas of high deprivation are less likely to engage in the arts.

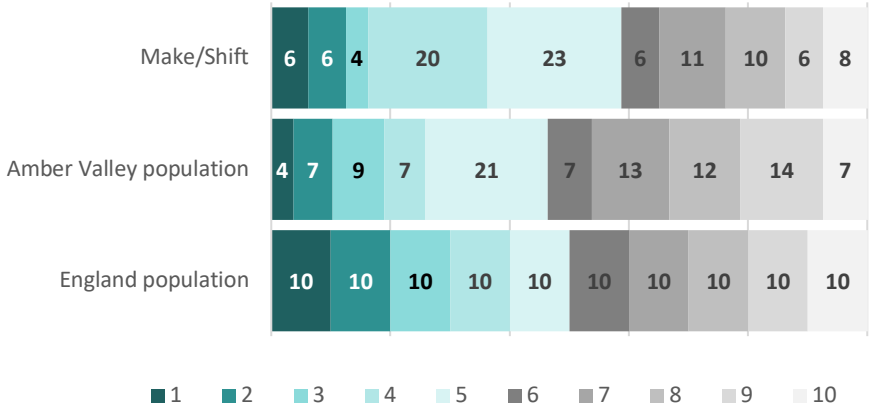


Figure 4: Indices of Multiple Deprivation for Make/Shift audiences, Amber Valley and England. Base = 80

The chart here shows the percentage of Make/Shift audiences who live in each 'decile' – the lower the decile the higher the levels of deprivation, with 1 being the 10% most deprived areas of England.

Here we see that Make/Shift audiences (6%) are slightly less likely to come from the 10% most deprived areas of England than the national average (10%), but slightly more likely to than for the population of Amber Valley as a whole (4%). This is a positive sign

that Make/Shift are beginning to reach into the more deprived areas of Amber Valley. This is also seen in the fact that Make/Shift are reaching the more deprived half of Amber Valley areas at a greater rate (59%) than for England as a whole (50%).

As this analysis is based on a relatively small sample of postcodes, improving data collection will provide better insight into Make/Shift's reach for next year.

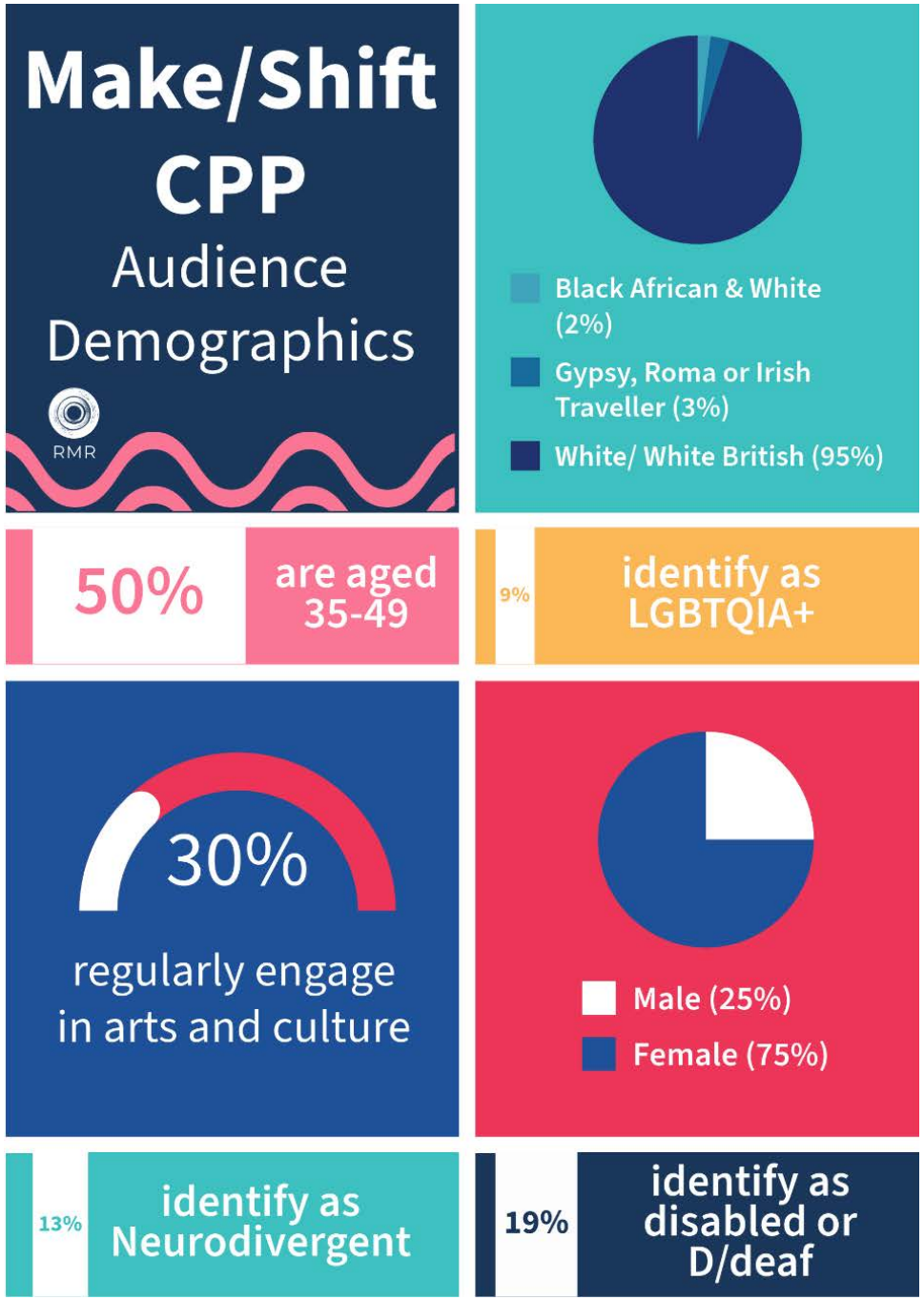
Demographically

Here, we present the demographics of those who filled in surveys, but more is needed next year to provide an accurate idea of audience profiles.

The infographic here shows the demographic make up of Make/Shift audiences and participants at events where data was collected this year.

95% of Make/Shift audiences were White British, which is slightly lower than the proportion for Amber Valley population (97%)[26]. 19% identify as D/deaf, disabled or as having a long term health condition. 13% identify as Neurodivergent.

Three-quarters of audiences and participants identified as female (75%). No one identified as non-binary or trans. 6% identified as LGBTQIA+.



22% do not already regularly engage in arts and culture activities, including 13% who only do so once a year. 30% regularly attend arts and culture events.

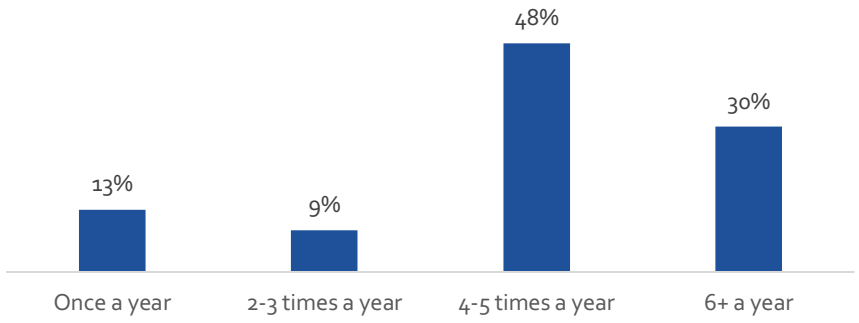


Figure 5: How often do you engage in arts and culture activities? Base = 23

Make/Shift audiences are far more likely to come from the 35-49 age range than the average for Amber Valley population.

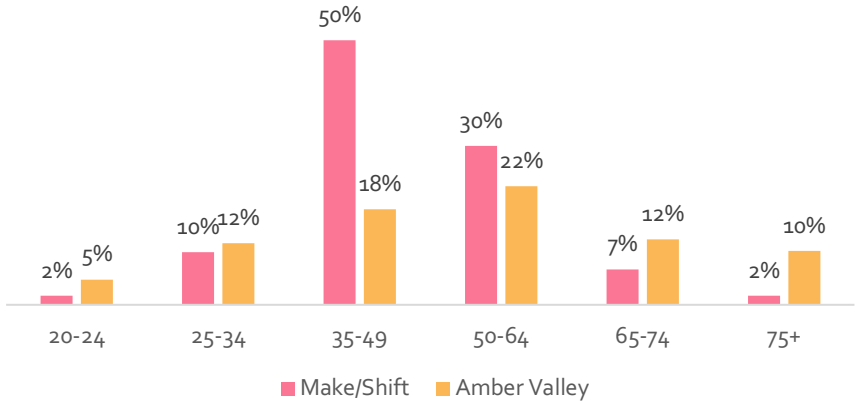


Figure 6. Audience age, compared with Amber Valley population average. Base = 60

Were they inspired?

> **I could have easily spent all day chatting with the other people and being creative.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

93% of audiences and participants rated Make/Shift events good (36%) or excellent (57%).

71% of audiences and participants felt their expectations were met or exceeded. 21% attended with no expectations. Just 7% felt the event fell short of their expectations.

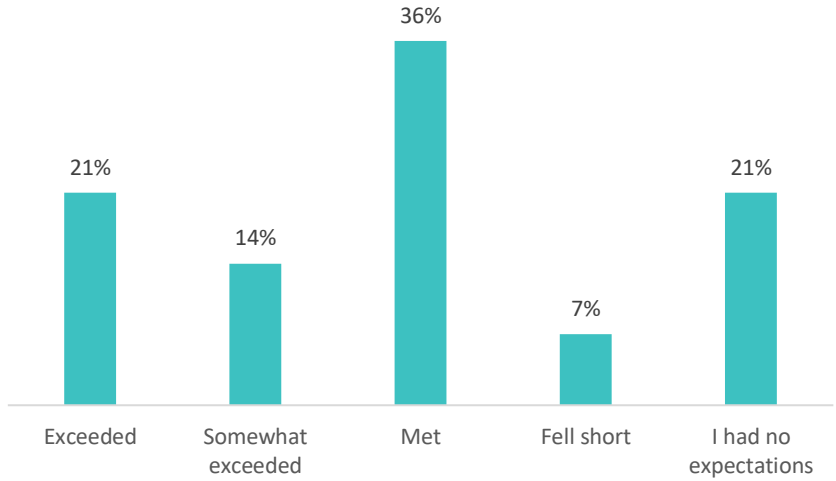


Figure 7: How did today's event compare to your expectations? Base = 14

Inspiration through making

Core to Make/Shift's work, the space and the freedom to make was highly regarded by audiences and participants. **100%** of Golden Glue Awards audience members felt **motivated to get creating** and 100% felt **curious and wanted to find out more**.

> **[I enjoyed] being able to chat to people whilst making. I loved using the hand powered blender! Arranging the cut flowers was very special. It was great to see the creativity of others coming out in so many different ways.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

At events, the team observed people making and sharing what they made, and conversations being sparked. A mother shared with the Make/Shift team that she hadn't seen her child focus on an activity that wasn't digital for as long as they did at an event.

Make/Shift's care and attention for event planning built a safe space for people to try out something new.

> **It worked! Built trust enough that people feel okay to come along, out of their comfort zone. One person said 'you don't know what it's meant for me to come out of the door today'. First step to building that community.**
>
> Delivery partner, via reflection

Inspiration through Connecting

78% of participants at the Understory mapping events highlighted the **importance of connection** in their feedback.

> **What a lovely way to meet members of our community. Lots of enthusiasm to work together, real sense of optimism.**
>
> Understory participant, via survey

Participants at many events enjoyed **meeting new people** and wanted to continue **building these connections**. 91% of audience members at the Golden Glue awards felt they'd met new people and strengthened their connections.

> **I would like to get to know the people here today more.**
>
> Understory participant, via survey

> **[I enjoyed] chatting with people I knew and meeting and finding out about others that I didn't know.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

> **[It was] useful to connect and would be nice to get to know the other humans here today.**
>
> Understory participant, via survey

As well as making connections on a personal level, the events helped people **expand their professional networks**.

> **It's been nice to unveil the community organisations that are under my nose in Heanor.**
>
> Understory participant, via survey

There was also something about the depth of connection – feeling seen and heard, not just in fleeting moments but forming the beginning of real human connection.

> **I connected very well with an amazing woman who I never met before, but who seemed to understand where I'm coming from better than many other people.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

In terms of things people found challenging about events, one person mentioned their own feelings of being out of place holding them back:

> **I felt a bit challenged by my own 'imposter syndrome' as I was representing [two organisations] – I realise I need to clarify my roles better to communicate clearly and move forward with ideas for the future.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

A few participants mentioned that at an event there were too many activities and that it felt rushed, which highlights **the importance of creating and holding these spaces** for people to meet and make without speeding the process along, but letting things develop **organically**.

> **[The event needed] more space in time simply for chatting with one another.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

Audiences and participants enjoyed the **warm, informal and welcoming atmosphere** Make/Shift fostered at their events this year.

> **It was surprising to feel so relaxed …. which made the session very enjoyable.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

However, some felt the relaxed atmosphere did not always provide enough direction, and they would have appreciated more steer to conversations as some felt less able to drive things forward themselves. A delicate balance needs to be struck between giving people space but also giving prompts from which to start conversations. This will also support those who are perhaps more introverted, Neurodivergent or shy to engage in an accessible way.

Overall, audiences and participants left events **feeling elated and inspired to engage further.**

> **The whole thing was completely stress free and I felt unusually uplifted afterwards.**
>
> Socials participant, via survey

Conclusions

- Audiences and participants enjoy making together and want to engage further.
- Events provide opportunities to meet new people or strengthen existing connections.
- A balance should be struck between space to meet and make, and using some steer to aid conversations.

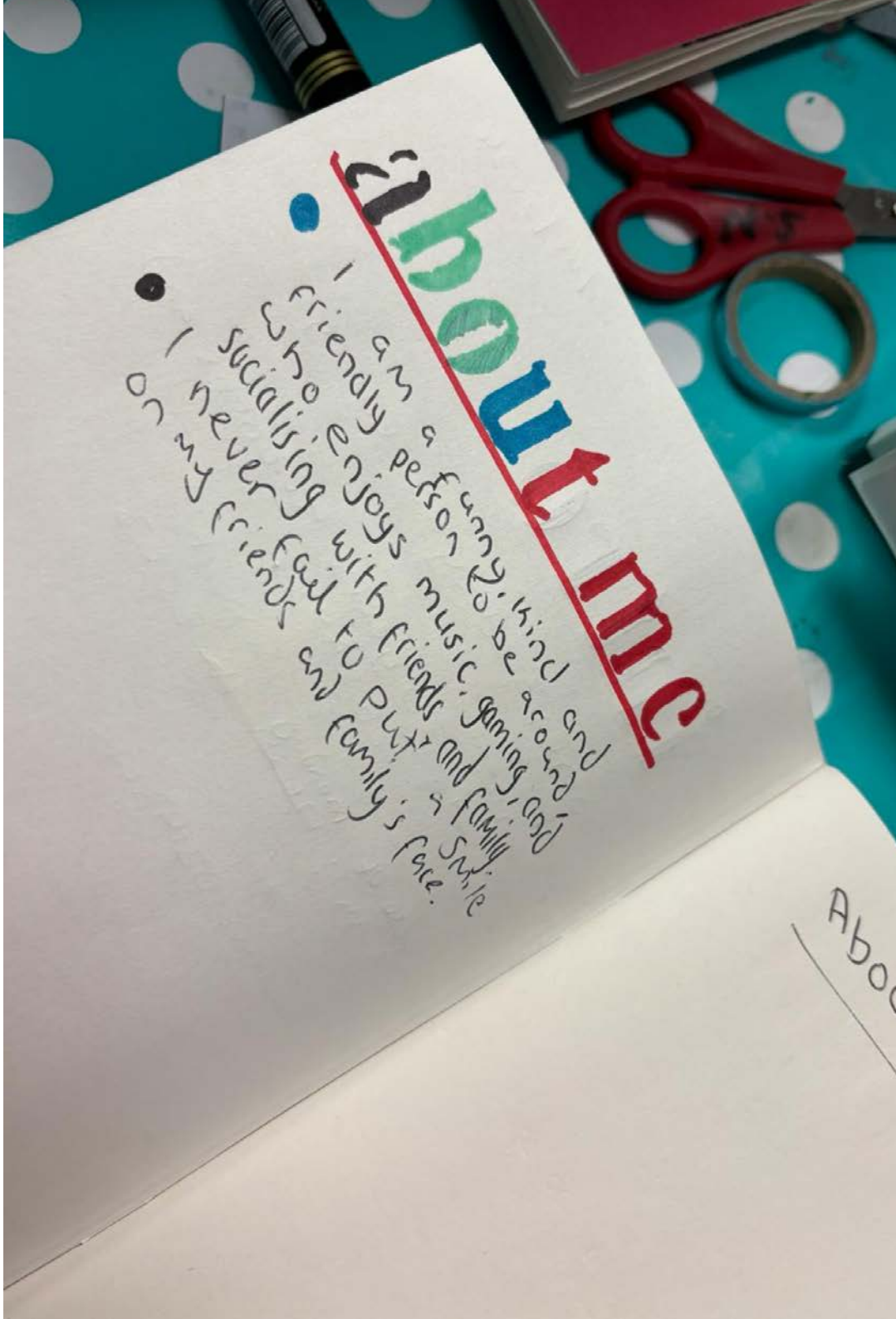
8. Two inches wide and a mile deep

Here we consider how Make/Shift approaches are ensuring an extremely high quality approach to every aspect of the way they work, addressing ACE research question 2:

What approaches enable us to deliver on our aspiration for excellence both in the process of community engagement and the creative and cultural experiences on offer?

We find that:

- Make/Shift's aims and principles all support delivering excellent process-led creative work.
- There is in particular a real commitment to ensuring quality in design and inputs at every stage



- Responses to Make/Shift's work have been positive and have included shifting of perspective and other markers of excellence.

Defining and measuring 'excellence'

Arts Council England asks CPPs to consider:

> **What approaches enable us to deliver on our aspiration for excellence both in the process of community engagement and the creative and cultural experiences on offer?**
>
> ACE CPP RQ2

This can be a hard question to answer for CPPs as the word 'excellence' feels exclusive and often can be equated to inaccessible art which doesn't feel relevant to communities who don't typically engage with funded art. CPP research has suggested a definition of excellence and quality as 'what it does to you' – that excellence of the creative and cultural experience be assessed by how people who attend feel and respond.

This aligns with Make/Shift's outcomes around igniting curiosity and shifting perspective.

A second challenge with the question is the implicit assumption within the framing that excellence in the process of community engagement is somehow separate to excellence in the creative and cultural experiences on offer – or even that the community engagement and creative and cultural experiences themselves are separate. Make/Shift's approach is not to differentiate between 'engagement' and 'creative and cultural experiences' – seeing the 'process' and 'product' as different is very simplistic – the work to invite in, develop ideas, share and co-create the work is the process and also the creative product.

In approaching assessment of this research question we will work on two main assumptions:

1. To ensure excellence, it matters how you approach designing and delivering projects and activities – the process. We use this fundamental view to value measuring the quality INPUT, alongside experiences of participants and views of deliverers to understand excellence at outcomes stage.
2. Secondly, we use experience, resonance and meaning making as a way of assessing outcomes – these correlate well with the Impacts and Insights dimensions which were selected by RMR working with Make/Shift team to fit with CPP principles and Make/Shift principles and outcomes.

How Make/Shift is ensuring excellence in their work

Ensuring excellence through a commitment to core values and principles

Make/Shift's principles are about excellence of process and its values indicators of excellent work. They really take the values and principles seriously, designing all programmes to follow them and making time to reflect and adapt practice.

The Values talk about imagination and the value of curiosity, collaboration and working together, care of those around us and the environment and action – having agency to make and act. This along with the identified outcomes of trying something new, sparking curiosity and thinking differently are key signifiers of the sort of shift in thinking which come from experiencing excellent art.

Genuinely starting where the community is at

Make/Shift takes an asset-based approach to every part of how they work. They look for and recognise assets rather than see the place through the lens of its 'problems'. This is commented upon by all partners and is seen as extremely welcome and unusually good practice by those experienced in similar work, including with other CPPs.

> **It's not just like another CPP that I've been involved in. Because Rachel's going about this in a very different way. So she's not going … I'll bring in culture and it will be available to everybody … To be honest, I'm always fearful of when big shiny projects come into an area like this, they come and go have no understanding about the context …those actually [cause] a lot of problems for people who are trying to do things but Rachel have got a real good sense of … the ground and the challenges. And she's got a real clear vision which … we've all got a part of and we own, thank goodness! … It doesn't feel like you're in … a project, it's more than a project, it feels like this could really shift and change things.**
>
> Locally based partner organisation

Taking a holistically designed approach to the place as an ecosystem.

This involves considering the ecosystem of the place and how to support it, thinking about all aspects, not just the arts and culture, and not just the immediate project being worked on. There is a commitment to linking into the wider ecologies of the place – well beyond 'culture' – as well as thinking about how you invest in and build the local economy and infrastructure – working with local groups and artists and supporting excellent practice locally, as well as bringing in external partners for ambition and learning. As part of this commitment Make/Shift specifically tries to spend locally and logs where spend is made – finding that 35% of spend this year has been to local groups and organisations, including thinking about it for catering, venue hire, photography etc, as well as using local creatives and organisations.

Going as slowly as necessary, allow people and processes to take the time they need to

This is part of the commitment within the principle of 'moving at the speed of trust' and is a core element in ensuring community involvement and then leadership of the work. As part of this approach Make/Shift are committing to longer term relationships which will build trust. There is a real need to 'hold your nerve' in this approach as there aren't as many immediately visible outcomes:

Mostly CPPs just put on shiny stuff and drag people along the road with them. That is the way that this is being designed and grown. Which is why it's probably taken a while ...

Locally based partner organisation

Being a connector not a blocker

In terms of developing excellence in the area more generally it is essential that a project like Make/Shift does not hold on to the connections made. The Understory mapping offers a way of talking about the difference between 'super-connectors' (who ensure everyone they connect with also connects with each other) and 'blockers' (who may have many connections, but hold them all, ensuring they remain essential and maintain power in the ecology. It is early in the project but there are already examples, through Socials and increasingly within the developing Co-Lab of Make/Shift ensuring that connections are 'many-to-many' rather than running through Make/Shift staff.

Genuine commitment to handing over power to community

There is absolutely no doubting the commitment Rachel, as Make/Shift Director has to handing over power to local communities. This is put in place at every opportunity, starting with taking time to see what is wanted and needed – even under the inevitable pressure to produce outputs which comes with every funded programme.

The model for 2024-26 which has been co-developed with local communities, includes community-led commissioning of work, development of skills and projects and space for new ideas and input to governance.

This builds on the latest thinking on how to support fundamental shift in power, and includes searching out new technology which can affect this. This commitment and the routes to support this shift have already been noticed by partners who are watching Make/Shift as a good practice example.

Being prepared to try (and possibly fail) to build new approaches

This is absolutely core to making change, particularly when looking to do something so radical which hasn't really be fully tried before. The approach the programme takes to risk – supportively and gently leaning into it – and to what counts as success – thoughtful and not output oriented – really support this.

Work hard to remove any barriers to engagement

Make/Shift considers all the barriers to access, from physical limitations, through to financial and structural. The aim is that through this even the least experienced communities can engage and begin to lead change. This thinking has been particularly effective around trying to ensure access to decision-making and financing – with the decision to use Open Collective to overcome challenges with the university systems also acting as a way of enabling greater handover of control with transparency. There is further work to be done in terms of ensuring diverse groups are

able to access all events and feel welcome, and also in terms of telling the telling the story and aims in really accessible ways for all the audiences.

Evidence in the responses – both enjoyment, and already shifting expectation

93% of audiences and participants rated Make/Shift events good (36%) or excellent (57%).

71% of audiences and participants felt their expectations were met or exceeded. 21% attended with no expectations. Just 7% felt the event fell short of their expectations.

Make/Shift events are rated highly by audiences and those who make them happen alike. The chart here shows the results of Impact & Insight dimensions of quality, rated by programmers before and after events, and by audiences who attended them.

Overall, scores are largely similar between audiences and programmers, which shows that Make/Shift have a really good idea of what the people of Amber Valley need and want. All quality metrics have a score of 69 or higher, with many in the high 80s or 90s. Audiences rated events particularly highly for motivation to do more creative things in future (99%), enthusiasm to attend something similar in future (99%) and feeling welcome and included (92%).

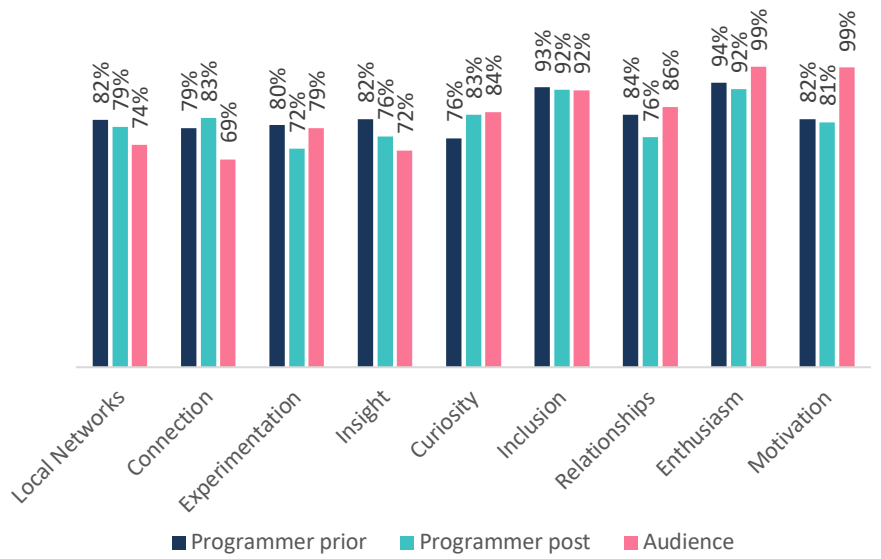


Figure 8: Impact & Insights ratings for programmers before and after events, and audience ratings. Base = 36

Mostly programmers' scores prior to events are in line with their scores after, but occasionally the post scores are slightly lower. This shows areas where Make/Shift have reflected on their programme and are using the learning to continue to improve.

Conclusions

Overall it is clear that Make/Shift has an extremely strong commitment to excellence in all areas of the work. This is beginning to show within the responses of audiences and programmers, but more within the quality of discussion, reflection and commitment to co-creation and further to community owned and made high quality work.

9. Learning what works

In this section we explore what is working in Make/Shift's approach and what the challenges are, which addresses ACE research question 3:

What else are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?

We find that:

- The principles and values that underlie the programme are strongly thought through, genuinely held by the team and give a strong direction and way of working.
- The concepts of making, connecting and shifting are useful in giving a sense of process and change over time
- A group of partners from very different backgrounds have come together to support the programme and will help embed it into the Amber Valley
- There's a need to rethink how Make/Shift's aims, purpose and models are articulated beyond a core group of collaborators.

- There is considerable challenge around capacity and the governance model to fulfil the very ambitious aims around significant shifts in power.

What seems to be working so far

Taking a principle-led and thought through approach

The programme is designed with asset-based principles at the heart, and the principles of starting with and building on local strengths are not simply add-ons but are clearly utterly integral to every design decision made. There are some challenges with this, particularly given the structural factors of delivering a time-limited project and operating in an area where previous investment has been top down, or non-existent, meaning local assets have needed a lot of energy and care to uncover. These feed into the challenges below, and it is impressive that Rachel has managed to continue the commitment to working in this way throughout.

It has paid dividends in terms of buy-in from key partners from the start – with organisations from who were otherwise cynical about change putting a great deal of energy into the programme. Thus Make/Shift has been able to draw in support and build networks – and thus bring in existing assets, particularly from organisations beyond the arts

It is beginning to pay dividends in terms of outcomes from communities, and modelling so that wider partners are considering adopting different approaches. Most of the 'what works' relate to this approach but are spelt out more directly below.

Thinking carefully about who delivers and how

The team work very carefully at every stage of the design process, in particular considering not just 'what' is delivered, but how, where and who is best to do it. The benefit of this is clear in the case study projects above, as well as other strands of the work. They have found partners who share their principles, in particular being prepared to be open to working in a non-outcomes led way – following community need and handing over power and decision-making where possible. As well as people who can be flexible to adapt to what any particular community needs. As a result, the projects are crafted with care, and deep engagement has happened in a relatively short time.

Energy and evidenced commitment of the Make/Shift team – particularly Rachel

This energy, belief and genuine wish for change comes up all the time as a success factor, with a recognition that Rachel genuinely cares and wants the best for the Amber Valley community – and how much this matters to buy-in to the programme. It seems particularly important in a place which has been 'worn down' by successive challenges where this new enthusiasm and belief in change is essential to give others the strength to be the change.

> **...it's Rachel, let's be honest. And it's the way she is ... generous, space giving, meeting people where they are ...when I first met her, she was still meeting people in the system ... so I was trying really hard not to be a complete cynic... but she very quickly saw it or for what it was, and then, you know, didn't get bogged down ... was like, right,**

> **how do we galvanize, how do we move into action and not let this drag us down? And that is completely refreshing and new.**
>
> Delivery partner organisation

This will form the basis of 'shifting' in the longer term and as above with the principles is part of why people locally are prepared to put their energy in after so many setbacks in the past.

It is essential to consider how to keep this energy going.

The use of the word/ concept of 'maker'

The use of the concept of 'maker' and 'making' – with the strapline (and core belief) that everyone is a maker has had real traction in Amber Valley as it allows a clear connection to the heritage of the place as an industrial area and works for groups which might not ever see themselves as 'creative' per se. This can be seen clearly in the response to the Golden Glue Awards where groups who wouldn't be classed as 'arts' felt more than comfortable to see themselves as 'makers'

> **It's about time someone recognised us like this, frankly**
>
> Golden Glue award winner, observation

Commitment to time for reflection, being open to experimenting with new solutions to 'blockages'

As a core part of the CPP approach, taking an action research approach allows Make/Shift the time and support to try out new ways of working with the understanding that they might not work.

This offers a chance to trial more radical solutions to complex problems and the Make/Shift team have applied principles in an effective manner:

> **Learning from more than human ways of organising, to help untangle ourselves from dominant stories and systems that keep us trapped in solutions that aren't working.**
>
> Make/Shift principles, Learning from Nature, above

There are always significant challenges in working as a new project within and around the systems of a parent organisation, and this has been well documented challenge for CPPs. Working within the complex systems of a university – while delivering in the community with small-scale organisations and individuals makes this issue more stark. Particularly in terms of finance, and getting payments out, this has been a major issue for Make/Shift and taken considerable time resource and had impact on relationships and reputations at times. For example, one payment of £30 took several months and a lot of emails and different levels of involvement to sort.

Make/Shift's response to this has been creative and potentially more than addresses the basic issue as they have linked to Open Collective, a legal and financial toolbox platform for grassroots groups allowing the transparent sharing of both decisions on how money is spent, but also quick sharing of the money with fully logged and visible records.[27]

This is being trialled and if it works could be a solution for other CPPs and grassroots groups.

All of this works within a setting of time to reflect and a willingness to face up to knotty issues and competing priorities.

The commitment to this time to reflect and learn, and to build safe spaces of trust where people can feel able to challenge, run alongside a partnership approach to evaluation. RMR is very much a reflective partner, walking alongside the programme and offering continuous reflection and challenge for change, the Critical Friend and the new diversity challenge partner also feed into this.

This will allow Make/Shift to trial approaches to overcome other challenges – for example how to equitably give out small pots of money - which could give a great deal of learning to partners. Core partners are already looking at ways of implementing some of the learning which Make/Shift as an action research project has been able to test.

Developing a 'support structure' for change makers

It is already clear that individual change makers – people who care about their communities and are keen to their own time in to supporting change – are one of the greatest assets Amber Valley has. Make/Shift has already added huge value by connecting people who hadn't realised who else was out there, and specifically by using the ideas of 'making' 'connecting' and 'shifting' bringing people together based on shared principles and aims, rather than sector in which they work.

This, along with the input of energy, belief and opportunity has begun to turn into a support structure. The development of more 'spaces for shifting ideas' – as well as spaces to make and spaces to connect through the 2024-26 programme will enable these assets to strengthen into the aimed for "network that has resources to thrive which is used to shift power to a grass roots level"

Offering a galvanising point for creative work and new ways of working in the Amber Valley

As a large organisation with a creative and place-based brief Make/Shift is uniquely placed to be able to bring work into the district which smaller organisations wouldn't be able to partner on. This has already happened with Derbyshire Makes where Make/Shift is the Amber Valley end – there initially having not been a plan for this project to operate in the district at all.

Belief and commitment from consortium partners

There is a growing level of trust and commitment from wider strategic partners. This is particularly true for consortium partners and includes considerable financial support from University of Derby, with a commitment to supporting the place, not gaining from it as an institution.

Consortium partners offer time and contacts from elsewhere and it is notable that there is less of an issue with conflict of interests and partners seeming to be looking out only for their own organisation – rather than the benefits to the people of the Amber Valley and M/S aims - compared to other CPPs. There is a wish and a need to give more input and support expressed by most Consortium partners. This needs to be carefully supported to be useful and fit alongside community-led programming.

Challenges to work on

Need to communicate the model and plans to wider communities

Make/Shift is working in new ways, with new concepts and at times new terms and phrases in a way that can be hard to understand in the abstract. As a result many partners have found it hard to tell the story of what Make/Shift is doing and what it's purpose is.

This is necessary to extend connections and buy-in beyond people who already have an inclination to work in this way, into groups where there would be great benefit and likely enthusiasm were they to have the approach made clear.

The move from needing to talk about the approach in the abstract, which isn't always effective, to being able to see it in action through the planned programme for 2024-26 should help with this, as has already happened with earlier projects:

> **[that was the] outcomes of the socials: the network the appetite, the awareness of Make/Shift … because even if you do have a shiny website on day one, you can only say so much.**
>
> Delivery Partner, Interview

It is really important to think about this communication now, as the programme is ready to be rolled out, and to take opportunities offered by all the different networks to reach unexpected people for whom this approach might really work.

Acknowledging the amount of time and range of skills needed to do this sort of work

Throughout this report it is clear that the successes so far come from having made time to connect, be present on the ground and let things develop as they needed. Challenges have come when there is rushing, or not enough time given to develop something which is bespoke to a particular community or space.

In addition to the time needed to build trusting relationships, there's also a need to focus which expends a lot of energy in itself. Make/Shift team and Consortium members need to recognise the huge range of different spaces in which the team needs to operate which mean moving at different speeds and wearing different hats. It is challenging to move into and out of the different spaces and logics and requirements. There is a certain type of flexibility and attitude to uncertainty which is needed to do this sort of work:

> **[You have to be able to handle] not having structures and timelines, deadlines and needing to be open and like organic and flexible and all that stuff that you have to be in the sector … people that can get this quickly and run with it and be and be uncomfortable, and you're happy with that … people who can be bold**
>
> Delivery partner organisation [talking about skill sets for the sector]

An effective team of this sort doesn't end with recruitment, they need to be managed and supported to bring out these skills as well. There has been a great deal of staff turnover, and a sense of exhaustion is clear at times.

This needs addressing urgently recognising both the complex skills which are being brought into play, and the level of support needed to do this sort of work.

Recognising the shifts needed within and around the consortium to maximise value

The Consortium haven't always felt as involved and empowered as they might and are not all fully clear on how to communicate the approach Make/Shift is taking. This means the team are missing what could be a key resource for the programme. There is a need to look at how Consortium's value and input can be maximised, but also how it can fit alongside future plans for shifting power to give more of a community role in decision making.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarising learning and sharing recommendations for the future.

It is clear that Make/Shift's approach is creating rich and meaningful connections in Amber Valley.

However, at this early stage of what will need to be a long-term shift, it is still too early to make any strong conclusions.

The asset and values-based approach to community-led design and co-creation of the programme is already developing unusual and effective partnerships for delivery, allowing Make/Shift to reach beyond those who might typically see 'art' as something they are interested in.

Changes are happening:

- Audiences and participants enjoy making together and want to engage further.
- Events provide opportunities to meet new people or strengthen existing connections.
- Locally based creative and other organisations who are working with Make/Shift view the approach as a welcome change from the norm: radical and committed to doing things differently to shift power structures, and
- Cross-sector partners who have been involved in activity welcome the energy and ideas

As a result, Make/Shift is reaching people who live in areas of typically low attendance at Arts Council England funded events. It is clear that people are inspired through and by making, and the use of this word is particularly effective.

The work and approach is highly thought out, considering all aspects of quality within the process of co-creation and implementation, producing deep outcomes which will undoubtedly begin to shift perceptions of self and place.

The team are reflective and building in learning and adaptation within the co-design and development processes, with plans for the rest of phase building completely on testing and exploring work done with communities this year. This action research approach building on and around sharing stories and making spaces to discuss different ways of approaching change continues within plans for the future.

Recommendations

The Make/Shift Team should:

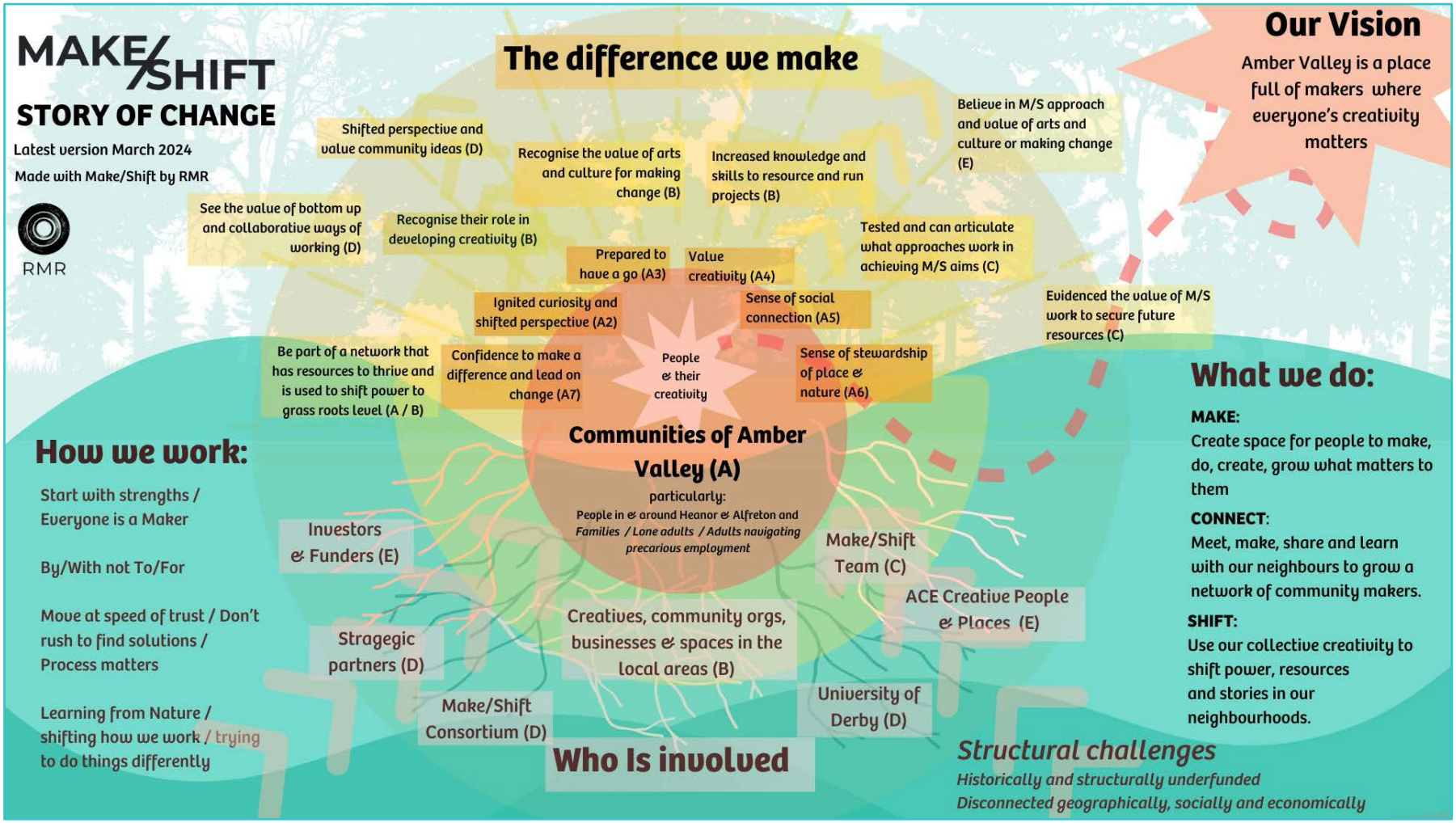
- Continue with the slow, deep and thoughtful approach which closely follows the core CPP ambitions and best practice learning from previous CPPs.
- Work on sharing the learning and model more effectively, to ensure community members and partners understand the approach and aims of Make/Shift. This requires work on a communications approach, considering all audiences.
- Increase data collection to get a better understanding of who is engaging in activities, and more evidence of the effectiveness of the approach.
- Review access and inclusion, particularly considering how to reach diverse audiences and ensure all feel fully welcome

The Make/Shift Consortium should:

- Spend time to reflect on the role of the Consortium and Lead Organisation and provide stronger challenge in governance, as well as working with the team to support the ambition to more embed a community-led approach to governance.
- Ensure the team has the support and structure needed to deliver on the vast range of requirements and nuanced approaches of running a CPP, this needs to include ensuring all roles are filled or temporary additional support added, and that all staff have the support needed to fulfil their potential.

Appendices

Appendices providing extra information and analysis on the content of the Report are available at https://rmresearch.uk/makeshift-appendices/. We include the Story of Change below for reference – this is also available as a separate appendix.



Endnotes

[1] https://www.varbes.com/population/amber-valley-population

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[8] Cormac Russel & Joop Hofman, Working on the Root System of Social Connections in a Community, 2024 https://www.qeios.com/read/TD4ETJ

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[15] https://www.infinite-wellbeing.co.uk/

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[18] https://map.understory.community/ambervalley/network

[19] Make/Shift - Open Collective, see https://opencollective.com/makeshift

[20] https://maisonfoo.co.uk/

[21] See https://maisonfoo.co.uk/valleries-gallery

[22] From interview with Ian

[23] See https://www.wearemakeshift.uk/golden-glue-awards/ - includes photographs and video from the Awards

[24] See https://maisonfoo.co.uk/ and https://www.infinite-wellbeing.co.uk/ for more details

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[26] Census 2021 data, ONS, https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000032/

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