

GROWING THROUGH THE STORM

Learning from the
Creative Civic
Change response to
coronavirus



**Creative
Civic
Change**



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About this report

Published in July 2021, this is the second of a series of reports sharing the learning and outcomes of Creative Civic Change, compiled by the project's independent evaluation team of Sarah Boiling, Anousheh Haghdadi from Beatfreaks Consulting, and Amanda Smethurst.

Creative Civic Change

Creative Civic Change (CCC) is an experimental funding programme delivered by Local Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Modelled on the Big Local programme, CCC offers flexible, long-term funding, in-area mentoring and a substantial peer learning programme to fifteen communities across England.

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Design & illustration

By **Molly Bland**, an Illustrator and contributor to the CCC project Creative West End, Morecambe.



Foreword

It is said that storms are good for ecosystems of all kinds; the lightning fertilises the soil, the rain nourishes the plants, the wind strips deadwood from the trees and stalks and branches become stronger. Life continues to grow.

In Creative Civic Change (CCC), this metaphor has been something we have clung to in the last, long, stormy year. As we absorbed the many blows, suffered our losses, and looked at the devastation around us, we were nourished by the newfound creativity, resilience and community spirit that has seen us (almost) to the other side of the storm.

CCC set out to experiment with ways to allow 15 communities across England to transform their places through creativity. From the start we built a programme with trust at its heart and gave communities the power, resources and support they needed to transform their own communities. After delivering the Big Local for 10 years, Local Trust already has proof that this funding model works, but never has that been clearer than in this incredibly turbulent year.

At the beginning of 2020, Creative Civic Change was looking forward to a bumper year of exciting activity. Hearts sank as the reality of lockdown hit and project after project was postponed or cancelled. With CCC funding, however, each community was able to reassess and quickly react to their changing circumstances. Instead of going quiet, each one responded with more vigour, ingenuity and compassion than ever before – and as a result, some amazing things have blossomed.

This report shows some of the ways that these communities continued to spread joy and cheer to those around them in this dark year. Neighbourhoods were brought together to sing, dance, draw, fly kites and play mini-golf. Artists were provided with jobs and opportunities to keep their heads above water.



Connections and relationships were strengthened, efforts were finally noticed. Essential services like food banks were reimagined and parents were given support with the hard task of homeschooling.

Funders have a habit of telling the shiny success stories - and of course there are many of those to tell with CCC, but as we all know, this is not the full picture. The effects of the pandemic have been felt profoundly by these communities, on all levels. In each one of these places, the hardship of the pandemic fell on already tired shoulders.

Throughout this long year energy has dipped, enthusiasm has waned and the feelings of burnout have been felt by everyone. Let this report be a record of the amazing things communities can do in a crisis, but also evidence of the need to care, support, and value these people and the work that they do. If we do not look after these community leaders - where will we be when the next crisis comes around?

This last year has presented many storms for us as funders to grow through too. Not only the pandemic but the ongoing fight for social justice that came into focus in the wake of George Floyd's murder. We have relearned over and over the importance of trust, of stepping back and allowing everyone's voice to be heard, allowing people to rest, to change their minds, to grow.

Most profoundly, it has never been more apparent that behind each one of the wonderful stories we shout about online, or in our reports, there is a group of real people trying their best to keep going, to keep smiles on their communities faces, and find some way through. Our funding practices must continue to support these herculean efforts.

This report could more accurately be called "Growing, learning, struggling, failing, thriving but most importantly surviving through the storm." Let's all hope the sun comes out soon.

Grace Bremner, Local Trust



About this report

Our first report talked about how Creative Civic Change projects had been “preparing the ground”; working with their communities to set a vision of what their communities could achieve over the three years of their funding. As many communities set about making those visions a reality, the Coronavirus pandemic forced us all into lockdown. This report picks up how the CCC projects responded to the “storm” of the Coronavirus crisis. Our main conclusion is the title of this report – despite the huge challenges, CCC projects continued to grow in some way, big or small, throughout this challenging time.

The gardening metaphor that we are using in our learning reports is something that has come from our conversations with the CCC projects throughout this period. We talked about how working in communities is closer to gardening than to building, requiring long-term investments of care, connection, patience and resilience.

We have drawn on these themes in this report, which is in three sections:

Designing & Planting

This map illustrates the breadth and variety of CCC activities from March 2020 onwards

Blooming & Growing

This section explores what difference CCC projects made in their communities

Learning & Caring

These checklists pull together CCC projects’ collective wisdom on how to continue to work creatively in communities under crisis

The data for this report comes from activity reports provided by the fifteen CCC projects; interviews with each project team or working group; and interviews with residents from a sample of the CCC communities.

Our thanks to everyone who generously contributed their time and reflections to the report.

Sarah, Anousheh and Amanda
CCC evaluators.

DESIGNING & PLANTING

The 15 communities that are part of CCC - shown here on the map - have undertaken a huge number of activities in the period from March 2020 to the spring of 2021.

The illustrations in this section show a selection of these activities, focusing on where they took place - at home and on the streets. Scroll over the illustrations on the following page to find out more about each activity.

The Communities

1. **Whitley Bay**
2. **Creative West End Morecambe**
3. **Kensington Vision Liverpool**
4. **Portland Inn Project Stoke-On-Trent**
5. **REMAKe Grimsby**
6. **Greater Creative Blackwell**
7. **Hard Times Require Furious Dancing Birmingham**
8. **Creative Kingswood and Hazel Leys Corby**
9. **Filwood Fantastic Bristol**
10. **Urban By Nature London**
11. **Tilting The Mirror London**
12. **Creative Newington Ramsgate**
13. **Par Bay Creatives Cornwall**
14. **Good Stuff St Leonards**
15. **Nudge Community Builders Plymouth**





CCC
activities:
at
home..



CCC
activities:
on the
streets...

BLOOMING & GROWING

What difference did CCC projects make in their communities?

CCC teams and residents described a wide range of different outcomes that resulted from their activity, benefitting overlapping communities of residents, creatives and the CCC projects themselves. For residents, CCC projects brought joy and cheer, rekindled community spirit and connections, fostered creativity and inspiration, supported mental health and wellbeing, and prompted people to think differently about themselves and their neighbourhoods.

CCC projects supported local creatives to develop new skills and to survive financially and creatively. CCC projects have also strengthened their strategic relationships, bonded as working groups, helped to connect and inspire local action, and continued to put local people in the lead.

Many of these outcomes were like wildflowers in grass verges - blooming unexpectedly, but contributing something vital to the local ecosystem.



FOR RESIDENTS



Joy and cheer!

Many projects talked about the importance of bringing joy and cheer to people; providing some positivity to counter the challenges and difficulties that communities were (and still are) living through.

Filwood Fantastic's Hearts and Stars stay at home lantern parade involved residents making lanterns for their windows, with materials provided and on-line artist-led sessions. The parade itself went ahead in COVID secure conditions, with a small number of people carrying larger lanterns around Knowle West, accompanied by a live band of local musicians. One of the lantern carriers commented:

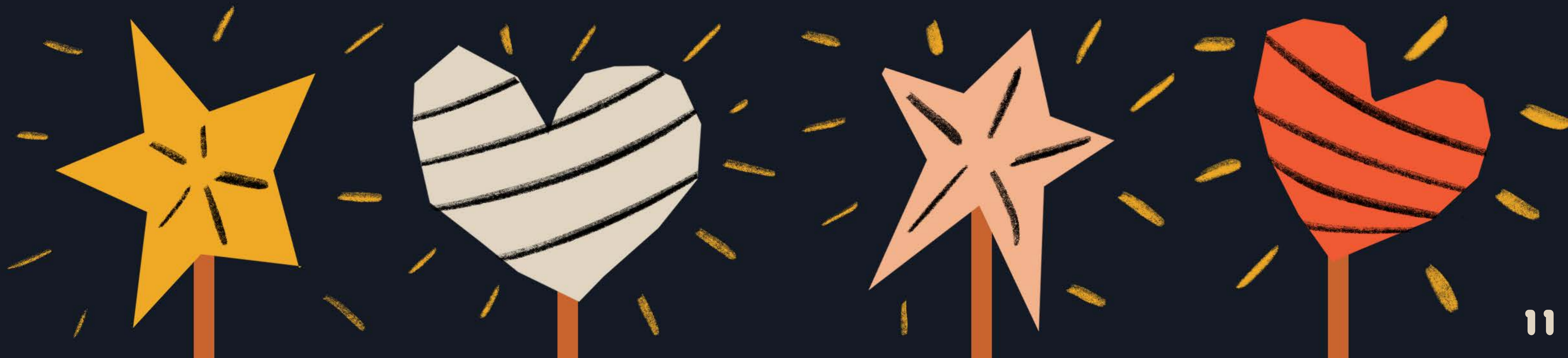
"It was great to be a part of the lantern parade, it was a really collaborative event. It gave me great joy to see people coming out to watch, they were dancing along to the band and it brought a lot of smiles and waves! The light of the lanterns cut through the darkness of the times and brought people together, I was really proud to be part of this community."

Whilst at **Creative Newington** in Ramsgate the Nearly Normal Thanet Dog Agility team was a hit with families:

"That was amazing! The children loved it so much"

"The dog people came and the kids loved it, they had so much fun."

"The children had so much fun although it rained it really brightened up their day. It was lovely to see them all happy."



At **Nudge Community Builders** in Plymouth the vision for their CCC work is to bring joy and colour to Union Street, this became even more vital during the pandemic, and their activities such as Alien Activists, doorstep Valentines, Community is Kindness posters and one window film shows transformed the street, with residents commenting:



"We are so lucky to have this happening on our doorstep"

"So much colour and love on the street!"

"I think you have changed our area forever!"

Tilting the Mirror in Peckham took their Yuh Figet Yuhself intergenerational programme online. Despite challenges, the project lead reported:

".. we had these moments of joy... I was sitting in my bedroom on this workshop and we're all working with the clay. And the young people were just laughing and laughing at themselves and laughing... we're able to be vulnerable and laugh with each other about these things that we've never done before with these wonderful materials. And that was a great moment." (Project lead).



A sense of community spirit & connection



A consistent theme from conversations with residents and project teams was how activities helped people feel more connected with one another and feel part of a community.

One project spoke of how at the start of the pandemic it took half an hour to drop off their creative packs to people's homes, but was soon taking three hours as residents increasingly valued the conversation and connection, whilst another established a 'list of love' of residents they knew would need extra help; regular phone calls from volunteers provided a chance to chat and arrange for help with shopping, gardening and other tasks.

At **Kensington Vision's** Liverpool Community Radio, providing a genuine community voice and information for the Kensington community has always been their role; this has become even more valuable during the pandemic:



When lockdown hit in March 2020, **Whitley Bay** was getting ready for the Whitley Bay Carnival. The project worker reported that the impetus for taking the carnival digital was the enthusiasm and support of the local community. The resulting Whitley Bay Lockdown Carnival fostered both digital and "in real life" connections. People taking part commented that unlike other on-line activities, they felt connected to other Carnival goers who were also involved in the workshops. The project worker commented:

"Well, because it's community radio, dealing with local issues in Liverpool it gives hope, as an outlet to what's going on in their city...The guests here are so varied you can see it's a radio station without discrimination, varied people you may not have otherwise met. People can see their community is alive; have a better understanding of their community; and have knowledge of what's going on." (Volunteer)



"From being out on the day of lockdown carnival, just seeing the connections in the streets, which you would never see, whole streets out having a laugh and being connected".

Other projects reported similar dynamics, explaining how zoom sessions were a catalyst for real world relationships, both in communities and between communities. Participants in on-line workshops became walking companions, introducing each other to different parts of their neighbourhood, A series of creative packs provided by **Creative Kingswood and Hazel Leys** culminated with recipients meeting in a local park to fly the kites they had all made. Zoom workshops allowed for connections to be made between communities too, such as **Par Bay** and **Creative Kingswood and Hazel Leys** "Cross-Pollination Poetry", connecting Corby with Cornwall.



Fostering community spirit was the most common resident feedback given to **Greater Creative** in Blackwell Parish in connection with their lockdown projects. As one resident said:

"I just think it just brings you together as a community, and it's just something to occupy your mind and take your mind off the horrendous things that are happening right now just to give you focus" (Resident interview)

"..because the pit had closed, you lost all that community adhesion. But now, I feel we're finding a way to bring that back. That's what I'm going to take forward, is the fact that there is a way to create community spirit" (Working party member)

"Don't feel so isolated & this a lasting legacy for community spirit" (Community message book)

Encouraged creativity & provided inspiration

For many people the creative activities they got involved with were a brand new experience; something they didn't realise they would find so enjoyable or that they would be any good at.

At **Portland Inn Project**, households in the neighbourhood created clay Portland Pigeons for sale – which sold out within 3 hours of their launch in October 2020.



"It's given us something to look forward to, something to do that we like and something that challenges our creativity as well. Because I have never done modelling before with clay. I see myself as someone who's not very artistic, I try and I want to be artistic. But I just, I'm limited with my skills. So this has really been something that we all look forward to doing. And we'll try to take our time to make something, it worked out well. And it's been quite nice. It's really been quite nice...So I went a bit wild with the decorating. I actually ended up making a funky hen. So great. I love it." (PIP resident)

This was echoed by an East Marsh resident involved in RE-MAKE's activities, who was also inspired to seek out more things to do independently:

"... it wasn't just the packs, the stuff we added to that then. It sort of inspired us a bit, we did stuff on the internet. There was one video where we recreated Oliver Twist, the kids got a thing and mucked about."
(REMAKE resident)

"It wasn't the best time, to be honest, and some of the stuff we've done with [REMAKE] has probably helped us to bond as a family... there's some stuff like that, crafting, I didn't realize I had a knack for it... It sounds really bad as a father, but I've never done it with my kids. We've done colouring books, and moon puppets... and to be honest it was brilliant."



Greater Creative's Winter Windows project inspired one resident to decorate her windows at Easter too:

"It's inspired me. For Easter, I thought, "Ooh, I could get some colored chalk pens and do some Easter decorations on my window," so it's been quite inspirational."
(Greater Creative resident)

Helped with mental health & wellbeing

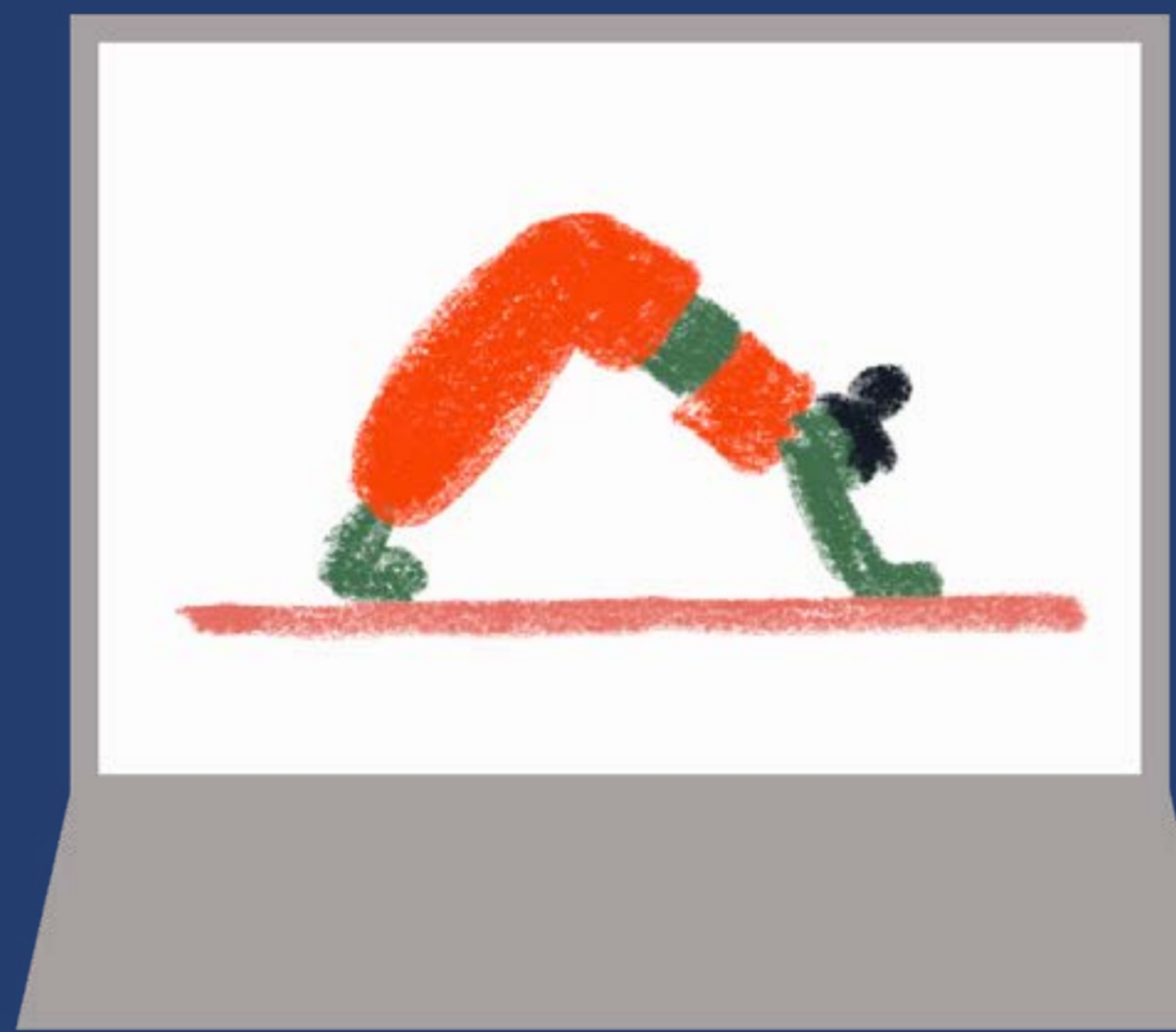
Creative activities provided by CCC programmes provided a sense of purpose when it was easy for time to drift by aimlessly; it was easy to get involved, and you didn't need any particular skills; the activities created a sense of achievement and pride when people realised what they could create; and many activities were family focused, all of which provided much needed positivity and helped residents and their families cope with the on-going situation.

Par Bay Creative's online creative workshops have made spaces for people to creatively process feelings of depression, anxiety and stress in lockdown:

"There's one lovely girl who's part of the [poetry] group... In the feedback, she explained that she gets quite depressed. Yesterday, she vocalized that. She said, "When I'm feeling depressed, I start writing." She was saying how much it helps her, so that was lovely." (Covid & Beyond project leader).



Portland Inn Project's Singles and Mothers Unite Together group has made space for women on the street to get together:



"So we all have yoga on zoom and that's so, so, so useful, and so helpful. It's really helped me de-stress. I really look forward to Wednesdays. So we just check in on each other and have a chit chat. And then someone volunteers to read poetry. And then we do yoga." (PIP resident)



Good Stuff In St Leonards' All Choired Up has been described by one participant as "an LGBTQ choir where I can feel comfortable to be myself". Born in lockdown, one participant in this Zoom choir described the impact of this work as "therapy - a space to just let go".



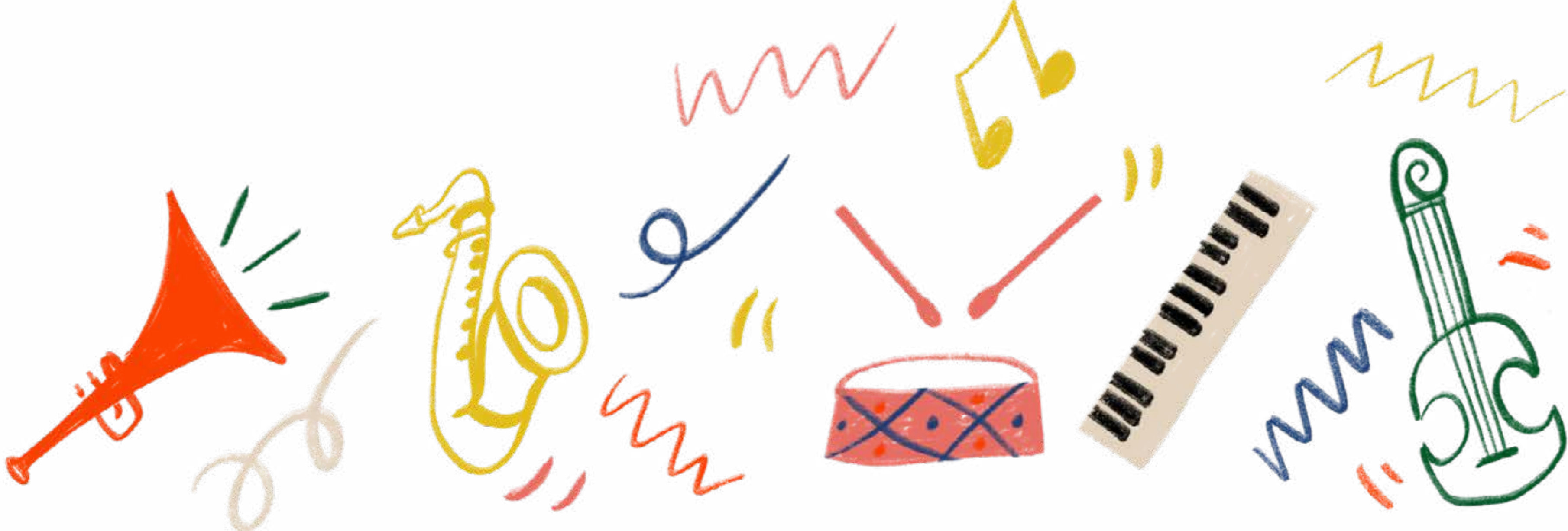
Made people think differently about their neighbourhood

Residents spoke about how the CCC projects in their area, and their involvement with activities has made them re-consider their local neighbourhood; seeing the positive things that have been happening, has shown their community in a new light.

Hard Times Require Furious Dancing have reclaimed unloved and under-utilised public spaces to put on pop-up events such as jazz music in the communities of Birchfield and Welsh House Farm. Their working group said:

"Some of it that's happened, not just in Birchfield, but Welsh House Farm, but is probably something that's happened everywhere, is that appreciation of open space, even if it's just a small bit of space, or those unofficial spaces, which as a kid I used to play in places like that." (Working group member)

"...it has influenced, and it has changed the way I look at spaces around my community, and the way I look at what can be done, and what we can do." (Project lead).



Greater Creative working party members and residents told us how their public installations such as chainsaw sculptures have connected the villages in the parish together:

"... it's getting people in different areas to talk to each other and spread the word about what is happening" (Working party member)

"I think since we've got this **Greater Creative** in the village... it's a greater sense of community. ... but it just feels like we're all working together now and things are getting done." (**Greater Creative** resident)

An East Marsh resident told us how their engagement with **REMAKe** made them want to get more involved in the community:

"I sort of ended up on the East Marsh by default, really... But this [**REMAKe**] thing and the people have made me feel at home there, I'm in no rush to move at the moment. Whereas before, I will admit, I was plopped there. Whereas now, no, I think once COVID's gone, certainly with my partner, I think we might get a bit more involved with the community, and that's probably the one thing that we got from it." (**REMAKe** resident)

FOR THE LOCAL CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Many CCC projects were already supporting local artists and creatives through commissions, networks, and skills development, and this became even more important during the pandemic, when many freelancers and artists were struggling financially. Projects expanded their support of artists, making it easier to access, and were proactive in identifying people who would benefit. This meant that a broader range of people who may or may not have described themselves as 'artists' before COVID 19 were financially, personally, and creatively supported. This support helped artists to:



Develop their skills & confidence

Many CCC projects described how artists they worked with had grown in confidence during this period, how they developed skills around digital delivery, project management, community engagement and fundraising, and how their CCC work enabled them to access other funding and creative opportunities.

One member of **Hard Times Require Furious Dancing's** photography group went on to work with the Ikon Gallery in the city, whilst two young artists supported by **REMAKe** were successful in obtaining Arts Council England funding for their work. At **Filwood Fantastic**, an artist supported early during the first lockdown became involved with larger scale initiatives and benefited from working alongside a more experienced colleague.

In Morecambe, two young people, members of Creative West End's Creatives Network, and self-described "anxious little beans" talked about the encouragement and support they received from the project leads, who gently identified opportunities for them to take the lead in activities, when in the past they would have been participants, and were proactive in keeping in touch and checking things were going OK as their project progressed. One practical outcome of this was that the young people facilitated a zoom session for Creative West End network members and fellow CCC project, **Urban by Nature**. A first for them both, and an experience that really helped to build their self confidence.

" [it was] terrifying...It makes it harder when it's people that you know as well. ... [but] it worked out well in the end and everyone said that we did well anyways. But it was another thing that seemed way more scary than it was going to be. And then once we actually got into it and sort of settled into the meeting, it just kind of organically fell into place... I think as well, because like we were the youngest people on the call. Yeah. We were the ones leading it. So we were like, we're basically telling the grownups what to do and it feels weird."



Survive financially

In areas already facing significant economic disadvantage, CCC project teams were acutely aware of the impact of the pandemic on local creatives, with those with more established practice hit hard by the cancellation of contracts and commissions, and others who were balancing their creative activities with other paid work, struggling with reduced hours and in some cases, redundancy.

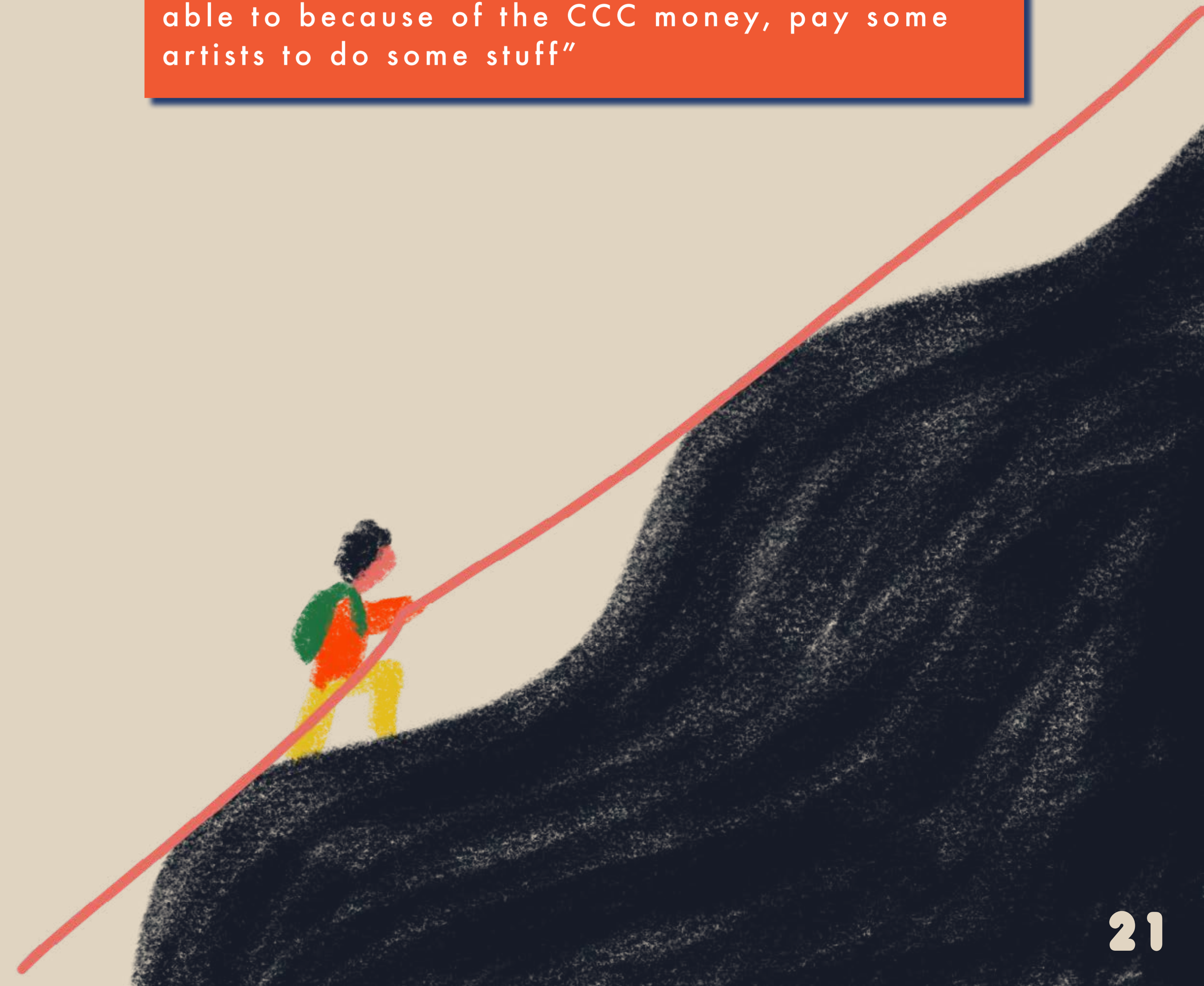
This was felt first hand at **Par Bay Creatives** in Cornwall, where two members of their working group lost their businesses and needed to make a career change, and two of the artists commissioned in one of their earlier funding rounds could no longer deliver their activities for the same reason. Retaining creative talent in the local area is one of their key aims, and they have funded a scholarship for a young creative in Par Bay, as part of Prodigal Theatre's Emergent Artist scheme. The recipient of the Par Bay scholarship has also joined the **Par Bay Creatives** working group.

Many projects re-purposed existing contracts so artists were paid to create art packs and provide digital support, rather than planned face to face activities, whilst others extended and expanded projects especially to support their local creative community. **Greater Creative's** Create a Crest project commissioned local potter David Wadsworth, who explained:

"For us as an arts-based business the project has been a lifeline really. It's led to new commissions from a couple of schools who saw Create a Crest and wanted to work on a similar project with their pupils."

Project lead at **Creative Kingswood** and **Hazel Leys** commented:

"Kate and Lola as local artists, are really important in terms of the culture of Corby and the culture of these two estates. Actually, them having paid work last year, having seen what has happened to freelance artists across the rest of the country, I think that's an impact that we don't often talk about that much. Is that we've been able to because of the CCC money, pay some artists to do some stuff"



Survive creatively

CCC funding supported artists to work together, to maintain their practice, to expand their experience into new areas, and to work alongside communities - all of which helped to sustain them creatively.

The **Creative Newington** project lead commented:

"For all of the artists who did the Cope play, it was like it was a bit of a light at the end of the tunnel or a breath of fresh air because they're all used to working with people. And so actually that little window where we brought in bubbles from schools, they were doing what they love and what they're good at."

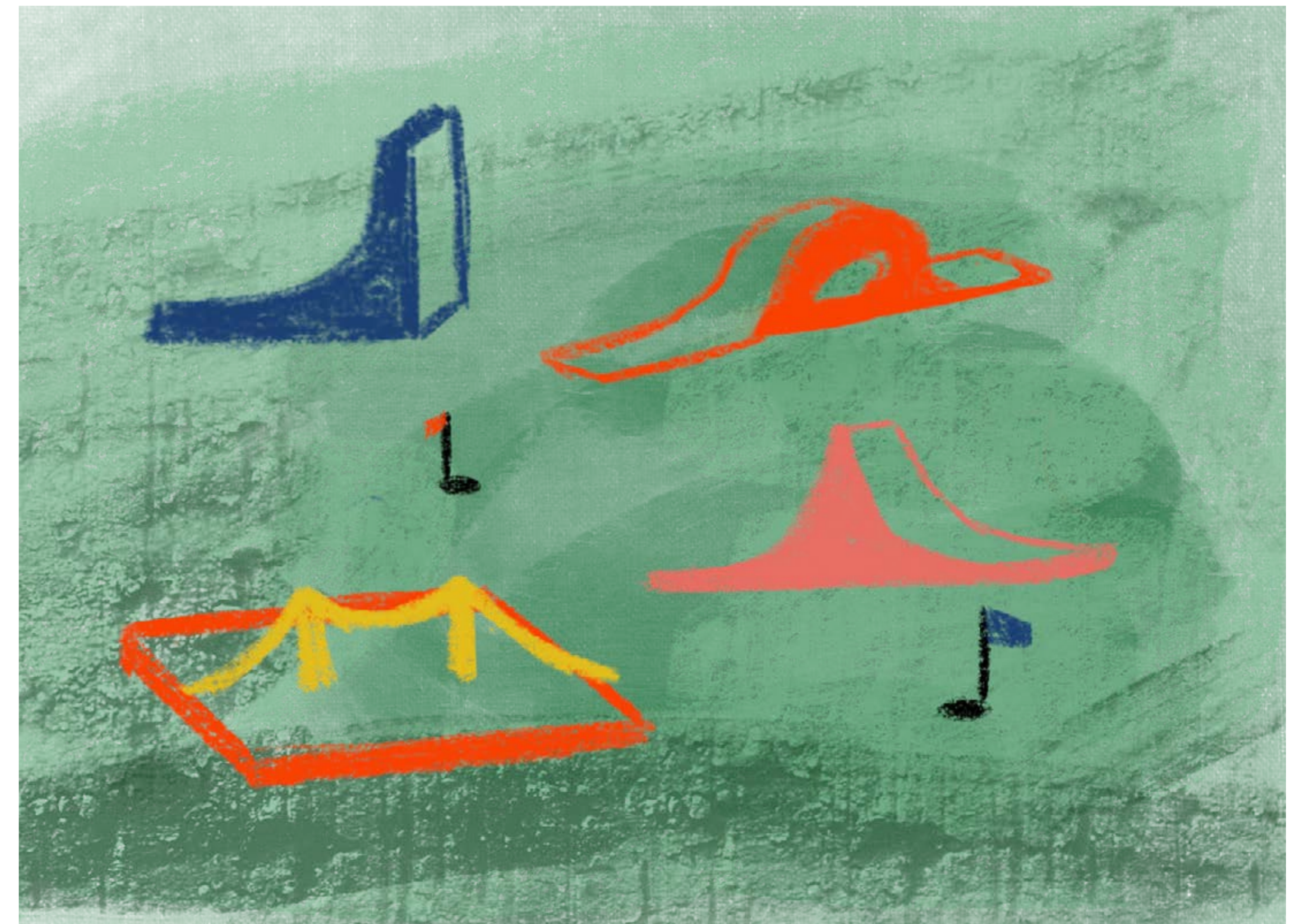
Whilst wood artist Andrew Frost who is working with **Greater Creative** on their sculpture trail reflected on how the project's ethos has been refreshing for him as an artist:



"This project has been great, it really feels like the community involvement has been just as important as the sculptures. I like that we've not really changed the entrants designs much, usually I'm commissioned and given an idea of what's required, and I go away and carve something that visually represents that idea, I love that for this project I'm just designing what they've drawn, there's a real truth to it"

And artist Megan Clark-Bagnal who led **Filwood Fantastic's** mini golf project reflected on how this work has brought her closer to her community:

"This project has allowed me as a local artist to be more connected to the people in the houses I pass daily that I didn't know who they were - it has changed my geographical understanding of where I live from dropping off parcels. It's been an amazing opportunity to meet talented neighbours, that otherwise I don't think I would have ever spoken with before, let alone seen inside their houses and learnt about the many hidden talents tucked away on our estate."



FOR THE PROJECTS

Whilst all the projects have faced challenges during this time, many have experienced some unexpected positive outcomes.



Strengthened their strategic relationships

The visibility and commitment of CCC projects to keep going during the pandemic has been noticed in their local communities, and has led to many of them developing new and stronger relationships with partners and stakeholders.

For **Nudge** in Plymouth, their grassroots connections across the community resulted in them being approached by their local Police and Crime Commissioner to distribute a series of small grants to 40 local beneficiaries, as well as being paid as consultants as part of their city's Cultural Partnership High Streets funding bid. Both marked a considerable step up for the project, who were more used to being the recipients of funding rather than allocating it.

Another project noted how many more cultural, and other organisations were approaching them to work together or who were commenting how they had seen or heard good things about their work.

At **Portland Inn Project** in Stoke, young members of their working group (aged 6-13) reported finding needles and seeing men passed out in the green space. With parents' permission, the Project Lead passed on the young people's accounts to the local policing team and the head of ASB at Stoke City Council. Their response was immediate - and the following days, the policing team were doing their best to tackle some of the issues raised in response to the children's reporting. The Project Lead noted how this was in contrast to previous reporting from adults, which hadn't resulted in such swift action, and how their local Police Constable had been especially supportive of their project during the last year.

A number of projects strengthened their relationships with the education sector; **Good Stuff in St Leonards** received support from University Centre, Hastings for their plans for a Pride Prom organised by Flexed, their young LGBT group. The Fine Arts Course leader reflected that:



"Student culture has gone by the wayside a bit during Covid, which is very sad. I'm excited about the opportunity to engage in an honest conversation with students about a positive and celebratory event around sexuality."

At **Urban by Nature**, Walthamstow College became a key partner in developing and delivering the William Morris Design Line as part of the London Design Festival.



Acted as a catalyst for other local organisations

The connections, relationships and trust that CCC projects have across their communities has had a 'ripple effect' that has enabled other local groups and organisations - and therefore the wider community - to benefit too.

One project described how many of their arts partners were reaching communities they hadn't done before, as they were uncomfortable "swooping in and doing something" whereas working with the CCC project meant their activities were more meaningful and relevant to local people.

There was also a sense from some projects that their activities had encouraged and inspired other local groups and individuals to do their own thing along similar lines. One project noted how a small project in a neighbouring area was establishing as a CIC:

"I always get really nervous about over claiming, but I think they are definitely... quite clearly following in our footsteps, and they've definitely come to us at key points and asked for support or advice or have volunteered and things like that, so there's all that nice crossover stuff that's happening."

Urban by Nature used their contacts with a classic British furniture company to connect the Chairman of the company, who visited the project, with the local Salvation Army. This connection resulted in a significant donation of furniture for the Salvation Army to sell, which in turn funded their Christmas Foodbank. The CCC project lead reflected that:

"The thing [the furniture company] liked most about it was how local it was, how community orientated it was. And I think they were really struck by the sort of like grassroots-ness of it."

Also at Urban by Nature, a local trader arranged for a musician to give an impromptu performance as spin-off from one of their initiatives, the project lead commented:

".. I didn't even almost know about it until three days before... the guy who runs the audio shop, he lives down the road and they wanted to do something nice for the people on their street... that wasn't about me saying, can we get that musician... Because it's not really me. It's the people who are part of the community surrounding it, who are putting all those pieces in place."



Created stronger connections within the team

Despite the challenges, a number of projects spoke about how they feel the COVID 19 period has brought them together as a team or a working group; a feeling of being united against adversity and an even stronger sense of their role in the community.

Members of the **Creative Kingswood and Hazel Leys** working group commented on the importance of trust, creativity and passion:

"We have gotten to know each other more and we have a group of people that work together for the best interest of **Kingswood and Hazel Leys**. We trust each other to get on with things and support is available when needed."

"I feel it's a safe space. I feel it's a creative space. It's a passionate space. It's a groovy space, you know?"

Whilst the **REMAKe** project lead declared:

"It feels very much like we've come together as a team with a very clear purpose and a sense of very strong righteous indignation about what's happened to these people and how they've been abandoned and failed spectacularly for 20 years. And we have to step up because nobody else is going to."

One of the artists involved in **Par Bay Creatives** noted how their group had bonded through the shared challenges of Covid-19:

"it's been incredible about how easily we've gelled as a group... I do feel that very much considering that we are quite a diverse group. There's different age groups. There's people from very different backgrounds. There's people from different levels of experiences... All of those things could have been problematic, but I think maybe as we all felt we were in the same sort of desperate and scary space with COVID, that we've worked together.... I look forward to every meeting."



Handed over more responsibility

A number of projects found themselves stepping back and encouraging artists, facilitators and volunteers to take a more active role, providing the right support and conditions for them to organise and lead themselves.

At **Creative West End**, providing a sense of purpose was important, their Project lead commented:

"I think in a lot of instances, it's given people something to be working on. So I think the main thing that we've done is pass on quite a high level of ownership to people that want it."



Similarly, the lunchtime programme on **Kensington Vision's** Liverpool Community Radio is now produced and presented entirely by volunteers who have come through their training programme. Both the Project lead and volunteers stressed how important this is:

"the reason I'm most pleased with it is that I don't physically do anything towards it. it's got a life of its own. It's nice to do something, and be involved in it. But it's better if you step away from it... And so, I'm, I'm more proud of the stuff I don't do that than I do, you know" (Project lead).

"I never thought I'd be able to present on radio but here you just offered this free course, and it opens the doors. You realise that anything is possible and you can do it... if you make a mistake, that's ok. We're all normal people, it's a big family, it's not a closed shop, it's welcoming..."

it's changed me in confidence. Not just in the manner of talking to someone at the bus stop, but thinking about how to draw information out of people; how am I going to get this across to them; and being more confident about being in the driving seat." (Radio volunteer)

Like many projects, the team at **Good Stuff In St Leonards** invested a lot of time in helping groups and facilitators move on-line, providing technical support and training, and establishing structures to enable groups to run themselves. The support they provided varied enormously across the groups from simply re-posting their information on social media, to facilitating meetings to help groups move from talk to action, and it often developed organically rather than following a fixed plan.

LEARNING & CARING

A guide for gardening through the storm

How have CCC areas been able to not just weather the storm of Covid-19, but grow and even thrive? We know that the impact of Covid-19 has been uneven across the country: we may be in the same storm, but we aren't all in the same boat. This is also true of CCC projects, who are working in different contexts, communities and project structures.

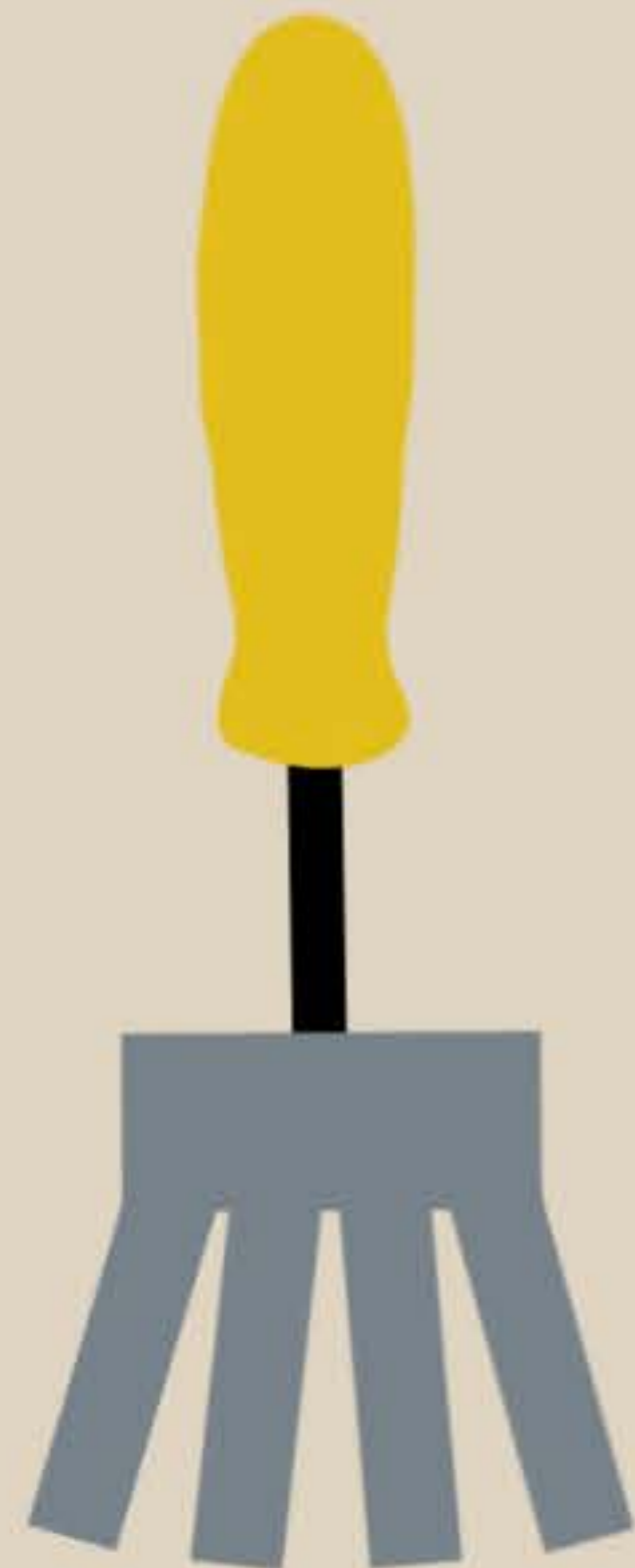
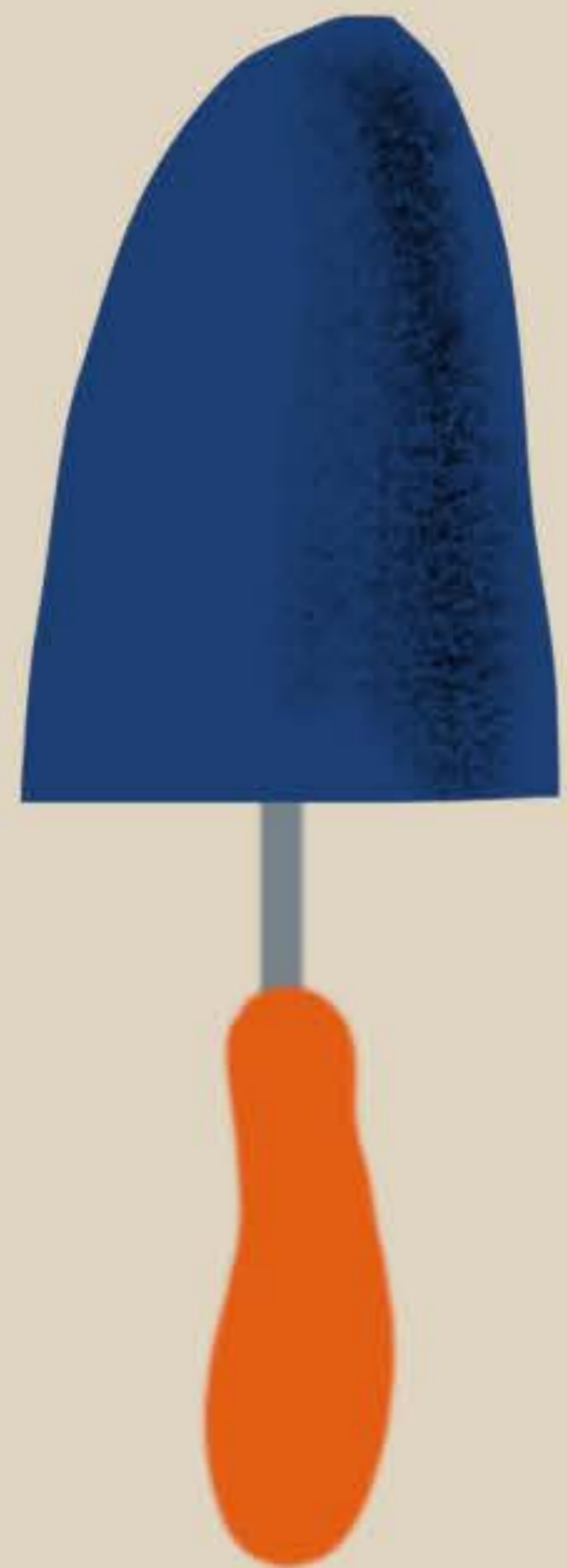
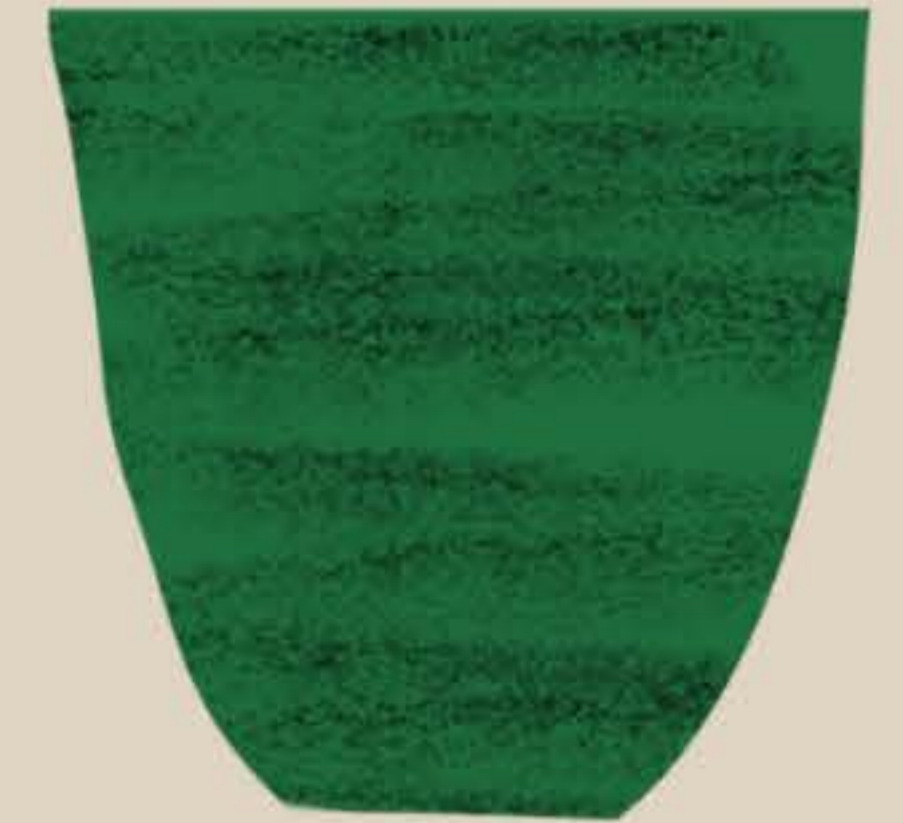
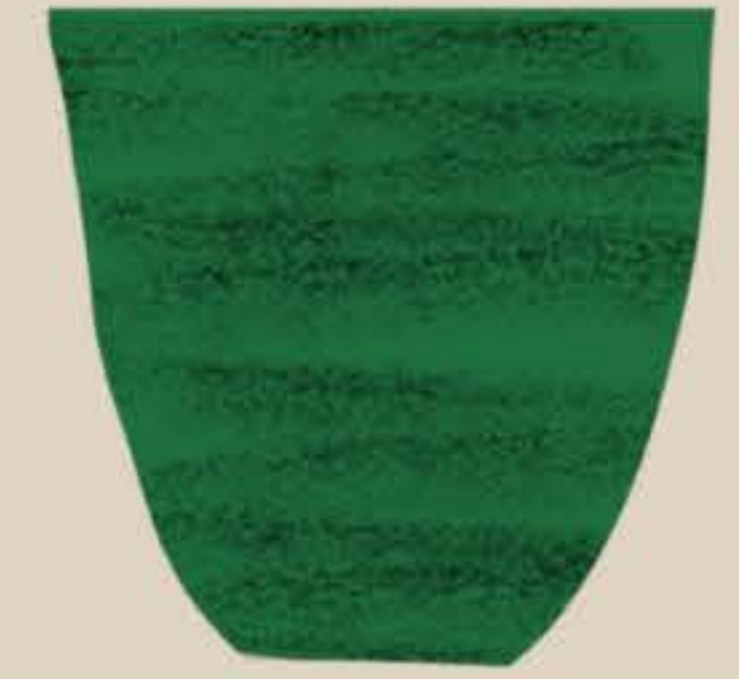
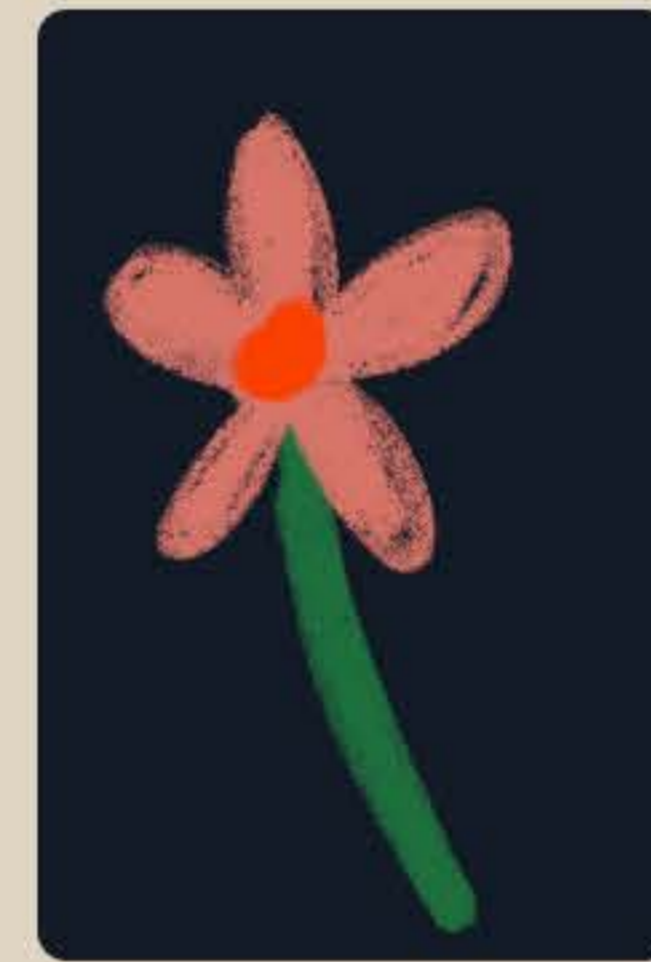
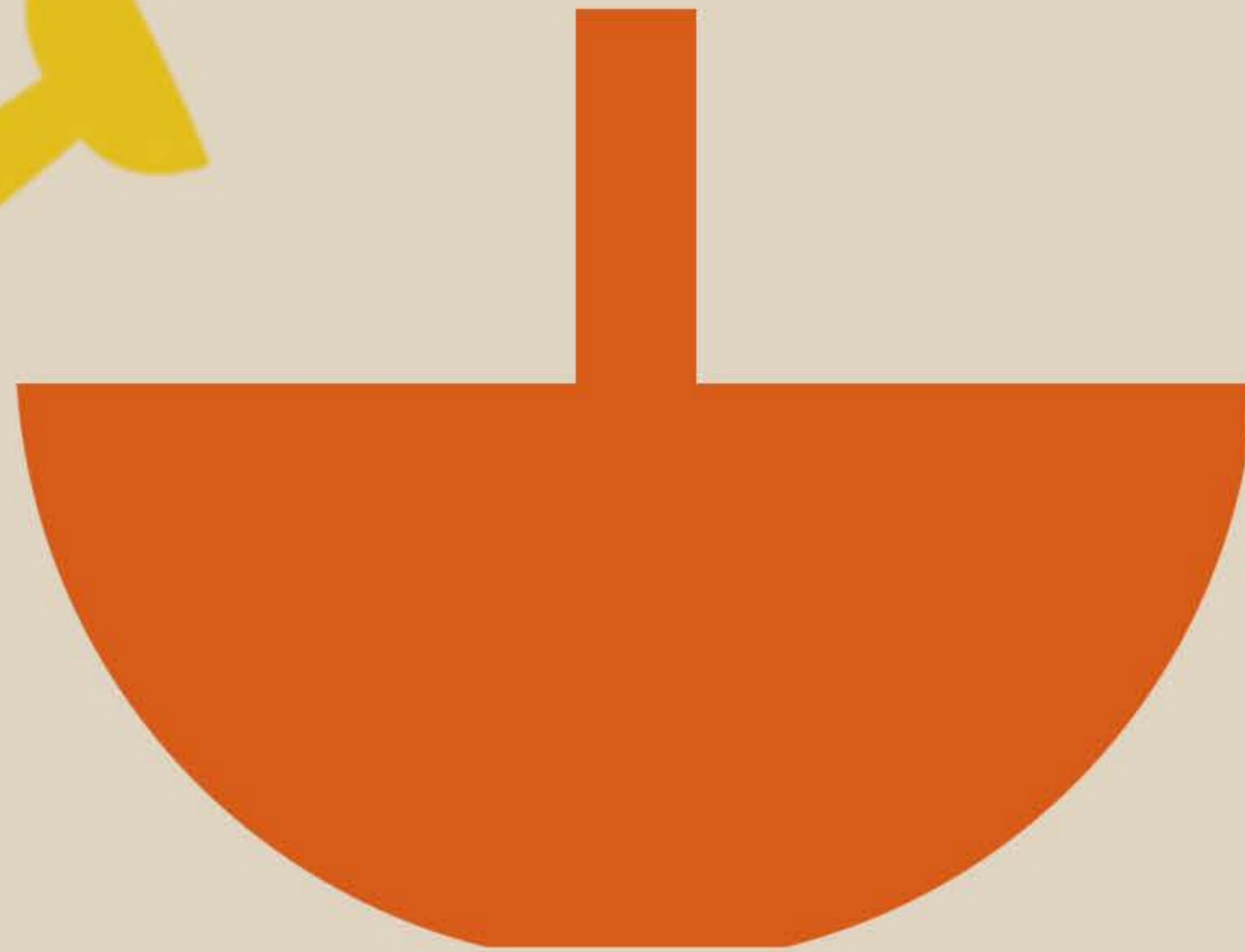
Despite these differences, our conversations with CCC project leads, working groups, and residents have identified some key learnings that have relevance both to the specific context of Covid-19, and also to whatever the future might hold. We have arranged this collective wisdom into two "gardener's checklists" for growing community through crisis.

- 1. What you will need: optimum growing conditions**
- 2. What to watch out for: pests and diseases**



What you'll need

Optimum growing conditions for growing community through crisis



**YOU WILL NEED:
A DIVERSE AND CONNECTED
WORKING GROUP**

Maintaining an active working group was a challenge for some CCC areas, whereas others found responding to the challenges of Coronavirus brought them closer together.

Diverse ✓

Connected ✓

Trusting ✓

Creative ✓

**GARDENERS' NOTES FROM
CCC AREAS:**

"Never underestimate what a small group of people can do" (**Greater Creative**)

Greater Creative's working party comprises residents from four different villages and a wide range of ages, and this diversity of perspectives is really valued by the group. Although working party members missed meeting up in person and sharing food, switching to more frequent meetings via Zooms and setting up a team Whatsapp helped the group to feel connected. Co-creation is the fundamental ethos of the group, creating a space where ideas spark and kindle into life.

"A really key ingredient for success that we've had is that we all just trust each other to be honest, be creative, and be real about what we want to do and then just get on it and just go for it". (Working party member).



YOU WILL NEED: COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS AT ALL LEVELS

The success of CCC projects in the early days of the pandemic was possible because it is a programme built on established community relationships. For more on this, see our first report [here](#).

With residents ✓

With creatives ✓

With education ✓

With the community sector ✓

With cultural organisations ✓

With local businesses ✓

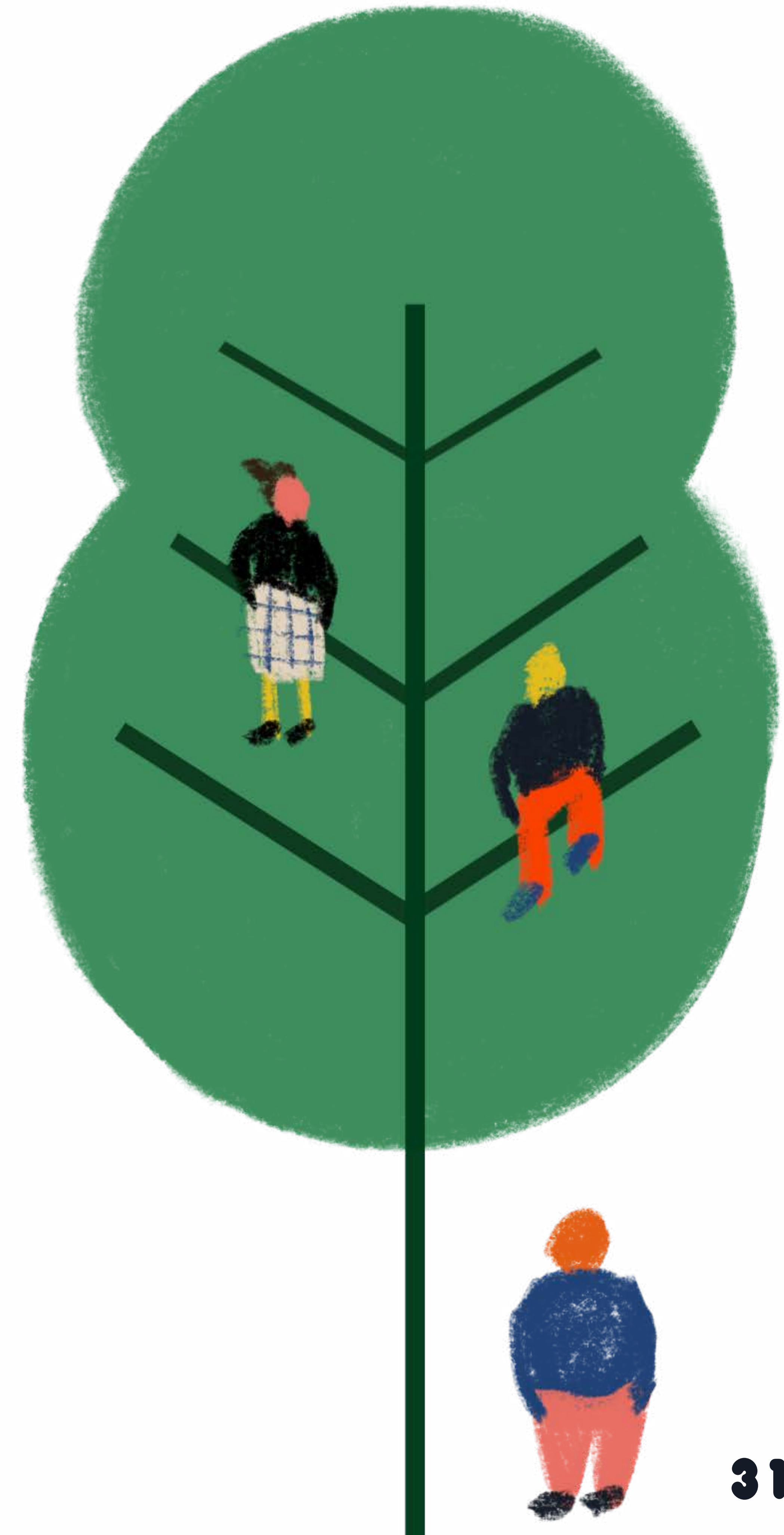
At a strategic level ✓

GARDENERS' NOTES FROM CCC AREAS:

Filwood Fantastic's small grants programme for local creatives and residents made space for local people to germinate their own creative ideas.

They put out a "flexible, really loose" open invitation, saying "we're open, any ideas.. about joy, creativity, wellbeing", drawing on the team's own connections, social media followings, partners in the wider Knowle West Alliance, plus other "allies" (local organisations and businesses).

"I'm most proud of the fact that I've made it easy for local people to access money because I know that can be really hard. Whether they're artists, a resident's group, whether that's people having opportunity for materials or short contracts/jobs." (Project lead)



YOU WILL NEED: TO WORK ITERATIVELY

In order to flex to constantly changing laws and guidelines, CCC areas have had to work iteratively, building from often small and responsive actions to more ambitious projects.

Action focused & can do approach ✓

Build trust ✓

Make it simple ✓

You don't need fancy equipment ✓

GARDENERS' NOTES FROM CCC AREAS:

"The smaller boat you're in, the quicker you can turn around"

In spring 2020, the co-chair of **Creative Kingswood & Hazel Leys**, received a poem written by one of his local neighbours during lockdown. This small and unexpected seed prompted **CKHL** to call out for other poems from residents, as a way for people to express their thoughts and feelings in a time of isolation.

The poems grew into a book, with a copy given to every household in the area, excerpts from poems being pasted up on posters round the estate, and a blossoming joint poetry evening with fellow CCC area Par Bay.



YOU WILL NEED: BOUNDARIES

Boundaries came up a lot in our conversations - when to blur, cross and keep them.

Blur boundaries when it helps you to be responsive & stay connected ✓

Cross boundaries to grow ambition ✓

Keep boundaries to focus on your key strengths & contributions ✓

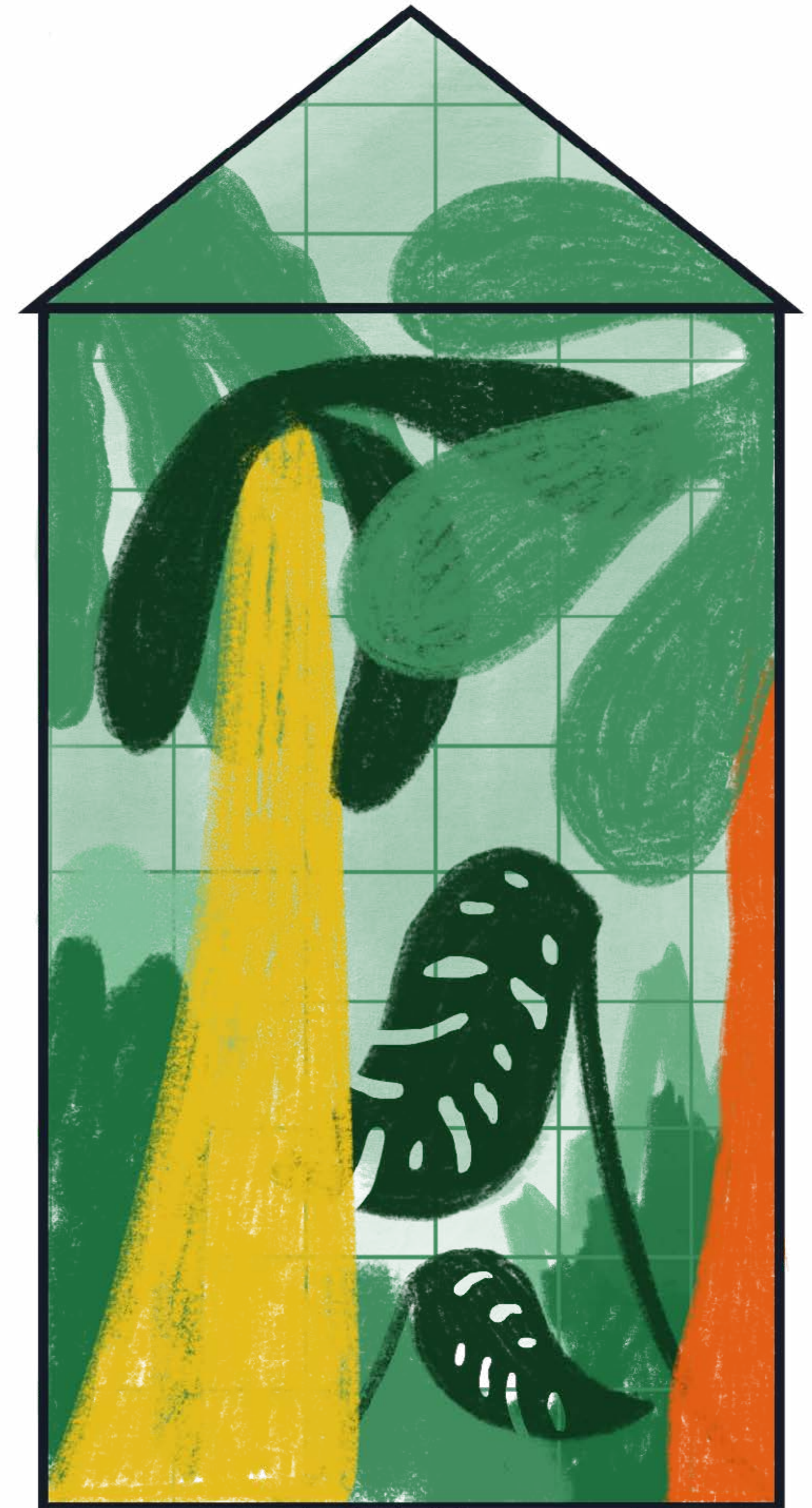
GARDENERS' NOTES FROM CCC AREAS:

"What I think makes **Portland Inn Project** really exciting is that we are constantly crossing these different networks... the art network... the community and neighbourhood network... and the network of public services".

Artist Rebecca saw one role of the artist as boundary crosser, sometimes even "the fool and jester... in a serious court space... entertaining and pushing boundaries or speaking a different language".

These practices of boundary crossing have helped to grow small, responsive projects into more ambitious work. For example, giving sunflower seeds to young people on the street has rooted and branched into developing a 100 year project for the green space.

At the same time, it has been important for Rebecca and Anna to maintain their identities as artists in the project. This has included expanding the team to include two youth and families workers, as well as drawing on their networks to keep services accountable.



YOU WILL NEED: TO BE RESPONSIVE, BUT BE TRUE TO YOUR CORE VISION

Although projects flexed and shifted their activities, staying true to their key aims and values remained at the heart of their decision making.

Listening and noticing are the heart of responsive action ✓

Responsive action connects the grassroots to the wider political context ✓

Keep your values at the heart of what you do ✓

Be brave ✓

Trust yourselves and others ✓

GARDENERS' NOTES FROM CCC AREAS:

Nudge Community Builders' programme brings joy and colour to Union Street in the Stonehouse area of Plymouth. How to work "on the street" when the message is to "stay at home"?

"Oh my gosh, the headline message is stay at home. But it was never, stay at home and don't care about anyone else, or stay at home even if someone really needs some food on the street."

The *Nudge* team's previous experience of navigating public safety rules gave them the confidence to examine the changing rules and make informed decisions, allowing them to host their annual Union Street Party in September 2020 - with socially distanced hula hoops, social distancing clowns, and more!

'I walked out on the street and burst into tears at the amount of colour and love on the street.' (Resident)



**YOU WILL NEED:
FLEXIBLE FUNDERS**

At the start of the pandemic, Local Trust and other funding partners made it clear to all the CCC projects that as long as they stayed true to the principles of the programme, they could make whatever changes they needed to projected spending and activity plans.

The CCC support programme also pivoted, offering more flexible and responsive support to CCC areas.

Trust ✓

Support ✓

Flexible budgets ✓

**GARDENERS' NOTES FROM
CCC AREAS:**

"They trust you to make the decisions rather than freaking out about what you're reporting on or what you originally set out to do and things like that"

"[Local Trust were] putting us in this sort of bigger picture as well, being a part of those conversations about policy, and being able to kind of connect with other organizations across the country."

"The most basic reason was having the resources, I think..., I just really appreciated how flexible it's been and how we've been able to change things when we need to change things."



What to look out for

Pests & diseases



**WATCH OUT FOR:
TEAM BURNOUT**

Whilst early in the pandemic, CCC project teams were energised in responding to the pandemic, many teams experienced burn-out, especially from January 2021 onwards.

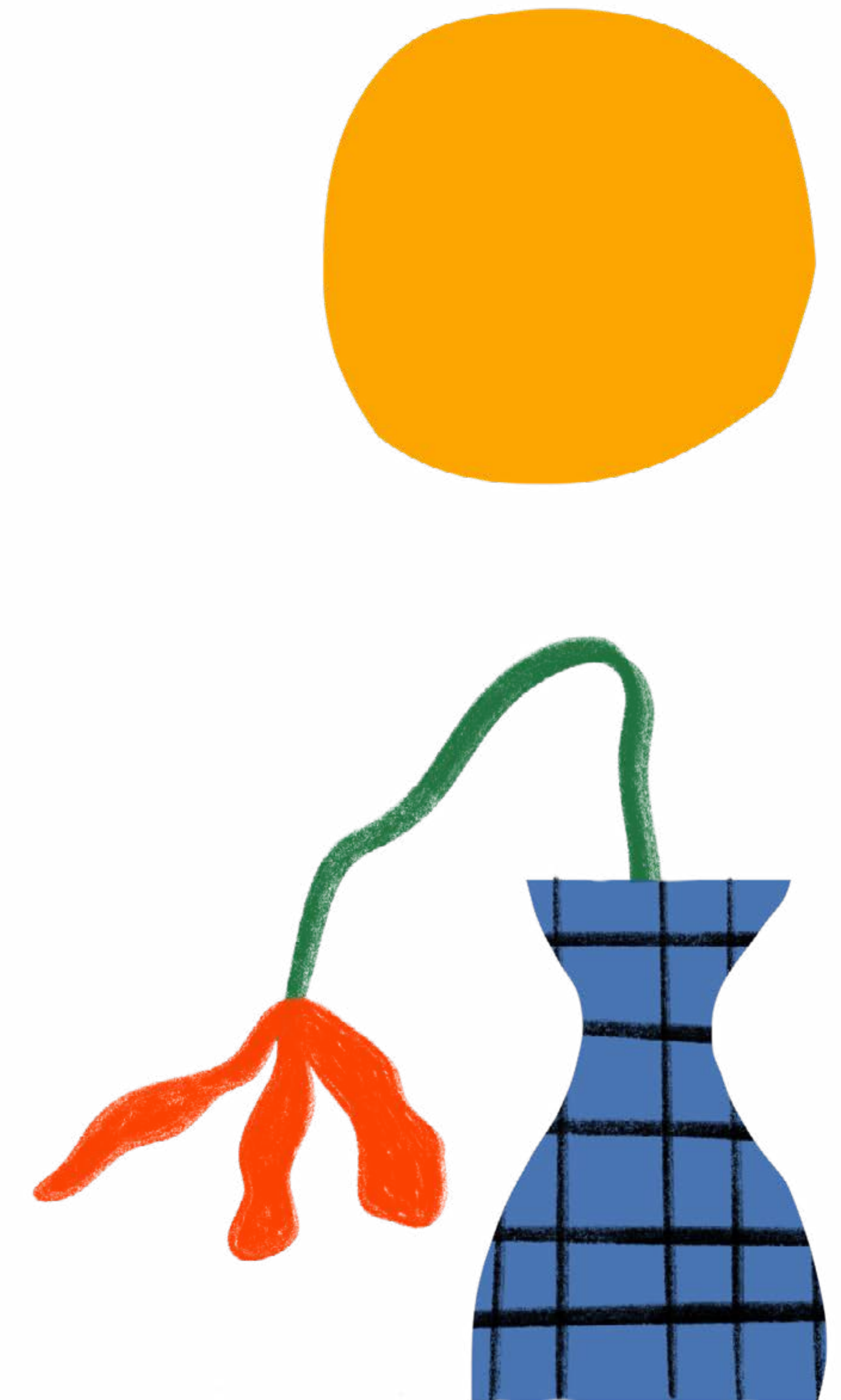
Know when to slow down ✓

Managing boundaries ✓

**GARDENERS' NOTES FROM
CCC AREAS:**

"You can't just be on call 24/7, you've got to stop. And that was the big mistake we made with [programmes] at the start... you have to have some time out and to have boundaries... because you can't be all things to all people all the time." (REMAKe)

"When you see such need...there's a temptation sometimes to just want to jump in and help and you can't always, so it's about knowing... where that line is and what you are for, and really remembering all the time that this is a Community Arts project. It's not social services, it's not the United Nations."



WATCH OUT FOR: DIGITAL OVERLOAD

Most CCC projects had a complex relationship with digital working. Whilst many projects were successfully delivered online, and even attracted new people, CCC areas identified a number of pitfalls.

Be aware of digital inequality ✓

Digital activities can be stressful if too complicated ✓

"In real life" meetings might not translate to Zoom ✓

It can be difficult to engage new people online ✓

GARDENERS' NOTES FROM CCC AREAS:

"We can't be creative if we don't have our needs met" (*Tilting the Mirror*, who made food, data, and counselling available to participants)

"...it got far too hard.... just being part of a WhatsApp live video call was a challenge enough nevermind trying to create lettering with a glue gun" (*Whitley Bay*)

"...phone calls, they're a big thing. Like emails not so much, a bit of social media, but mainly phone calls... it's been going for walks with people. And so a lot of the feedback that we're getting is through those kind of interactions" (*Creative West End*)

"what the pandemic's meant is that we can't do those things where people might accidentally stumble across something... You almost have to have a personal introduction to every household you're engaging with." (*Creative Klingwood & Hazel Leys*)



**WATCH OUT FOR:
OVERCROWDING YOUR
ACTIVITIES**

CCC projects reflected that connection is central to their work; and that activities need to make space and time for listening and connection.

Make time to listen and connect ✓

Be patient ✓

**GARDENERS' NOTES FROM
CCC AREAS:**

"We realised that when activity is so complex that there is no space or time for community conversations, the connections we have with people suffer" (**Portland Inn Project**)

"I've learned to be more patient and just see how things unfold... We have to do what we can in community involvement, because anything we've produced that doesn't have community involvement is not a success." (**Creative Newington**)



**WATCH OUT FOR:
CHALLENGES TO A RESIDENT
LED APPROACH**

Burnout, digital issues, illness, caring responsibilities, grief, and intensified local need all put a strain on one of the key values of Creative Civic Change - that activities are resident-led - as more responsibility fell back on to members of the project teams.

Be prepared to take on more of the responsibility in the short term ✓

Create breathing space for everyone involved ✓

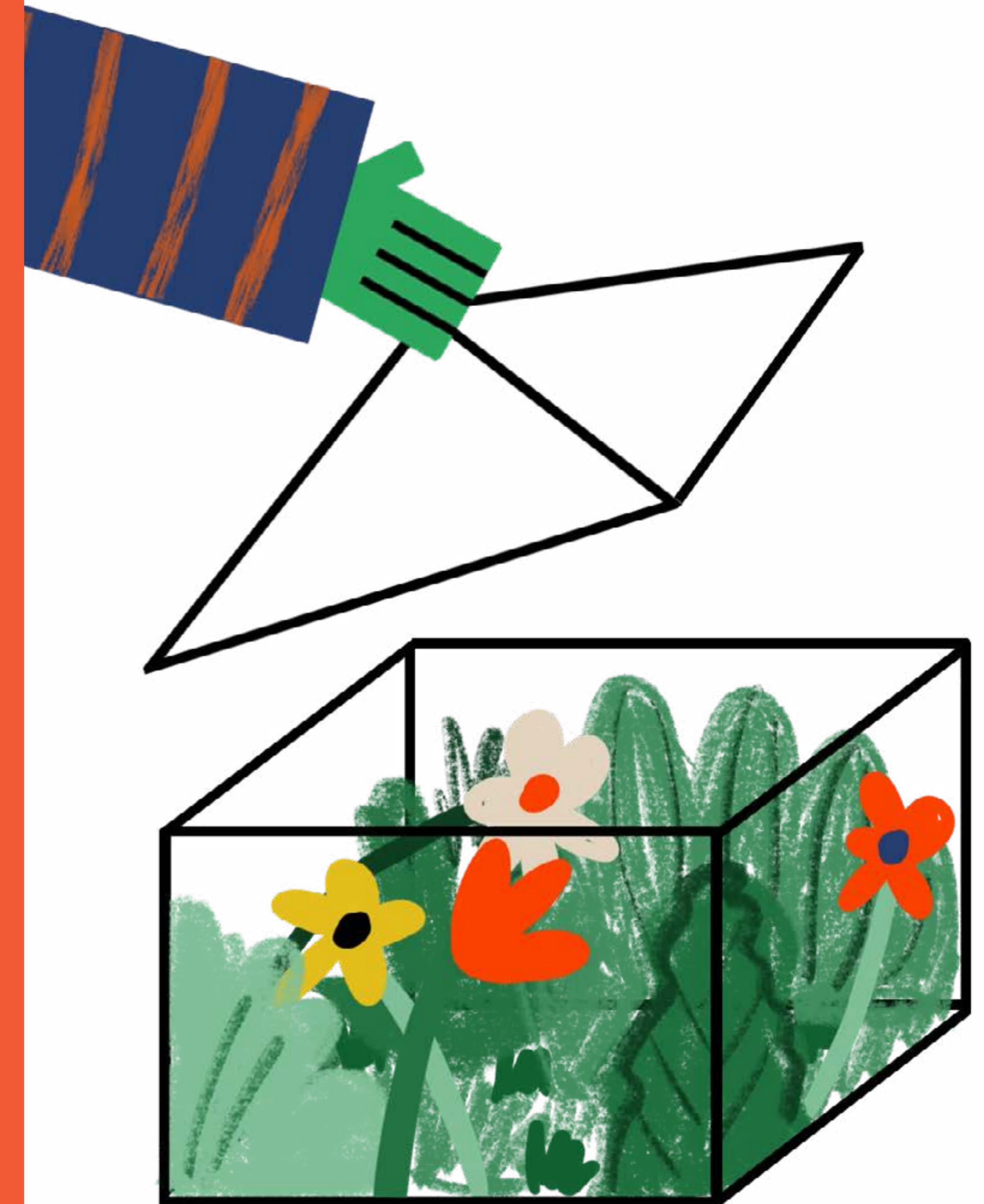
Be honest about what is & isn't resident led ✓

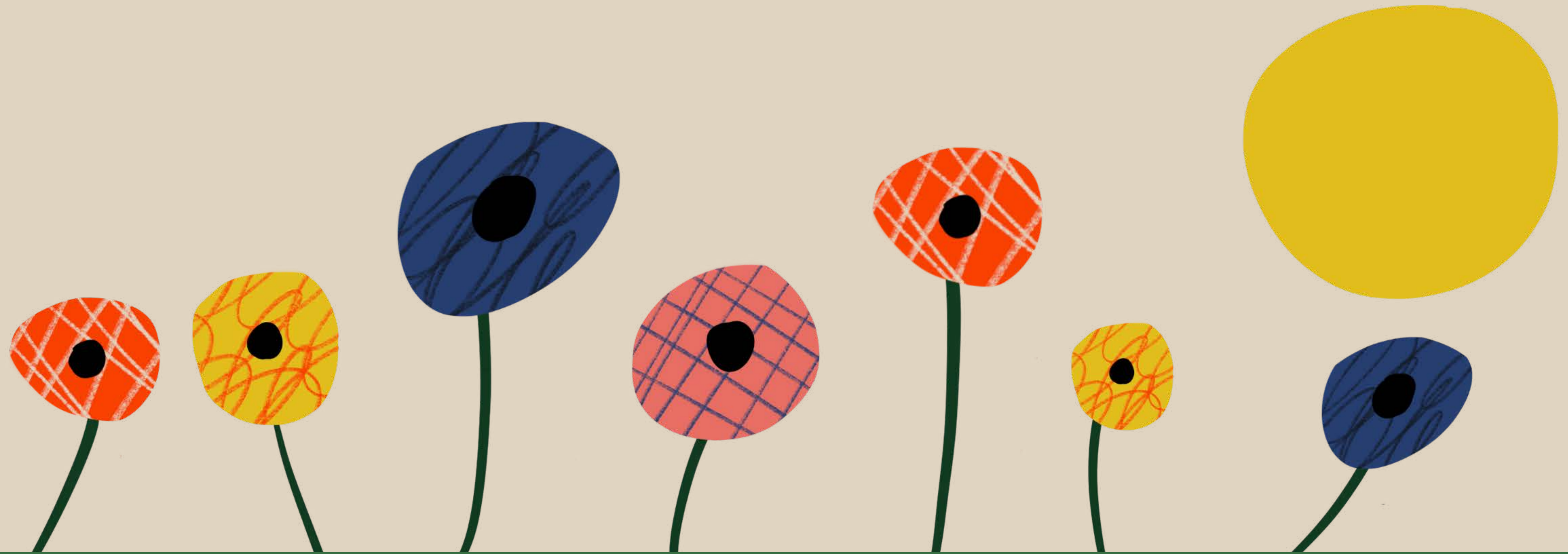
**GARDENERS' NOTES FROM
CCC AREAS:**

Filwood Fantastic described how their working group (and wider residents) "experienced rather than co-designed the Lantern Parade"

"People are firefighting. And we're not the most important thing to them, or probably in the top three most important things to them, unless we're giving them a cheque for a core part of their project." (Tilting the Mirror)

"...give people a bit of slack and a bit of time"





Thank you!

Thanks to the brilliant community leaders, volunteers, artists, critical friends and funders that help make CCC happen. Creative Civic Change is funded by:



Local Trust

