



Case study: Fitzrovia Noir

August 2021

Fitzrovia Noir is a Community Interest Company (CIC) delivering community-based activities related to art and cultural heritage. Based on to the Aberfeldy Estate in East London, Fitzrovia Noir works with artists to put on art interventions. It also provides a space for local organisations, and its community pub, The Tommy Flowers, is an entry point to bring people together and engage the wider community.

Fitzrovia Noir received £10,000 through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF). The CCSF is a funding programme supported by a grant of £200 million from Government, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, to help organisations in England respond to the COVID-19 crisis and increase community support to people affected by the pandemic.

How was the CCSF grant used?

Fitzrovia Noir had put on various creative and artistic projects in the past, with and for the local community. The COVID-19 pandemic affected Fitzrovia Noir's revenue streams. The community pub closed and commissions were cancelled, meaning the organisation faced a financial shortfall that hampered their ability to deliver activities. On top of this, the restrictions and social distancing limited the number of people Fitzrovia Noir was able to engage.

Drawing on Poplar's industrial history, Fitzrovia Noir had the idea to set up a glass casting workshop in an outside space during the pandemic, to provide a socially distanced offer that was open to everyone, titled the "Making Space" project. The aim was to attract people from the local community and provide an activity to bring them together and connect with each other.

People took part in the glass blowing process and worked on a glass casting of their own. They brought a personal item (such as a toy or a letterhead) and created a cast of it in sand, which was then filled with molten glass. Participants learned about the technique and craft behind glass blowing and casting.

Fitzrovia Noir used the CCSF grant to procure raw materials and equipment and hired professionals to lead the workshops. They also produced a video documenting the activity.

Fitzrovia Noir concurrently also provided a unit next to

the glass casting operation for the arts group 'Young Blood Initiative', to put on arts interventions. Part of this included a hot food offer as well. As a result, this created a new creative hub for people to connect and engage with each other (facilitated also by Poplar HARCA housing association).



With the CCSF grant, we are able to bring in more people to learn about crafts, to learn about new technologies. – Grantholder

Quick facts:

Grant period: **July-October 2020**

160 people engaged

8 workshops held

12 volunteers

Three key messages:

- ① The design of the activity was a key driver in garnering engagement from a wide range of beneficiaries, as it was simple yet something completely different and new.
- ② Basing the activity in a neglected neighbourhood filled a real gap in service delivery to the residents living in the area.
- ③ The project's success gave the organisation the confidence to grow and continue bringing arts and culture to a new audience.

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What difference did the CCSF grant make?

For people and communities

Engaging with arts and culture through the glass casting activity gave people a moment's respite from the worries of the pandemic. It offered a chance to do something out of the ordinary and to learn about something they otherwise would never have had the opportunity to.



We now have these glass objects in our houses [...] they're a reminder of having a bit of fun and finding something out and discovering something. – Beneficiary

This is particularly true for the area in which Fitzrovia Noir is based. There is nothing comparable on offer and very little community outlets available in general. As such, access to arts and culture is challenging for most people living in the area. The pandemic exacerbated this, with residents stuck in a 'dead' area, lacking community-based opportunities.

Fitzrovia Noir's "Making Space" project not only drew people from the local area but also from further afield. It offered a chance to connect. One beneficiary described how for the duration of the activity, an instant community was created, bringing people from different walks of life together. Fitzrovia Noir was deliberate in ensuring the activity, as well as the surrounding offer, was inclusive. The glass casting activity was accessible to young and old, and the accompanying food included vegetarian options, for example.

For volunteers

Fitzrovia Noir offered a space next to their pub and workshop to a young arts group. The artists volunteered their time and skills to put on art interventions, open to everyone. This created an artistic hub with multiple different activities to help foster dialogue and facilitate connections between people attending.

For the volunteers, it provided an opportunity to share and engage people in their art. This gave them a sense of purpose that helped them through the pandemic.

Want to know more?

Website: <https://fitzrovianoir.com/>

Project video: <https://vimeo.com/481222395>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/fitzrovianoir>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MakingSpaceAberfeldyE14



I was able to share some of my practice as an artist, and it helped me feel good. I had a whole different purpose during that time. – Volunteer

Additionally, being part of the wider project created connections with other artists and the community, which volunteers said helped generate further opportunities to work together. One volunteer described already being in contact with members of the local community to discuss future opportunities.

Fitzrovia Noir also involved a local college in the project, providing students the opportunity to help with the redecoration and restoration of the activity space. This provided valuable work experience and also gave students a feeling of accomplishment upon seeing the results of their work.

For the organisation and its staff

The CCSF grant helped Fitzrovia Noir respond to the financial shortfall caused by the pandemic and enabled them to offer a positive activity in an area that has few cultural opportunities for local people. The organisation brought the community together through the glass casting and arts interventions, which helped them stay connected and positive during a time of isolation. Without the funding, they would not have been able to deliver these activities.



The surprise is not only how the Fund allowed us to survive [...] but also develop and actually come out the other side of it stronger than beforehand. – Staff

The success of the activity – and importantly the video produced as part of it – allowed Fitzrovia Noir to grow as an organisation. They filled a gap in the area by bringing the community together and lifting spirits during challenging times. As a result, they have increased staff hours and successfully raised funds to continue the project.

Key legacy from the experience:

This project showed Fitzrovia Noir that there is a real demand and interest in their activities, as they are filling a gap in the provision of arts and culture to neglected neighbourhoods. It gave the organisation the confidence to grow and pursue further funding to continue the glass casting activity.