

University of Northampton Public, Community, Engagement and
Participatory Research Fund Autumn 2024

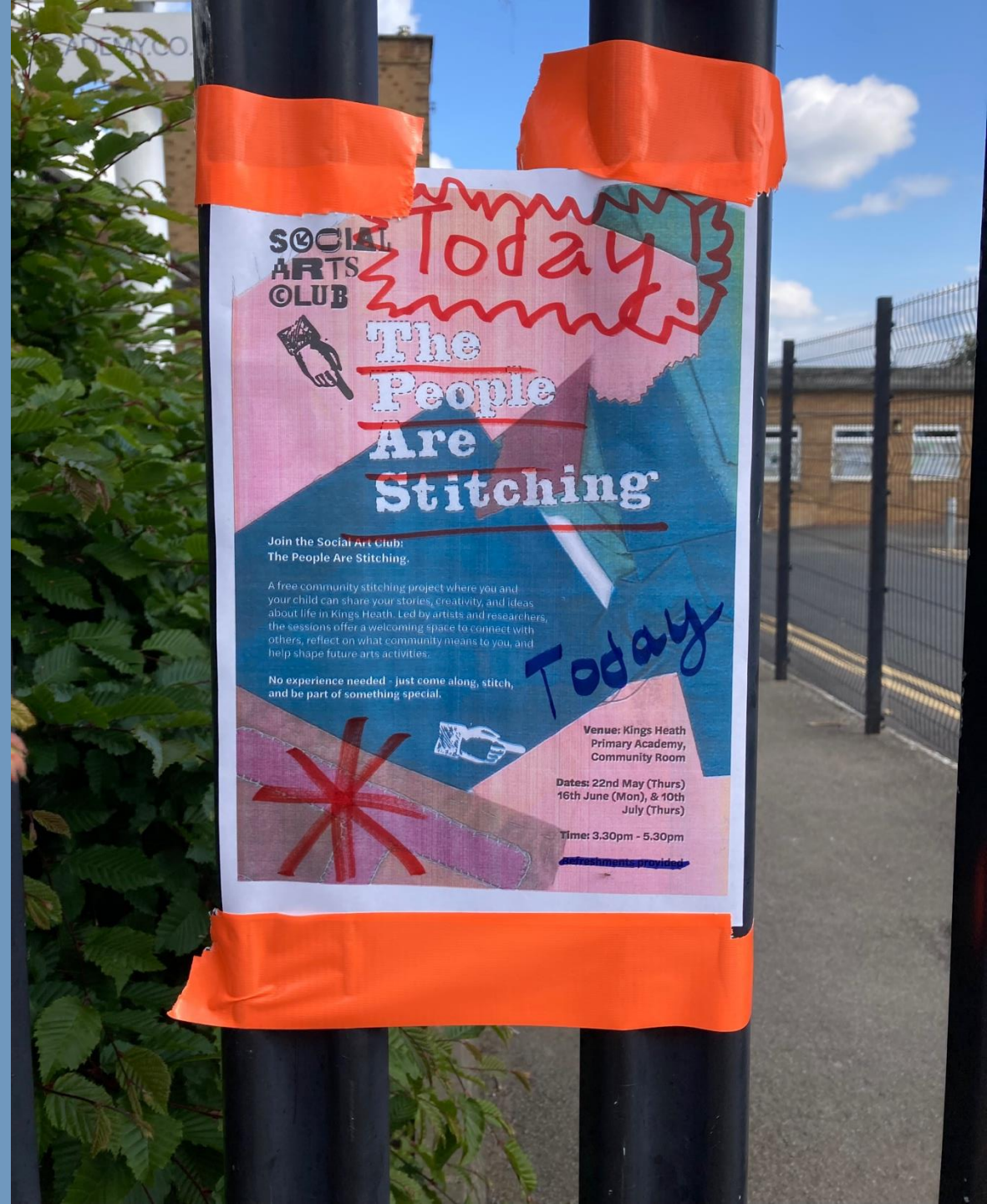
Social Arts Club: The People are Publishing!

*This Time the People are Stitching, Producing
a Banner and Making a Film*

April 2025 - Aug 2025

Partisan Social Club - artist researchers

Andy Hewitt, Mel Jordan and Michael Wright





Project Aims

This project aims to strengthen community cohesion in Kings Heath by combining arts-based methods of engagement. Working with the Community Safety and Engagement Team at West Northamptonshire Council, we will identify current challenges in local community development and involve residents, stakeholders, and organisations in shaping new models of community. Through collaborative making, such as collectively made banners, participants will share lived experiences, explore the question “who makes up our community?”, and articulate future needs. Building on the *Social Art Club: Kings Heath Calling* pilot (Zine Making) and research from the AHRC-funded Well Communities Research Consortium, this third phase will foster belonging, dialogue, and civic action in a resource-limited setting.

Project Objectives

To identify opportunities and **challenges for community cohesion**, as well as potential facilities, resources, and individuals

To **build on existing relationships**, residents, stakeholder organisations within Kings Heath

To test media and communication methods at a community level **through artistic research and community engagement** – film making and portrait making

To include UON students and alumni to develop their **skills in working with communities**

To develop a **network of individuals delivering community arts activity** in Northampton to create a group of shared interest

To display the outcomes to the public in Northampton

To organise **future legacy events** to share project findings and feedback and to maintain networking activity

To **maintain presence and commitment** to further work with Kings Heath communities



Templates for workshop, 2025

Project Timeline

[illegible]

Project Funding

- The project was funded by University of Northampton Public and Community Engagement 2024, from Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF). A combination of direct costs (£7,667.50) and researcher time in kind to the value of £14,490
- West Northants Council direct costs £2,000
- The film was funded by Coventry University Research Development Funds (QR Funding) £1,500
- Coventry University researcher time in kind £2,600
- Middlesex University researcher time in kind £1,800
- **Total project worth £22,390**



Project Description

In Kings Heath, reduced resources and the loss of physical meeting spaces have weakened communication and civic engagement, challenging community cohesion. *'This time the people are stitching'* addresses this by combining arts-based activities with the opportunity to have conversations about the area and the people who live there.

Participants - residents, stakeholders, and local groups - have produced portraits of people they know, invented characters that they wished lived in Kings Heath, and even people they miss who live in different places. The project workshops help to stimulate exchanges, and the separate portraits will be stitched together to create a Kings Heath banner.

The film, *A Good Enough Place: Traces of Care, Use, and Everyday Life in Kings Heath*, documents three people's experience of Kings Heath across generations.

The aim of the project is to generate innovative models of community development and foster a renewed sense of belonging and civic action. The networking approach embedded in the project aims to develop a community of interest around Kings Heath.



Workshop 1: Portraits and comments by participants, reviewed by student helper

Project Methods – Portraits

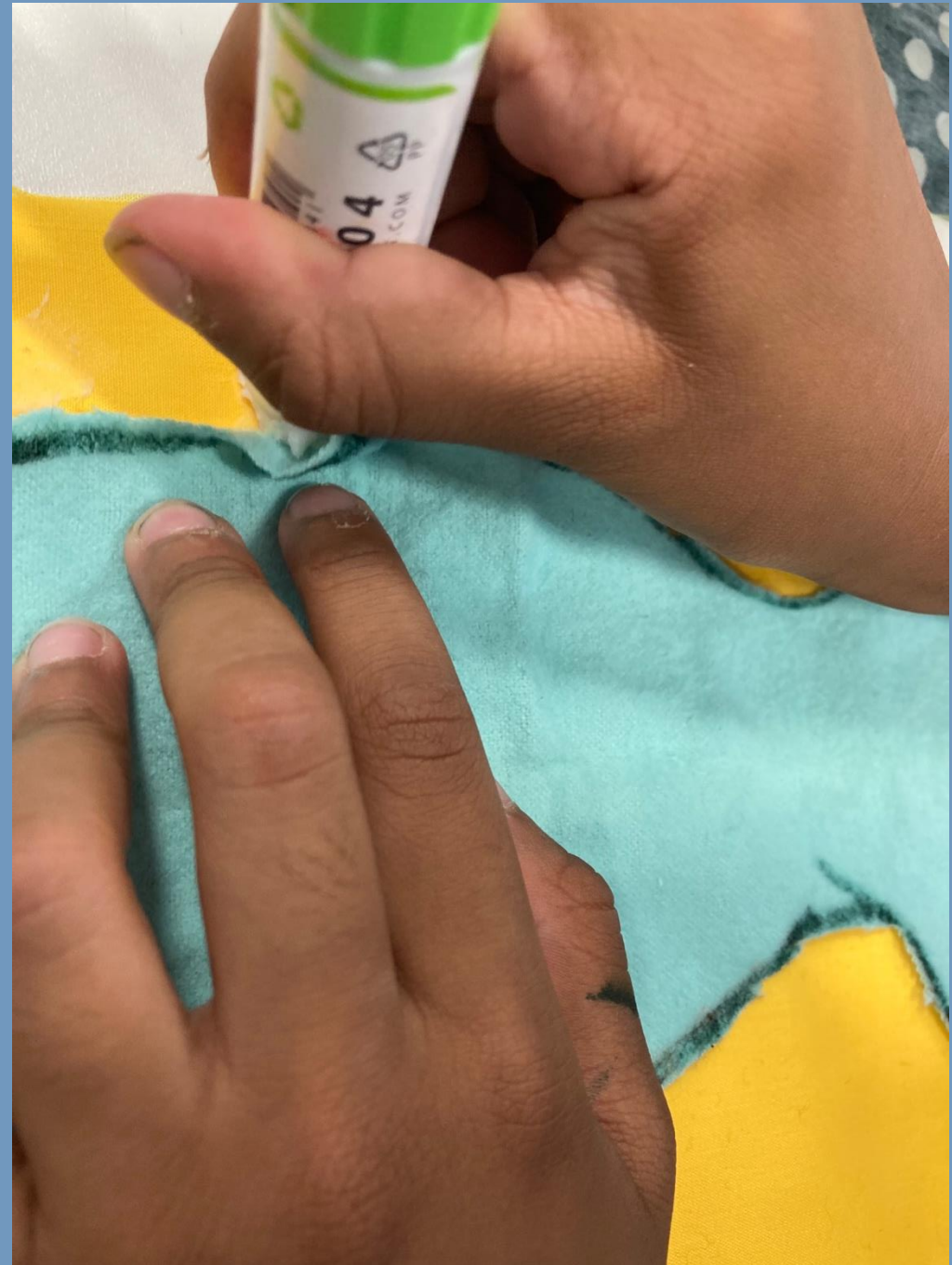
The project, in collaboration with West Northants Council's community development team led by Carolyn Howe, used the Kings Heath Primary Academy Community room for a series of six textile portrait-making workshops. Designed for experimentation and conversation, the sessions emphasised care and inclusivity, enabling participants to create fabric portraits of loved ones, friends, and imaginary characters. Three UON student helpers supported the workshops.

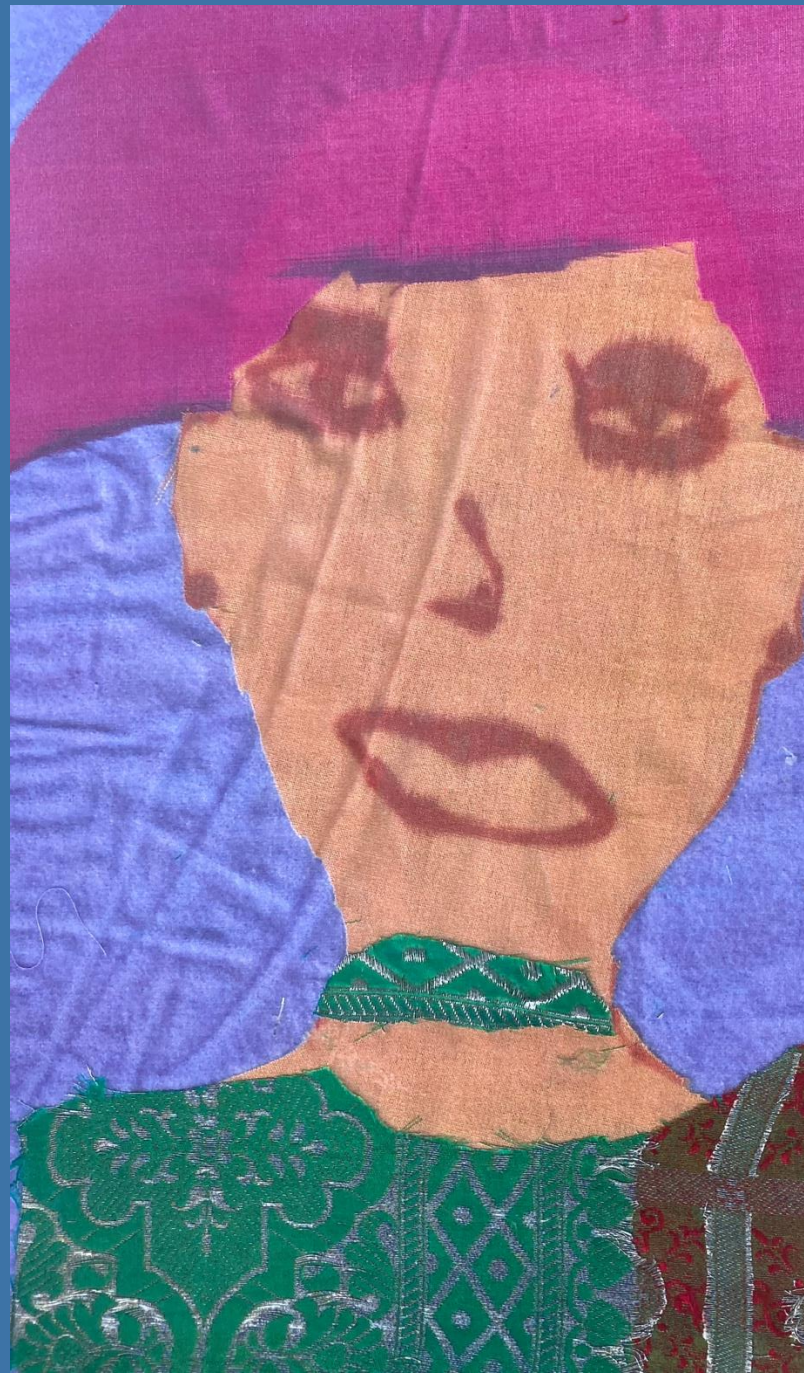
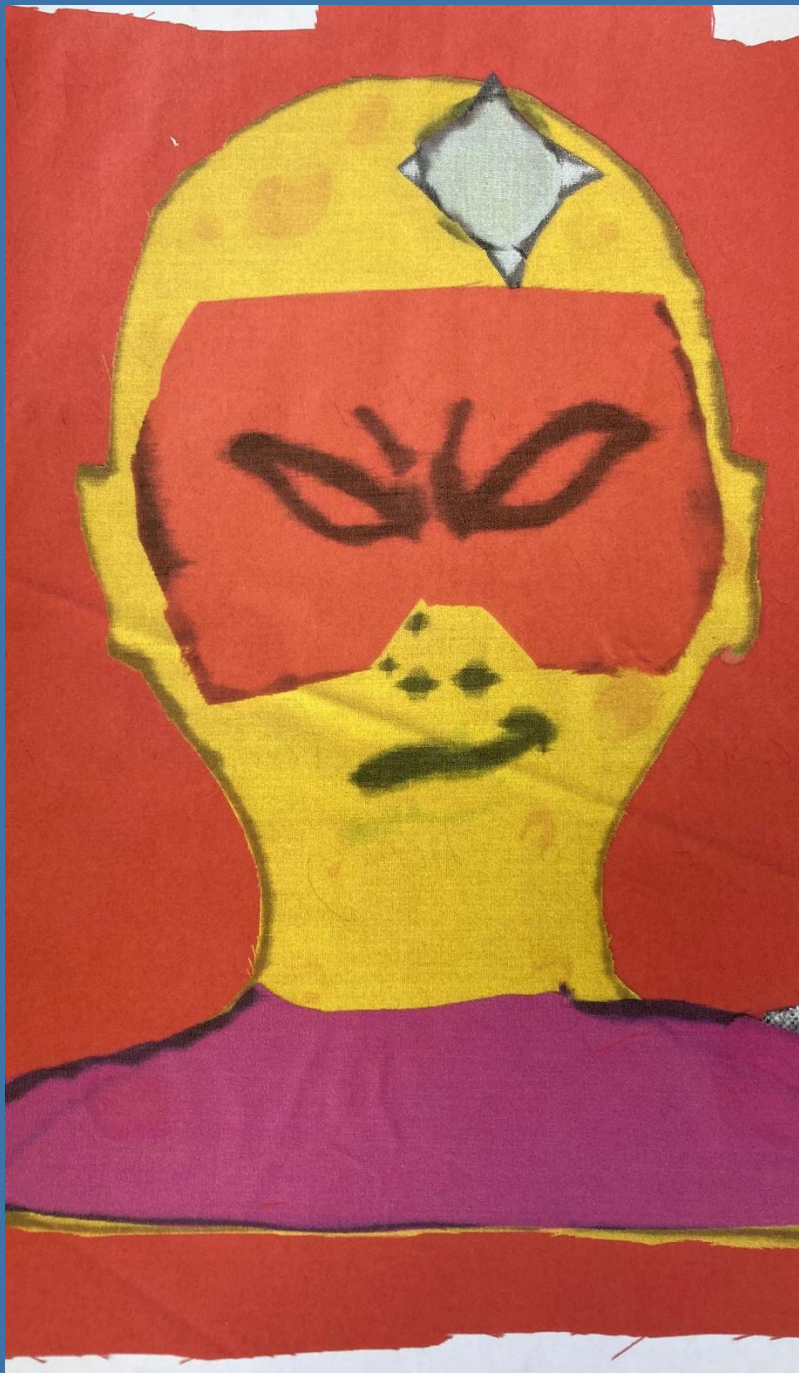
Student Quotes about their experience of the workshop

"There was a family of three boys with their mother one of them produced a piece of work that he said was his mother – complete with hijab. When completing his envelope, he praised his mother for her beauty, kindness and cooking."

"I loved to see their creativity regarding choice of fabrics and colours – sometimes choosing something very different from the reality of the person they were creating. A few children added amusing details of accessories and physical features that enhanced the characteristics of their chosen person."

Portraits were both photocopied for the participant and retained in fabric form to be stitched together into a community banner for Kings Heath. These exchanges deepened our understanding of local concerns, built trust, and encouraged repeat participation. The project drew on arts-based research practices that foster critical citizenship and collective agency through creative methods and media.









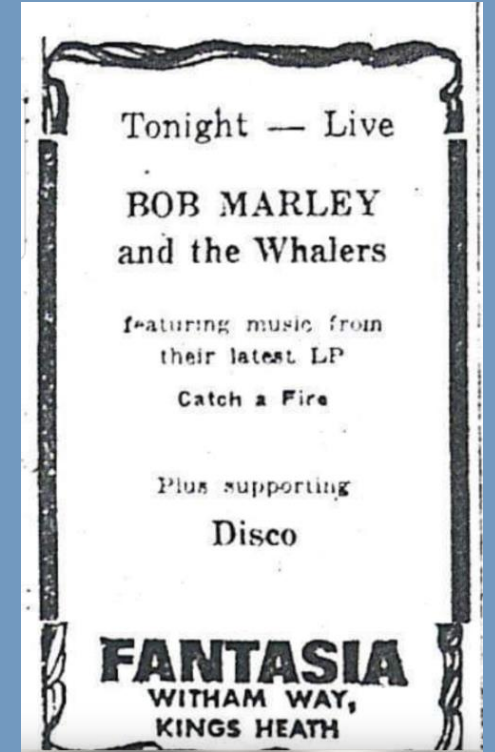




Project Methods – Film

We created a short film to capture the histories and experiences of past and present Kings Heath residents. The film, *A Good Enough Place: Traces of Care, Use, and Everyday Life in Kings Heath*, was funded by Coventry University through the Social and Cultural Resilience Research Challenge, with Quality-Related Research funding used to commission a film maker to work with the artist-researchers.

The 15-minute piece reflects on the post-war urban planning of the area, its openness as a community, and the energy and diversity of its activities. One participant recalls working at the local off-licence and being taken to a concert at the Fantasia Club, where the performers—listed on the poster as “The Whalers”—were in fact Bob Marley and the Wailers. Another, shares memories of visiting grandparents in Kings Heath and enjoying the freedom of playing in the surrounding green spaces. The final participant, a resident of 50 years, speaks about the allotments and the resilient gardening practices that have long sustained the public flower beds.



Film Intent – in detail

The film brings together three very different personal accounts to reflect the complex and evolving nature of community. Rather than offering a fixed definition, it explores how community shifts in response to broader social, cultural, and historical changes.

Kings Heath itself is a layered site - once common land used for grazing, later redeveloped post-war as suburban housing, and home to Northampton's first race track. These historical traces shape the backdrop to contemporary experiences of belonging, memory, and disconnection.

Kings Heath was shaped by post-war urban planning principles that aimed to provide reasonably priced housing and promote a good quality of life for residents. Although originally common land with no permanent housing, it was developed as a new residential area where ideas of "good living" and accessible shared spaces were central to the design.

The area was planned by J. Lewis Womersley, who spent several years working in Northampton. Womersley also designed St Catherine's House, a ten-storey residential block in the town centre and is perhaps best known for his later work on the Park Hill Estate in Sheffield. His approach to urban design focused on the integration of green space, high-quality materials, and solid, spacious family housing. He believed in providing homes large enough for families of five, often in terraced arrangements with gardens or access to communal outdoor areas. Womersley was notably sceptical of car-centric planning. He sought to create environments where pedestrians, particularly children, could move safely and make full use of outdoor spaces. His vision was one of connected, livable neighbourhoods - spaces designed for health, safety, and community interaction. After his time in Northampton, Womersley went on to lead the City Architect's Department in Sheffield, where he oversaw the development of the Park Hill Estate. This project became famous for its "streets in the sky" and is now a listed building, seen as a landmark of British post-war social housing design. Kings Heath, too, was recognised at the time as a model for modern housing. It won design awards and was seen as a forward-looking development-one that reflected the optimism and social ideals of the post-war period.

Through the stories of Marion, Pradeep, and Emma, we begin to see how place, migration, green space, and generational change shape how people understand what it means to live together. Each narrative reveals not only a different relationship to Kings Heath, but also a different lens on community, as cultivation, as cultural memory, as childhood environment.

We want to use the film as a form of *practical literature review*; not in the conventional academic sense, but as a way of opening up issues that require further attention. The film sets out the terrain: why these questions matter, how they intersect, and where they might lead. It is not about offering solutions, but about creating a frame for enquiry about what is at stake in the idea of community today.

While local well-being and safety teams work hard to deliver pragmatic support, they are not tasked with interrogating the deeper meanings of community-nor do they often have the time or resources to do so. In an era shaped by austerity, digital sociality, and political disillusionment, the traditional anchors of community have become unsettled.

This project asks: how do we describe and understand the intertwined nature of community and urban space today? And how might creative work - such as this film - offer new forms of reflection and engagement that don't just document but also participate in the living, shifting reality of the commons?

Legacy and Network Activity

We worked with artists and UON alumni (Dylan Fox and Billy Hawes) at print studio Silly Gooze to produce an artist book edition of the zines.

The aim of this activity, was to bring the Kings Heath Calling Zines together in one publication, create a legacy object for the stakeholders at the same generate some interest around the Kings Heath project.

We launched the book on 3 April 2025 at Silly Gooze, Weedon Bec. 30 people attended the launch, and we were able to network with stakeholders and creatives working within community contexts in Northampton.

During the final part of the project Artslab reached out to us to meet with them as they are working on a heritage community project in the Mounts. They have offered to screen the film in November 2025.

Artist groups and organisation that have connected with the project, Silly Gooze, The Lab, Northampton Film Festival, Northampton Museum and Art Gallery (in conversations to display banner).



Images of the Book Launch, 3 April 2025 Photographs by Mr Bain and Mel Jordan

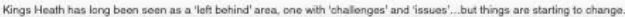


Images of the Book Launch, 3 April 2025 Photography by Mr Bain

‘This is Kings Heath calling!’ New book illustrates a truly social art and community collaboration

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We're showcasing how Professor Mel Jordan is using creativity to amplify community voices this [#WorldArtDay!](#) 🎨👉

Mel, Director of our Research [Centre for Postdigital Cultures](#), has been working with residents of Kings Heath in Northampton - an area often described as "left behind" - to support a series of zine-making workshops that encouraged people to reflect on their local area and share their needs, hopes and ideas for the future 🌱

📖 The collection of drawings, writings and collages were then used to launch a new book, *Kings Health Calling*.

Created in collaboration with artist-researchers from [University of Northampton](#) and [Middlesex University](#) and the West Northants Community Safety and Engagement Team, the book captures the shared aspirations of the community - and how creativity can ignite ideas that inspire positive action, influencing the future of the places we live 🏡💡

It's part of a wider initiative, Social Art Club, which returns this spring with a new project inviting local people to co-create a stitched wall hanging that celebrates personal memories of Kings Heath 🧵👉

Read the full article: <https://lnkd.in.eFnGcURc> [#CovResearch](#)
[Andrew Hewitt](#) [Michael Wright](#) [Jason Day](#) [West Northamptonshire Council](#)



Project Results and Findings

Opportunities and challenges for community cohesion identified

Opportunities included the strong sense of place and pride among long-term residents, intergenerational connections, and the value placed on green spaces and allotments. Challenges centred on the limited formal spaces for gathering, the need for better communication channels across different community groups, and the impact of economic pressures on local amenities. Delivering an arts workshop programme alongside making community artworks helped initiate connections with relevant stakeholders. However, the lack of specialist expertise in community arts development, together with the absence of a dedicated space or local resources, presented significant barriers to sustaining activity. These constraints, along with limited capacity to follow through with Kings Heath stakeholders, further reduced the feasibility of securing Arts Council funding.

Strengthened relationships with residents and stakeholder organisations

Built trust with key individuals and groups through repeated engagement. Secured ongoing dialogue with local Northampton organisations, enabling more collaborative planning for cultural activities.

Media and communication methods tested and evaluated

Film-making proved effective in capturing lived experience and sparking discussion across diverse age groups.

Portrait-making workshops provided an accessible entry point for residents unfamiliar with artists techniques. The process also supported those less comfortable with verbal participation.

Combined, these methods were successful in amplifying community voices and stimulating intergenerational storytelling.

Network for community arts in Northampton initiated

Brought together artists, educators, and community organisers with an interest in sustaining creative practice in Kings Heath and Northampton more widely.

Established a core group committed to mutual support and resource-sharing.

UON student and alumni involvement

Students and alumni gained practical experience in community-based artistic research, including interviewing, collaborative creative production, and ethical engagement. Feedback from student participants highlighted improved confidence, stronger professional portfolios, and greater cultural awareness.

Alumni said that the project showed a need for a network and a forum to discuss arts-based community projects in Northampton and a forum to discuss arts-based community projects in Northampton

Public display of outcomes

Film and portrait artworks, will be exhibited locally, aiming to attract a wide cross-section of the community and to generate conversations about local history, identity, and future aspirations. Hopefully, participants will attend noting the importance of seeing their own narratives represented.

Legacy events planned and networks maintained

Early planning under way for collaborative activities linked to wider Northampton cultural events.

Press can be garnered through public events and projects creating a buzz and energy highlighting Kings Heath

Ongoing presence in Kings Heath

Maintained regular contact with key residents and groups, signalling a sustained commitment beyond the life of the funded project.

Identified several resident-led initiatives for potential future collaboration. Toy Library, Paint Shop Space.

The Sure Start Centre is being brought back online and may provide space for future workshops and the display of the community produced artefacts (Zine Book and prints, Portrait Banner, Film Screening).

Potential Legacies

Critical Reflection on Potential Legacy

The project generated meaningful opportunities for connection and collaboration, but its legacies remain uneven. On the positive side, it established new relationships, as well as consolidated existing relationships with residents and stakeholders in Kings Heath, offering a foundation for longer-term engagement. The creative methods of portraiture and film-making gave visibility to community voices and fostered intergenerational dialogue. University of Northampton students and alumni also benefited, gaining practical skills and experience in working alongside communities. Importantly, the project initiated the beginnings of a community arts network in Northampton and created public-facing outcomes that reinforced community identity and pride.

At the same time, significant structural challenges limited the durability of these gains. The absence of a dedicated space or sustained infrastructure for community arts constrained follow-through with local stakeholders and reduced the possibility of embedding activity in the longer term. Without specialist expertise in community arts development, it was difficult to position the work for future Arts Council funding. Economic fragility within Kings Heath -alongside the closure or instability of local amenities - further reduced capacity to host activity. While a network of interest has emerged, it requires resources and coordination to persist beyond initial enthusiasm.

In this sense, the project's legacy is best understood as one of **potential rather than consolidation**: it has opened pathways, built trust, and demonstrated value, but sustaining these outcomes depends on overcoming structural barriers in funding, infrastructure, and community arts capacity.

Thanks to:

All the those that made a portrait and talked about who they love, like and wished lived in Kings Heath

Marian Hindson, Pradeep Rajguru and Emma Britten for working with us and participating in the film

Kings Heath Primary Academy, for participating in the workshops and letting us use their community room

Jenny Devers, Lynda Grant (for workshops and stitching) and Amy Pinto (UON Student Helpers)

Duncan Whitley (Film Maker)

Dylan Fox and Billy Hawes, Silly Gooze for production and launch of the Zine publication

Richard and Russell at Artslab for offering to screen the film

Mr. Bains for photography

Community Safety and Engagement team West Northampton Council Carolyn Howe Locality and Community Development Manager, Community Safety and Engagement Team: Anna Thorpe and Chloe Turner for helping us finding spaces for interviewing film participants.

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