

Evaluation Report

Back to Ours

Phase 2 Year 1

Ruth Melville, Vickie Bissett, Catherine Doran and Ben Morgan

April 2021





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About this report

This is an evaluation report covering 2020, the first year of Phase 2 of the Back to Ours Creative People and Places (CPP) programme for Hull. It follows Phase 1 which ran from 2018 to December 2019. It uses data collected using an action learning approach, in keeping with national CPP approaches. Thus a lot of the learning has fed directly into the programming through regular feedback to the Director and the team. This evaluation will continue to December 2022, ending with a final report in March 2023.

The report has six sections:

- Section 1 offers an introduction to Back to Ours.
- Section 2 explores how the Back to Ours model adapted to the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdown, continuing to connect to audiences and reach new ones.
- Section 3 looks at how the programme's Hubs approach is developing as a co-creation model.
- Section 4 considers how Back to Ours refined their work with local artists to support their engagement with new audiences through lockdown.
- Section 5 investigates the reach of the programme and the difference it made to participants and audiences.
- Section 6 concludes and shares recommendations for next steps.

In addition, the report addresses Arts Council England's three National CPP Research Questions:

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
3. Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?

The answers are threaded throughout the sections of the report.

A separate Summary Report is available to accompany this full report, covering the main findings and recommendations.

Credits

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

Project team:

Author and project lead: Dr Ruth Melville

Authors and researchers: Catherine Doran and Vickie Bissett

Editor: Ben Morgan

Mapping and data: Mac Ince

Summary design: Rui Verde

Photographs: Tom Arran, Malcolm Scrivener, Jerome Whittingham and Back to Ours

RMR would like to thank Back to Ours for their help in compiling this report, in particular Louise Yates, Christie Parkin, Chrissie Lewis and Nesta Nelson.

To get the complete picture of Phase 2 Year 1, this Summary should be read in conjunction with the full Evaluation Report. This and earlier Back to Ours evaluation reports are available at www.backtoours.co.uk/reports.

More about the whole Creative People and Places programme can be found at www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk



1. Background

1.1. The Creative People and Places programme

Creative People and Places (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. The programme started nationally in 2012 and initially funded 21 places (in three rounds in 2012, 2013 and 2014).

It was well received following success in reaching those least likely to engage in the arts across the full spectrum of socio-economic groups. As a result, from 2019 a whole new round of (new) CPPs have been commissioned with 10 more places funded. In March 2021, a new call for bids for further expansion was launched.

Back to Ours was set up in 2017 during Hull UK City of Culture year. The Director developed the programme by building on her work with Hull 2017's high profile Back to Ours Festival brand. This was supported by key stakeholders (Hull 2017, Hull Council, Arts Council England).

Currently CPP Phase 2 funding (running from January 2020 to December 2022) runs alongside two other funding streams. These are National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) funding for work specifically on Bransholme Estate (2019-2022), and Esmée Fairbairn funding for work with the Hubs. As a result, the next two years of delivery are secured. The team is now working on securing funding for 2023 onwards to continue the successful strategic approach developed so far into a long-term sustainable organisation to deliver and embed the work.

1.2. The city of Hull

City of Culture: Hull is a city of 259,778 people situated on the Humber Estuary. In 2017, it became the UK City of Culture, challenging long-held stereotypes of the city, attracting millions in investment, and bringing in 6+ million visitors¹.

Economy and employment: Although 8,435 businesses in the city generate 123,000 jobs, unemployment is around 5%. Average pay, and the numbers of those with a degree, are lower than national figures².

Health and welfare: Hull is the fourth most deprived local authority according to the 2019 Index of Deprivation. The areas of Hull that fall within the most deprived 10% of areas nationally make up 45% of the city³. In 2019, 31% of dependent children in Hull were living in poverty, compared to 18% nationally⁴, and there were high levels of childhood obesity. 28% of the population identify as disabled⁵, and almost 21,000 people in the city are at risk of social isolation⁶.

Arts engagement: The city has a rich arts and culture heritage and several nationally significant cultural destinations. However, arts engagement is lower than the national average – the figure for any arts participation or attendance at least once in the last twelve months for Hull was 55.2% compared with an average of 60.6% for England⁷. Hull is also lower (71.9%) than the national average (76.1%) for attendance in any arts, museum or library engagement.

¹ <https://www.marketingweek.com/hull-brand/>

² Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22

³ Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=7

⁴ Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=7

⁵ 2011 Census quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22

⁶ Hull Public Health Profiles 2020: Hull, Hull City Council, p.3

⁷ Arts Council England's Active Lives Survey 2015-17, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/active-lives-survey#section-2>



1.3. 2020 – programming through COVID-19

Back to Ours is about people; delivering outstanding arts and cultural experiences for, and with, the people of Hull – engaging local people as audiences, participants, creators and commissioners. Venues for live shows are right in the centre of Hull neighbourhoods as opposed to the city centre. So schools, community centres, churches and social clubs are used to connect audiences with high-quality arts experiences.

At the heart of the organisation is connection and engagement, mixing the familiar with the unfamiliar to grab attention, provoke and entertain. People are taken on a journey – someone who doesn't feel particularly interested or confident in the arts might have a dance with a Dolly Parton impersonator outside Asda, then somewhere down the line, might bring their grandchildren to a family show in the North Point Shopping Centre. They engage with the Back to Ours experience and want more.

In 2020,

- Back to Ours produced or supported 211 activities, totalling 671 hours of delivery.
- This included:
 - 24 live-streamed digital shows, with 83,901 views.
 - 8 digital **Artist Takeovers** with 47,354 views of online content alone.
 - 33 **Bedtime Stories** shared through Facebook and YouTube with 31,192 views.
- There were over 192,000 engagements⁸ made up of:
 - 162,447 digital audience.
 - 5,916 in-person audience.
 - 24,106 digital and in person participants.
- There were Four Hubs in Bransholme, East Hull, North Hull and Derringham, all areas of low arts engagement in the city.
 - Around 70 Hub Members, with 20-30 particularly active.
- 1747 volunteer hours were given, with a total estimated value of £15,226.

2020 had its challenges for an organisation that works so closely with people, prompting a swift strategic response to ensure the continuation of the engagement – through a screen rather than face-to-face.

The year began normally with the **Wizard of Oz pantomime** and two **Secret Gigs** in February. However, COVID-19 arrived early in Hull with a first suspected case in early March 2020.

Back to Ours and Hull Truck planned to produce **Two**, aimed at engaging new audiences with theatre in pubs and social clubs across the city. Opening on the evening the Prime Minister announced initial restrictions⁹, this was cancelled as England went into lockdown on 23 March¹⁰.

Recognising that the arts would have a large part to play in supporting people through the pandemic, Back to Ours put their Hub members, participants and their partner artists at the centre of their thinking. All in-person events and activities were cancelled, artists contracted were paid in full and the **Bransholme Chat** shop closed its doors to the public.

⁸ These totals do not include all Hub meetings or attendances, or volunteer training events.

⁹ Statement was made on 16 March 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-16-march-2020> - lockdown was subsequently announced on 23 March 2020 <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-23/what-you-can-and-can-t-do-in-the-three-week-coronavirus-uk-lockdown>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/23/boris-johnsons-address-to-the-nation-in-full>



They quickly moved to shift the in-person **Right on your Doorstep** programme to people's front rooms through their **Right on your Sofa** brand. This offered safe alternatives for people to continue to socialise, replacing going to the pub, club or an arts venue.

The **Right on your Sofa** online programme was delivered across five cycles – two months of programming followed by two weeks to reflect and adapt. The programming used the core 'ingredient' of mixing the familiar content with the unfamiliar and shows included:

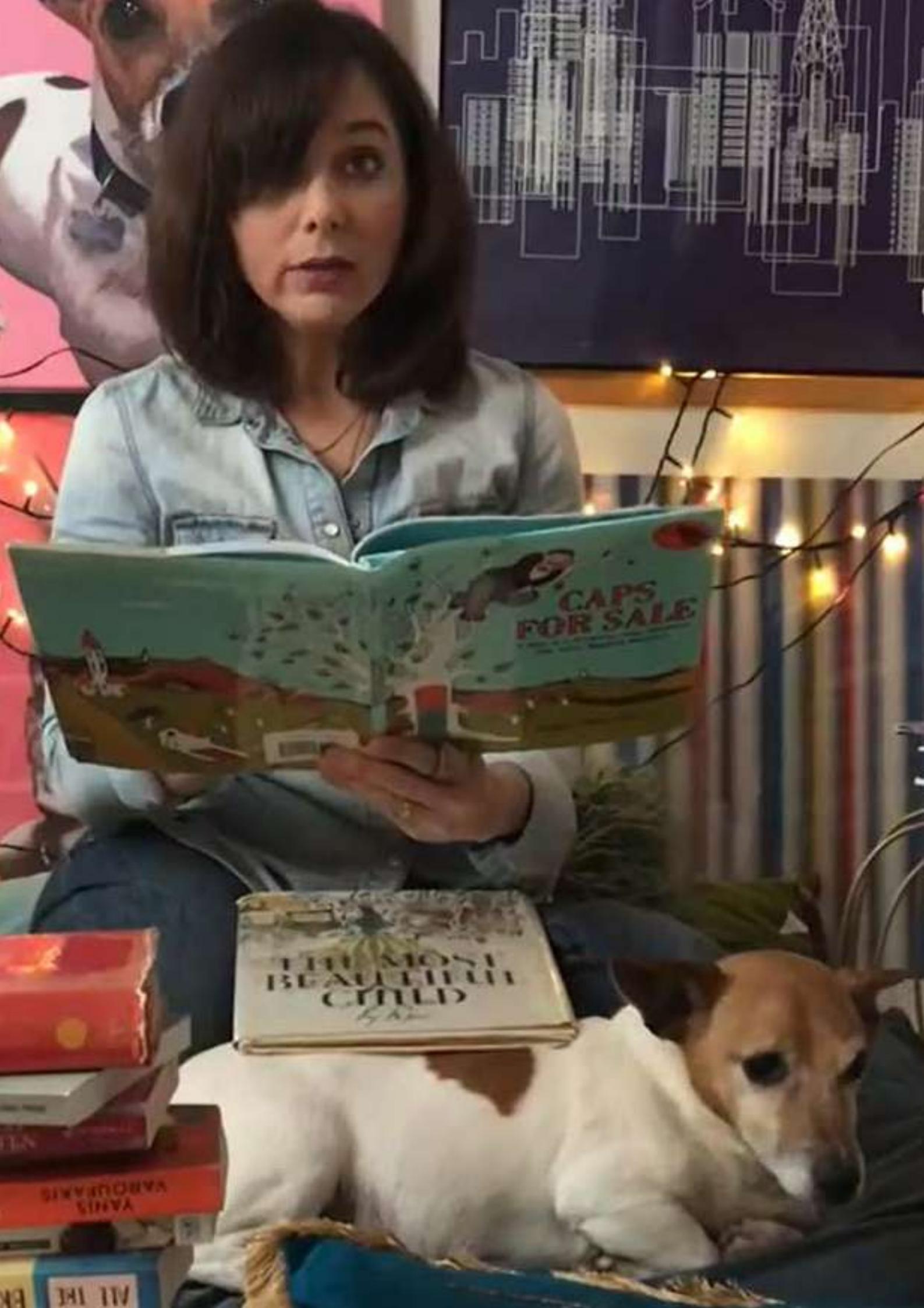
- **Friday Night Gigs:** Regular Facebook live shows delivered from the homes of artists, attracting new and repeat audiences. Programming included family-friendly entertainers and spoken word artists. Keeping a live element allowed the audience to share the experience with others and they could interact and have conversations as they would in a 'real' venue.
- **Artist Takeover:** A day dedicated to an artist, company or project across all Back to Ours social media focusing on creative partnerships (Studio McGuire, The Herd, Lydia Caprani, Lost in Translation).
- **Bedtime Stories:** A weekly story read by a local performer or key figure in a particular neighbourhood. Pre-recorded and shared through Facebook premiere to give a live feel to the stream. It was aimed at families with small children, as well as a hyper-local audience.
- **Artist commissions at Bransholme Chat: Back to Wilson** by Shaz Darley asked people to make their own 'Wilson' from what they have in their home. **Pets in Lockdown** saw Hub member and local artist Chrissy Collinson paint portraits of people's pets and exhibit them alongside the story of the owner-pet relationship.
- **Black Kings Upon Hull:** Working with Hull musicians Bacary Mundoba and Chiedu Oraka to make a four-part documentary exploring issues around race, class and colour in the city in part as a response to the Black Lives Matter protests and the debate around race, history and power.¹¹
- **The Dean Wilson Film Club:** A six-part series of films and poems, released monthly. This was released alongside two existing pieces of Dean's work. It aimed to entertain and introduce audiences to spoken word and poetry.
- **The Christmas Card:** The product of a collaboration with Hub members, this was originally planned as a large-scale Christmas parade through key neighbourhoods. With a second lockdown and high infection rates in Hull,¹² the team moved the live parade to December 2021. To let people see what they could expect next year, an animation of the story was produced and shared.

Though delivery has been mainly digital, there have been some live events. **Lullaby**, a partnership with Freedom Festival, saw Hub members and volunteers riding their beautifully-lit bikes through neighbourhoods as families gathered to watch from doorsteps and gardens. This was complimented by **Bedtime Stories** read by prominent media figures, encouraging families to watch the bikes and then settle down together to watch the story on the Facebook page.

There was work with the Hubs, including specific events (**Quiz Nights**, the **Hubs 'preview' film club**), regular check-ins, and the operation of **Bransholme Chat**. Mainly aimed to get people locally chatting, with the premise that 'everything feels better after a good chat', the latter pivoted quickly in lockdown to offer phone support to the most vulnerable particularly those unable to get online or experiencing isolation.

¹¹ Developed in 2020, this was delivered into 2021 so will be covered in the Year 2 evaluation report.

¹² <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases?areaType=ltla&areaName=Kingston%20upon%20Hull,%20City%20of>



THE MONK
BEATIFIED
CHILD



2. Flexing to lockdown – the Back to Ours programming model

For every arts organisation, lockdown made 2020 a year like no other. CPPs were asked to engage new audiences and continue doing that despite a global pandemic. This section explores how the unique **Right on your Sofa** model which Back to Ours had developed allowed it to flex and adapt, moving the programme online and taking the audience with them.

We find that:

- **Back to Ours adapted fast to COVID-19**, establishing a new and high-quality arts programme during lockdown that was welcomed by artists, Hub members and audiences alike.
- **Adopting two-month cycles of programming provided space to stop, reflect and adapt** both to programming challenges and the changes in lockdown.
- Even when things didn't work as expected, Back to Ours was able to flex and adapt because of a **unique approach to programming that allows deep and lasting engagement**.

Building a new audience for [Dean Wilson Film Club] was slow and spotlights the importance of keeping regular engagement moving – it's time consuming, as in-depth engagement of this kind means slower processes and a longer-term outlook to building relationships.

Back to Ours team.

- The model has five key ingredients:
 - **Strategically and consciously thinking about the offer** that has allowed the programme to adapt to changes during lockdown.
 - **How and why things are done matters** and this is driven by the core values at the heart of the Back to Ours brand.
 - **The importance of a mix of the familiar and unfamiliar** opens up opportunities and is seen in the how, what and where of the programming.
 - **A willingness to take steps into the 'unknown'**, that takes risks and experiments, offering the audience the chance to embark on a journey.
 - **Understanding the importance of monitoring and evaluation** – listening, learning and adapting in response to audiences, partners and the team itself.
- **Audiences love the Back to Ours offer** and are very likely to recommend it to others.
- **Audiences particularly valued that Right on your Sofa events as fun, different, and interactive** – the sense of (virtually) being with others.

2.1. Programming strategically through lockdown

Like every organisation around the world, the 2020 global pandemic required a massive shift in programming for Back to Ours. Their own learning, their knowledge of their audience and ability to listen and gauge their responses proved vital, and they quickly adapted and were able to deliver through a completely different platform (online), guided by their core 'ingredients' or principles.

2.1.1. Pre-lockdown

The original strategy for the first three months of 2020 was to retain Back to Ours' audience by continuing to work in venues in the heart of the communities. A new collaboration was developed with Hull Truck Theatre to allow a broadening of the Theatre's reach into Back to Ours' core audiences. This collaborative approach involved bringing elements of a play, **Two**, into Back to Ours' venues. The social clubs where Back to Ours



staged the **Secret Gigs**, along with others selected by Hub members, were to stage a series of **Two-Doos**. Each was an evening mixing of familiar and unfamiliar entertainment, promoted with and by the Hub members. They mixed together parts of the play (**Two**) with Back to Ours elements, and included the chance to buy heavily discounted tickets and find out more about the production. This was a ground-breaking project for both Hull Truck Theatre and Back to Ours. It demonstrated a radical approach in which venue-based organisations in the city could collaborate with and learn from the Back to Ours model.

Unfortunately, the first night of this planned engagement work for '**Two**' – including a bus tour bringing people into the social clubs from around the Hub areas – had to be cancelled at the last minute. It coincided with the Prime Minister's announcement of the social restrictions that led a few days later to the first lockdown.¹³

2.1.2. In lockdown – adopting programming cycles

As lockdown was announced, Back to Ours responded quickly to the new restrictions. It moved from **Right on your Doorstep** to **Right on your Sofa**, delivered online for the first time on 19 March 2020.

Back to Ours began to work in two-month cycles of programming followed by two weeks to review. This allowed the programme not only to review data and adapt, but also to respond to the changing nature of lockdown restrictions.

The **First Cycle (March – April 2020)** focused on reshaping the programming, shifting the audience over to digital, and giving them a safe virtual space in which to socialise and enjoy themselves whilst maintaining the core of Back to Ours approach. **Right on your Sofa** was established as noted above and became a weekly event. Reflecting on the first cycle, Back to Ours became aware that there was a great deal of online content available which may have been swamping the audience.

For the **Second Cycle (May – June)**, there was a move to introduce pre-recorded material and review the quality of the shows. The pre-recorded material created a bank of content that can be watched any time (mirroring people's consumption of material on other platforms like Netflix).

The **Third and Fourth Cycles (July – August, September – October)** started with a summer break to allow the team to refresh themselves as the previous cycles had been an intense period. There was a reduction in the regularity of the outputs but a focus on more strategic programming. **Friday Night Gigs** became monthly and projects like **Black Kings Upon Hull** and **Dean Wilson Film Club** were planned. In addition, there was a shift to communicating more with funders and other arts organisations (see below).

The **Fifth Cycle (November – December)** responded to the coming Christmas season by increasing online programming in response to the Hubs and the audience on Facebook. Because of lockdown, Christmas was a time when people wouldn't be together as usual, so more shows would allow more space for people to interact. Although the audience was comfortable with Facebook, there was a move to YouTube as it offered both a better technical platform but also access to new audiences. Since this point, Facebook and YouTube have been used in combination. It is perceived that moving exclusively to YouTube would lose a large number of the audience as they would not have time to become accustomed to the platform. In addition, the programme started to consider how it would mix both 'real life' and digital in the future to produce more interesting content that maximised engagement and quality.

¹³ Statement was made on 16 March 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-16-march-2020> - lockdown was subsequently announced on 23 March 2020 <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-23/what-you-can-and-can-t-do-in-the-three-week-coronavirus-uk-lockdown>



"Elvis with Tourette's" – The Dean Wilson Film Club case study

Strategic engagement and audience evaluation

I like Dean. I like the little gift pack and membership badges, it's very well thought out.
Audience member

Genius! Dean Wilson's poetry is unique and his film collaboration with Dave Lee is quirky and atmospheric. I was gutted it was only 5 minutes. Have already re-watched 3 times!
Audience member



Dean Wilson is a bit of a Hull icon, and yet he describes himself as the 'fourth best poet in Hull'. Despite his self-deprecation, he comes from a generation of serious-minded poets who performed in and around Hull's pubs and clubs during the late nineties and early noughties. This made Dean Wilson an interesting addition to the **Right on your Sofa** programme, and with his experience of performing in both the club world and the arts world, his quirky act was seen by the Back to Ours team as appealing to diverse audiences and bringing them together.

Like many artists, Dean's work disappeared overnight in March 2020. Even though he had worked with Back to Ours before, the six-month commission to create the **Dean Wilson Film Club** and work with film maker Dave Lee was a great opportunity for them both to make new films and reach new audiences.

For Back to Ours, before COVID-19, Dean had performed live at some Back to Ours Shindig events and the commission and opportunity of digital gave them the chance to introduce him to a whole new audience. A regular series of live spoken word events or an exclusive poetry night wouldn't typically appeal to the core Back to Ours audience, but they might watch it free, right on their sofa.

The lockdowns and the careful way Right on your Sofa was developed gave the team opportunities to play with programming in a way they wouldn't normally. They could explore how their core audience would respond to Dean's work and distinctive style of delivery.

They also saw the benefits of using Dean as a longer-term engagement project, not only around the development of their audience, but also in introducing Dean's core arts audience to the work of Back to Ours. They showed the online premiere of his short film 'East Coast Fever' early in the first lockdown and wanted to see how this initial invitation could be extended even further.

The project ran for six months, with a set of poems – two existing and one new commission for Back to Ours – released at 9 pm on the last Thursday of every month. At the start of the project limited edition goodie bags were sent out to people who requested them on social media, including an exclusive Dean badge, bingo card and signed poem. Back to Ours recorded the postcodes of anyone who received a pack, either through the post or by picking one up at one of three local venues.



At Christmas, three months into the project, a further set of goodie bags were made available. These included a special edition Dean Christmas badge and a pamphlet of all the poems featured in the Film Club. By posting packs out and making them available from the same venues, the team were once again able to track postcodes to see if there had been any difference in audience. This might be a move from an HU5 (The Avenues) audience, which accounted for 16% of the overall Hull audience requesting original packs, to a greater percentage in the key Hub areas of the city (East Hull, Bransholme, North Hull). At that point the postcodes remained relatively similar, with marginal growth in HU6 (Orchard Park/North Hull), HU7 (Bransholme) and HU8 (Summergangs, Sutton, Stoneferry).

Many of the postcodes were also out of the city entirely for both packs (38% and 42% accordingly), alluding to Dean's Twitter page as the most popular point of entry for people engaging with the project.

Back to Ours worked closely with Hubs members to show previews of Dean's videos, asking what they thought and who they'd like to share them with. There was a lot of discussion about who Dean was; some felt they weren't sure if he was performing or not, which made them uncertain as to whether to trust and commit to the work or not.

The Hub members reflected that they particularly enjoyed seeing and recognising the local places and landscapes that are featured in the films, such as Dean performing outside the Scarborough Spa and/or looking through the window of the Bonny Boat pub in Hull. One Hub member reflected:

So, they've [Back to Ours] helped me to push my boundaries, and even though I don't like poetry or Shakespeare, I've got involved with the Dean Wilson Film Club and really enjoyed it.

Dean reflects on his experience of working with Back to Ours:

It's been totally worthwhile, to get commissioned to write a poem, which I did ... It was quite a long poem. I don't often write long poems. So, getting commissioned by Back to Ours gave me the motivation to do something different. ... we get paid for it as well, which is pretty novel in the poetry world.

Dean's stilted delivery of self-referential poems is well-known and appreciated, not only by the HU5 crowd of Hull, the 'culture buffs', but well beyond. Although it is sometimes difficult to separate the artist from the act with Dean, he is an everyday artist who enjoys sharing the 'familiar' and the 'unfamiliar' with his audience, just as much as Back to Ours.

For Back to Ours the project highlighted the value of their strategic approach to engagement and the potential of using the packs approach to collect data from the audience.

In the last episode of the **Dean Wilson Film Club** (February 2021), the usual three poems were followed by a Q&A with Dean and a live performance by **Memphis Pete**, an Elvis tribute. The live Facebook premiere audience (50+, the highest ever figure) stayed for the poetry and the Q&A, switching off when the live music began. The Q&A brought the audience closer to Dean, which meant that they 'got' the work and wanted to know more, especially as they knew it was going to happen through advance callouts to send through questions for him to answer.

Building a new audience for this project was slow, and spotlights the importance of keeping regular engagement moving – it's time consuming, as in-depth engagement of this kind means slower processes and a longer-term outlook to building relationships.

Back to Ours team

Authors: Christina Lewis and Vickie Bissett



2.2. The Back to Ours model – built on principles

Phase 1 saw the Back to Ours team build on their collective experience of programming work. They developed a model which enabled deep and lasting engagements with arts and culture in neighbourhoods where the arts had never been recognised before. The development of the Hubs began to build a sense of ownership, and ability to take action further within their neighbourhoods.

The Back to Ours model has been further refined and developed through the experiences and learning from a year of lockdown. There are five overlapping principles to this model:

1. Strategically and consciously thinking about the offer
2. How and why things are done matters
3. The importance of a mix of familiar and unfamiliar
4. A willingness to take steps into the 'unknown'
5. Understanding the importance of monitoring and evaluation

None of these are set in stone but are developing organically all the time. Below we consider each in turn and how they worked in 2020.

2.2.1. Strategically and consciously thinking about the offer

Back to Ours take a strategic and planned approach. They might make what they do look easy but that is more a reflection of their commitment to being straightforward and easy for people to access – it doesn't mean what they do is simple.

Putting the audience at the centre

Reaching new audiences, enthusing and retaining them is at the heart of Back to Ours' work and lies behind every programming or commissioning decision made by the team. The approach taken is to explicitly view programming in a holistic way.

The work itself needs to be good, but the setting, location, the marketing and communications, the welcome and ticket access and pricing, the evaluation and feedback are all an important part of the process and experience. The audience member is experiencing Back to Ours from the moment they first come across information about a show. And the experience doesn't end when the show finishes.

Every decision draws on the programming principles and questions that put the audience at the centre. These questions are:

- Is the work of quality?
- Is it ambitious?
- Will it excite people?
- Is it risky?
- Does it develop existing audiences?
- Can people resonate with the work?
- Why programme this work?
- Will people want more?
- Can the work be delivered to a high standard?
- Does it present any barriers? If so, how can they be overcome?
- Is this something new for people?

The quality of the programme overall is ensured by a strong artistic vision held and shared within the Back to Ours team. This centres around a belief in the ability of high-quality art, if programmed and marketed appropriately, to engage people who don't typically attend arts venues and festivals. It recognises the fact that people aren't typically attracted by an artform or title but by the sense that they are welcome, and it will work for them.



The quality of the welcome

For Back to Ours, marketing is more than a flyer or a website – it's 'an invitation' asking the audiences to join in, to come 'back to ours'. When someone attends a show, there isn't a 'front of house' – it's a welcome, a 'come on in', with an informality that might include unicyclists or kids running around enjoying themselves.

Previous evaluations highlighted the importance of this. Audience members repeatedly commented that they felt welcomed, and it was a huge part of the team's and the volunteers' role on the day of any show.

Hi everyone, hope you're enjoying CJ Stewart, #rightonyoursofa this evening! ✨ Have a singalong, have a boogie, and enjoy yourselves x

Back to Ours on Facebook LiveStream, 1 May 2020

This approach is still largely instinctive, learnt by members of the team through experience and modelling. It is a work in progress as to fully work there is a need to thread the approach through all areas of delivery. This is hard to maintain whilst delivering at pace and moving from 'real world' to digital. As a consequence, in 2020 doing this put the team under strain.

Other organisations seeking to learn from Back to Ours in order to broaden their reach need to recognise the holistic nature of the approach: simply changing the language of brochures, or knocking on a wider range of doors won't alone lead to broader reach into communities who typically don't attend their events.

[Audience member] Hey Back to Ours, I'm a Primary School Teacher, any chance of doing day time gigs for children between now and the summer holidays? Friday afternoons would be perfect!

[Back to Ours] Absolutely, yes! - Hi Victoria, can you drop us a message at team@backtoours.co.uk and we can discuss? :)

Dialogue over Facebook, 6 June 2020

Time to reflect

The two-month cycles described above gave time for reflection and feedback. The team could look at the new experiences of creating, producing and hosting digital work and having discussions about the 'what works' and 'what doesn't'.

In switching to digital, they didn't just invent a whole new programme or conversely do exactly the same thing but online, they strategically adapted the in-person programme to suit their main audiences.

2.2.2. How and why we do it matters and doesn't happen by chance

All decisions refer back to the brand and the central values at the heart of Back to Ours. This is summed up by Director Louise Yates' summary of the intent for 2020:

Back to Ours is about bringing together the familiar with the unfamiliar, the accessible with the challenging; mixing popular culture with outstanding contemporary art and taking it right to people's doorsteps - or across 2020 and beyond, digitally through Right on their Sofa. The programming and venue (or choice of digital platform over the past year) is chosen to resonate with people least likely to engage with mainstream arts - particularly in Hull's outlying estates - and has wide appeal, bringing together people of different backgrounds rather than pushing people into silos.¹⁴

Louise Yates, email correspondence March 2021

¹⁴ Email from Back to Ours Team, 19 March 2021 – this is an evolution of what appears in the COVID-19 Business Plan



To reiterate what has been noted in previous reports,¹⁵ the Back to Ours brand is a strong and consistent one, representing a commitment to quality programming and the sense of welcome which lies at the heart of Back to Ours' approach.

It is about **how** things are done rather than **what** is programmed and there is a very conscious effort to include the people of Hull:

At the very core of Back to Ours is people. We want YOU to take the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in amazing art experiences, as participants, decision-makers, artists, volunteers and, of course, audiences.¹⁶

And a sense of speaking to people in a way that resonates:

This is the ethos for Back to Ours, we are a bit of a family, we're a family with an agenda which is to get people involved in the arts.
Back to Ours Director

The tone of voice used is not simply warm, immediate and inclusive because it reflects the Director's own voice. It is also an invitation that resonates with the audiences, puts them at ease and lets them know they are welcome – reinforcing the quality of the welcome discussed above.

But it's also considered – it's not like many other arts organisations' language – it's direct and straightforward so it never becomes a barrier to engagement for people who may not regularly engage with the arts.

The tone of voice is an incredibly useful asset as demonstrated below in the context of carrying the audience online. But in 2020 it also had to adapt, as the programme made a conscious effort to talk to funder and other arts organisations. It evolved to be more 'informative' and to work effectively on a new channel (LinkedIn) as a conscious effort was made to reach these secondary audiences¹⁷.

Lockdown's challenge to the brand

So, in moving to the 'cold', virtual medium of digital, how do you replicate physicality, warmth and friendliness?

It meant taking a core part of the programme's ethos - a warm, friendly approach to inviting and welcoming the audience to a real-life show - and translating this into a comparable digital experience. It also meant producing a digital 'space' that could be as familiar a location as the social clubs and local schools where the real-life shows had been staged.

This was achieved by using a 'digital space' – Facebook – that was already popular and familiar to the audiences and was the programme's main channel, but then ensuring the 'welcome' was as friendly and interactive as possible. Team members attending the online shows messaged and commented, being present and attentive to the audience to create the 'welcome'.

The Back to Ours brand – the tone of voice, people's trust in the programme – helped make the transition to an online programme more straightforward. People were forgiving when the technology went wrong or artists used to a live audience found performing in a void unsettling or shows didn't go as planned. It demonstrated the programme's human side – not perfect but friendly and 'real'. It also demonstrated a willingness to experiment, and learn from that experimentation.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.backtoours.co.uk/reports/> for all previous reports

¹⁶ Back to Ours website, <http://www.backtoours.co.uk/whats-back-to-ours/>

¹⁷ The people coming to the shows are the primary audience; communicating with funder and arts organisations performs a different function.



2.2.3. Familiar/unfamiliar mix of utmost importance

Bringing together the familiar and the unfamiliar is a key ingredient for Back to Ours, and can be seen in the how, what and where of the programming. This very much draws on the Director's background and experience of the arts, and is an approach with many facets:

- There are different things to attract different people.
- The audience can enter at any point, there are can be different styles of 'invitation' and someone is (hopefully) starting a relationship with the programme.
- Wherever they enter, the audience begin a journey with Back to Ours that offers new experiences and the chance to discover new artforms that might resonate with them.
- The unfamiliar in a familiar setting can grab an audience's attention and challenge them.
- Having this approach gives Back to Ours a freedom to play and experiment in what they present.
- Potentially it asks both audiences and artists to consider 'what is art?' and 'who are artists?' – challenging distinctions between high and low art, popular and elite culture.
- It creates a rich and exciting mix with many possibilities which people will enjoy.

Platforms instead of venues

Before lockdown, Back to Ours often programmed the unfamiliar in familiar locations. One challenge of lockdown was to make digital spaces both familiar and friendly to as many people as possible so that audiences could engage and take part - but also turn a familiar digital channel (Facebook) into somewhere to engage with 'art'.

Some digital spaces were rejected (Twitch) and others only adopted later (YouTube). Facebook's technology was familiar – it allowed people to chat, adding to their enjoyment of the live events. Back to Ours began to mix things up by using Facebook Live and Premiere to give a 'live' feel to pre-recorded content. However, the programme also adopted YouTube as a secondary platform because of Facebook's music copyright checks. These interrupted performers singing well-known tracks and hence disrupted live shows.

Unfamiliar and familiar strands

Online programming started with the more familiar and accessible **Bedtime Stories** and the **Friday Night Gigs**. These were established early in lockdown when 'unfamiliar' for many audience members was any sort of digital engagement itself. Programming then mixed the accessible (a **Memphis Pete gig**, an **Easter Egg hunt**, **Bedtime Stories**) with the more challenging (a digital premiere of contemporary circus company Lost in Translation's show **D'Emblee, Black Kings Upon Hull, Dean Wilson Film Club**). Around Easter, Back to Ours started to introduce the unfamiliar into the **Friday Night Gig** with **Passion for Classical**.

2.2.4. Willingness to take steps into the 'unknown'

For Back to Ours, a willingness to step into the unknown perhaps naturally follows from the desire to mix the familiar and the unfamiliar. It's about being open to trying new things, to experimenting and bringing the audience with you on their journey into the 'unknown'.

There is also an implicit risk – things may not go as planned. But if an organisation is willing to accept that – and learn from it – there is much to be gained. Audiences may experience something they've never seen before. New ways of doing something can lead to ways of doing things better. So, this principle is also deeply linked to listening, learning and adapting – understanding the importance of evaluation (see below).

Challenging old audiences, welcoming new ones

There were several aspects of the programming that could be seen as steps into the unknown – knowingly undertaken experiments that would challenge the core audience and yet reach out to new ones. For example, the commissioning of **Black Kings Upon Hull** and the **Dean Wilson Film Club** presented content that was



perhaps challenging for the core audience – the history of the black community in the city, performance poetry – outside of their comfort zone. But in supporting this new work, Back to Ours promoted local artists to a wider audience and offered the opportunity for the audience to experience a wider range of work and engage with new ideas and discussions.

Both commissions brought new audiences to Back to Ours. **Black Kings Upon Hull**, in terms of both subject matter and delivery platform (YouTube), reached a younger male audience that weren't the programme's core audience. Dean Wilson is a local poet with a strong following among those who attend arts events locally – again not a typical Back to Ours audience.

As mentioned above, for Back to Ours programming doesn't start or stop with an event. These commissions were coupled with engagement work to support anyone to enjoy them. For example, the Hubs '**film nights'** invited members to preview work – including the **Dean Wilson Film Club** and the **Black Kings Upon Hull** film series. People could comment and discuss the work and feel ownership of the film, making them comfortable promoting potentially challenging content to their networks. This work relies on the team having time and space to understand all the programming principles rather than having to call on the Director.

Keeping on with digital after lockdown ends

Another learning from lockdown has added a new element into the brand, and offered another step into the unknown (at this point). This is the potential of digital content and delivery to add something into the overall offer – not just because of need, but because it is the best way to reach and welcome in a wider audience and to keep them coming back for more.

As the team programme 2021 and 2022, the final years of the Creative People and Programme funding, and the launchpad for the next stage of Back to Ours, the Director has made a commitment that all programming will have a digital and a real-world element. This means not creating parallel programmes, but using every route into diverse communities and groups that they can find, supporting people to take steps that feel risky to them but could prove rewarding in terms of experience and networks, and changing the way that the arts ecosystem views its role and its work.



Figure 1: Right on your Sofa - Bedtime Stories with Nigel Taylor



Nicola Meekin – East Hull Hub Member

Connecting digitally during lockdown

For some people the lockdown has led to a positive change, because it has created the conditions to find new and better ways of connecting with each other. Nicola has ME (chronic fatigue syndrome) which means that she is sometimes housebound, and the lockdown has meant that attending Hub meetings, arts events, and even getting involved with making art has mostly been online during 2020. Nicola reflects that during 2020 she has attended more Back to Ours events than she would normally be able to.

Having not engaged with social media before, Nicola has had to learn the digital skills to get herself online and connected with Back to Ours during the lockdown. Learning how to Zoom and WhatsApp has been a big thing for her - it has meant that she could meet her fellow Hub members again to get involved in planning Back to Ours projects, such as **The Christmas Card** and **Lullaby**. Nicola says that her absolute highlight of 2020 was seeing and talking to her Grandma, whom she had not seen since March, on Boxing day on a WhatsApp video call.

Also during the lockdown, Nicola has spent more time with her daughter at home and together they have watched and engaged with many of the **Right on your Sofa** events.

Back to Ours have helped me to feel like I'm part of something bigger which has been a real lifeline for me.

In her role as an East Hull Hub member, Nicola has been able to promote the **Right on your Sofa** events far and wide, sharing the content digitally with her family and friends. She reflects that this makes her feel like she is helping other people during the lockdown, because it brings joy and laughter when they watch the music, comedy, **Bedtime Stories** and many other Back to Ours shows.

Nicola was training to be a Dance Instructor when she was diagnosed with ME, so Back to Ours offers her the opportunity to plan and help organise art events in her neighbourhood. Nicola is a passionate supporter of the arts and is deeply committed to Back to Ours. She describes her reasons for being involved:

I'd like to develop that sense of community ... there's no youth clubs anymore, and kids don't have anything to do. We need something around here - at the risk of sounding like Whitney Houston, the children are our future, and we need to look after them.

During September, Nicola and her daughter volunteered together on Lullaby, an outdoor cycling spectacular event in East Hull, and part of the Freedom Festival. Lullaby is performed by local cyclists touring bikes around their neighbourhood at dusk with sparkling lights and twinkling sounds. Nicola and her daughter sat in the back of a rickshaw and counted audience numbers, noting their locations as well as noting down people's comments as they stood and watched from their front gardens. Nicola says that the amount of work that Back to Ours invests in these local neighbourhoods is incredible and she is proud to be part of these events and work with the Hubs network.

Author: Vickie Bissett



2.2.5. Understanding the importance of monitoring and evaluation

Although this is the principle identified in Back to Ours Story of Change, in fact it goes beyond simple guidelines for monitoring and evaluation. It is an approach of listening, learning and adapting grounded in action research and an audience-centred approach.

Listening is a key plank in the Back to Ours approach to engagement and community collaboration, which affects every aspect of their relationship with the communities they work with and their partners. They recognise that formal structures of engagement can be seen as an end in themselves, perhaps masking a lack of real engagement. Furthermore, they can be excluding, particularly of those who are least likely to engage in the arts. From the start, the Director has explicitly decided to steer away from any set model of consultation. Instead, she and the team base their approach on 'being there' – listening, spending time with people, working alongside, developing and testing ideas, talking through.

Listening in lockdown

Listening to audiences, communities and partners built resilience in lockdown, where more formal structures might not have survived the switch away from face-to-face work. Even though the number of survey responses were vastly smaller for online events compared with live ones in 2020¹⁸, there was no sense from the team that they didn't know how their audience was feeling. Team members attend every event – often more than one going to the events – and noticed not only quality issues which they could fix then and there but also how the audience responded in chats. Every event was recorded and questioned internally through the event sheets which the team used to challenge themselves on the key programming principles (see 2.2.1 above) and reflect back together so as to make change.

There were several other informal feedback loops. For example, personal feedback was made to team members who are seen by regular attenders as friendly and accessible; and Hub members regularly meeting online through the year offered a chance to 'take the temperature' of the audience.

Reflecting and acting

Early in the year, there was a need to address the overcommitment of the team and how to balance workload and quality. With their enthusiasm to deliver to people missing live events or perhaps at home isolated, Back to Ours initially presented a packed schedule. Refusing to compromise on quality, the intense workload during the first wave of online programming led to near burnout.

This was addressed by taking regular reflective breaks – at the end of the two-month cycles – and rethinking their approach.

The pattern of the cycles with their 'stop and reflect' points were key in this learning and adaptation. They were time off from programming for the team to recuperate, and to share learning. The latter came from reviewing data collected (social media stats and any feedback via audience surveys) and, more importantly, from team reflections on their observation of the audience at the live (online) events. In turn, these gave the team a more in-depth understanding around the importance of monitoring and evaluation. It helped them realise they could use the data and observations in the planning work rather than it merely being useful for reporting purposes.

One area of learning which will shape future programming was to move away from delivering everything live. **Bedtime Stories** is a good example of this, as discussed in the case study.

¹⁸ Live events in which data was collected took place in February 2020. They included the Secret Gig, William Gemmell Club 13.2.20, Wizard of Oz on 15.2.21 and Secret Gig, Willows Club 21.3.20. This was the last live event before mandatory Lockdown was introduced on 23.3.20. The other events later in the year at which data was collected survey were all online.



No sleep til Bransholme – The Bedtime Stories case study

How reflection saw a show grow and adapt

When the first lockdown was announced in March 2020, Back to Ours were keen to produce digital work that would continue to bring people and families together in one space, sharing an experience as they would do in a live venue.

The first **Bedtime Story** readers were professional performers. The team quickly learnt how to use the technology themselves so they could support the readers in filming or streaming live to the Facebook page. As time went on, the quality of what was delivered increased.

The two-monthly cycles allowed the team time to evaluate the work being produced, assessing its place in the overall organisational strategy. This allowed a re-evaluation of **Bedtime Stories** and a number of changes to the format.



The first change was a move away from professional performers. The team realised they could better engage the everyday audience by using non-performers to tell the stories. This shift made the work more accessible for a wider audience, and introduced those doing the reading to something new too. For many, reading out loud was something they had maybe only done at school or to their children or grandchildren. So being filmed 'performing' in a public location was a challenge. But it didn't matter if they were confident readers or slick performers. What mattered was they read the story in a unique way – made it their own – and got satisfaction from being involved.

The engagement then was twofold – with the readers themselves, but also a new hyperlocal audience tuning in from the reader's neighbourhood. One participant in particular was reticent as she didn't think herself 'a good reader'. Taking part gave her more confidence to read with her grandchildren which will perhaps spark greater engagement with the arts further down the line.

In terms of production, Back to Ours started working with a professional filmmaker to film the readings or support the people reading to film themselves. The footage was handed to The Herd Theatre to caption and add opening and closing branded titles. Short trailers were filmed for each individual story so they could be easily promoted prior to release.

Another decision was then made to stop the live readings and move to a pre-record on Facebook Live. This still gave the 'live' feel and enabled the Back to Ours team to monitor numbers of people tuning in. It was a logistical decision based on people's time – it was too risky to expect people to always be free at 7 pm on a Monday to perform. Plus working with people who don't have a performance background, managing technology and reading the story to a live audience added an additional level of stress.

The **Bedtime Stories** were also premiered on YouTube, a strategic move to encourage a core, dedicated Facebook audience to move across to watch the content. The thinking was people would become more comfortable with the platform and use it in the future. Also it opened up access, responding to requests from people using Twitter and Instagram who didn't have Facebook accounts.

Author: Christina Lewis



2.3. Audiences' responses

So, having looked at the programme's model and how it flexed to respond to lockdown, how did audiences react? Audience responses to the Back to Ours 2020 events were definitely positive. When asked 'would you recommend this event to friends and family?', 94% indicated that they were likely or very likely to do this (they scored the statement between 7 and 10 out of 10). 72% of the responses scored it at 10/10, showing they were 'extremely likely' to recommend the event to others. Only two people gave a response less than five.¹⁹

When asked what people particularly liked about the **Right on your Sofa** events, three main themes were that they were fun, different, and involved interaction and community – there was a sense of being with others even though viewers were at home. The latter is shown particularly in the comments on **Facebook Live events**, where audience members have casual chats with each other – about the show, but also about asking how they are getting on and generally catching up. This sense of the social was clearly important to people and valued by them.

Just feeling like you're getting involved and knowing everyone else is watching too having a good time.

Loved them, felt connected with family and friends we joined in online, and carried on talking about them online after the shows had finished... Such a great idea in these difficult times especially when you are on your own... Makes me feel part of something...

Easy going, relaxing, fun, able to interact with others on the chat, felt a real sense of community.

Audience members via survey

Some of the sense of community seemed to be felt by Hull people watching from much further away, who were then able to feel more connected, and demonstrating the spread of the audience.

I loved to hear voices from back home.

Audience member

There was absolutely a sense of being entertained and having fun, and a strong feeling that the events were different from anything else out there.

I found the gigs really good, and they gave a feeling of being out and socialising.

Unique and quirky.

Opportunity to see/hear something different.

Audience members

There was also a sense of the benefit of lockdown in some ways...

No one can watch my terrible kitchen dancing!

Often things that were liked, or that were named as highlights of the audience member's experience, related to particular events. **The Dolly Parton** show came up several times, as did the **Dean Wilson Film Club**, but a variety of different shows and sometimes artists were mentioned here.

Dolly Parton - I couldn't have loved that more.

¹⁹ Of a base of 103 answers, scoring the question 'How likely is it that you would recommend the Back to Ours Right on your Sofa events to a friend, family member or colleague' where 1 = 'not at all likely' and 10 = 'extremely likely': 10 – 71.76%, 9 – 9.41%, 8 – 9.41%, 7 – 3.53%, 6 – 1.18%, 5 – 2.35%, 4 – 0%, 3 – 0%, 2 – 1.18% (one person), 1 – 1.18% (one person).



I absolutely loved the Easter Hunt - the whole family got involved and it was quite challenging.

Herd Takeover day - Slime story in particular (Finn is an excellent storyteller).

Seeing DJ Tony!

My Friday night on the sofa was the highlight of my week - difficult to choose one night.

Audience members

Some valued the fact that friendly and familiar people were there. However, around 10% of answers simply valued 'all of it'.

Unfair to select one - have enjoyed all I've seen so far.

Audience member

There were signs that other family members had joined in as well through recommendation, or experienced the effects of it simply by being part of the same household – an unintended consequence of lockdown.

Last concert getting my Spanish family watching too!

Shaking a tail feather in the kitchen with my poor 21-year-old son who's stuck with me during lockdown!

Audience members

The quality of the offer was mentioned positively many times, as was the performers' talent, and being able to access this at home during the COVID-19 situation was spoken of highly. People appreciated:

Quality performers, right length, content came across strongly, felt engaged.

The chance to watch something quality new to me and from my sofa.

The singer's voice, the genre of music, and the way people were getting into it and commenting.

Audience members

And one linked it very strongly to the way they felt about Hull.

Makes you proud of the local area and what we have to offer.

Audience member



Back to Ours

Becky Howes

Joshua Matheson-Bell

Jason Coyle

Ruth Getz

Jessica Morley

Graham (HPSS)

David Pisaro

Back to Ours

Tony Forrester

Back to Ours

Becky Norman

Ahmed Smith

Tony Forrester

paul

Graham Reedier

Sara Coupland

Mathew

Christie

Nicola Meekin

zoom



3. The Hubs: ensuring and developing a community voice in programming and commissioning

This section explores the role of the Hubs within Back to Ours and considers the way in which Back to Ours have addressed quality of engagement in co-design and co-creation, a key principle of Creative People and Places²⁰.

The Hubs are key to Back to Ours' programming in three ways:

- In providing a sounding board for ideas
- As promoters and encouragers of other people in their area to attend
- As the voice of the community in co-developing the programme

We find that:

- **Lockdown has increased the value of Hub members to Back to Ours and of Back to Ours to the Hub members.** This mutually beneficial relationship will enhance the quality of community engagement in programming.
- **The Hub members responded well to the new Right on your Sofa programme.** They are regular attenders at the **Friday night gigs, Bedtime Stories, the Quiz** and all elements of the programme. The Hub members have shared the **Right on your Sofa** content, securing new audiences for Back to Ours.
- **Many of the Hub members have improved their skills during this period.** This is particularly digital skills, but also evaluation skills through Chat to Ours and production skills through the development of new art events.
- **Some Hub members have thrived and benefited from being able to access an online programme during the COVID-19 lockdown.** Once new digital skills were acquired some Hub members have been able to attend more meetings or art events than they would usually be able to.
- **The social aspect of Back to Ours events is crucially important for many Hub members interviewed.** The loss of normal everyday social experiences means that the supportive 'family' atmosphere created by Back to Ours has gained a heightened degree of significance for people.

3.1. Introduction to the Hubs

The Back to Ours Hubs network currently operates across four geographical areas of Hull. The Hub areas include the following wards²¹:

- 1) North Hull Hub (includes the 3 wards of Orchard Park, University and Beverley & Newland)
- 2) East Hull Hub (includes the 6 wards of Sutton, Ings, Longhill & Bilton, Holderness, Southcoates and Marfleet)
- 3) Bransholme Hub (includes the 3 wards of North Carr, Kingswood and West Carr)
- 4) Derringham Hub (1 ward)

The North Hull, East Hull and Bransholme areas of the city contain many of Hull's ten most deprived wards. These include Orchard Park, Marfleet, Southcoates, Longhill, North Carr and West Carr.²²

²⁰ Data for this section is largely derived from online survey responses from 29 Hub members, with a total of 38 surveys completed. Five Hub members were interviewed face-to-face for the case studies. Interviews with the team, reflection sessions and attendance at online events also contributed to the analysis.

²¹ <https://maps.hull.gov.uk/myhull.aspx> file path is my hull/my maps/council and democracy/area committees [accessed on 3/3/21]

²²Hull is currently 4th in the English Indices of Deprivation (IoD) 2019. For further information, the demographic and statistical breakdown of the Hull wards can be found within the Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory website http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/ [accessed on 3/3/21]



Each of the Hub groups consists of a small number of volunteers from the local area who are supported by Tony Forrester, the Back to Ours Neighbourhood Programme Manager. At the time of writing, the Hub network has approximately 70 members registered and a core active group of around 20-30 members who attend across a wide variety of events and meetings. The majority of Hub members that signed up during 2017 and 2018 have consistently engaged across a variety of Back to Ours programme activities and events. Many of the proactive Hub members have gained new skills: for example, by joining the Chat to Ours group and the Act to Ours group they have become essential members of the evaluation and performance activities. During 2020, the Hub members have been instrumental in supporting and developing an audience for the **Right on your Sofa** programme: they regularly attend social events such as the **Quiz Nights**, go to planning meetings and attend the online programme, some of which has been designed specifically for them, such as the **Dean Wilson Film Club** and the **Quiz Nights**.

The aims of the Hubs are to:

Act as a sounding board - Hub members represent the area of Hull they live in, and the city itself. When programming and commissioning artworks for a particular area, it is important that Back to Ours gauges the responses of local residents. Who knows local people better than local people? Back to Ours looks to the Hub groups for suggestions and guidance and for local knowledge and experience.

Promote & encourage - The Hub members are essential to promoting the Back to Ours programme and other arts activities that are delivered in and around the city. The Hubs encourage participation and are confident enough to talk openly with friends, family and neighbours about the arts and the Back to Ours programme.

Develop co-commissioning - The Hub members are regularly offered training and development opportunities in the arts, with a view to making the groups and individuals more culturally confident. This will be evident through conversations and planning meetings in which the members can talk and express themselves openly about the arts and about participation in the arts and, importantly, engage critically with decisions made about the area they represent. This is a very important part of the Hub members' role. It is a difficult relationship to nurture, but very worthwhile in the long run. The development programme provides a closer insight into Back to Ours and the artists they work with. It will also encourage the whole group to speak openly and honestly about the Back to Ours programme and area they support.

The Hub network undergoes a continuous process of iterative development overseen by the core Hub members and the Neighbourhood Programme Manager. This has developed a strong sense of belonging and ownership of the Hub groups, and a feeling of being directly involved with their local neighbourhood, as illustrated by this North Hull Hub member:

People from my area now ask me when Back to Ours have got their next show on. I enjoy this side of things, letting people know when the shows are on, promoting them and giving out the tickets.



Malcolm Scrivener – East Hull Hub Member

Portrait of a volunteer

Malcolm is an accountant within a Hull caravan firm and, like most people, he has found the lockdown difficult. Before, Malcolm used to go out with friends a lot: he would go regularly to music concerts, theatre shows, football, and every Monday evening he would attend an art class.

He reveals that the Back to Ours **Right on your Sofa** events have kept him going. He points to events such as the **Dean Wilson Film Club** and particularly the **Quiz Nights** as a lifeline, connecting him with the art world that he has missed during 2020, and says that it offers him the chance to socialise with like-minded people.

Originally Malcolm is from Greatfield Estate in East Hull, a close-knit community which he reflects on proudly, saying with a smile, "They'll tell you if they don't like something". East Hull has a rich cultural history which includes Mick Ronson (lead guitarist in David Bowie's Spiders from Mars) and Cosey Fanni Tutti (artist and musician) who were all born and raised in the East Hull area, and today it is home to the Hull Kingston Rovers Rugby Club.

Malcolm began volunteering during 2017 as a City of Culture volunteer. He says that before this he was more introverted, and that Hull 2017 really brought him out of his shell. What he particularly enjoys is being actively involved whilst volunteering. For example, he dressed up as a postman as part of the **Back to Bransholme** event, the 1940s punk-pop circus opera. He guided audience members to the best spot to stand to watch the outdoor spectacular event and handed out evaluation forms to the audience.

I've always liked the arts. I'm a big music fan and I like painting and drawing, and I enjoy going to see shows. My taste in music is not mainstream. I like things that are off the wall and a lot of the events that Back to Ours put on have been quite original. They've not been afraid to push the boundaries, and those things seem to go down quite well.

Malcolm has been a Back to Ours Hub member since the beginning and tries to attend all the events. He went to see **Dr Blood**, an outdoor and socially distanced Halloween event, at the Leeds Playhouse in October 2020. Going to see **Dr Blood** was Malcolm's cultural highlight of the year, partly because he was able to see live art again and it meant he could contribute to the planning and discussions of future Back to Ours events.

Like many, Malcolm is concerned for the future of local arts and social venues in Hull. He reflects that Back to Ours had built up a real momentum and he hopes that it can be picked up again soon. He enjoys being a Hub member because he can contribute as much or as little as he is able to. He thinks that no one person could do what Back to Ours does.

There is a General at the top who oversees it all and then the troops [like myself] that keep it all going at the bottom.

Author: Vickie Bissett



3.2. Enhancing creative confidence and community voice in programming

3.2.1. Hub members active role in co-design/production

The Hub members have always played an important and influential role within Back to Ours. But when the national lockdown was announced their roles and responsibilities shifted overnight and they had to accommodate new ways of working and socialising together. Previously, Hub members had shared and gathered their ideas and thoughts by attending social events (such as the Hub meetings) and at art events (for example, **Edinburgh Fringe Festival**). This quickly shifted to Hub meetings on Zoom and watching live-streamed arts events on Facebook.

All of the interviewed Hub members expressed an enthusiasm and willingness to get involved with the co-design and production of Back to Ours events. Previous projects such as the 2019 **Back to Bransholme** event are still recalled with pride and affection. It was an event which they felt genuine involvement with and ownership of. One Hub member reported that she had really enjoyed being part of the **Back to Bransholme** project; she had worked directly with a member of the Back to Ours team to design and create the audio recording for visually impaired audience members. This same East Hull Hub member reflected that:

When I was younger, I loved to [do] singing and dancing, and I loved being in the limelight but now I'm behind the scenes and that's what floats my boat.

Some Hub members have contributed their creative skills to Back to Ours events. A long-established Hub member was invited to curate an exhibition at the **Living Room** and reflected positively on the level of autonomy that she was given right from the start of this project. These are skills that this particular Hub member already possessed, but Back to Ours had not utilised them before. Through the new **Right on your Sofa** programme innovative digital approaches have been developed by Back to Ours and Hub members alike and both have discovered new skills and valuable experiences that they can draw on for future events and programme development.

The creation of new opportunities for Hub members to engage with, such as the co-design of Back to Ours projects, came through the development of a Christmas event. In September 2020, Back to Ours began consulting with Hub members via regular Zoom meetings. One Hub member interviewed was particularly proud of her contribution to the development of an important Back to Ours project, **The Christmas Card**. The Hub member described how the Director of Back to Ours had spotted her post on the Hub members' Facebook page, and that this had provided the visual inspiration for the whole project. Her involvement continued from conceptualisation to planning and sharing of local knowledge. The Back to Ours team encouraged and developed many Hub members within this process, which will now take place in December 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions. **The Christmas Card** helped to cement a strong sense of project ownership and of having a voice within Back to Ours. Sara Coupland, the North Hull Hub member involved reflected that:

They've given me a lot more confidence by doing new things. They give you the chance to have your own voice and put your own stamp on things when you get involved.



Sara Coupland – North Hull Hub Member

Adapting to lockdown

Sara is a busy mum with young children. She first encountered Back to Ours when she went on a bus trip to see Avant Garde Dance's **Fagin's Twist**, on the other side of Hull at the Wilberforce Sixth Form College in 2018. Based on that experience, Sara and her friend both agreed to sign up and become part of the North Hull Hub.

Sara played a key role as a Hub member in planning the city-wide **Two** project with Back to Ours and Hull Truck Theatre. She attended the press night at Hull Truck, helped to plan which artists should be involved and distributed free tickets to residents in the North Hull ward. Unfortunately, with the announcement of a national lockdown the same day as the bus tour was due to take place, the event was cancelled and Sara said that she was gutted but understood why it couldn't go ahead.

Since then both Sara and the Back to Ours team have been more busy than usual planning events such as **Lullaby** and **The Christmas Card**. She says that being part of **Lullaby** in North Hull brought tears to her eyes when she saw the young children getting excited and shouting for the bikes as they cycled down the street. Also, the inspiration for **The Christmas Card** came from one of her Facebook posts, during consultations about what to do in the run up to Christmas.



Sara's enthusiasm for trying new art experiences is infectious - she reflects that she doesn't always like every art event, but that she enjoys trying something new and that she feels part of the Back to Ours team.

Sara says that the online **Quiz Nights** have been really important for the Hub members to continue to get together and socialise, and that she particularly misses the big Hub meetings that they used to have in town before the lockdown. This social aspect of being a Hub member is key to her involvement and commitment to Back to Ours. Sara also supported Back to Ours in their commitment to supporting local artists by continuing to commission new art experiences and digital events through the **Right on your Sofa** programme.

Author: Vickie Bissett



3.2.2. Developing the Hub members' cultural confidence

Cultural confidence comes in many forms and can be practical activities or support for others to engage with an art event. Small craft-based activities such as the **Back to Wilson** project and **Pride 2020** engaged Hub members in making activities, creating quick, fun, and unusual pieces of art at home and then sharing their creations on the Back to Ours Facebook pages. These creative and interactive art events have created lasting memories for the participants, who have gone through the process of making, sharing, liking, and later re-telling the stories to their friends and family. They were also useful in tying together the activity of **Bransholme Chat** (discussed further in Section 5.6.3 below) with Hub members. Back to Ours is in tune with the national move towards online art clubs which have been very popular during the lockdown, with celebrity artists, arts organisations and arts people leading them.

Many of the Hub members already have an interest in the arts: some of them are artists and some are enthusiastic supporters. Being creative is not a requirement of being a Hub member but is a factor which can be harnessed for the benefit of Back to Ours and the Hub members' network. For example, one Hub member is a practising visual artist and during the lockdown was commissioned to develop a new project based on her own creative skills and experiences, called **Pets in Lockdown**. This example is explored further in the Hub member case study for Paul and Chrissy Collinson. This localised commissioning of a Hub member could be developed further based on matching skills development for the individual and meeting identified programme needs.

Another Hub member interviewed said that she is 'passionate' about poetry but does not write herself. She supported and promoted the **Dean Wilson Film Club** (see Section 2.1.2 above) to all her family and friends to increase engagement and audience numbers for the event. Her enthusiastic support encouraged others to connect with this event in a way that no box office staff or an arts producer would be able to.

All of the Hub members interviewed reported their strong support and interest in the arts, across all artforms; this is fundamental to their reason for being involved with Back to Ours. Surprisingly, around 65% of survey respondents stated that they 'had not done anything similar' to volunteering with Back to Ours before. This indicates that Back to Ours is reaching its target audience through the Hub members network and may reflect the extent to which Back to Ours is creating the right mix of opportunities which develops cultural confidence for volunteers.

3.2.3. Promoting and supporting Back to Ours delivery

The Hub members have always been key in the promotion and support of Back to Ours events, but the newly established **Right on your Sofa** digital programme has engaged them in new methods of promotion and support. Hub members have shared, liked and commented on the different events throughout the year, helping to build an entirely new digital audience for Back to Ours.

One Hub member interviewed who had particularly embraced the role of content distributor on social media recognised the benefits of sharing art content with her family and friends: she reflected that because it had made her laugh and smile she wanted to share that same experience with others. A Hub member from East Hull said that:

I did a lot of signposting [on social media], to get people involved. I believe everybody should be a Hub member, we're all like a big family.

Attending planning meetings for live events, such as **Lullaby** and **The Christmas Card**, were cited by nearly all Hub members interviewed as having given them a real sense of purpose. Both Hub and Chat to Ours members were involved in the planning of the **Lullaby** routes across the three areas of Hull. Their unique skills and experiences relevant to their own neighbourhoods made them invaluable sources of local knowledge and skills. For arts organisations such as the Freedom Festival, who commissioned the **Lullaby** event for Hull as part of their annual festival, the involvement of Back to Ours and the Hub members ensured the smooth and successful delivery of each event. After many months of lockdown restrictions, the members felt that they were contributing something meaningful to Back to Ours. A number of Hub members particularly enjoyed the practical and hands-on tasks, such as playing an active role in a performance or backstage assistance to ensure that a show runs smoothly.



3.3. Personal and social outcomes for Hub members

3.3.1. Digitally enhanced communities

All the Hub members interviewed gained new digital skills and improved their knowledge of technology whilst staying in touch with Back to Ours by attending meetings and social events. This has entailed learning how to use online platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp and Facebook. Back to Ours has supported some Hub members to get online, by providing a mobile Wi-Fi USB, and this has enabled them to connect better with planning meetings and the regular programme.

Some Hub members reported not enjoying online communications whilst others felt that social media had been instrumental in keeping them connected with Back to Ours and the Hub members' wider network. As a Hub member from East Hull explains:

I've never really been the biggest fan of social media, but it's been a lifeline during the lockdown.

The Neighbourhood Programme Manager understands that social media and online communications do not suit everyone and was the reason for some Hub members taking a back seat during the lockdown period, although he anticipates them re-joining when events are face to face again.

Back to Ours plans to continue using digital platforms in future, to run alongside live meetings and events, will enable Hub members and others who cannot travel due to work or health issues to be involved in ongoing planning and programme events. However, digital is not the whole solution – one or two Hub members who responded to the online survey said they engaged with Back to Ours less during the lockdown because they were shielding or were very busy as key workers. Both digital and face to face communications will be important in the future to sustain Hub member involvement.

3.3.2. A sense of social connection and belonging

Many of the Hub members reflected on the social benefits and appeal of being a Hub member, both before and during the lockdown period. They described the positive effects on their emotional health overall, and on their mental wellbeing.

All of the interviewed Hub members reported a strong sense of 'belonging' with Back to Ours, and the respondents to the survey also demonstrated this too - around three quarters of them saying they would like to be more involved with the programme. Commonly used phrases in interviews included 'family', 'extended family', and being 'part of something'. This sense of communal friendship and support extends beyond any one member of the Back to Ours team, meaning that Back to Ours has successfully established a brand which has a strong association with being part of a friendly, supportive and open arts organisation which is highly valued by individuals.

All of the Hub members interviewed reported missing the everyday social interactions of their lives before the lockdown, and they missed their previous social interactions associated with Back to Ours. 45% of the Hub members that responded to the online survey reported that they felt 'a bit more' lonely and 7% were 'much more' lonely since the lockdown began. Hub members reflected that the **Right on your Sofa** programme had provided new opportunities to socialise with their family, friends and Back to Ours team. All of the Hub members interviewed said that they regularly attended the **Quiz Nights** and for some it was the highlight of their week. One North Hull Hub member said:

On the quiz night, that's the main way we get together now. There are different people that come along to the quiz nights, and there is a core group that come along to everything. I think I've only ever missed one or two quiz nights in the whole year. I don't do it to win. I was doing it so I could see everyone and have a laugh with people.



The practical and emotional support provided by Back to Ours through small gestures, such as a card or a piece of equipment, had made a big difference for them. They all noted that Back to Ours had been supportive of them during the lockdown period.

The social benefits of being part of Back to Ours, particularly during a pandemic, have been reflected on positively by all the interviewed Hub members. Back to Ours has provided new opportunities for Hub members to connect socially and creatively, which has reinforced an already strong sense of belonging to something bigger within the arts sector of Hull.

3.4. Taking a lead in the future

There is a high degree of gratitude expressed by the Hub members who were surveyed and interviewed as part of this report. They expressed their steadfastness to the Back to Ours vision and a deep understanding of the methodology of how and why engaging people in the arts is of benefit. They also recognised and validated the need to support and work with artists during the lockdown.

All of the Hub members interviewed were highly equipped and willing to take part in their established roles and potential new roles within Back to Ours, should they be asked to try something new.

All were regularly advocating for Back to Ours events with their local councillors, friends, family and neighbours. It is apparent that they are acknowledged and valued for this support to the development of the programme and the organisation itself through the Hub meetings and social events.



Figure 2: Development of work for Pets in Lockdown, Chrissie Collinson



Paul and Chrissy Collinson – Derringham Hub Members

Engaging family groups in different ways

Paul and Chrissy are affectionately referred to as 'the Collinsons' within the Hubs network and have been members since 2018. They attended a Back to Ours 'meet the team' event at around the same time to share their idea to improve a green space in the Derringham ward. Since then, they have been involved with a number of Back to Ours projects and regularly attend network meetings.

Paul and Chrissy are also well known and highly respected visual artists within their home city of Hull and beyond, each exhibiting their paintings in galleries across the UK. Paul is also a regular exhibitor with the prestigious annual John Moore's Painting Prize.

Paul says that the lockdown has given them more time to be involved and supportive of the Hubs network, and Chrissy has been particularly busy working on the **Pets in Lockdown** project. For this project Back to Ours invited Hub members to send in photographs of their beloved pets. Chrissy designed and planned the project, selecting an assortment of images showing the range of pets that Hub members have previously owned and have today. She chatted with each pet owner to get the back story, and from this she created 16 beautiful oil paintings, one for each Hub member whose pet picture had been selected.

In October 2020, Chrissy exhibited the pet portraits in the Living Room shop window (at the Bransholme Shopping Centre) and used the opportunity to have socially distanced conversations with passing shoppers about their own pets and being involved with art projects. The **Pets in Lockdown** project created a huge amount of interest and positive feedback. Chrissy says that:

I get a kick out of painting and that is what I needed to do this year [2020]. I needed a challenge to get on with, and Back to Ours helped me to do that through the Pets in Lockdown project.

Paul and Chrissy both enjoy being part of Back to Ours because it means they can help bring arts events to their neighbourhood, with the added benefit of being part of something in the city. Paul regularly attends local and national art events and enjoys being at the heart of the local art world.

Paul explains that Derringham does not have a communal public space, such as a community centre, but that Back to Ours has supported and created events in alternative places and spaces which helps to bring people together. The Collinson's **green space project** has also provided a place for residents to galvanise around, through litter picking days, bug hunts and a summer picnic event. These combined efforts have contributed to an increased sense of community and creative activity in the Derringham ward.

Paul and Chrissy's creative practice connects them with their neighbourhood and with Back to Ours, meaning that they are able to engage with Back to Ours in multiple ways, making them valuable Hub members. Paul reflects on his reasons for being involved:

Back to Ours have been pretty essential to Hull and they have kept things moving in the arts sector. They have kept the residents involved with art through the Hub areas and they listen to them. It is not just a top-down approach. I enjoy putting things into words on canvas, otherwise I would be out on the street shouting at people ... I would like to change the world really.

Paul and Chrissy are proactively involved in supporting their neighbourhood, the arts and the work of Back to Ours. They promoted **The Christmas Card** and the **Two-Doos** to their local councillors and neighbours. Paul says that he would like to see the Hubs promoting even more challenging artworks and events in Derringham which he believes will attract new audiences and people willing to get involved with Back to Ours.





4. Developing artists to deliver to Back to Ours' audiences

Supporting Hull-based artists to develop their skills in working with all the communities of Hull, particularly those who are less likely to engage in the arts, is a core part of the Back to Ours approach. This approach leads to a more sustainable outcome; as audience confidence and demand rises for high-quality art and high-quality engagement, there will be artists based or working in Hull able to deliver at the level they have become used to from Back to Ours.

The approach to supporting and developing artists was adapted from Phase 1 into Phase 2 with a much tighter focus on working with locally-based artists who were keen to develop their work with Back to Ours, and to deliver along the principles of co-creation and ensuring reach into diverse communities. This was always the plan for Phase 2, but in this section we explore how the extreme need in the sector as a result of COVID-19 has hastened and refined this process, and the resulting impact on artists and their audiences.

We find that

- **Back to Ours showed their commitment to the city's arts ecosystem** during lockdown by commissioning artists they'd worked with before – this helped artists to survive, to bring new audiences to the programme and to offer a high-quality mix of familiar and unfamiliar.
- **Artists and Hub members have always appreciated the support that Back to Ours offers, but lockdowns have intensified the need and appreciation for the increased levels of support.** The word 'lifeline' was mentioned on many occasions.
- **Artists and Hub members both recognised and valued Back to Ours' willingness to take creative risks.** It is often referred to as 'going on a journey' together and is appreciated as part of a learning experience which is supported and encouraged.
- **Back to Ours are recognised as professional and hard-working by the local artists they work with.** Artists feel the approach aligns with their own creative and ethical values and acknowledged that this was not always the case with arts organisations and venues.
- **These artists buy into the Back to Ours principles and commitment to prioritising audience experience.**

4.1.1. The Back to Ours approach to working with artists

When the national lockdown came into effect the negative impacts on freelance artists were severe and immediate, with one report estimating that 96% of freelancers had a reduction in income because of COVID-19²³. The artists²⁴ interviewed for this evaluation reported similar experiences, finding that the lockdown had impacted on their ability to perform live as all arts venues, clubs and public spaces were shut down from the 20 March 2020 and a full national lockdown was introduced from the 23 March 2020.

Back to Ours' response to the lockdown was swift and decisively supportive of artists as well as audiences. They quickly refocused their efforts into developing a new programme based on creating digital content which was either pre-recorded or live streamed on Facebook and/or YouTube.

From the start, Back to Ours decided to work with their known and trusted performers during the lockdown to help to develop the ideas and content for the new **Right on your Sofa** programme. Regular features were

²³ Covid Impact Study, April 2020, a-n (Artists Information Company) and BOP Consulting, <https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/covid-19-impact-survey/> - sample of 4,000 freelance artists indicating a reduction in income already by March 2020.

²⁴ For this report we interviewed 14 freelance artists who had been part of the *Right on your Sofa* online programme during 2020. Using semi-structured interviews via Zoom or phone we conducted 16 interviews across 3 periods, 2 of the 14 interviewees were interviewed twice as a consistency comparator. All were asked to reflect on their experiences of working with Back to Ours during 2020.



established such as **Bedtime Stories** on Monday evenings, **Friday Night Gigs** with established Back to Ours performers such as Elvis and Jessika-Mae, and new acts such as Cris Quammie and Dan Furniss. The **Artist Takeover Days** were introduced as a regular feature showcasing professional artists such as The Herd and Studio McGuire, and offering audiences a chance to get to know them better and see 'behind the scenes' about how artists work.

Despite the speed at which the new digital programme was developed, it is clear that Back to Ours took everyone including the artists themselves along with them on the journey. This was acknowledged by one artist who said:

I just want to give a lot of praise to Back to Ours because over the lockdowns they've had to be really innovative about how they engage people in the arts. Back to Ours have done remarkably well, considering the circumstances.

Artist, artist interviews

Many of the artists engaged in the **Right on your Sofa** programme had no or little experience of performing online shows, although one individual had been streaming for around two years and referred to it as "busking online". Nonetheless, even the most experienced online performer said that they had acquired learning from being part of the **Right on your Sofa** experience and that they would build on this in their future performances and paid for events.

4.1.2. Developing new audiences, digital skills and confidence

The development of new skills and experiences, particularly digital (including filming, editing, and content creation) but also performing and writing funding applications were described as new and 'next level' skills learned during the lockdown period and whilst working with Back to Ours.

Some artists reported that they had improved and gained new digital skills specifically for their **Right on your Sofa** performance. One artist explained that it had taken a lot of time and planning to prepare for their live performance, but the investment had been worthwhile as it would benefit their future online performances. The same artist reflected:

It's inevitable that it will become part of my practice now; it's a new skill that I didn't have before, it's going to be a long time before live events come back, so it will become what I do now in future.

Artist, artist interviews

The majority of artists interviewed reported an increase in confidence and ambition to put on their own online digital events. One artist plans to develop a new online cabaret show based on their experience of being part of the **Right on your Sofa** programme.

The majority of the artists were surprised that they had attracted new and varied audiences, sometimes with more audience numbers than they had expected, attracting viewers from as far away as Spain. A couple of the established artists reflected that the interactions they observed during their performance created a whole new dimension to their experience of a live gig. They were able to respond by giving 'shout outs' and 'thank you' comments to the audience in real time, and performing songs that people requested immediately. The live streamed performances were very different and can be 'scary' for even the most experienced performers, with one artist described it as 'performing into the void', but they recognised that it can also be more rewarding when the audience's comments are flowing and audience members can interact with each other.



Vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, vaccine... – The Dolly Parton case study

Helping an artist flourish in lockdown

Beebi-Del is a singer, well known for her Dolly Parton act. She has been a performer since she was 18, and she first appeared on national TV when she came second (as Olivia Newton-John) in Saturday Superstore's talent contest. Beebi-Del has a variety of shows based on singing stars including Shania Twain and Celine Dion. However, she says that once her husband got her into performing Dolly about ten years ago she never looked back.

Back to Ours was live.
24 July 2020 ·

Beebi dels Dolly Parton tribute show. Hull pride 2020. Enjoy x

10K views

69 Likes · 563 Comments · 81 Shares

Share

Performing as Dolly, she has done several events for Back to Ours. Her first Pride performance in 2019 was to 15,000 people and she says it was probably the highlight of her career. She is always willing to try whatever Back to Ours asks her to do and she hopes that one day Back to Ours will ask her to perform live from Dollywood in Tennessee.

2020 was to have been busy for Beebi-Del until the lockdown happened. Then everything was cancelled at once:

My job finished on the day of lockdown; it was quite upsetting really. Since then, I've not done a live show.

With bookings vanishing overnight, she says that she had time to re-evaluate her busy life. In the future, she will just keep the Dolly shows going as they are more fun and the audiences really engage with her as Dolly. As lockdown was announced, Back to Ours invited Dolly to perform a live-streamed show – one of the first acts for Right on your Sofa. She says that it was quite daunting because she couldn't see the audience but that she enjoyed the experience.

People can stay home, watch and enjoy. It was a new experience for me at the time. It was exciting reading the comments afterwards, and it gives you a nice buzz; its lovely to see what people are thinking. You never get that in a live show. I got a lot of reassurance from that.



She has learned a lot about the technology since that first event and has started putting on her own live Facebook events. Another show for the Programme in 2020 was The Big Dolly Parton Pride at Home Show, part of the online version of Pride In Hull²⁵, continuing Back to Ours' ongoing involvement with that event.

Can't thank you enough for this - you have made this scary world a better place for the evening



Audience online comment, 23.3.20

Author Vickie Bissett

²⁵ <https://www.hullccnews.co.uk/22/07/2020/pride-in-hull-celebrated-with-launch-of-online-exhibition/>



It would be reasonable to say that the **Right on your Sofa** experience for many of the artists has increased their expectations and ambitions for their own online events and for increasing their reach to new audiences. Another artist said that:

We reached our audience and new people [through Right on your Sofa]. Through what we have seen on the comments on the live stream, from the analytics on the ticket sales, feedback from people who we know who haven't seen us play live before ... we know that we're reaching new audiences.

Artist, artist interviews

The **Right on your Sofa** programme has opened up new avenues of work and networking for the artists involved. Some of the artists were able to show that they had other skills which were useful to Back to Ours, for example one artist who had previously done walk-about performances for Back to Ours and was able to show off his compering and editing skills for the first time through the **Right on your Sofa** programme. Another artist who had previously undertaken community engagement work was able to showcase her performance poetry skills. The lockdown has created a moment of change and an opportunity for new ways of working between Back to Ours and a number of artists.

The **Bedtime Stories** events have been taken on by established Back to Ours artists, new artists and non-artists alike. Most of them report that they had not done anything like this before, but would definitely do it again, as it was rewarding and, as one interviewee explained, "felt like I was giving something back to my community".

4.1.3. Artists feel valued, contribute to the aims and ethos, and proactively seek to work with Back to Ours

Back to Ours have worked incredibly hard to support their established and new artists during the lockdown period and this has been recognised and appreciated by the artists that were interviewed. All the artists, without exception, expressed their appreciation of being asked to undertake paid work during lockdown; one artist referred to Back to Ours as "... a bit of a lifeline to be honest". Again, all artists interviewed appreciated the high level of support and care they had received during the planning and delivery of their project. A number reflected that they felt supported to achieve not only the work they had been commissioned to do but also their own creative ambitions. One artist explained:

Venues do not go to the extent that Back to Ours went to, to help me. I have never experienced that level of support before.

Artist, artist interviews

Another artist explained that he felt valued and listened to by Back to Ours because they would ask for feedback and then respond to it: he illustrated this by describing how he had given difficult feedback on an event that had not worked very well, and Back to Ours responded by changing the format of the event based on his ideas and suggestions. This same artist also recognised that the Back to Ours team would always attend the online and real time events, encouraging the audience to respond and engage with the performers and helping to create a comfortable atmosphere enabling everyone to relax and get involved. These nurturing and supportive actions enable artists to work at their best and engage audiences fully in their performances.

Probably because of the high level of support and care that Back to Ours provides, all artists interviewed said that they would like to work with Back to Ours again in the future. Some of the artists hoped to build on the live streaming work that had been established through **Right on your Sofa**, whilst others were simply open to new ideas and ways of working with Back to Ours. One artist said that working with Back to Ours had made them consider approaching other Creative, People and Places projects in England, as they want to extend their community engagement work.

A number of the artists described the 'professionalism' and 'passion' that Back to Ours inputs to every project, and that the team are always willing to put in the extra effort to make sure that the end product and experience is of the highest quality. An established artist reflected on the Back to Ours approach as:



One of the things that Back to Ours has always done that I admire is scale - they'll decide to do something and make it big, that will add to the overall experience.

Artist, artist interview

The Back to Ours scale of ambition is accompanied by an ideology of not being frightened to take risks, and this is illustrated when another artist reflects:

Back to Ours have always been risk takers, and the vast majority of it has paid off.

Artist, artist interview

All the artists felt able to illustrate their understanding of the Back to Ours ethos, and cited examples of 'putting the audience first', 'bringing people together' and 'taking art to the community'. Some acknowledged that this was different from the approach of other arts organisations and artists, and the majority of them valued and supported the work of Back to Ours as a highly skilled and dedicated team working with a different approach. Many of the artists were willing to support Back to Ours specifically because they feel part of the Back to Ours 'family' or group of 'friends'. The respect afforded to artists, and everyone alike, reflects a non-hierarchical culture within Back to Ours and supports the 'hyper-local' grassroots approach of its creative practice.

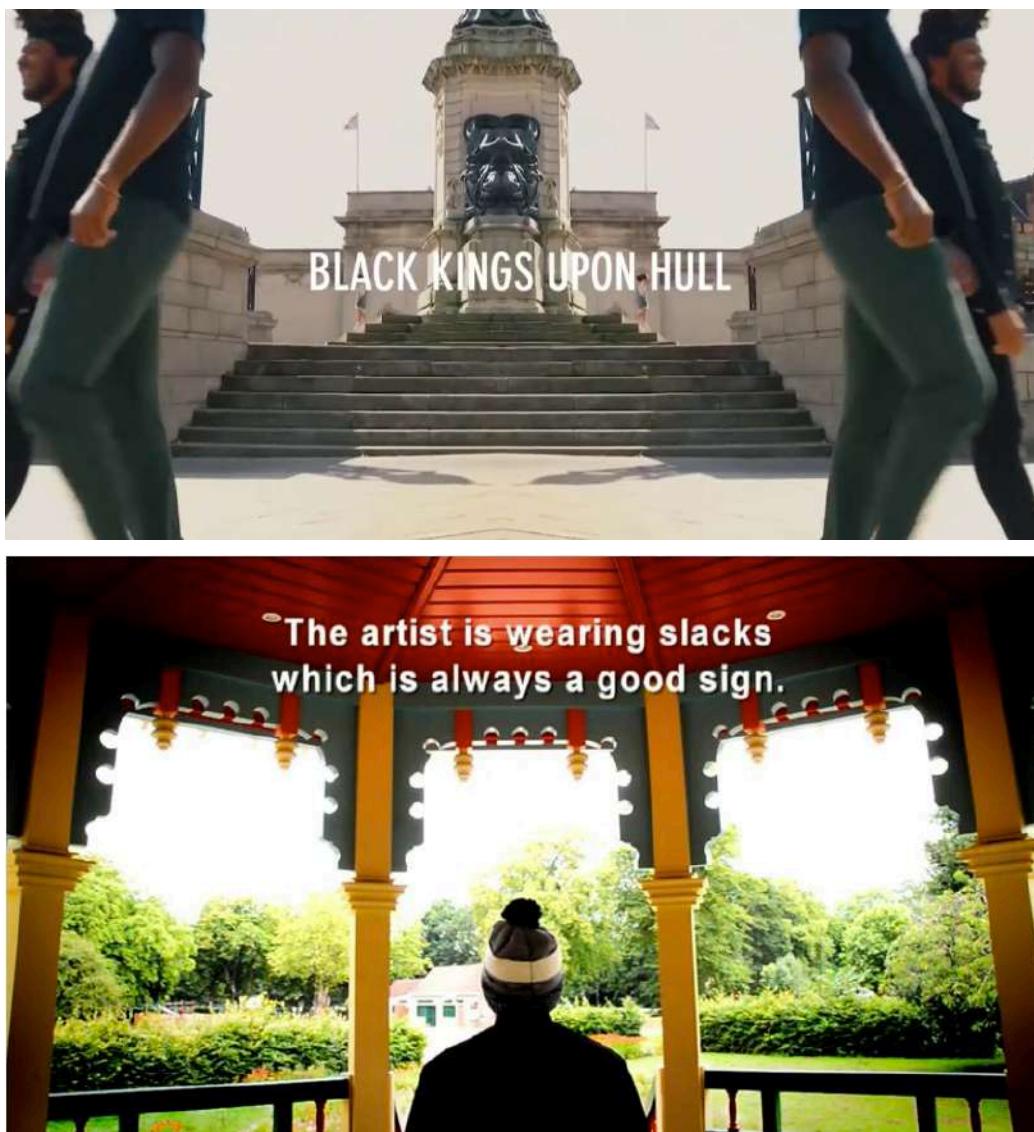


Figure 3: Screen grab from Black Kings Upon Hull and Dean Wilson Film Club



Meeting people is easy – The Artist Takeover case study

Breaking down barriers between artist and audience

The idea of **Artist Takeovers** was to showcase the talent and diversity of the Back to Ours creative partners, something normally done through live events and shows. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that spotlighting these partnerships could be done digitally with a day of content curated by Back to Ours and the artists.

The **Artist Takeovers** appeal to multiple audiences; in fact, they're probably one of the only Back to Ours online events unique in universal appeal. For audiences, they break down the barrier between them and the artist, showing them how work is created and giving them a chance to ask questions directly through streamed Zoom chats. For stakeholders, they promote and spotlight the work Back to Ours does and who they're working with. For funders, they evidence how the organisation is adapting and working with audiences and artists in different ways. For featured artists, they platform their work and also give other artists insights into different ways of working. They also cover a broad age range in terms of engagement, from The Herd Theatre (children's theatre) to Lost in Translation (contemporary circus) and Davy and Kristin McGuire (multimedia artists). From the Back to Ours perspective, they enable showcasing their diverse portfolio of creative partners and the relationships between them.

Mabel said that was amazing. Please send more to us. We love it ❤️❤️

Online comment, Herd Takeover day

-I'm 50 in September, is it too late for me?

- It's NEVER too late Teena! We'll rope you in next year 😊

- Take me now

Online comments exchange, Lost in Translation Takeover day

From the first **Takeover**, a clear format was determined with varied content to keep the audience interested. Using video and photographic content, some of the **Artist Takeovers** have been punctuated by a live streamed Zoom over lunchtime featuring discussion between Back to Ours staff and the artists. This has further enabled the dismantling of barriers, enabling the audience to watch and ask questions. On the Lost in Translation **Artist Takeover Day** for example, a young girl was able to ask advice directly about how to become a performer.

We've had a fab day, thanks for an amazing takeover 🎉

Online comment, Lost in Translation Takeover day

Similarly, with Davy and Kristin McGuire it was decided to do a live Q&A at the end of their day which enabled people to ask questions in the comments, breaking down the walls between audience and artist. The **Artist Takeover Day** format is deliberately flexible, giving the artist options as to how much of themselves they want to show. Some are happy with a day of pre-recorded and scheduled content which showcases the range of their work and relationship with Back to Ours. For others, it feels more comfortable in front of a live audience starting conversations as would happen in physical venues.

Thank you both for an insight into your world...xx

Online comment to Davy and Kristin McGuire

Artist Takeover Days do not just let people into the world of that particular artist, they invite them into the world of Back to Ours. It's a strategic move, letting people understand what an artist is doing and why they're doing it. Bite-size pieces of content telling the story in other ways, letting the audience dip in and out. It's a deeper process than entertainment; it's storytelling.

Author Christina Lewis, Back to Ours





5. Who came and what difference did they experience? Engaging and inspiring new audiences

This section explores who attended Back to Ours events, with specific reference to Arts Council England's CPP National Research Question 1: Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?

We consider the geographic spread of the audience, their diversity and their previous arts engagement, and how well it represents the population of Hull²⁶. With reference to this, we look at how Back to Ours is approaching the challenge of engaging and inspiring new audiences, and how engagement with Back to Ours makes a difference to cultural confidence, pride in place and wellbeing with a view to assessing the likelihood of longer-term and sustainable impacts in these areas.

We find that:

- **Back to Ours has a mainly Hull based audience** although 6% are from the surrounding East Riding of Yorkshire area and another 8% from elsewhere, including a few from beyond the UK.
- **Within Hull there is a good spread across the different areas**, including reaching into areas with the highest deprivation in England.
- **87% of the whole audience came from medium or low engaging groups**.
- **There was reach into all demographic communities** although there is an under-representation of BAME communities, and an over-representation of disabled people compared to the Hull population.
- **Conclusions on reach can only be tentative** due to low sample sizes for online audiences.
- **Back to Ours audiences** appreciate how the programme's work reflects and responds to their neighbourhoods and say Back to Ours inspires them to engage further in arts and culture.
- **Participants appreciate the way that Back to Ours offered a chance for them to come together and share, despite lockdown, maintaining their important sense of community**.
- **The programme made a difference to people's lives** in terms of increasing confidence to engage in the arts, pride in place and sense of connection, and feeling valued.

Totally appreciate all the opportunities that Back to Ours have given me personally in the last 3 years - I get as much, if not more, back from participating. Thank you all, long may it continue because you are unique.

Participant

Note on data validity and engagement statistics in 2020: The way in which data was collected in 2020 needed to adapt to the COVID-19 restrictions. When programming moved online, methods of collecting data from audiences needed to go online also. It was not possible to collect direct feedback via data postcards, which had been the main way of getting a good sample of audience data in 2018-19, and instead the online survey approach was extended with audiences asked to fill out a **Right on your Sofa** online audience survey. The aim was that the responses to these could be used to:

- Monitor audience demographics, geography, previous arts engagement and experience and feedback on the shows, and

²⁶ Note of caution in all this data as it comes partly from booking data, which would privilege online bookers (and thus those likely to be more comfortable with engaging in the arts) and also affected by any bias in data collection. It is likely that those most comfortable in engaging with the arts will also be most comfortable with engaging with data collection at event – however sensitively handled. Despite all efforts, this will always be something to be borne in mind.



- Compare those audiences who attended live shows (pre-lockdown) and those who attended online events (post-lockdown) and determine whether the audiences differ.

However, despite a large and active online audience, only around 100 online audience surveys were completed. Without a larger sample size, we cannot draw firm conclusions about shifts in audience shape.

In addition, it should be noted that there is often a bias to opt-in surveys - the people who are more likely to fill them in are also more likely to engage in arts. This bias can be overcome by the randomised sampling of data postcards at events but not online surveys. Thus, online surveys tend to under-report those new to the arts, those who come from areas of higher deprivation, and groups who often face barriers in attendance and engagement.

5.1. Where did Back to Ours attenders come from?

Analysis showed that Back to Ours events attracted audiences from across the UK and beyond. The reach developed as programming was moved online during the first lockdown, and brought viewers from wider areas including France, Spain, London and the Lake District. Survey responses show that events such as the **Dolly Parton Facebook Live Secret Gig** in March began to bring in a wider spread of postcodes, with around a sixth of these indicating they came from out of the area, and similarly at the **Elvis Secret Gig on Facebook** where about a third of survey respondents indicated the same. Later, the **YouTube LIFE Moon Factory gig** and **Dean Wilson Film Club Christmas edit** also attracted a wider range of postcodes. The shift of programming online successfully broadened Back to Ours' audience to new areas.

Despite this wide reach, postcode analysis reveals that the majority of audiences did still originate from closer to home, with 86% from Hull, and another 6% from the surrounding East Riding area, showing the strong local links and retention of a local audience.

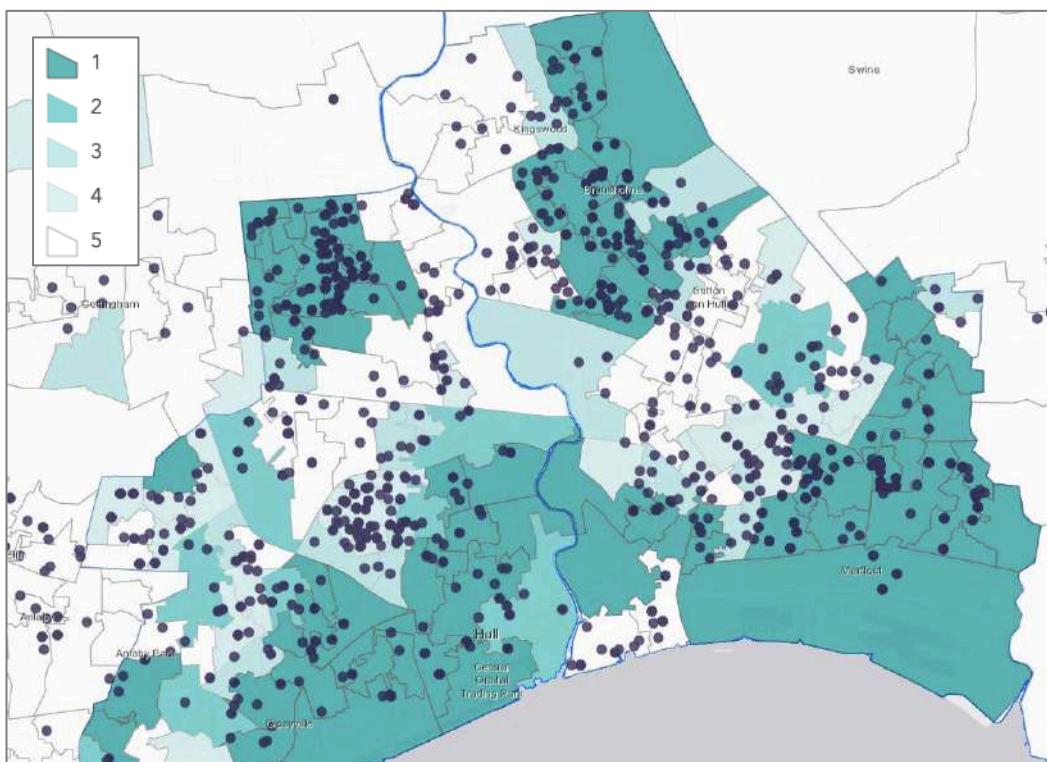


Figure 4: Map of attenders to Back to Ours events in 2020, purple dots are postcodes given, see key for level of deprivation, with 1 being the 10% most deprived in England, 2 being second most deprived etc.

Those attenders from the local area were just as likely – in fact, more likely – to come from the more deprived areas of Hull, shown in greens on the map in Figure 4.



They were most likely to come from HU9, 5, 7 and 6 postcode areas, with nearly 80% of Hull attenders coming from those postcode sectors and 30% from HUg alone.²⁷

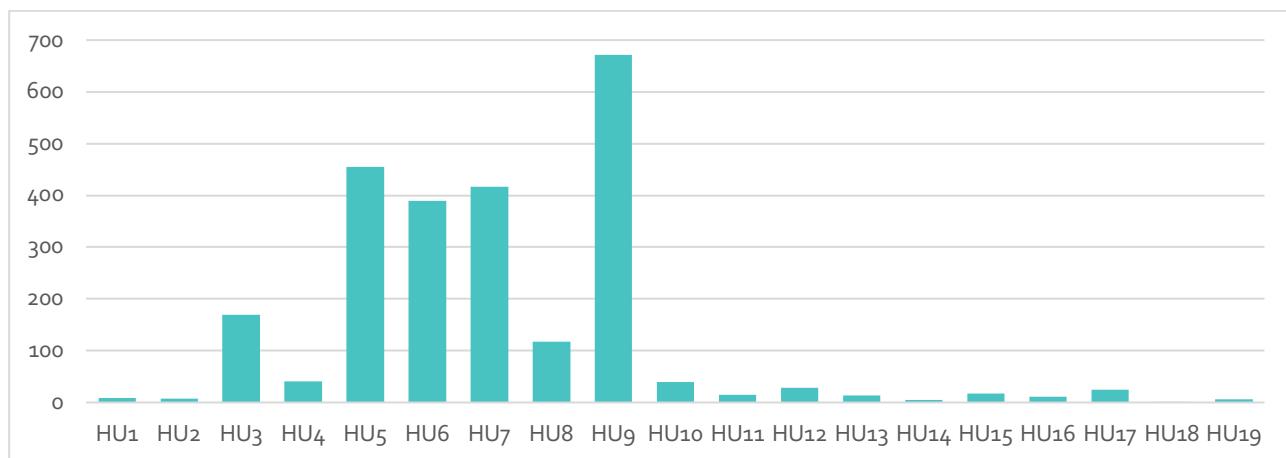


Figure 5: Numbers of Back to Ours event attenders from Hull postcode areas

5.2. Were they new to the arts?

Attracting new audiences to the arts is a central aim of Creative People and Places and can be hard to measure.²⁸ In order to get the clearest view on this, and on whether Back to Ours is reaching not just 'non-attenders' but also those who typically are least likely to engage in the arts, we measure via two routes:

- Direct feedback from audiences at events through a question on the online audience survey.
- Analysis of audience postcodes, matched to Audience Spectrum segmentation, which uses consumption behaviour to map likelihood of people living in this postcode to engage in the arts.

There can be benefits and issues with both approaches – self reporting can over-represent through positive bias (people feeling they should say they do attend the arts) and/or be unreliable due to memory. On the other hand, Audience Spectrum profiling only looks at the likelihood of people attending due to the consumer characteristics of where they live. Despite this, in previous research we have found strong alignment of these two indicators.

5.2.1. Self-defined

During the earliest part of 2020, three events in February 2020 attended by live audiences showed high levels of people new to the arts – an average of 60% of audiences for these events said they had not engaged with culture in the last twelve months.

²⁷ HU6, 7 and 9 are amongst Hull's most deprived postcode areas inside the city boundary. HU6 includes areas such as the Orchard Park Estate (Hull's most deprived ward) in North Hull, HU7 includes the Bransholme wards (ranked 4th and 5th most deprived wards in Hull), and HU9 includes the East Hull wards (which features in the list of Hull's top 10 most deprived wards). The HU5 area is deemed to be as the place where the 'arts crowd' live, and as regular attenders of arts and cultural events, it would be surprising if they were not present on Back to Ours data. The HU5 areas of Newland and Avenues are ranked 14th and 15th out of the 23 Hull wards, still not the most affluent parts of the city. It is also worth bearing in mind that even the most affluent areas of Hull can be comparatively deprived as overall the city ranks as the 4th most deprived authority in the English Indices of Deprivation (IoD).

²⁸ For Back to Ours audiences there are two specific issues with this approach: The first is that the 'baseline' for Back to Ours was measured when public engagement in the arts in Hull was at a historic high (post- City of Culture). Hull 2017 claimed involvement of 95% of the local population (see CPPI Cultural Transformations, p69 "around 95% of residents experienced a cultural activity, event, installation or exhibition over the course of the UK City of Culture year") This means that all those who have the least interest in attending the arts, presumably took up this opportunity in 2017. If the Hull 2017 figures are to be believed, only 5% of the local population would be 'new to the arts' in terms of the usual CPP category, and it is possible these people might never be interested. The second issue is how people self-define being new to the arts, and is shared by other CPPs. The question asked: "Have you been to an arts event in the last 12 months, e.g. a theatre, gallery, festival etc? Yes/No" appears clear. However, it is known from analysis of data in other CPPs that people's own definitions of 'art' varies, plus their memories may not be totally reliable.



The **Right on your Sofa** audience survey, which started gathering data in early April 2020 - shortly after the first lockdown began and programming moved online - also asked whether respondents had attended an arts and cultural event in the last twelve months. This showed that only around 18% of audiences had not done so, a figure much lower than that of the initial live audiences before COVID-19.

As Back to Ours returns to whole or partial live data collection it will be possible to see how well they have retained and expanded reach into their core target audiences – alongside reaching those audiences in Hull and beyond who enjoy the quality and uniqueness of the Back to Ours offer alongside a wider cultural engagement.

5.2.2. Via audience segmentation

Another way of finding out more about the audience is through Audience Spectrum. This uses data from consumption patterns alongside box office and other arts data to estimate the likely arts engagement patterns of people in particular areas – to the lowest postcode level – and categorises them in 10 groups based on their likelihood to engage in the arts.

The figure below shows the Back to Ours audience compared with the Hull population for these 10 groups, with most to least likely to engage shown from left to right.

There are very few people in the groups most likely to engage – ‘high engagers’ – either in the Hull population (9%) or in the Back to Ours audience (13%). This shows that Back to Ours isn’t just engaging those most likely to engage in the arts anyway. The middle three groups, the ‘medium engagers’, comprise 23% of the Back to Ours audience and 29% of the population. The largest group in the Back to Ours audience, 65%, is made up of the groups least likely to engage. This is very similar to the local population, which shows 64% in this group.

This shows that the Back to Ours audience for 2020 more or less matches the local population in terms of likelihood to engage. As with the self-reported data above, these figures will be affected by the low numbers of postcodes collected from the online audience, which makes up the majority of the programming for the year, so as before, it is hard to conclude firmly about audience reach - but certainly Back to Ours is attracting an audience from areas of typically low engagement.

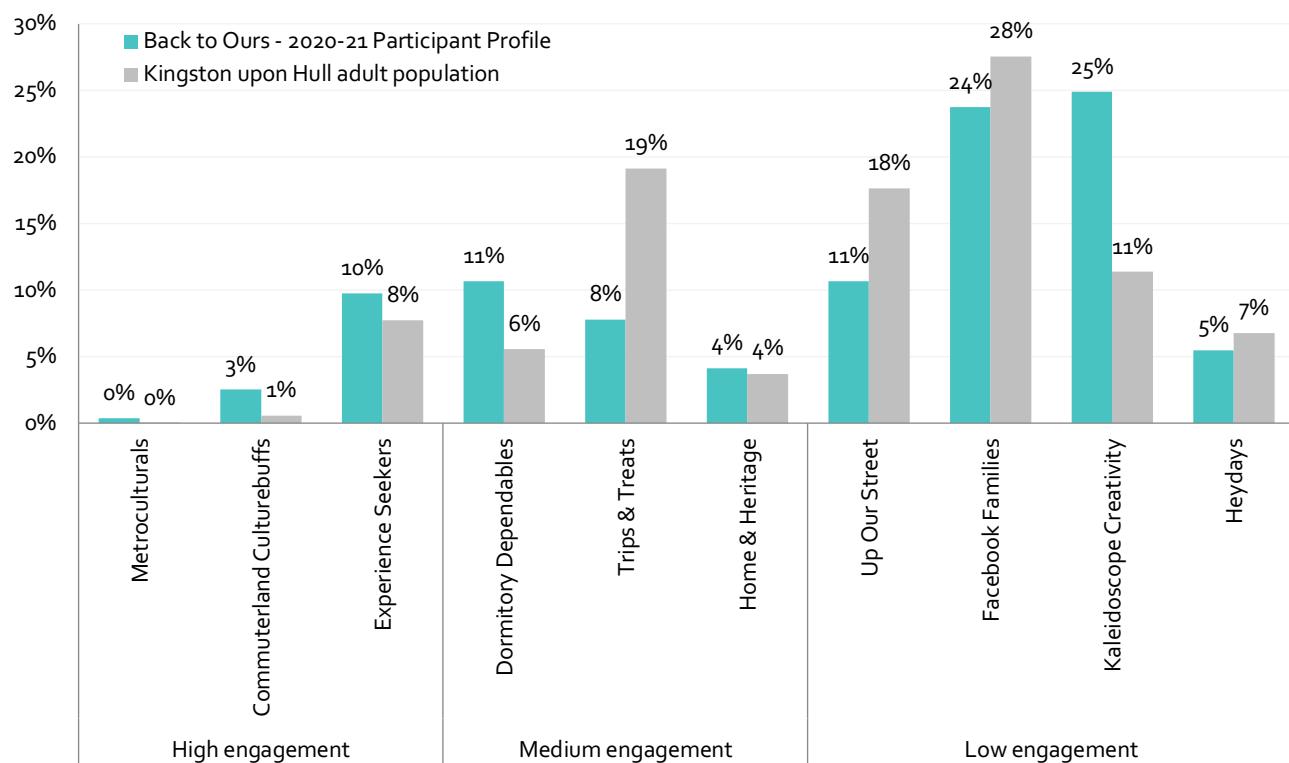


Figure 6: Audience Spectrum Profile for Back to Ours Phase 1



5.3. Which demographic groups?

Both Back to Ours, and CPP as a whole, have the aim of reaching the population on a representative basis and in particular reaching those groups who typically engage less in the arts. For Arts Council England (ACE), these groups include black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (BAME), people from lower socio-economic groups who typically are massively underrepresented in ACE funded work. They also aim to represent across age ranges, gender and disability groups.

Monitoring of this data is compulsory for CPP programmes but raises many issues of definition, and labelling of people when collecting this. Back to Ours does collect data on gender, ethnicity, age and disability. It has been agreed not to ask about socio-economic group, as this is both definitionally and ethically complex. Instead, we use postcode analysis using IoD (Indices of Deprivation)²⁹ as a proxy.

5.3.1. Socio-economic group

In terms of deprivation, even in a city with high levels, Back to Ours have still reached those in comparatively poorer areas. 56% of Back to Ours attenders lived in areas among the 10% most deprived in England, compared with 45% of Hull residents.³⁰

As can be seen in the figure below, for some types of programming, the reach into the most deprived areas was particularly high, notably for the Promenade performance **Lullaby**³¹, and the users of **Bransholme Chat**. The audiences for online offer, in contrast, were less likely to come from the most deprived areas although this may be affected by bias from small response rates as discussed.

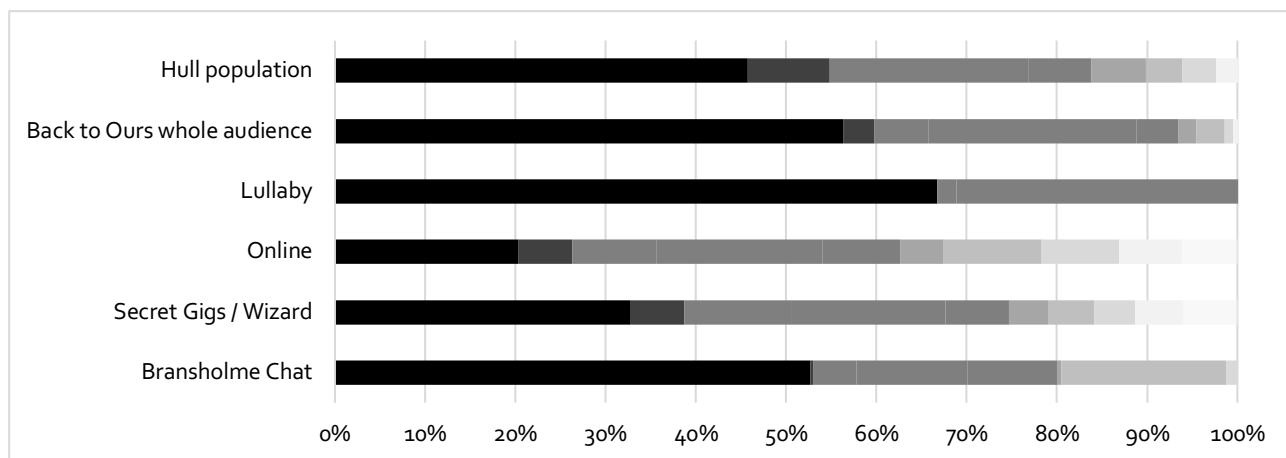


Figure 7: IMD levels of Back to Ours audience groups, darker indicates more deprived, the proportion in the 10% most deprived in England are marked with a narrower line for comparison purposes

We know that audiences from these areas are likely to face a wide range of barriers to engaging with the arts, including poor health, education and poverty. We also know from the findings from national studies that people living in deprived areas are typically underrepresented amongst arts audiences and have been increasingly so in recent years. Locally, work carried out by **Bransholme Chat** (from the **Living Room**) found that many of the most vulnerable of Hull's residents do not have internet access and they therefore have more barriers to accessing arts and also social activities and events. This is discussed further in Section 5.6.3.

²⁹ The English Indices of deprivation 2019 (IoD). The IoD provides a measure of a broad concept of deprivation, made up of several dimensions, including income, employment, education and health deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment and crime.

³⁰ IMD has been sourced and matched from the 2019 IMD, Open Data from opendatacommunities.org using <https://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/imd/2019>

³¹ Luke Jerram's 'Lullaby' is a surround sound illuminated artwork, delivered at dusk, to the public's door by a mass of illuminated bikes. It was delivered in Hull as a partnership between Back to Ours and Freedom Festival <https://www.freedomfestival.co.uk/lullaby/>



5.3.2. Demographics

Both for the audience before lockdown and that after the first lockdown began (and programming altered), there was a much higher likelihood of women than men attending Back to Ours events (around three quarters of the audience compared to around half the population).³²

Back to Ours audiences although not totally dissimilar to the overall Hull population tend to be older, although there was a very high proportion in the relatively younger 35-44 age range for the in-person events early in the year. Attenders at the events from lockdown onwards did tend to be 35-64 range, and particularly in the 55-64 age bracket.

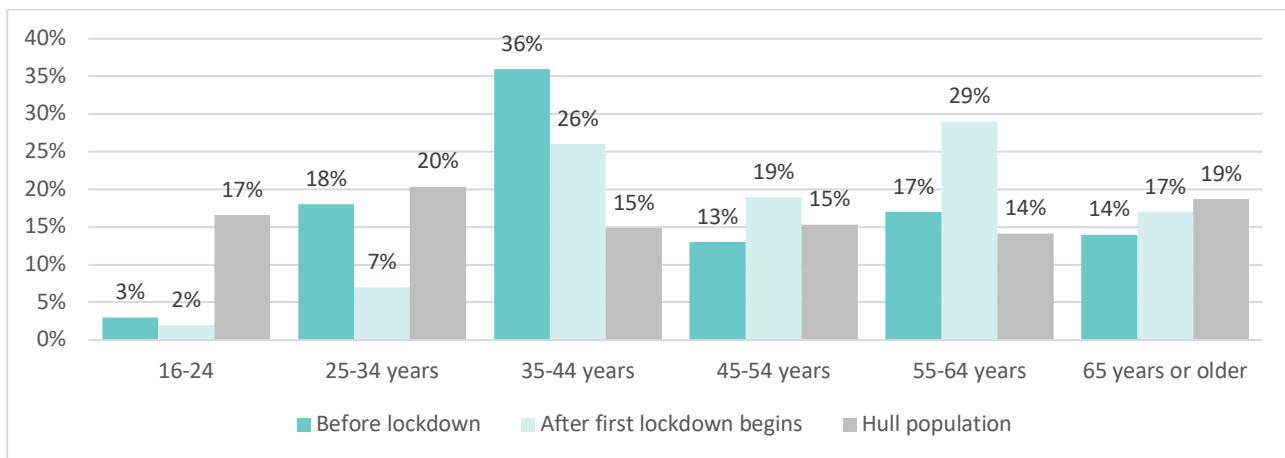


Figure 8 Age - Back to Ours audience and Hull population

Our data this year shows the BAME proportion of the audience at 2-3% amongst the audience as a whole, falling slightly in the audiences attending events since the first lockdown began. This partially reflects the fact that Back to Ours work with a series of estates which are predominantly white, but it is lower than the 10% BAME proportion recorded over Phase 1. However, it is not clear whether this represents an actual fall in engagement of BAME groups due to data issues discussed above.

Black Lives Matter related work – particularly the **Black Kings Upon Hull** commission – has the potential to draw in a wider range of audiences and the data for attendance at this is not yet available as the programme will continue to run into 2021. This is an area which will be tracked over the next two years of Phase 2.

Data was not available for disability amongst the audience who attended live shows before lockdown arrangements began, but the COVID-19 audience group reported that 26% had disability which affected day to day life to some extent, and 7% of the audience felt this limited it a lot. This is a rise from 16% of the audience reporting that they experience disability to some extent in Phase 1.

5.4. Social media engagement

Facebook was Back to Ours' main digital engagement channel – the core audience felt comfortable with it and there were less barriers to use. Therefore, when Back to Ours shifted online in response to COVID-19 the audience followed, as reflected in the increases in followers, impressions and engagements.

By the end of the year, follower numbers had risen 54% (to 3,378) and impressions totalled almost 1.25 million. Impressions rose from 41,000 in February 2020 to over 267,000 in April as the momentum for the online programming grew. Although they dropped after April, impressions stayed high until the end of July and rose again in October 2020, roughly mirroring the easing and tightening of COVID-19 restrictions.

³² ONS Mid-Year Estimates 2019 quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22



April was the peak in both activity and engagement. Over the year, there were 77,000+ engagements on Facebook – likes, comments or shares – reflecting the programme’s efforts and commitment to getting people interacting. There were over 225,000 views of the programme’s Facebook videos.

Key figures for other digital channels in 2020 include:

- Twitter followers increased 88% to 1,981 and there were more regular tweets from the programme as the year progressed.
- Instagram saw an increase of 53% in followers to 1,629.
- LinkedIn, a channel not previously used by Back to Ours and aimed at reaching funders and other arts organisations, attracted 159 followers.

The website saw only 6,110 unique visitors in 2020, but this was because the focus was on activity in the social media spaces. Although subscribers to the YouTube channels weren’t high (100), the **Black Kings Upon Hull (BKUH)** project alone brought 28 new subscribers (mainly young men). Both **BKUH** and the **Dean Wilson Film Club** appeared on YouTube, demonstrating that the combination of content and delivery channel could appeal to new (non-core) audiences.³³

5.5. Were they inspired to engage further?

It was clear that audiences, including volunteers such as Hub members, continued to love their experiences with Back to Ours and valued them highly. They indicated that they were definitely now much more likely to go to arts or arts events since engaging with the Back to Ours event they went to, or following their engagement overall with Back to Ours so far. 75% of the 103 respondents to the 2020 audience survey said they were now more likely to look for other arts or cultural activity online having watched the **Right on your Sofa** content.

I have become a trustee for a local art organisation as a result of being involved with Back to Ours. I have made some fantastic friends and business connections and am attending more art events than ever.

Participant via survey

Hub members and participants felt they now knew more about what was available, with one, for example, saying they were ‘much more aware of local events and likely to attend’, and 66% of the 103 audience survey respondents also said they were specifically more likely to attend a Back to Ours show or performance in person now they had experienced the **Right on your Sofa** event. Some directly said they would also be engaging further with online Back to Ours events having experienced this one, an indication that the shift to online programming had worked for audiences.

I liked how different they were. I'll be going back and watching the rest of the events that I wasn't around to see. Y'all seem to have a great pool of artists and performers to show off and I'm 100% here for it.

Audience member via survey

Those people who had already been involved with Back to Ours really valued what it gave them, and saw it as an ongoing process of involvement with a team rather than a series of separate events, and therefore something they wanted to continue to engage with. Many participants and Hub members, for example, have been involved with Back to Ours since 2017 and have established a firm relationship which is set to continue, while newer volunteers also look to the future.

Two of Back to Ours key aims³⁴ are to ‘bring the arts to life in familiar settings as you’ve never seen before’ as well as to ‘have fun’ – and there is a clear sense gained through survey information that this is happening, and

³³ YouTube started to be used instead of Facebook because of technical issues around music copyright that had negative impacts on at least one show.

³⁴ See <https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/project/back-ours>



that it is inspiring participants, for example, to engage with new forms of art and feel inspired to come back for more.

My involvement and continued interest with Back to Ours often mirrors my interest within its new projects and the Art it brings to its highly varied audiences. I can feel completely at home, happy and comfortable as well as shocked, scared and questioning...I love that about Back to Ours and accept its bravery head on. Long may it last.

Hub members via Hub survey

Many volunteers wanted to see more events from Back to Ours happening in their local areas as well, both as part of a wider arts provision in the area and also to see more from Back to Ours in particular.

5.6. Making a difference to Hull's communities

Beyond the core Creative People and Places aims of reaching new audiences through high quality arts, Back to Ours also aims to make a real difference to Hull's communities. This focuses on:

- Increased arts appetite and expectations of quality and feeling empowered within the arts process
- Pride in Hull and their neighbourhoods, and a sense of belonging and connection
- Feeling valued and having increased confidence

These together are all part of that personal sense of wellbeing. Initial qualitative findings indicate that there are already huge differences being made to people through engagements, whether light or in depth.

Making a difference to Hull communities has of course been invaluable as everyone works to come to terms with the arrangements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was important to Back to Ours that the transition to a digital programme was done in a way that supported people's overall experience of Back to Ours. The commitment to making a difference to people's lives in terms of increases in confidence to engage in the arts, pride in place and sense of connection and feeling valued and worthwhile continued.

5.6.1. Increased arts appetite and expectations of quality, feeling empowered within the arts process

Back to Ours continues to increase confidence to engage in the arts amongst participants and audiences. For some volunteers, for example, this continues as their involvement with Back to Ours over time has continued but for others this is newly found.

Answers to 'what is art' (where respondents are asked to answer using three words) speak to a confidence and sense of ownership of art - the themes of creativity and fun continue from those found in 2018-9 but use of the word 'community' appears to be newly prominent. This theme of community, getting involved, friendliness, participation, social and togetherness appears to be stronger this year - compare the two word clouds from 2020 and 2019 respectively below.



Figure 9: What three words would you use to describe art – 2020 left and 2019 right

This could reflect the need for community and linking with others during lockdown, but also potentially that the sense of what art is to people has moved during this most unusual period – now these two factors have come together strongly as arts events move online, and highlighted how art can have this outcome for people. A sense of community was definitely a prominent theme in survey responses from volunteers and, within that, from Hub members. Some also commented that art was a part of their identity and that it provided a ‘meditative space that aids my wellbeing’. While the community aspect seems new and the sense of art contributing to wellbeing is not, art’s contribution to wellbeing seems most important at the moment and very important to audiences.

There was definitely a sense that people supported the ethos of Back to Ours in bringing arts to people in Hull who had not experienced it, and joined with Back to Ours in aiming for this. They wanted people to see what Back to Ours genuinely offered rather than just 'cheaper priced shows and activities'. They are proud of the work Back to Ours has achieved, supportive of their ethos, and feel ownership as part of the team.

The work of Back to Ours is also supported by audiences, who felt (via answers to the audience survey) that **Right on your Sofa** gave people a chance to try something new and exciting (63%) and that it helped young people to show their talent also (51%).

5.6.2. Pride and sense of belonging in Hull and to their neighbourhoods

Back to Ours audiences living locally are proud of their neighbourhoods and feel they belong. 81% of Hub members strongly agreed (52%) or agreed (28%) with the statement 'I am proud to live in Hull', showing a clear sense of pride in the place where they lived. A very similar percentage of participants in general said the same, and even one person who had recently moved out of the area said they still felt part of Hull and very proud of that.

There was a definite sense that people enjoyed living in their localities, with 76% of Hub members and 71% of participants in general stating they agreed that their local neighbourhood was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together. Most Hub members felt their neighbourhoods hadn't really changed in terms of what they were like to live in (48%), but more felt they had got a bit worse (28%) than got a bit better (14%). This was roughly echoed across the group of participants in general, although more thought they had got better than worse.

Just over half of these residents generally agreed they could personally influence decisions affecting their local area (56% of Hub members and 45% of participants overall).



Around three quarters of Hub members felt they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood either fairly strongly (55%) or very strongly (14%). Comparing their change in sense of neighbourhood belonging since the COVID-19 lockdown arrangements had begun, people tended to feel they belonged about the same as before (48%) or a bit more (34%). This slight increase in feeling of belonging during a time of isolation may be a result of feeling more through the camaraderie experienced through **Right on your Sofa** programming, particularly the 'live' sessions like the Friday Night Gigs where audiences came together through the shared experience and the lively interaction in the chat.

Often, people said the best thing about being involved with Back to Ours was this community and neighbourhood aspect, for example saying they most enjoyed seeing people locally, making new friends and coming together, as well as wanting to contribute to their communities in the volunteering work that they did.

5.6.3. Sense of connection, isolation and wellbeing

We also asked about volunteers' feelings of wellbeing during this year. Most told us that they had been feeling optimistic often (42% of responses) or some of the time (29%). The percentage feeling this only rarely was 16%. Similar proportions were reported for feeling useful and feeling relaxed and that they'd been dealing with problems well or thinking clearly. While we can't illustrate how this changed over the year, these figures suggest that volunteers were feeling generally reasonably good in themselves.

Feedback from the audience via the **Right on your Sofa** survey indicates that audiences also see other positive outcomes to themselves and others arising from their involvement with Back to Ours.³⁵ Feedback about loneliness, feeling close to people and about COVID-19 illustrate this a little more. 2020 has definitely been a time of loneliness for Back to Ours participants: in general 53% said they did feel lonely at least occasionally, with 3% saying they felt lonely often or always. This rose under lockdown with 38% feeling a bit more lonely, and 14% feeling much more lonely³⁶.

Just how important Back to Ours programming had been to people experiencing feelings of loneliness during this period was very clear. 61% of the 103 audience members surveyed said they felt it brought people together, and 84% of the audience members surveyed said that the impact of **Right on your Sofa** was that it made people feel happier. Virtually all participants had taken part in Back to Ours online events, most often regularly. Many mentioned watching live online on a Friday night and quizzes. Some had taken part in events including **Lullaby** and also in clown and singing workshops. Participants felt Back to Ours was 'doing a fantastic job with events online'; they also said it had been fun and that they had shared events on their own social media. 'Watch parties' were also mentioned – keeping people together. The whole family got involved:

I look at the community Facebook page. I've watched a fair few of the Friday night performances. I've done a quiz held by Tony. My kids entered and won a prize in the Easter egg competition. My cat Ralph has been chosen to have his portrait painted as part of pets in lockdown.

Participant via survey

There was evidence of how Back to Ours have helped improve things for the people who are involved with them. Volunteers felt that involvement had increased their friendships and social connections. They gave high ratings for the question 'What difference has Back to Ours made to you in terms of your friends and social connections?' – 84% from participants in general - and said that meeting new and friendly people was also one of the best things about Back to Ours involvement as well as a gain in confidence. Many emphasised that they had made long lasting friendships, one adding that they had been able to reconnect with old acquaintances as well, demonstrating that some of the friendships formed within Back to Ours have developed into rich and enduring ones over time. The meeting of new people also meant that involvement had had a positive effect on their knowledge of the local area and people who live there.

³⁵ They were asked 'to what degree do you think watching or interacting with the **Right on your Sofa** content from Back to Ours is having a positive impact on you and those around you?' 83% agreed it was with 60% of these indicating 'definitely'.

³⁶ Findings around loneliness for Hub members are discussed above in Section 3



It takes two – the Two case study

Building a new collaborative partnership

Back to Ours and Hull Truck had previously worked together on smaller collaborative projects, developing interesting models of engagement around theatre shows. **Two** was their first significant partnership project together, in which they both took a strategic view of how to reach out and better engage new audiences.

The second phase of **Two**'s community engagement programme, **Two-Doos**, launched with a bus tour. Starting from Hull Truck Theatre, it would tour Hull estates introducing actors Nicola Stephenson and Matthew Wilson, and local artists to residents to chat about the **Two** show and discuss attitudes of 'going to the theatre'. The difficult decision was made to stop the project only hours before the bus was due to set off on 16 March, to protect staff and audiences alike. At that moment, no one knew how long the lockdown would last...

Eighteen months earlier, senior staff from both Back to Ours and Hull Truck Theatre had made a commitment to develop a strong working partnership, with an ambition to create a fresh approach to building arts audiences in Hull.

Two was identified by Hull Truck's Artistic Director as a suitable and accessible piece of theatre. Both organisations imagined it would appeal to the Back to Ours audience and attract new audiences to Hull Truck theatre. Each committed considerable staff time, enthusiasm and resources to the project, investing in a new way of partnership working.

The Back to Ours evaluation volunteers, Chat to Ours, were instrumental in early discussions with Hub members to understand people's attitudes to attending theatre events. Hull Truck's Head of Communications reflected that they wanted to explore new ways, 'to build the journey for new audiences to attend theatre events.' Back to Ours provided a direct link with Hull neighbourhoods, helping to build the trust needed to engage first time theatre audiences.

The project generated a lot of good will and enthusiasm, not just from within the partnering arts organisations. Local residents and venue landlords, who were involved with planning the bus tour, went to see the **Two** show and attended the press night at Hull Truck before the lockdown.

Two has established a precedent for new and collaborative ways of working for both organisations already, which Back to Ours may be able to use elsewhere. Genuine enthusiasm has emerged on both sides to learn from each other and share skills and expertise. The relationship is professional and with a mutual respect for each other's skillset.

Despite the challenging circumstances, this is an opportunity with much promise.

Author Vickie Bissett



Value of Bransholme Chat in overcoming isolation

Clarity on the importance of internet access to people was added from the findings of the '**Bransholme Chat**' project. This opened as 'the **Living Room**' in 2019 (funded by Back to Ours but also gaining National Lottery funding later in 2019) and aimed to be a place for people of all ages and demographics to connect and to chat to each other, and a way to reach those feeling lonely and vulnerable in the community. As lockdown approached, plans were made to continue work by contacting people by phone and online, via Facebook, and referrals began to be made from other organisations and service users. It became increasingly clear that there were plenty of people without an internet connection who therefore had no way of joining in with online social events and ways of being together with others. Lockdown measures for public facilities had a knock-on effect on this too – often it was their only way of getting online at all.

I felt isolated due to the closures of the libraries as they provide wifi. We did not have home broadband.

Participant via survey

Part of **Bransholme Chat's** response to this was to identify those who find it helpful to have regular phone calls with others – participants said they had both helped with this and also really benefited from it. A regular Back to Ours newsletter keeping people in the loop was produced including a popular quiz. It is planned for activities to continue from this, so that live events can be posted online and recordings and newsletters can continue to be sent to those who can't access them.

This programme of reaching out to people who felt the most isolated was very much something that helped people cope with lockdown.

Have been involved in telephoning people linked to the Living Room who are on their own or vulnerable.

Participant via survey

People commenting in Hub member and participant surveys said that they had been phoning others who might be more isolated or vulnerable every working day. Some said they had received phone calls from others, sometimes these were people who identified in their survey responses that lockdown had had a negative impact on their sense of loneliness. Various comments showed that the calls were definitely appreciated. One said that they hoped other places 'like the **Living Room** for the lonely' could be developed. This shows the service is both needed and highly valued in communities.

I would like to thank Back to Ours for the Living Room and the work they do for the people.

Participant via survey

5.6.4. Feeling valued and gaining confidence

I am proud of the work Back to Ours achieves and enjoy every minute of being a part of it.

Participant survey comment

As discussed, participants (including Hub members) were enthusiastically involved with Back to Ours' programming. They were engaged in moving activities online, feeling fully involved with the process. One volunteer commented:

I really feel like part of a huge team.

Volunteer

People felt welcomed and valued, with one also saying there was a 'wonderful inclusivity for anyone to get involved'.

The programme continued to help people connect to and engage with the arts, and to make a positive difference to people's lives. It was clear that volunteers and Hub members valued being able to help others in



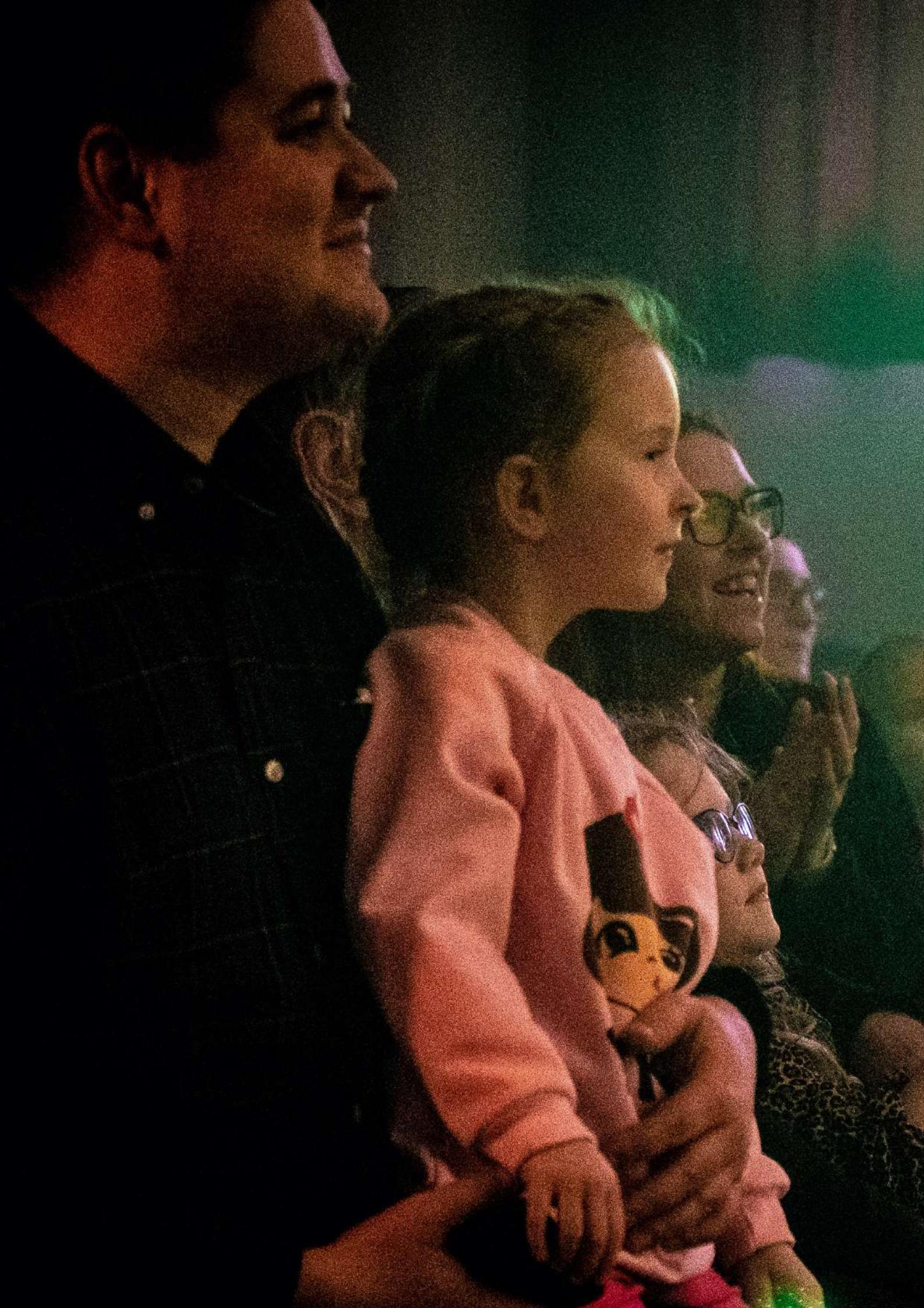
this way – it made them feel useful and more confident because they were doing something valuable. One said, ‘giving something back to the community and being involved with the arts’ was the best thing about involvement with Back to Ours, and another simply stated it was ‘helping make people happier’.

Volunteer and Hub members responses to surveys showed that they were felt more confident as a result of being involved³⁷. Working with the wider Back to Ours team helped people develop better self-esteem. One participant, for example, said they felt ‘a lot more confident and assured that I belong and matter’. For those accessing **Bransholme Chat**, this was also true – it gave someone a ‘safe place’ to go to, helping them feel secure.

People’s confidence was increased when they were able to do new things they may not have normally done. Participants, including Hub members, said they had new experiences because of their involvement with Back to Ours. Some mentioned being more confident with particular skills or situations, such as performing in public, and having received support to be able to do this. Being able to overcome fears and do something successfully was a source of self-esteem.

In essence, working with Back to Ours made a real difference to the people it works with, helping them feel part of the team and to experience real wellbeing outcomes. Volunteer and Hub members support Back to Ours and feel supported by the Programme, seeing this as a long and rewarding partnership.

³⁷ For example, the high scoring of the question ‘what difference has Back to Ours made to you in terms of your confidence to try new things’ - a score of just under 75 out of a maximum of 100 from Hub members, and 89 out of 100 for participants in general.





6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

2020 was a challenging year for communities across the UK and in economic terms, the arts sector was hit particularly badly. Despite this, Back to Ours still succeeded in meeting the Creative People and Places aims of reaching new audiences among those least likely to engage with the arts. It continues to provide a high-quality experience that audiences have appreciated and want to (re)connect with.

The team's creative and adaptable approach to programming meant that the **Right on your Sofa** programme hit the ground running. Back to Ours have retained their audiences and gained new ones – participants and Hub members remained engaged. All this is particularly interesting given how much the Back to Ours' approach relies on personal contact, welcome and warmth.

It is clear that the strength of the Back to Ours approach and commitment to truly listening to and understanding their audiences is paying dividends, meaning that they can flex and adapt to new platforms but by keeping the approach, they can take their audiences with them.

6.2. Recommendations

As Back to Ours moves into the second year of Phase 2 we would recommend they:

1. **Celebrate the success of 2020 and the resilience of the Back to Ours community** – of team, volunteers, artists and particularly audience in getting through the year with humour, fun and a sense of collective endeavour.
2. **Continue to reflect on and articulate their unique, innovative engagement model** to enable sharing with local, national and international partners and to influence national arts policy.
3. **Build on the learning from lockdown** in three key areas:
 - i. **Extend the rich mix of delivery platforms** – both in person and digital – and the opportunities for increasing audience reach through offering more than one way or more than one chance of viewing work.
 - ii. **Look for ways within in-person programming to replicate the sense of community** experienced through digital programming, for example through Facebook live comments during performances which really helped people feel part of the experience.
 - iii. **Retain the 'stop and reflect' moments to continue to refine the strategic approach** to programming by building in time and space for reflection and implementation of learning throughout the programme.
4. **Take the opportunity to review the needs of Hull as lockdown lifts** and the extent of the impact of COVID-19 is fully understood. Adapt the programme to strategically deliver what the city needs – 2021 will be a year of changes.
5. **Build on the willingness of many Hub members to do more** and play a greater role in promotion and development of the programme.
6. **Restart the level and quality of data collection as programming returns to live** – in particular ensuring that audience reach is tracked.
7. **Extend Chat to Ours to fully reflect the Back to Ours community** and to explore deeper questions of engagement to prepare the Programme for its next stage of development.





Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology

This report is based on work carried out by a number of different researchers. Ruth Melville Research (RMR) and the Back to Ours team developed and analysed data collected within an evaluation approach developed by Ruth Melville in discussion with the Back to Ours team and Steering Group and which followed on from the approach taken during the evaluation of the previous Phase.

The evaluation framework takes into account the National Evaluation Research Questions developed for CPP by Arts Council England at the start of the programme in 2012 and not changed since:

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
3. Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?

It draws on the monitoring and reflection required within the ACE Quarterly monitoring and reporting model, which asks for figures on activities, attendances, delivery, and geographic and demographic reach, as well as whether CPPs are reaching people new to the arts. The monitoring framework was in place when the evaluation started, but some minor adaptations have been made to make it deliver more clearly to the evaluation requirements. In addition, this model was updated during 2020 due to necessary changes on programming prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of Chat to Ours as a volunteer researcher network was unfortunately not practical overall this year due to social distancing requirements, and it is hoped that their expertise can be used later on in the Phase.

Data collection was carried out by Ruth Melville and Vickie Bissett from RMR and by the Back to Ours team and volunteers, particularly Christie Parkin, Monitoring & Evaluation co-ordinator.

Analysis of postcodes was carried out by The Audience Agency and by Mac Ince.

Full analysis and reporting was carried out by the RMR team.

Case studies were written by Ben Morgan, Vickie Bissett (from RMR) and Christina Lewis (from Back to Ours).

Data gathering included:

Audience surveys: carried out at most audience events, using a mix of paper questionnaires, postcards and online surveys prior to March 2020, and online surveys only after this time. The survey used after March 2020 was the **Right on your Sofa** survey run by Back to Ours which received 103 responses.

Hub and participant surveys: carried out in 2020, largely online since lockdown first began in March 2020, by Back to Ours and RMR with participants and Hub members taking part in a range of programmes. 29 people responded to the Hub members survey and 31 to the participant survey.

Interviews and focus groups: carried out formally by Vickie Bissett with the staff team, and informally by Ruth Melville and Christie Parkin with the staff team, partners, Chat to Ours and commissioned and associate artists. One focus group was held with 3 staff from Hull Truck in April 2020 to capture thoughts on the **Two-Doo** project. Throughout 2020, 14 artists were interviewed, and 16 interviews transcribed, two artists took part in 2 interviews spread across the year, to give comparator data. 6 staff members were interviewed across the year, completing 2 interviews each. 5 Hub members were interviewed in early 2021 to provide reflections on the programme and the activities of 2020 as a whole.

Observation: extensive data gathering has been carried out through observation and participant observation at team meetings, **Right on your Sofa events** and Hub meetings.

Story of Change sessions: the Story of Change approach is a way of looking holistically at a project, taking into account what the outcomes and stakeholders are: 'who' you want to make a difference to, 'why' – what's the difference you are trying to make, as well as principles and approaches – 'how' you'll do it, before thinking about



'what' you are planning to do. This approach is helpful for avoiding programmes rushing into action, giving a chance to stop and reflect on why they are doing what they do, but also is helpful for developing an evaluation framework as the 'why' elements form the basis of what difference is intended and thus should be measured. Back to Ours' Story of Change is constantly evolving – see Appendix 1 above for Phase 2 model, and will change throughout the course of the programme as they reflect and learn and adapt what they intend.

Analysis was carried out within and across the various projects. Both Back to Ours and the RMR team worked together to draw out the learning from analysis across the 2020 programme.

Postcode analysis was carried out to determine the reach of the audience. Postcodes were collected from a sample of 2684 audience members who attended 40 events delivered. 2595 of these postcodes were matched and used in the analysis (separately) by Mac Ince of RMR and The Audience Agency.



Appendix 2: Back to Ours Story of Change

