

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Creative Care kits

Organisation: Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Region: North West England

Introduction

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has been working with cultural sector organisations, GM i-THRIVE, Greater Manchester (GM)-wide Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and voluntary and community sector organisations to ensure that people who cannot connect online do not feel forgotten, are able to feel connected with others and are offered help with their mental health and wellbeing. We are doing this by creating and distributing a Creative Care Pack to be sent to individuals in their homes. The pack contains a range of activities that can be completed at home and using materials provided with the pack. Activities include a range of creative forms including music, writing, craft, horticulture and visual arts. Kits also include key telephone numbers for help and support as well as hints and tips to protect mental wellbeing.

We are distributing two Creative Care Kits to all 10 GM boroughs... 22,000 packs for young ... 16,000 packs for older people who have little or no digital access.



We have distributed two Creative Care Kits to all 10 GM boroughs. Firstly 22,000 packs for young people (13-20 year-olds; our upper age limit is 20 rather than 18 so that we can include care-leavers). And in parallel 16,000 packs for older people who have little or no digital access.

Image credit: GMCA

Who is it for?

Young People's Kit

Greater Manchester is home to 898,000 children and young people under the age of 25. A large number of these young people can be understood as vulnerable due to a range of

circumstances including economic deprivation, mental health difficulties, being a young carer, a care leaver, being disabled or being a "hidden" young person (not in education, employment

or training and not in receipt of welfare support). Some young people fall into a number of these categories simultaneously.

In Greater Manchester there are 2,000 care leavers, 27,000 young carers (up to 25 years old) and 12,000 unemployed young people aged 18-24. The Covid-19 crisis increases the vulnerability of these young people who are now experiencing social isolation and a drop off in face to face support from networks and agencies. Schools, colleges, media organisations, charities and community groups have all responded quickly to the crisis by creating and promoting online content for young people. However, we know that there are many who cannot access this content or connect with friends or support networks because of digital exclusion. This may be because they are one of the 60,000 young people in the UK who have no internet access at home at all, because they have a limited data plan, because they lack equipment or because they have to share equipment with a large number of family members. Only 5% of vulnerable young people are taking up emergency school places nationally and this is placing them and their mental health at serious risk.

The kits are designed to reach out to young people who struggle to get online and are therefore much more isolated at this time. This includes those who do not have digital equipment and internet access due to cost as well as young people who are more vulnerable to feeling lonely and isolated due to mental health difficulties, being a young career, a care leaver or not in education, employment or training.

As well as giving young people something to do while spending more time at home, the kits will also reinforce the message that recipients are not on their own; creating a sense of connection at a time when they are not able to rely on face-to-face interactions with family, friends and support networks.

Older People's Kits

The Covid-19 crisis increases the vulnerability of older people who have experienced a drop off in face to face support from networks and agencies. Whilst the message to stay home and stay safe is the right one, for older people, it is resulting in increased social isolation, particularly for those who do not have digital access. Feelings of isolation, loneliness and fear are being compounded by media coverage of the susceptibility of older people to Covid-19 and a strand of reporting which describes older people as expendable during this crisis.

Despite the easing of lockdown we know many older people, especially those who struggle to get online, are feeling isolated. There are also many older people who have caring duties, mobility issues, health difficulties or are simply maintaining physical distancing.

Funders

Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Trafford Housing Trust
Young Manchester
Ambition for Ageing (Community Fund)
Great Place (GMCA) project budget – from ACE and NHLF

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Combatting loneliness and isolation

- Supporting wellbeing and mental health
- A sense of purpose and social connectedness for volunteers assembling the kits
- cultural organisations – working together for economy of scale and wider reach

Where is it happening?

All 10 districts of Greater Manchester

Are you working in partnership?

We are working with cultural sector, voluntary sector and health sector partners: 27 arts organisations including Castlefield Gallery, The Lowry, Contact Theatre, Link4Life (the Culture & Leisure Trust in Rochdale), Gallery Oldham, Curious Minds, ARC, Unity Radio, Manchester Museum, the Royal Exchange. Voluntary sector orgs including Manchester Carers, 42nd Street, the Proud Trust, Reclaim, Creative Support. Also i-THRIVE; this is the project team rolling out the new child and adolescent mental health model across Greater Manchester.

For the older people's pack:

- GM Ageing Hub
- The 10 ageing leads in the 10 GM districts
- Age UK
- 25+ cultural organisations
- The 5 Culture Champions projects across GM (older people as cultural activists, makers and producers)
- Ambition for Ageing

How many people took/are taking part?

- Organisations – about 35
- Volunteers – 300 including Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue, furloughed cultural sector staff, teachers, members of the public...
- 22,000 kits delivered to young people
- 16,000 kits delivered to older people

For how long has it been happening?

We started as soon as lockdown began and will continue to September

Evaluation;

Manchester Metropolitan University are working with us on evaluation of the young people's kits.

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Unexpected successes

- Supporting mental health of volunteers
- Supporting mental health of cultural sector employees who are furloughed /freelancers as they felt a sense of purpose
- New connections in districts between cultural organisations and voluntary sector, already leading to discussion on ways of working together in the future
- Better connections between health and social care and cultural leaders

Further information

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/3020/creative-care-kit-young-people.pdf>
#GMCreativeKits

The GMCA is made up of the ten Greater Manchester councils and a directly elected Mayor, who work with other local services, businesses, communities and other partners to improve the city-region. As a body, the GMCA comprises the Leaders of the 10 constituent councils in Greater Manchester (or their substitutes) and is chaired by the Mayor for Greater Manchester.

Creative Care Kits is part of the GMCA Great Place programme – funded by NHLF and ACE.