

# LeftCoast

## Phase 3 Year 1 Report

Ruth Melville & Catherine Doran

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# Summary

This report evaluates Year 1 of Phase 3 of LeftCoast, the Creative People and Places (CPP) project in Blackpool and Wyre. Year 1 ran from November 2019 to October 2020, and is the seventh year of the Programme overall.

## Background

- LeftCoast is in Phase 3 of its Arts Council England (ACE) funding and this is running alongside a separate three-year project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.
- The Programme's overall aim is to establish a sustainable arts organisation for Blackpool and Wyre by October 2022.
- Even before COVID-19, Blackpool and Wyre faced a number of underlying demographic, health and economic challenges.
- The arrival of COVID-19 in the Spring 2020 presented a major challenge to LeftCoast in four broad areas – delivery, projects, partners and the evaluation.
- LeftCoast's structure and clarity of working arrangements meant that they were able to adapt and refocus relatively easily – the Programme continued to successfully deliver and indeed explored new opportunities.

## Highlights of Year 1 of Phase 3

Despite the various lockdowns and restrictions on gatherings the pandemic brought, LeftCoast has continued:

- **183 events delivered.**
- **A total audience of over 110,000<sup>1</sup>** which included around 60,000 who attended physically outside of lockdown (rather than digitally).
- **7894 people participated in the events** – that is performed or took part in an event – for example, as community cast members or workshop attendees.
- **885 hours of events** delivered through Year 1.
- **Supported by 858 hours of volunteer time** worth around £7,450.

The year was dominated by Covid 19 lockdown. Pre lockdown work included:

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<sup>1</sup> The figure given here relates to ACE returns data from LeftCoast excluding 'viewing figures' such as the audience for the LeftCoast film May 2020 which was given as 7200000.



- Two exhibitions of legacy work from the previous Artists in Residence, Natalie Lee's 'Hawes Side Stories' at a local library and Ocean Farini's 'Our Big Green' at the Affinity Shopping Centre in Fleetwood.
- Two new Artists in Residence, Mark Borthwick and Gillian Wood were selected and welcomed into Hawes Side and Flakefleet Estates in Blackpool and Fleetwood.
- Carol Salter's film LeftCoast about the Fylde Coast, which grew from a LeftCoast commission as part of the Real Estate: Micro Residency project<sup>2</sup>.
- Workshops were developed for summer activities including the planned Soapbox Rally linked to SpareParts Festival.

With lockdown in late March 2020, the team quickly adapted and altered programming to respond to the new circumstances. Work included:

- A regional Scrub Hub set up by Artist In Residence in Fleetwood, Gillian Wood (see case study below)
- Three 'Covid Commissions' from locally based artists, Tina Dempsey, and Daniel Astbury and photographer Henry Iddon, to explore the experience of the Scrub Hub group, lockdown's impact on local places and spaces, and co-create posters with key workers about their experiences of the pandemic.
- Blackpool resident artist, Mark Borthwick, set up a telephone storyline to make connections with neighbours and created gardening packs – and in collaboration with Professor Alastair Roy, documented his experience of being an artist in isolation.
- "Meanwhile", a virtual series of artist talks on creativity were hosted by the Programme in partnership with Abingdon Studios, The Grundy and Blackpool School of Art.
- Ten artists were invited to form a virtual peer discussion group based on the notion of small radical acts.

## The LeftCoast Model

The LeftCoast model has been evolving over the seven years of programming and partnership building to date. Phase 3 marks a shift in focus from lots of programming to development – of partnerships, innovation and socially engaged practice.

There are two main types of work:

- **Commissioning and inspiring new ideas and approaches in socially engaged practice** through its residencies and commissions
- **Building partnerships to share this learning**, and inspire partners to deliver in this model thus multiplying the benefits of the programme well beyond the core funding.

The approach relies on LeftCoast's skills and experience, and on the core principles by which they work.

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<sup>2</sup> This was one of twenty-one films in the collection "The Uncertain Kingdom" offering "a unique portrait of our nation today" (<https://theuncertainkingdom.co.uk/>). It was made available via the BFI Player, other online platforms (iTunes, Amazon etc) and internationally via The British Council.



This shift brings real opportunities to multiply impact and value arising from the work. Partners continue, and replicate, the work started by LeftCoast. So the impact is felt not just by those who directly come into contact with LeftCoast or one of their residencies or commissions, but also by people who live and work with any partners or artists who use this approach.

This is potentially a far more sustainable approach and offers the possibility of mainstreaming, and thus multiplying, impact.

## More people enjoying the arts

**LeftCoast continues to attract new audiences and participants for the arts from a broad section of the local population. They are doing this in different ways and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The available evidence shows that:

- **The Programme is reaching into the poorest areas** in Blackpool and Fleetwood, among the most deprived towns in England.
- **During lockdown, LeftCoast are increasing that reach** into those more deprived areas which are often excluded from digital offer.
- **Digital engagement was of key importance this year** – many workshops and activities moved online – and the digital reach was massively enhanced by Carol Salter's LeftCoast film.
- **Participants continue to enjoy their experiences** and are inspired to do more.
- **Lack of data means it is hard to draw strong conclusions** on many areas of reach and engagement.

## Partnerships for change

**Since its inception LeftCoast sought to develop partnerships across Blackpool and Wyre. The new model has strengthened this further, with partnerships becoming a key vehicle for sharing learning and multiplying practice.**

The fundamental approach is to use high quality socially engaged arts to show how this can deliver on the aims of partners, particularly in terms of social change.

We find that:

- **LeftCoast continues to build on strong partnerships with the local non-arts sectors** – particularly in health and housing – reflecting six years of excellent and committed work.
- **Partners continue to have faith in LeftCoast and the arts as a force for positive change.** The Programme's flexible response to lockdown reinforced this belief.
- **Specific work in Fleetwood has supported and strengthened the role of the arts** within partnerships for change, and strengthened the partnerships themselves.
- **Considerable challenges to partnership projects resulted from lockdown** restrictions and related risks to funding and to organisations as a whole. These are likely to continue into 2021 and beyond.



- **There remains a need for a more coherent approach to developing cultural ecosystems** in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast, which LeftCoast cannot solve alone.

## Supporting artists to deliver with communities

While LeftCoast's focus is developing audiences, they recognise the value in supporting locally based artists to gain skills and experience in doing this alongside them. Phase 3 activity focuses on supporting the existing and emerging local artist communities to gain the understanding, commitment and skills to develop new audiences.

LeftCoast operates within a challenging cultural ecology – a lack of strong coherent cultural partnerships, a sector with a traditional emphasis on tourists rather than local audiences, and affected by austerity and the pandemic.

LeftCoast has supported artists to deliver with local communities:

- **A small number of commissions reflected local experiences of lockdown** and provided a starting point for further discussions and development.
- **An action learning approach helped support artists through the challenge of lockdown** but also to develop their practices and brought new socially engaged ideas and approaches into the area.
- **The Artist in Residence programme supported the development of new approaches to engagement through the pandemic**, despite challenges arising from the model and associated isolation.
- **Locally based artists value the opportunity to develop the sustainability and quality of their practice with communities** and to shift perceptions of Blackpool and Fleetwood.

## Developing social capital

LeftCoast has made a real difference to local communities through the use of arts as a catalyst for the development of a sense of confidence and self-worth, developing or rediscovering skills, and increasing social connections.

We find that:

- **Participants' sense of worth increased through being involved in LeftCoast's projects**, and this was magnified further during lockdown when they felt they were helping the community.
- **Learning new skills, or revaluing existing skills, positively contributed to people's sense of themselves** and how they could both be creative and useful.
- **Projects increased connections and a sense of being connected** both for local residents and for artists.
- **A sense of connection was particularly important during lockdown** because of people's isolation from one another, but this had been an issue on the Estates prior to lockdown.
- **The Programme's work increased a sense of place**, and connection to place, among local residents linked to their agency to make a difference locally.



Developing social capital is a desired outcome of CPP. But it is also a driver for future funding and sustainability of the practice because it can help achieve other CPP outcomes – that is, greater arts engagement and a sense of place through transforming partners' views of the value of art in achieving their own aims.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

**At the start of Phase 3, seven years into its ten-year vision, LeftCoast continues to develop its effective approach to delivering a CPP programme, appropriate to the specific needs and opportunities of Blackpool and Wyre.**

LeftCoast has reached new audiences, and inspired them to engage further in the arts, reaching into the poorest areas of Blackpool and Fleetwood, already some of the poorest towns in England.

LeftCoast continues its commitment to deliver excellent engagement in the highest quality art, further developing its socially engaged practice that also supports partnership building beyond the arts. Phase 3 sees a refinement of the model undertaken by LeftCoast, focusing down to two main areas of work:

- Commissioning and inspiring new ideas and approaches in socially engaged practice through its residencies and commissions,
- Building partnerships to sharing this learning, and inspiring partners to deliver in this model thus multiplying the benefits of the programme well beyond the core funding.

This approach builds on work and approaches developed over the previous six years.

### Recommendations

These are what we recommend LeftCoast continues to do, or to bear in mind, as it moves forward:

- 1) Being committed, personally, socially and politically works – carry on.**
- 2) Local resonance is very important in attracting audiences to potentially more challenging work – keep using it.**
- 3) Carry on with the in-depth engagement – it makes a real difference to participants and brings art experiences to others through family ties.**
- 4) Continue to work in partnership to develop a strategic approach to developing the arts ecosystem of Blackpool and the Fylde Coast.**
- 5) Continue the new more focused approach developing innovative socially engaged practice through residencies, commissions and making space for artists to interact – along with building partnerships to share learning and multiply impact.**
- 6) Use the partnership approach to get the full value of past projects – enabling you to fully realise their legacy even several years on.**



- 7) **Build on your relationships with a national and local network of socially engaged artists to act as artistic 'critical friends' to the programme, ensuring it stays at the leading edge of practice to maximise value.**
- 8) **As lockdown ends and audience access increases, restart the thorough data collection approaches developed over Phase 2 to ensure that all outcomes are clearly monitored to evidence the wide range of activities and impacts.**
- 9) **Carry on with the new more reflective approaches and embedding of action learning.**







# Introduction

**This report is an evaluation of LeftCoast, the Creative People and Places project in Blackpool and Wyre. It covers Year 1 of Phase 3, or Year 7 of the whole three phase programme.**

The report naturally focuses on this year (November 2019 to October 2020) but for a broader perspective, it can be usefully read alongside the previous Phase 2 Final Report<sup>3</sup>. It may also be worth bearing in mind that we are describing an ongoing programme which like so much of arts and culture in 2020 has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This Report is structured as follows:

**Background** provides an overview of LeftCoast, the area it operates in, and the impact of COVID-19 on Year 1 of Phase 3.

**The LeftCoast Model** investigates the underlying structures and values that have evolved over seven years of programming and partnerships.

**More people enjoying the arts** examines the profile of participants and whether LeftCoast is reaching people from places of least arts engagement.

**Partnerships for change** considers how organisational relationships have been developed across Blackpool and Wyre and become a key to sharing learning and practice.

**Supporting artists to deliver with communities** explores how LeftCoast operates within a challenging cultural ecosystem and contributes to a stronger local arts sector.

**Developing social capital** assesses the impact of art as a catalyst for the development of confidence, skills and increasing social connections in local communities.

**Conclusions and recommendations** reviews Year 1 in the light of the Arts Council England's three National Creative People and Places 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?

Answers to Research Questions are also threaded throughout this Report. Data for this report came from a mix of secondary sources: LeftCoast data, national datasets and other evaluations, as well as primary data collection including observation, surveys, workshops, interviews and artist-based approaches. Full details on the methods used are included in [Appendix 1](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Produced by MB Associates in December 2019



# 1. Background

**LeftCoast is the Creative People and Places project for Blackpool and Wyre in the North West of England. This report covers the seventh year of nine, one which was inevitably impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

To help contextualise both this Report and the data presented, this section provides a brief overview of LeftCoast as a programme, Blackpool and Wyre, and the impact of COVID-19.

In summary:

- LeftCoast is in Phase 3 of its Arts Council England (ACE) funding which runs alongside a three-year project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.
- The overall aim is establishing a sustainable arts organisation for Blackpool and Wyre.
- Even before COVID-19, Blackpool and Wyre faced a number of underlying demographic, health and economic challenges.
- COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns required a significant adaptation to the planned programme but LeftCoast's structure and clarity of working arrangements meant that they were able to adapt and refocus relatively easily and the Programme continued to successfully deliver.

## 1.1. About LeftCoast

LeftCoast is a Creative People and Places project funded by ACE, along with local partners, to raise arts engagement in Blackpool and Wyre. It started in 2013, with Phases 1 and 2 running for three years each.

In January 2019, ACE announced that LeftCoast had been awarded a further round of funding for Phase 3 (November 2019 to October 2022). This runs alongside REAL ESTATES, a three-year National Lottery Community Fund project (2019 to 2021) working in three local estates. This combined funding allows LeftCoast to deliver on a ten-year vision of arts engagement, culminating in establishing a sustainable arts organisation for Blackpool and Wyre by October 2022.

This report covers Year 1 of Phase 3 (November 2019 to October 2020). In this phase, LeftCoast is running a programme of arts, culture and creative activity that works towards the following long-term outcomes:

- Inspire new and strengthen existing community activism
- Commission and/or produce brilliant, high-quality, socially-engaged projects/events/artworks about local people and place
- Tilt/reframe clichéd internal and external perceptions of Blackpool and Wyre



- Support local artists to be 'commission-ready' by providing relevant learning platforms and opportunities
- Further develop models of working that help us to be an efficient and effective, sustainable organisation.

## 1.2. Local context

LeftCoast covers two distinct but adjacent boroughs in the North West of England. Blackpool is a town associated with twentieth century seaside culture, and Wyre is a more rural district to the north.

The programme has worked across administrative boundaries, with the unitary authority of Blackpool, Fleetwood Town, Wyre District and Lancashire County Councils.

**Demographics:** The population of Blackpool (140,000<sup>4</sup>) features areas of high population movement<sup>5</sup> and is estimated to gradually fall in the coming years<sup>6</sup>. Wyre's population is 119,000<sup>7</sup>, with the largest town being Fleetwood (25,632<sup>8</sup>). Wyre has a markedly small non-white population (1.8%<sup>9</sup>) compared to Blackpool (3.3%) or the national average (14%)<sup>10</sup>. Over 65s make up a larger proportion of both populations when compared to the national average (17.9%) – 26.9% for Wyre<sup>11</sup>, 20.4% for Blackpool<sup>12</sup>.

**Health and welfare:** Blackpool is one of the most deprived districts in England<sup>13</sup> and "faces major health challenges"<sup>14</sup> – on 24 of 32 health indicators it is worse than the national average.<sup>15</sup> Fleetwood has similar deprivation levels to Blackpool, although Wyre as a whole performs better<sup>16</sup>. Local research in Fleetwood has identified stress as a major negative in people's lives.<sup>17</sup>

**Economy:** Tourism contributes £1.44 billion to Blackpool's economy and provides many jobs.<sup>18</sup> The town's unemployment rate is above the regional average and there are a significant numbers

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Blackpool-Profile/Population.aspx>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Blackpool-Profile/Population.aspx>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Blackpool-Profile/Population.aspx>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/area-profiles/local-authority-profiles/wyre-district/>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/northwestengland/lancashire/E34003462\\_\\_fleetwood/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/northwestengland/lancashire/E34003462__fleetwood/)

<sup>9</sup><https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/897604/census-2011-districts-ethnicity-change-since-2001.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> All figures from <http://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Blackpool-Profile/Ethnicity.aspx#Figure1>

<sup>11</sup> Public Health England, Wyre: Local Authority Health Profile 2018

<sup>12</sup> Public Health England, Blackpool: Local Authority Health Profile 2018

<sup>13</sup> Public Health England, Blackpool: Local Authority Health Profile 2018

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Blackpool-Profile/Life-Expectancy.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/health-profiles/2019/Eo6000009.html?area-name=Blackpool>

<sup>16</sup> Fleetwood Coastal Community Action Plan, The Great British Coast, 2016, <https://www.coastalcommunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fleetwood-Coastal-Community-Action-Plan-2016.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Source: Wyre DC "Life in Wyre 2018 report: Area Profiles" – SWEMWBS is a widely used metric for assessing mental wellbeing, national scores are 23.6, Wyre 23.3 and Fleetwood is 22.7. For information on SWEMWBS see <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

<sup>18</sup> Blackpool Council, Tourism Performance Update, <https://democracy.blackpool.gov.uk/documents/s36486/ITEM%2010%20-%20Tourism%20Scrutiny%20Report%20-%20June%202018.pdf>



of long-term sick<sup>19</sup>. Although Wyre has an unemployment rate below the regional average, there was a marked decrease in employment between 2009 and 2017 and a very low job-density rate<sup>20</sup>.

**Arts engagement:** The latest Active Lives Survey (2015-17) data shows 52.2% of people in Blackpool attended arts events or spent time doing an arts activity<sup>21</sup>. This compares to 61.6% in Wyre and 60.2% for England as a whole.

## 1.3. The COVID context

The arrival of COVID-19 in the UK understandably had an impact on LeftCoast. The first England-wide lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020<sup>22</sup>. On 25 September, Blackpool designated an 'area of intervention'<sup>23</sup> because of significant virus spread, and then on 17 October it went into Tier 3<sup>24</sup>. By the end of October 2020, there had been 2443 cases in Wyre<sup>25</sup> and 3814 in Blackpool<sup>26</sup> since March, with a peak in late October in both areas.

To illustrate what changed and how LeftCoast adapted, we can see four broad areas of impact – delivery, projects, partners and the evaluation:

**Impact on the delivery:** Although the first lockdown was five months into Year 1 of Phase 3, as this was the beginning of the phase it was effectively quite early in terms of delivery. A decision was taken to scale back the amount of delivery – especially as much of it was to be face-to-face – and there was the inevitable move online. A refocusing changed the modes of operation and what the Programme did but without fundamentally shifting who was worked with and why (outcomes).

The Programme Team noticed how flexible they were in responding to the new challenges, and felt able to support one another. However, the use of volunteers could not be developed as planned. It had focused on large events – now cancelled – and bringing groups of people together – now unlawful.

**Impact on projects:** There were some issues with co-ordinating with and/or supporting other people, especially the Artists in Residence (AiRs). The newly in-post AiRs were affected, particularly in terms of mental health, as they were resident on the estates when the pandemic started. Work in Mereside required time physically "on the Estate" – this wasn't safe (or allowed) for most of the year. However, the pandemic also created opportunities for new partnerships and approaches, as demonstrated by the Fylde Coast Scrub Hub (see case study below).

**Impact on partners:** Many partners faced major challenges because of COVID-19 and these in turn affected the Programme. For example, the significant impacts on ABnB meant it needed more support from the LeftCoast team.

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<sup>19</sup> Nomis figures, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157102/report.aspx?c1=2013265922&c2=1946157070#tabempunemp>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/area-profiles/local-authority-profiles/wyre-district/>

<sup>21</sup> Source: Active lives survey 2015-17 figures <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/active-lives-survey#section-2>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/23/boris-johnsons-address-to-the-nation-in-full>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-restrictions-for-wigan-stockport-blackpool-and-leeds-as-coronavirus-cases-increase>

<sup>24</sup> <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-no-laughing-matter-for-blackpool-as-tourist-mecca-adapts-to-tier-3-lockdown-12107112>

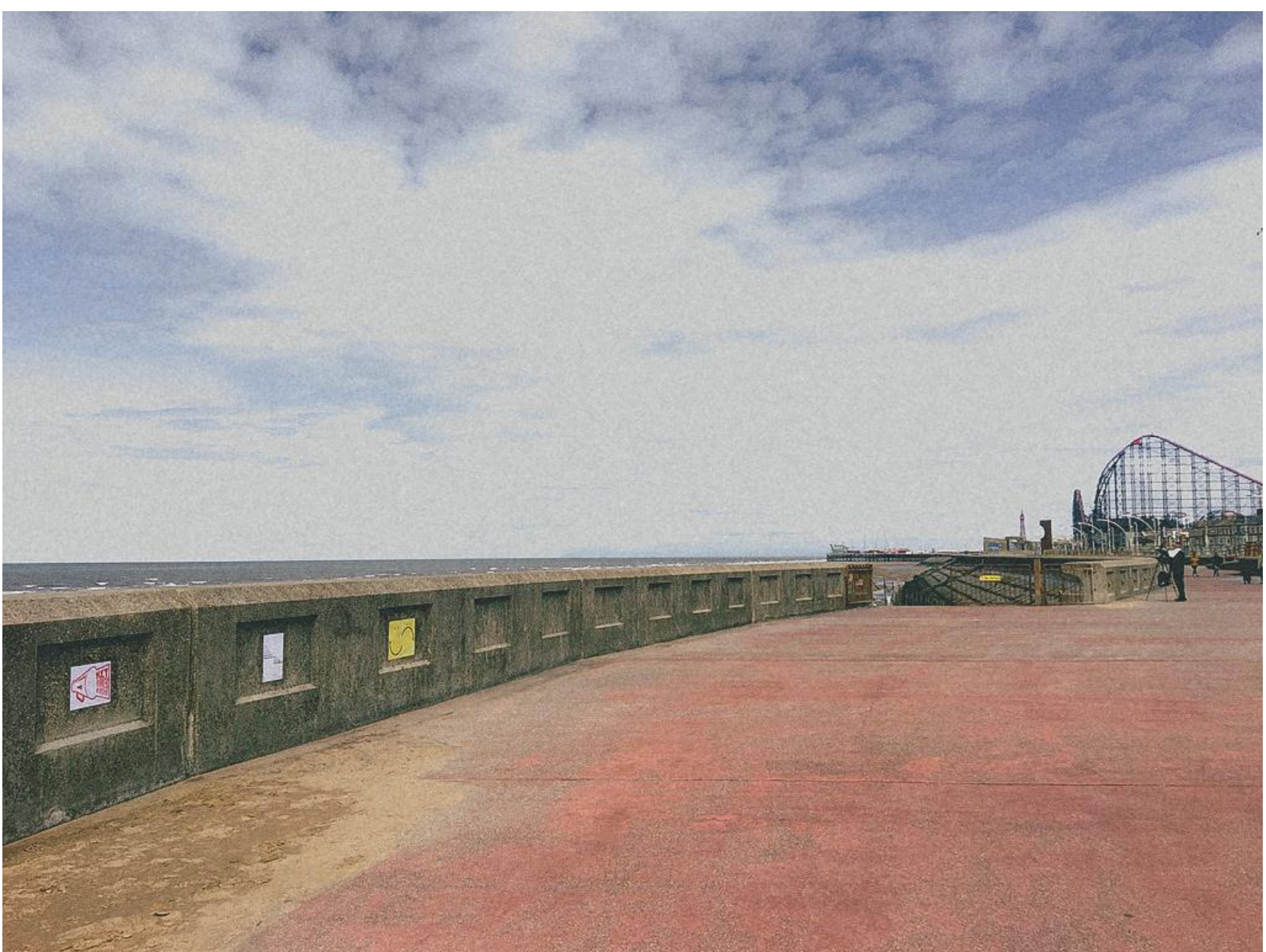
<sup>25</sup> <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases?areaType=ltla&areaName=Wyre>

<sup>26</sup> <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases?areaType=ltla&areaName=Blackpool>



**Impact on evaluation:** The restrictions around COVID-19 meant that data collection became very challenging. Some key collection of data – for example the Happy-O-Meter Population Surveys and Community Researchers – have had to be delayed into Yr2. This has resulted in gaps in the quantitative data available. Overall, there were lower audience numbers – but participant numbers remained high, in part due to AiRs working in a socially distanced way and some of the more participative online delivery.

In summary, COVID-19 presented a major challenge to LeftCoast, but by adapting and refocusing, the Programme continued to successfully deliver.





## 2. The LeftCoast Model – what works?

**The LeftCoast model has been evolving over the seven years of programming and partnership building to date.**

Phase 3 marks a shift in focus from lots of programming to development – of partnerships, innovation and socially engaged practice. There are two main types of work:

- Commissioning and inspiring new ideas and approaches in socially engaged practice through its residencies and commissions.
- Building partnerships to share this learning, and inspire partners to deliver in this model thus multiplying the benefits of the programme well beyond the core funding.

The approach relies on LeftCoast’s skills and experience, and on the core principles by which they work:

- Genuine care and working alongside: They explicitly and politically position themselves to work alongside – with, not for people – and this brings a sense of “travelling together”.
- Commitment to high quality socially engaged work, a standard which they challenge both themselves and their collaborators to meet.
- Taking risks and trying new things: politically and locally resonant work can feel risky at times, but it pays off. It attracts and enthuses audiences, develops new partnerships, challenges assumptions and leads to longer term changes and deeper engagement with local residents.
- Blackpool and Fleetwood to its core: LeftCoast’s work echoes Blackpool itself – the spectacle and ‘glitz’ alongside the real life of residents.

This shift brings real opportunities to multiply impact and value arising from the work. Partners continue, and replicate, the work started by LeftCoast. So the impact is felt not just by those who directly come into contact with LeftCoast or one of their residencies or commissions, but also by people who live and work with any partners or artists who use this approach.

For example, local housing association partner Regenda who co-fund one of the artist residencies has calculated the social value of some of the residency’s work. This is agreed as a limited application, we were not able to factor in a lot of the full social value generated by the project and we are looking to extend this approach for the current residency. However, the overall figure of nearly £90,000 of social value<sup>27</sup> created was both impressive, and validating for the non-arts partners involved.

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<sup>27</sup> Total of £89,490.42 using a Social Return on Investment model called the HACT toolkit (<https://www.hact.org.uk/value-calculator>) data from events and specific clubs/activities on the Flakefleet Residency – 2019-2020. Calculations courtesy of Marcos Glaister, Regenda Homes.



This is potentially a far more sustainable approach and offers the possibility of mainstreaming, and thus multiplying, impact.

## 2.1. The LeftCoast team

Furthermore, this is supported by the stable but flexible team model which has developed over the years, with a very small core of staff (2.9FTE) and a strong network of partners (see Section 4), and of associated artists and other creative deliverers.

As a result of the team's size and closeness they were able to adapt very fast to the lockdown reality and it was notable how much peer support was available to the core team. This is partly a result of the role designation, which isn't rigid but at the same time does have clear 'spheres of leadership', between for example the Director and the Programme Manager or between Director and Creative Engagement Manager. Decisions are discussed and shared from a very early point, ideas passed around and refined, rather than sitting in one area of the team alone. However there is a clear sense of responsibility for certain areas and although naturally things do fall between the gaps, there is a warm and no blame culture within the team which means it is soon picked up.

This closeness and care – which extends within the team as well as without – is strongly fostered by the leadership of the Director.

There can be limitations to this sort of model as it is reliant on personal style, close contact and informal interactions. The latter were particularly affected by Covid, and while the core team maintained a closeness and informality of regular communication via Slack and other media, this didn't always work for members of the wider team – particularly one of the Artists in Residence who felt very cut off during this time. Although some of the issues linked entirely to the restrictions of lockdown, and some to the particular experience of the artist concerned, this is a piece of learning which LeftCoast will be looking into, considering how they can explicitly seek to embed good practice that arises from instinct and intimacy with those coming into their orbit who might have different styles and where informal communication approaches are not possible.



# 3. More people enjoying the arts

In this section, we explore the extent to which LeftCoast is meeting the central Creative People and Places aim of ensuring that people from places of least engagement are experiencing and inspired by the arts.

This answers ACE Research Question 1: *Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?* and looks at the geographic, demographic and previous arts engagement of the audience and participants in the LeftCoast programme, as well as their immediate responses.

We find that:

- **LeftCoast are attracting new audiences and participants for themselves and for the arts**, and are also doing this in different ways, reflecting their adaption to the situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **The Programme is reaching into the poorest areas** in Blackpool and Fleetwood, among the most deprived towns in England.
- **During lockdown, LeftCoast are increasing that reach** into those more deprived areas which are often excluded from digital offer.
- **Digital engagement was of key importance this year** – many workshops and activities moved online – and the digital reach was massively enhanced by Carol Salter's LeftCoast film.
- **Participants continue to enjoy their experiences** and are inspired to do more.
- **Lack of data means it is hard to draw strong conclusions** on many areas of reach and engagement.





## 3.1. Reaching communities across Blackpool and Wyre

Here we look at the profile of those participating in LeftCoast's events, and how they compare to the figures for Blackpool and Wyre as a whole.

**Those less likely to engage in the arts:** Participants at LeftCoast events are asked if they have engaged in the arts and culture over the last 12 months. This data has been greatly affected this year by the reduction in data collection due to COVID-19. Of the data we have, across the entire LeftCoast programme, 53% said they had not engaged in the arts in the last year – and thus can be classified as new to the arts.<sup>28</sup> This is compared to 46% across the whole of Phase 2. This plus the socio-economic data below does indicate that LeftCoast is reaching its target audience of those least likely to engage, but more data would be needed to confirm this.

Feedback from participants indicates that the type of activity they were involved in was also new to them. This was confirmed by one artist in residence who said

**These are incredibly skilled people and they got to bring their skills to [Scrub Hub] in a way that they probably won't ever have done before. They've either sewn for family and friends or their own business, but never in that capacity.**

Tina Dempsey, artist in residence

**Geographic reach:** 78% of audiences and participants came from within B&W boundary, this percentage fell slightly after lockdown (from 80% before to 76% after) but shows that the programme still largely managed to focus on a local audience despite the digital focus. This compares with 63% of the audience for Phase 2 being local: a result partly of the reduction in large events, but also of the refocussing of the LeftCoast model to work directly with particular participants, and then through partnerships for change.

**Across socio-economic groups:** Across the LeftCoast audience, 63% lived in areas which are among the poorest 20% in the country.<sup>29</sup> This rises to 89% for the Artist in Residence work. This compares with 56% in Blackpool and 15% in Wyre. Furthermore, this reach into the poorest communities increased during lockdown<sup>30</sup> showing LeftCoast's commitment to reach into communities least likely to engage in arts, and least likely to engage digitally. Figure 1 below shows the clustering of participation in some of the most deprived wards of Blackpool and Fleetwood.

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<sup>28</sup> That is by Arts Council practice, Source: LeftCoast quarterly ACE reporting, base, 387

<sup>29</sup> We use postcodes to calculate levels of deprivation mapping postcodes against the English Indices of deprivation 2019 (IMD). The IMD 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.

<sup>30</sup> Rising from 57% of participants coming from the poorest 20% of areas pre lockdown, to 67% from first lockdown onwards.



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.

**Audience demographics:** The LeftCoast audience and participants were more likely to be aged 35-54 – and far more likely to be 45-54 – than the local population.<sup>31</sup>

Some of this will relate to differential data collection for different activity, for example both of the artist residencies worked extensively with older people, but ages and other demographic information was not routinely collected for these events so as to keep the interaction informal. The under-representation of younger adults is probably representative of the actual audience as many of the events which would have attracted a younger or family audience were cancelled due to COVID-19.

50% of the audience were female and 50% were male. This is in contrast to the proportion of female members in Phase 2 of LeftCoast, where it was 60%.

LeftCoast's audience is representative of the local population in terms of ethnic mix. This year, LeftCoast audiences were 96% white, almost exactly matching the local population.

Overall, 88% of participants and audiences said they did not have disability, while 12% said they did to some extent.

In the case of both gender and disability, there is likely to be undercount of both women and people with some level of disability as data may be affected by lack of demographic data collection for the residencies where participants were anecdotally more likely to be women and older or in supported accommodation.

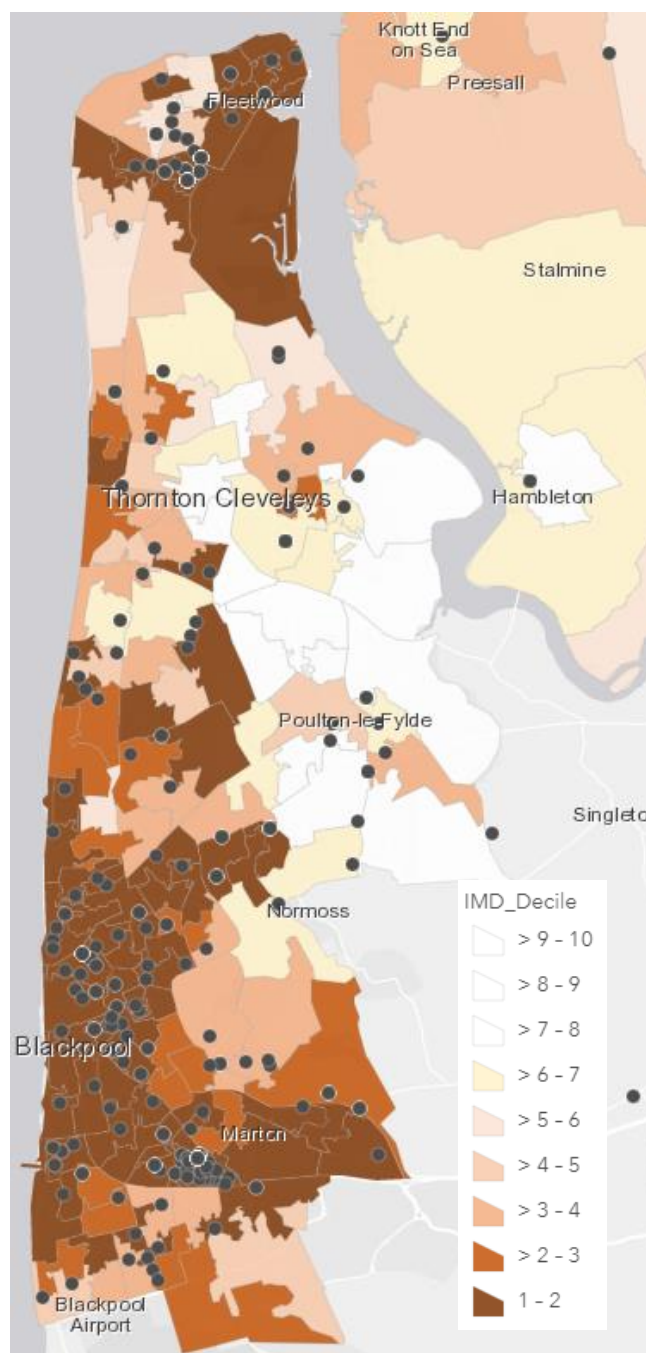


Figure 1: Indices of Multiple Deprivation map of LeftCoast attender postcodes by level of deprivation (deciles 1 and 2 are the poorest 10 and 20% of areas in England)

<sup>31</sup> Base for figures on this page: age = 515, ethnicity=526, disability = 335, source LeftCoast monitoring

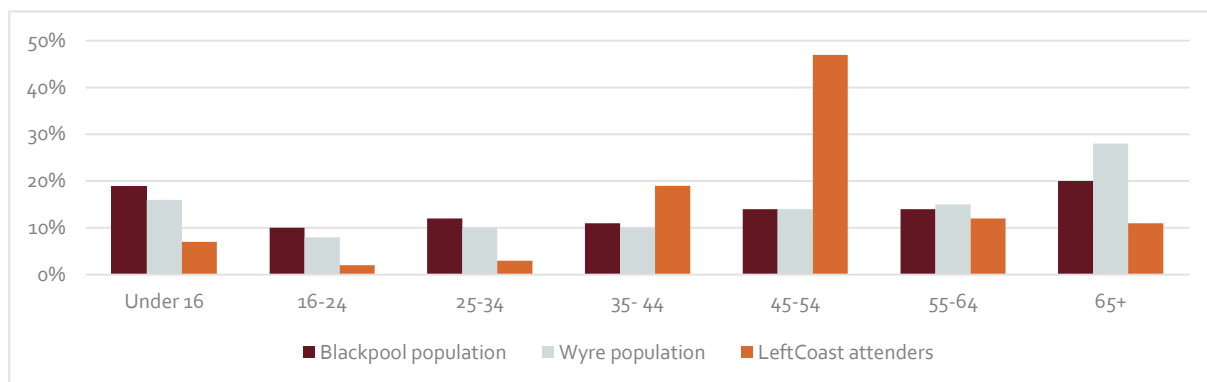


Figure 2: Age profile compared to local population

## 3.2. Digital reach

Digital engagement has been of key importance this year as adaptations to programming meant that many workshops and activities moved online<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, use of the internet and Zoom in particular has become a much more important digital channel for LeftCoast this year, as for many organisations. For example, from March to November the LeftCoast Zoom channel alone had 199 Zoom meetings, which consisted of 811 participants and a duration of 57,776 minutes (over 40 days solid).

Supporting this work, LeftCoast were successful in getting on the SPACE digital mentoring programme, which has been really useful in helping them consider how they use digital platforms more effectively.

This is shown in the increase digital audience size. 7,255,984 people were included in the digital audience for LeftCoast activities between November 2019 and October 2020 as opposed to 60,440 physical viewers. The latter include 60,000 for the Our Big Green exhibition, which took place from 1<sup>st</sup> July after lockdown measures began to lift from May to June 2020. During lockdown, all audiences accessed digitally. Many of these were for the LeftCoast film<sup>33</sup>, which was streamed via 4OD and therefore was able to reach a wide audience of 7,200,000 people.

LeftCoast continued to grow its social media channels – by the end of 2020, their Facebook had 2,496 fans and Twitter 3,064 followers. The most popular content across platforms was events and opportunities – for example, the ITV Ident, Carol Salter’s film and micro-commissions – and these drove engagements. There was a decision to develop Instagram as a channel to increase engagement with individuals and organisations which resulted in over 300 new followers<sup>34</sup>. Allowing artists to “take over” LeftCoast’s Instagram helped with this, proving popular and generated more engagement.

<sup>32</sup> [Covid 19 - LeftCoast](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Carol Salter - LeftCoast](#)

<sup>34</sup> An increase from 704 (31 December 2019) to 1,013 (31 December 2020)



The website continued as a platform to showcase work, share content and promote opportunities. This was enhanced by content audits and improving its technical performance. A policy of “mobile first” was introduced, reacting to the fact that most visitors were using mobile devices to browse content. The site had 29,795 page views in 2020, with projects generating a substantial number of views. For example, the ITV Ident project produced a massive spike in website activity over its duration<sup>35</sup>. Overall, 32% of traffic to the website was from social media channels, 23% by organic search and 13% by referral.

### 3.3. Inspiring people to engage further

LeftCoast has an approach that puts people from diverse communities in touch with high quality art which resonates with them, and hopefully inspires them to engage further.

As with the demographic data, we lack numbers on this due to lack of data collection during lockdown but the qualitative feedback from various sources shows that people who took part in LeftCoast events and activities clearly enjoyed what they were doing. One Scrub Hub participant said:

**If in future times anything happened like this again ... I would be very happy to do that.**

Participant in Scrub Hub

More than one participant said they had been brought back into the arts and/or felt inspired to get involved in more. Feedback from the Scrub Hub in particular (where specific data collection took place) shows the level of enthusiasm from LeftCoast participants. Some said they felt inspired to continue with sewing in new ways, or to branch out into new areas:

**I've relived my passion for sewing and I've got excited about doing the pattern scrubs from plain scrubs! And I really want to sew everything I wear really, I want to have a whole new wardrobe of stuff that I've just done - individual. Nobody else has got one. And I last weekend applied for the Great British sewing bee! So it's really, really made me love it again.**

Participant in Scrub Hub

**The confidence that I had to doing all that, it's just it just left me wanting to try more and more different things.**

Participant in Scrub Hub

There is also some evidence that participants felt more confident about being able to make art – for example, Halloween Doorstop where artists were able to help nurture both the participant’s confidence and new skills.

**“What is that thing?” one of the boys asked  
“It’s a portal to another dimension!” Sarah replied, “Would you like to make one?”**

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<sup>35</sup> Between 18 and 24 May, ITV Creates attracted 2,384 pageview, thus in 7 days it accounted for 8% of pageviews to the site in 2020.



**"I couldn't make that," the boy said, "Too difficult."**

**"You could!" Sarah explained the process for making the lightbox, his face lit up.**

Observation notes, Doorstep Halloween



## 4. Partnerships for change

**LeftCoast has had a role from inception in terms of developing partnerships across and within Blackpool and Wyre. This has been strengthened as a focus with the new refined model as partnerships become a key vehicle for sharing learning and multiplying practice.**

The fundamental approach is to use high quality socially engaged arts to show how this can deliver on the aims of partners, particularly in terms of social change.

We find that:

- **LeftCoast continues to build on strong partnerships with the local non-arts sectors** – particularly in health and housing – reflecting six years of excellent and committed work.
- **Partners continue to have faith in LeftCoast and the arts as a force for positive change.** The Programme's flexible response to lockdown reinforced this belief.
- **Specific work in Fleetwood has supported and strengthened the role of the arts** within partnerships for change, and strengthened the partnerships themselves.
- **Considerable challenges to partnership projects resulted from lockdown** restrictions and related risks to funding and to organisations as a whole. These are likely to continue into 2021 and beyond.
- **There remains a need for a more coherent approach to developing cultural ecosystems** in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast, which LeftCoast cannot solve alone.

The Phase 2 evaluation found that the partnership work developed over the six years of LeftCoast was one of the strongest outcomes in terms of potential for long term impact. The new approaches developed were already beginning to show impact in a place where serious socio-economic and image challenges, as well as a weak and fragmented sector, had been further devastated by austerity and major cuts to services.

This was built on the history of trust and ownership of the process between LeftCoast and the local authorities and other partners which had further developed in Phase 2. Despite Phase 3 beginning with yet another challenge to partnership – with the impacts of COVID-19 on timescales, priorities and finances – the trust developed has meant that LeftCoast has been able to flex their approach with the trust and commitment of the various partners, calling on them as appropriate.

The approach taken by LeftCoast is to show the value of the arts, or of socially engaged arts, in addressing partners' aims and outcomes. Delivering on community cohesion and resident agency when working with a social landlord; or community wellbeing when working with health initiatives; modelling or sharing approaches which extend audience reach and engagement when working with the local arts sector or using creative thinking to bring out the commercial potential of arts projects or their ability to change perceptions of place.



This approach is about an adaptation of communication and language, rather than a difference of activity – high quality socially engaged arts does deliver all these outcomes, it is just that it takes a particular communication style to help partners see how this work contributes what they need. LeftCoast’s continuing success in keeping and enhancing existing partnerships and in developing new ones is evidence of the success of this.

The hoped-for impact of this is the embedding of these approaches and ways of thinking into the mainstream practice of partners – multiplying the value of what LeftCoast alone can do. This is still a work in progress and will be tracked over the course of Phase 3.

## 4.1. Valuing the arts in building stronger communities

Social landlords and the local authorities in both Blackpool and Wyre recognise the value LeftCoast can bring in changing perceptions of place, and building cohesion within neighbourhoods. The core of this partnership is through the REAL ESTATES programme co-funded by Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH – the social housing provider for Blackpool) and Regenda (the social housing provider for Wyre) along with New Communities Lottery Fund.<sup>36</sup> The programme is partway through its 3-year run involving long term artist residencies in two estates.

This ongoing commitment is built on trust, with both housing providers fully on board with LeftCoast’s approach and plans, particularly at the senior level. The outcomes for the work are around reductions in social isolation, increases in pride in and connection to their localities and having the self-confidence to make change. The outcomes for these are addressed in Section 6 below, and in more depth in the specific REAL ESTATES report.

Partners valued LeftCoast’s ability to continue to deliver during lockdown, at a time when they needed to redirect nearly all effort to simply keeping people’s lives going. The flexibility of the response – particularly the adaptation to work which helped give a sense of purpose during the pandemic, for example the Scrub Hub, or simply kept communities talking among themselves, for example the Halloween event and the letterboxes, or the story telling, were seen as fulfilling needs others hadn’t time to fill during the crisis.

The initial outcomes of the partnership are clear: the funding itself, the work of the residencies, and the learning that arises. It is still too early to conclude on the longer-term impacts, but it is clear there is still further work to do in ensuring the aim of multiplying the value of the work. As outlined in the LeftCoast model above, the full value of the work will lie not in the actions and outcomes of the residencies, but in the learning that emerges about how best to achieve pride and local connection, reduction in social isolation and enhanced agency in communities which are often left behind by services.

In both estates, so far, the work has mainly been initiated by the artist, and either hasn’t continued after they left, or in the case of residencies in progress, there is still some doubt about how and whether this will continue. As stated above, there is high commitment to the project at

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<sup>36</sup> This work is part of LeftCoast overall but is evaluated under a separate contract with University of Central Lancashire. As such we touch only lightly on it for Yr1 and 2 reports, but will summarise all the findings from both evaluations for the final Phase 3 LeftCoast report in late 2022- early 2023.



the most senior level, including the boards of the organisations. Further work is needed in looking at how to continue the work (or more particularly the learning and opportunities arising from it) beyond the residency itself. Some of this delay arises from the disruptions of COVID-19 and the upheaval to staffing and ability to work in person for so many services. However there appear to be two structural issues emerging as blocks:

- A lack of clarity as to the purpose of the artist residency itself;
- Insufficient staff time or capacity to action ideas and initiatives which arise from the residency.

The residencies will continue for another year and there is time to further develop the partnerships around them, however it is essential that thought is given to the two issues identified above by LeftCoast, and by their housing association and local government partners so that the full value of the work can be felt and so that the initiative can be built on in future.

## 4.2. Developing commercial partnerships

Positive commercial partnerships were a key outcome of Phase 2 of LeftCoast offering potential for a diversification of funding as well as ability to reach a whole new range of audiences. This work has not progressed during this year, partly due to hold ups from a challenging relationship with one artist, partly to the impact of local businesses of lockdown, however the relationships are still being fostered and elements progressed where possible.

### Painting the Town

LeftCoast has continued development of Painting the Town<sup>37</sup> with a new palette and a range of new partnerships for sharing this being developed, including both Blackpool Football club and several visitor sector partners.

For example, LeftCoast consulted a community group at the Grange when developing the colour palette. Subsequently, Grange Community Centre bought all the main colours to be used in a mural created by artist Adam Robinson which depicted local people and places. As part of their degree course, UCLAN media students filmed its development and interviewed residents.

Already one local hotel has used the palette within their apartments.<sup>38</sup> A different colour has been used in each apartment and the owners hope to provide details of the LeftCoast collaboration in guest information packs in order help promote the art and culture of Blackpool through that collaboration, and perhaps change perceptions of Blackpool itself along the way.

**We were very keen when we did our refurbishment to incorporate what was good about Blackpool and what made people come here. There's a nostalgia quality, but we didn't want to just make people come back because of how it used to be. We wanted to use it as a launch pad. And I think having spoken to Tina [LeftCoast director] quite a lot, we actually shared quite similar outlook about what Blackpool can be...it's still lively and vibrant and we just wanted to kind of mix the nostalgia history with going forward. We really like the fact that on a different level, she was doing that with LeftCoast at the**

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<sup>37</sup> See Phase 2 report for analysis of this project, or <https://pttblackpool.co.uk/> for info on the project

<sup>38</sup> [Our Apartments – The Berkeley Apartments \(theberkeleyblackpool.co.uk\)](https://theberkeleyblackpool.co.uk/)





**Paint [Painting the Town project] - not to just make it history, but how it really is now and it really struck a chord with us.**

Hotel owners, Blackpool

These partnerships are key for LeftCoast as they provide a new avenue to reach different communities and support LeftCoast's aim of changing perceptions:

**PTT provides a vehicle for conversations with a different type of partner for LeftCoast. Partners that definitely bring their own communities of interest - some of whom are new to the Arts and others that have a keen interest. It is a diverse set of organisations in the mix and presents LeftCoast with a very distinctive place making strategy.**

LeftCoast Quarterly Narrative Report

## Art B&B

Coming out of the first wave of the pandemic, LeftCoast on behalf of Art B&B, commissioned a virtual hotel relaunch on Friday 24th July. This was part of the programme funded by the first ACE rescue grant that the hotel received (31k). It followed on from us commissioning architectural photographer, Sean Conboy, to take new interior pictures of the hotel and the commissioning of the hotel virtual tour.

This type of partnership with Art B&B enables LeftCoast to develop new audiences and interact with them online in a contrasting way to our hyper-local creative engagement work. The Arty Party had a reach of 770 people.

LeftCoast continues to sit on the Art B&B Board and its finance and programming sub committees, supporting bids and the Crowdfunder that raised over £6,000 for the hotel to 'treat' NHS workers. This has taken up extraordinary amounts of time (meetings have been weekly) as they have been pivoting the hotel offer constantly through the summer. There is a huge value in the partnership with Art B&B and this innovative approach to both arts engagement and funding resilience, but this needs to be considered in the context of the time needs spent.

## New Queers on the Block and Meanwhile Sessions

LeftCoast was able to support the local artistic community through partnerships before and during the lockdown.

As part of a strategic touring partnership agreement with the Marlborough Pub in Brighton, LeftCoast hosted two new queer performance events in February. 'The Gloop Show' was presented at Blackpool Fylde College and poets Jackie Hagan and Mandla Rae performed at Art B&B to a sell-out audience. Both shows targeted audiences from the local LGBTQ+ community with the support of a local ambassador (Mykey Young) who engaged the Horizon Project and the Students Union to build this audience. This was the third time LeftCoast hosted the New Queers programme and there are plans to develop this further.

In partnership with Abingdon Studios, the Grundy Art Gallery and Blackpool School of Arts, LeftCoast presented a programme of artist talks, exploring practice before, during and after Covid 19 lockdown. This took the name "Meanwhile" referencing the fact that Blackpool as a destination was closed: its work/leisure balance disturbed and local venues and organisations were all experiencing the impact of public programmes being closed or altered, in different ways.



Taking this as the context, the partners put together something 'in the meanwhile', collectively inviting four guest artist speakers to share their work in whatever way they saw fit. The idea was that while supporting artists with time, space and money to share their current practice, the programme gave people a schedule to engage with artists, and a consistent date and time, becoming a home from home comfort for many.

The shared approach for all artists and partners was conversation – the wish to remain connected, through the promotion and support of artists, and to help each other explore solutions to understand the world through a new lens and multitude of perspectives.

There was a very positive feedback from the participants, addressing a sense of isolation that many felt at the time. But strategically it played a wider role in supporting the arts ecosystem locally. These examples show how LeftCoast has been able to continue to ensure that Blackpool has a range of new and exciting programming by developing and supporting the local arts sector to do this.

## 4.3. A strong partner for the local cultural sector

LeftCoast continues to play a strong role within Blackpool and Fleetwood's cultural sector, both of which struggle with coherence and joint working. LeftCoast's director is often mentioned as a key player in bringing more of a strategic approach across each town.

This issue was discussed in the Phase 2 report where we found that there was a need for a strong and coherent strategy for culture across Blackpool, if not across the whole Fylde Coast. This would support engaging new audiences, supporting a strong volunteering offer, developing specialisms and particularly new local talent as well as growing the numerous talented artists and organisations to be able to operate to their full potential. Through this, Blackpool and its surrounding area could truly shine on a national and international stage. It was found that this leadership could not come from LeftCoast alone, but that their partnership working, innovative approaches and flexible model fitted them to take a key role within whatever might arise, should others be willing to work on this.

The plan for Lancashire to bid as a geographic area (including Blackpool) to be UK City of Culture 2025 offered an opportunity for a new joint approach in the sub-region, and initial links with the L25 bid and other Lancashire wide steps were positive.

LeftCoast continues its role as a cultural sector representative on wider groups, sitting on the Blackpool Town Centre Plan Board, the Local Cultural Education partnership group, the Arts Lancashire partnership, Lancashire Arts network, Wyre arts partnership and Lancashire Cultural Network. They have also met with local MP Paul Maynard to share their work, particularly the Painting the Town project.

However, 2020 has offered a huge challenge to all cultural eco-systems, and financial shortfall due to reduced revenue and local authority funding being diverted to crisis support mean that it is difficult to prioritise planning and strategic work, however important.

LeftCoast's flexibility and willingness to keep going through the lockdown has enabled them to retain and build partnerships in the sector. The partnership with the new Blackpool museum



project – Showtown – is very strong with Showtown drawing on LeftCoast’s relationship with Blackpool’s communities, one of their key target audiences. They are collaborating heavily on ‘Get Dancing’ a year-long dance engagement project which will both reach new audiences and reposition Blackpool nationally and internationally, as well as building a sense of place. Showtown’s team see LeftCoast’s role in defining Blackpool’s culture as crucial artistically as well as in terms of engagement – highlighting the ‘grit’ as the other side of the glamour and ‘frivolity’ which is part of Blackpool’s offer.

There is definitely a space for LeftCoast within the local cultural eco-systems, in Blackpool there’s a need for an organisation which works on creatively engaging with new audiences, and also which can bridge the divide between various interest groups in the town. With the flexibility which is allowed by not having to maintain a venue, LeftCoast can adapt to offer what is needed and can be freer to take risks than some other partners.

In Fleetwood there are fewer large organisations and there’s a role for a strong and confident cultural voice to unite the sector. The case study shows how specific work in Fleetwood to support the museum, the new resource centre for Fleetwood Trust, and the High Street Heritage Action Zone’s Cultural Consortium illustrates the potential LeftCoast can add into a town by joining up with local partners with shared goals and taking a leadership role in cultural programmes.

### **Case Study: LeftCoast and Fleetwood together**

Kelly Garrick’s enthusiasm resonates down the phone. She is working hard to bring more wellbeing to Fleetwood and is completely committed to the project. Kelly works with the Fleetwood Trust, a group of people who have come together to purchase a large and partly derelict hospital building to redevelop it into a community hub for the benefit of the people.

The Fleetwood Trust is one of several groups in Fleetwood coming together in partnership to make good things happen. LeftCoast have become more and more involved in helping that develop.

One of these is Fleetwood Museum. Manager Ben Whittaker knows LeftCoast through their work with the Arts Partnership Steering Group and as member of the new Heritage Action Zone Cultural Consortium<sup>39</sup> for Fleetwood. LeftCoast also contributed to an exhibition about Fleetwood Women (called ‘This Lass Can: Stories of Fleetwood Women’ and set for 2021) by loaning an item of clothing developed by d by Ocean Farini, the previous Phase 2 LeftCoast Artist in Residence. Gillian Wood, the current Artist in Residence, is contributing some material to the Museum that was produced during lockdown by the Scrub Hub locally, and this will be added to a Museum COVID-19 collection. She is also producing ‘Inside Out’ - an exhibition to exhibit examples of lockdown creativity by local residents. The Museum will also be involved with this, and it will be held in the Fleetwood Hospital building. Gillian has helped use existing networks to help let people know about the Fleetwood Hospital building and the new opportunities it brings.

**LeftCoast came to us and said could they use the hospital as an exhibition...well we nearly fell over ourselves, we were that excited about it! Because it links in every single**

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<sup>39</sup> [\[Fleetwood High Street Heritage Action Zone | Historic England\]](#) and add more links to this case]



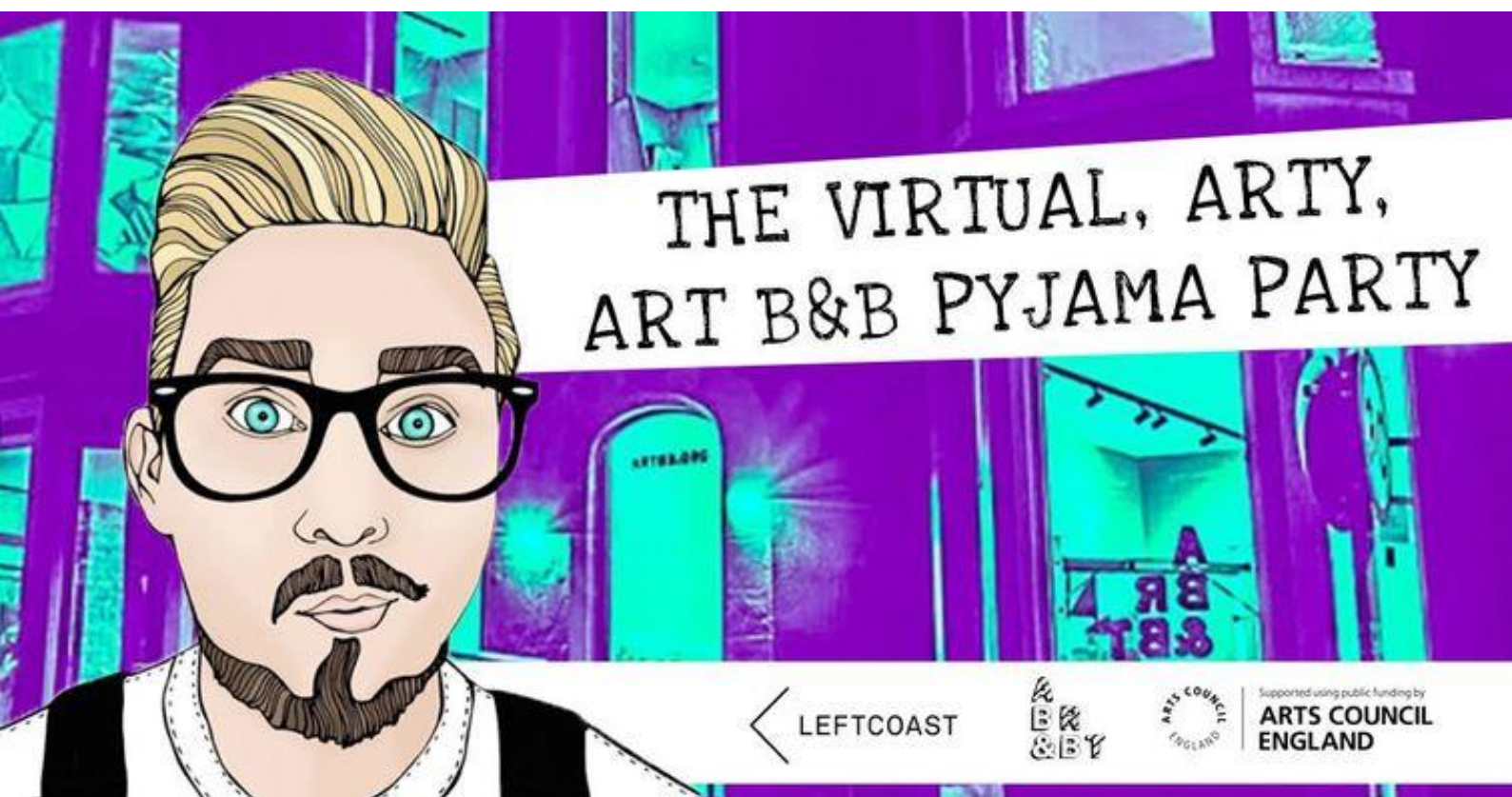
thing that we're trying to do - it's about mindfulness and positive attitude and really celebrating successes with people, and creating hope for the future, and that's what we're trying to create.

Kelly Garrick, Fleetwood Trust

Kelly hopes the collaboration with LeftCoast will continue. She wants to carry on bringing the community together, to help tackle isolation, help maintain mental health and create hope for the future:

**It excites the whole Trust about what we could do working together in partnership. It just blows our minds!**

Kelly Garrick, Fleetwood Trust





## 5. Supporting artists to deliver with communities

**While LeftCoast's focus is developing audiences, they recognise the value in supporting locally based artists to gain skills and experience in doing this alongside them. Phase 3 activity focuses on supporting the existing and emerging local artist communities to gain the understanding, commitment and skills to develop new audiences.**

LeftCoast operates within a challenging cultural ecology – a lack of strong coherent cultural partnerships, a sector with a traditional emphasis on tourists rather than local audiences, and effected by austerity and the pandemic.

LeftCoast has supported artists to deliver with local communities:

- A small number of commissions reflected local experiences of lockdown and provided a starting point for further discussions and development.
- An action learning approach helped support artists through the challenge of lockdown but also to develop their practices and brought new socially engaged ideas and approaches into the area.
- The Artist in Residence programme supported the development of new approaches to engagement through the pandemic, despite challenges arising from the model and associated isolation.
- Locally based artists value the opportunity which LeftCoast gives to develop the sustainability and quality of their practice with communities and to shift perceptions of Blackpool and Fleetwood

Blackpool in particular, and the Fylde Coast as a whole has a sizeable committed artistic community working locally, nationally and internationally. However following reductions in local authority resources there hasn't been an overall talent development or sector development approach. This role was to some degree filled by LeftCoast in Phases 1 and 2, with the 2013-16 (Phase 1) period in particular characterised by considerable artist development input, which led to a number of lasting initiatives including the Art BnB and Abingdon Studios.

With funding reducing in Phase 2 and still further in Phase 3 and with the central focus of Creative People and Places funding being on developing audiences rather than artists per se, there was a need to streamline LeftCoast's support to explicitly link this to what was needed to support delivery of their goals.

The Phase 2 evaluation report specifically recommended focusing down artist support to ensure it was about helping artists be ready to meet local audience and community need in a sustainable way, rather than feeling the need to fill in gaps left by other services.

The new Phase 3 strategy explicitly situates support to artists in this way to aiming to:

- Support local artists to be 'commission-ready' by providing relevant learning platforms and opportunities



In practice this would be done through the process of commissions, with mentoring and peer learning built in, as well as signposting to resources elsewhere, rather than putting together a series of training courses and surgeries.

Artists locally continue to appreciate this support and approach, feeling their business skills and links to local communities and to artist peers are enhanced through involvement with LeftCoast.

## 5.1. Covid Commissions

With lockdown and the recognition of the inevitable particularly high impact on the freelance artist sector LeftCoast sought to immediately offer support to Blackpool and Wyre based artists through a 'Covid commissions' programme. This was put out very quickly following lockdown – among the earliest of the CPPs to get it there – and was initially a 'trial' to see what came back.

Although there were about 15 responses, it was noticed that many of these weren't particularly reflecting lockdown or developing the artists' work.

**... it felt like the proposals were missing an opportunity. The general theme was that artists wanted to do what they had been doing before but move in online in some way. ... On reflection we thought that maybe at this time of heightened stress, people didn't have the time or creative thinking space to explore the different ways in which their practice might have to bend and flex.**

LeftCoast, Quarterly Narrative report

As a result, a new approach was adopted which is explored in section 5.2 below. There were three proposals which were felt to be suitable:

Daniel Astbury developed a poster project exploring what messages people in Blackpool wanted to express and making posters from these.

Tina Dempsey developed a project which ran alongside the Scrub Hub set up by Artist in Residence Gillian Woods, documenting the experience of participants (those who sewed the scrubs) and recipients (frontline NHS staff) of the ScrubHub. This was written up in a book and is discussed further in a Case Study in Section 6.2 below.

Photographer Henry Iddon documented the lockdown in Blackpool and Wyre from day 1. The resulting photographs are shared on the LeftCoast website as a piece of social documentation.<sup>40</sup>

**It reconnected me to my hometown, after living away for so long. I reconnected with a number of people through this project which has led to ongoing collaboration with old and new connections made through this program.**

Commissioned artist, artists survey

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<sup>40</sup> <https://leftcoast.org.uk/corona-lockdown/>



## 5.2. Small Radical Acts

Following the response to the original Covid commission call and a recognition of the challenges faced by artists in the uncertainties and isolation of lockdown LeftCoast decided there was a need to take a different approach. Taking advantage in the pause in programming, and building on conversations developed over Phase 1 and 2 about the potential for artists both in terms of supporting social change, and to have a direct role within programmes like LeftCoast, there was a decision to commission a series of workshops developing a virtual peer network.

Five locally based artists with an interest in socially engaged practice and five experienced socially engaged artists (based across the UK) were brought together in a virtual group over six workshops facilitated by experienced facilitator and artist Debbie Chan. Called Small Radical Acts, the idea was to explore the observation arising within the residencies that very often small acts of resistance or change are more catalytic or powerful than large acts which tried to solve every problem.

In practice the group acted in two ways:

- As a space for sharing and discussing the ideas, and more broadly reflections on the way forward for socially engaged practice – particularly in a time of lockdown and learning from lockdown, and the further blurring of home / life boundaries which are already complex for artists
- As a peer support experience for people who while not necessarily isolated socially, were often not able to pursue their usual highly social practice while socially distancing.

The group all found the experience useful, and there were several new ideas which bubbled up from the experience, including a couple of new partnerships where artists based in Blackpool got on and did pieces of work together. The nationally based artists all said they felt more interested in working in Blackpool and Fleetwood and were keen to explore that further, ideally in partnership with the rest of the group and LeftCoast.

**Really reaffirming to be approached to be a part of the project. Felt valued when otherwise low as the rug had been taken from under my feet due to cancellations throughout Covid. Introduced me to a new network of people who continually inspire and encourage me in my own practice.**

SRA artist

**A support network was created for artists during the pandemic - LeftCoast created something that many organisation fail to do which is to support artists.**

SRA artist

Despite the initial framing and development of the group within a virtual space, there was a strong wish to move from the virtual to the 'real' and everyone had agreed to attend a 3-day shared residency session in Art BnB which needed to be cancelled when Blackpool entered Tier 3 of lockdown.

**The conversations were super open and this was really beautiful. Also - the possibility of outcome was very open, and as a result co-decided by the group. Just such a shame that**



**we couldn't do this as I think this could have been a very special chapter for the project/outcome for the discussion.**

SRA artist

**A wide feeling that we were desperate to physically come together after so much online discussion.**

SRA artist

There is a wish to continue this work as lockdown eases and it would seem a productive way to continue to challenge and raise the quality of work in Blackpool and Wyre to keep and build on this peer group of artists locally and nationally.

**Main outcome was a strong network of peers to encourage creativity and hold solidarity. Also, offered some financial security throughout lockdown which was massively important. The work done with the SRA was about nourishing the artists ahead of us potentially nourishing people and places.**

SRA artists

There is also a wish to look at how these or other 'peers' could input into discussions about the LeftCoast programme, as potential peer reviewers or artistic critical friends to the programme which would support the programme aim and achievement so far of using the quality of the practice to make and embed the changes needed.

## 5.3. Artists in Residence

LeftCoast has supported three Artists in Residence during Yr1 of Phase 3 as part of the REAL ESTATES programme, linked to Creative People and Places but funded separately and hence covered mainly in a separate evaluation. This work arises from a strong partnership with two social housing providers and is discussed further above in section 4.1.

The experience of and gaining of value from the artists involved in the residencies, particularly the first two appointed, is reflected upon here as it links into LeftCoast's aim of strengthening locally based artists as partners for reaching new audiences.

Learning from the experience of Phases 1 and 2, LeftCoast had a very open brief for the residencies: to not come and 'do to' the community but to 'live with' and work alongside them. The residencies were designed as full time and year long, so a major undertaking for artists, but at the same time a great opportunity.

This sense of 'opportunity', with its related pressures was a challenge as well as a positive for the two artists concerned, particularly when coupled with the restrictions posed by lockdown. Both had a social practice, but Mark Borthwick, the Hawes Side Artist in Residence has an extremely socially created practice as a Story Teller.<sup>41</sup> Gillian Wood's practice as a film maker and costume designer was slightly less reliant on close physical contact, and she also had the emotional

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<sup>41</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/MarkBorthwickStoryteller/> or <https://leftcoast.org.uk/mark-borthwick/>





advantage of being locally based anyway – so having an existing social network in the area, and having her partner living with her.

### 5.3.1. Developing socially engaged practice during lockdown

Both artists found the pressures of trying to develop new social connections at a time of lockdown and social distancing hard and stressful, requiring a very creative approach, as Mark put it:

**I learnt a lot about how to engage with people with an array of difficulties in a guerilla style.**

Mark Borthwick, artist survey response

Both continued to make work, with Gillian developing the Scrub Hub – discussed further below in section 6.2 – as well as work with a sheltered housing area and linking into a number of other initiatives around in Fleetwood at the time. Mark had more challenges in linking to existing initiatives as the Hawes Side area is particularly divided and lacking in community networks, particularly in the immediate area of the house which is in an area of supported accommodation and faces many physical barriers to community. Noting the lack of internet access faced by many of his (mainly elderly) neighbours, he developed the Storyline dial in storytelling and story-gathering work. He began also to map some of the physical barriers and challenges to community through a series of maps.

In this way, despite (and to some degree because of) huge challenges caused by lockdown and knock-on effects in terms of contact with LeftCoast staff and with other local artists, both artists achieved one of the key aims of the REAL ESTATE funding, and the point of the residencies which is to explore, investigate, and make visible to others the lived reality of people in these estates. This experience of isolation wasn't unique to Mark and Gill, and their position as artists in residence meant that they weren't insulated from it.

Although leading to interesting work and a lot of learning, in the end Mark didn't feel able to continue with the residency after the first six months, feeling that LeftCoast were not able to support him as he needed. There was a series of miscommunications which went alongside the challenges of lockdown, and these shouldn't be underplayed or written off as simply related to lockdown. This experience has seriously affected the views of Mark on working with commissioners in this way

**Working with Leftcoast has made me reconsider my model as an artist. I think it's unlikely I'd take up another residency like this. In a residency, you are at the mercy of the commissioning org for your housing, income, and work. If the org is poorly organized, this can lead to a tremendously stressful situation.**

Mark Borthwick, artist survey response

LeftCoast has done a lot of reflection and asked input from both evaluators and used the learning to initially commission a short-term residency from a LeftCoast member of staff who knew the area and the work – and the implications of the role fully, rather than embarking on recruiting another artist before there had been time to fully rethink what is needed to support artists in this way.



It is also worth noting that Gillian has not felt anything of this sort, and in fact felt very supported.

**I am listened to when I talk about what I experience as a socially engaged artist, advised and supported constantly with my ideas. What is most important to me, is a feeling of safety and support, that I can express myself knowing I am supported in an intelligent and calm way, and that together we can always find interesting ways forward, share our knowledge, be curious and research, and as a team hopefully bring positive change. My ideas have been discussed at all times with leftcoast and they have always helped to form and improve things. They are great at helping to hammer down details and thoughts that are unclear by contributing artistic knowledge and helping me to reflect on my own thought process. Also they have been very supportive in suggesting places to look for inspiration as a socially engaged artist, broadening the pool of knowledge. Importantly, their support gives me added confidence to work with my practice in the community.**

Gillian Wood, artist survey response

Some of this will relate to her having a different style of working – her approach is to try out ideas by doing and making, rather than thinking them through fully first. While neither style is intrinsically better than the other, it is notable that a 'do first' approach can be much more reassuring for funders or partners looking for activity to happen. This has been interesting learning for LeftCoast and will likewise affect the way they recruit and manage residency commissions in future.

### 5.3.2. Artists in Residence within the wider arts eco-system

Another interesting outcome of the residency which has developed towards the end of this first year of Phase 3 is the involvement of other locally based artists in the residencies, as peer reflectors and as project support. This has been done explicitly to add input and support with the move of the Creative Activist into the residency following Mark's departure, but has had some interesting results in terms of ideas and collaboration which mean that it will be followed up further. It is important that visiting artists are put into contact with artists based locally, producing benefits for both:

**Blackpool is fortunate to have LeftCoast as an art organization with local artists being introduced and enabled to develop their own practice and be inspired by visiting creative practitioners. ... Blackpool and community are sometimes portrayed through the eyes of visiting artists or organizations with no connection to the place. ... artists with experience of those specific places such as Blackpool that might lack opportunity feel empowered to tell their own stories ... especially in a place like Blackpool where culture is predominately tourism and created for visitors.**

Locally based artist, artist survey





## 6. Developing social capital

**LeftCoast has made a real difference to local communities through the use of arts as a catalyst for the development of a sense of confidence and self-worth, developing or rediscovering skills, and increasing social connections.**

We've grouped these together under the general title of social capital as, while acknowledging there are elements not covered here, sense of self-worth, connections to people and place are core foundation blocks to build social capital.<sup>42</sup> For LeftCoast, these outcomes build on six years of development in Phases 1 and 2 where LeftCoast made a lasting investment in specific communities in Blackpool and Fleetwood. This involved getting to know local residents and their needs, but also building relationships with other providers from beyond the arts sector. These partnerships have borne fruit in the REAL ESTATES programme which enables full-time long-term artist residencies in two estates.

In this way, developing social capital is both a desired outcome of CPP, but also a motivator for future funding and sustainability of the practice, and thus of the other CPP outcomes: greater arts engagement and sense of place through transforming partners' views of the value of art in achieving their own aims.

We find that:

- **Participants' sense of worth increased through being involved in LeftCoast's projects**, and this was magnified further during lockdown when they felt they were helping the community.
- **Learning new skills, or revaluing existing skills, positively contributed to people's sense of themselves** and how they could both be creative and useful.
- **Projects increased connections and a sense of being connected** both for local residents and for artists.
- **A sense of connection was particularly important during lockdown** with the potential for isolation and reductions in opportunities for socialising during work, but had been issue in the Estates prior to lockdown.
- **The Programme's work increased a sense of place**, and connection to place, among local residents linked to their agency to make a difference locally.

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<sup>42</sup> For discussion on the relationship between Social Capital and Creative People and Places programmes see Karen Smith's (2018) *Persistent Encounter* <https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/persistent-encounter>



## 6.1. Context of impact on social capital and wellbeing

All of the impact of LeftCoast's work with participants this year needs to be seen in the context of the global pandemic. It is well documented that the impacts of the lockdown affected wellbeing in a number of ways<sup>43</sup>. Feedback from LeftCoast's participants mentioned people being unable to meet up with friends and family, the pressure of COVID-19 itself (worry for health, loss of family and friends), and the effect on mental health.

However, pre-COVID LeftCoast's data shows there were already isolation issues for some people. In the two estates where the artist residencies take place:

- 42% of residents felt isolated, with 11% *often* feeling isolated.
- 15% of people chatted to neighbours less than once a month, 9% said they never did.<sup>44</sup>

The REAL ESTATES programme evaluation looks in more depth at the key aims of this work: reducing isolation, increasing social connections and improving agency among residents. Our work thus takes a much more cursory look at these areas.

## 6.2. Sense of self-worth

Participants' sense of worth increased through being involved in LeftCoast's projects, but this was magnified during lockdown where they felt they were helping the community. By taking part in projects such as Scrub Hub (see case study), people felt less helpless and more useful. In addition, people felt valued through sharing their work via LeftCoast's platform and exhibitions.

Also, artists confirmed that their self-worth had been affected by COVID, and that being involved with LeftCoast had helped:

**Really reaffirming to be approached to be a part of the project. Felt valued when otherwise low as the rug had been taken from under my feet due to cancellations throughout Covid.**

Scrub Hub (see case study below) gave participants a sense of worth and agency, from being able to 'contribute to the fight against COVID-19', a theme reflected in *Handle with Care*, the book created by the project.

**I was feeling frustrated about the government's response to the situation and I was looking for something to get involved in to take some positive action that might help people in a small way.**

Scrub Hub participant

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<sup>43</sup> For an overview, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wider-impacts-of-covid-19-on-health-monitoring-tool/wider-impacts-of-covid-19-on-health-summary> or <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-54616688>

<sup>44</sup> Data from LeftCoast's Happy-O-Meter survey



Learning new skills, or revaluing existing skills, can positively contribute to people's sense of themselves and how they could both be creative and useful. This has been drawn on by at several of the Artist in Residence projects which invite people to share their skills: storytelling in Mark Borthwick's 'Storyline'<sup>45</sup>, Sewing for the Scrub Hub, a whole range of skills developed or refound during lockdown for Gillian Wood's planned 'Inside Out' exhibition.

As well as providing a valuable service to the NHS, the Scrub Hub highlighted that locally many people had sewing skills, and these were often part of their personal histories. Being able to use these skills to make a positive contribution to fighting COVID-19 (through making scrubs) made participants feel more valued and more in control through helping.

In addition, the very act of sewing was itself a self-help mechanism, a way of accessing a flow state.

**The process of sewing, it sort of takes you out of yourself. Takes you away from every day. It's quite therapeutic... you're involved in what you're doing. You're not really thinking about anything else.**

Scrub Hub participant interviewed as part of the accompanying film



Figure 3: Screen grabs from the Scrub Hub film

<sup>45</sup> In response to the fact that many of his neighbours were shielding and didn't have access to new technologies, Mark developed an analogue way of communicating with them. He set up a telephone line in which they could ring and hear a different story every day. Participants were also invited to leave a story or a thought to share with their neighbours. This was a way of people who are isolated to hear their neighbours' voices. Some collective online story telling sessions were also delivered to help encourage conversation between people shielding who potentially had very little human interaction over lock down. For an example story listen to 'Mullah Meal' [online](#).



## Scrub Hub – Handle with Care

An artistic and community response to the pandemic

The Fylde Coast Scrub Hub<sup>46</sup> was set up in April 2020 by Gillian Wood, local Artist-in-Residence with LeftCoast in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim was to provide scrubs for local NHS workers working with those affected by COVID-19. It quickly gained support from local people keen to help others in their community.

**Within three days we had orders coming in from medics in hospitals GP surgeries, and we already had a sewing team established. In the end we made over 400 sets of scrubs and raised £4860, all of which was spent on fabric to make the scrubs and some money for petrol.**

Gillian Wood

21 volunteers spent 420 hours making scrubs, and the total value of their contributed hours was £3662.

Another local artist, Tina Dempsey, was commissioned to work alongside Scrub Hub to tell the stories of those who did the sewing and of the NHS recipients of the scrubs. She spoke to participants about what it meant to them, and found that conversation soon turned from the practicalities of the work to the wider issues.

**The project itself, the Scrub Hub, was massive to all of them... They had a purpose again, and they were helping other people. Nearly all of them said, 'we're helping other people, but in turn, that makes us feel good and it gives us something to focus on' so they weren't thinking about their own concerns about this lockdown.**

Tina Dempsey

Tina soon found that though sewing had been a huge part of some of the scrub makers lives this was a new way of using their skills for them.

**These are incredibly skilled people who'd made all sorts of different garments, but it was fascinating to hear how they navigated making scrubs, something they'd never made before.**

Tina Dempsey

For Tina and for the group, a new purpose began to develop beyond making scrubs.

**Throughout the conversations, we'd all said, 'Oh, God if we could just meet up! Just see the other people, talk, have a cup of tea!'**

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<sup>46</sup> A network of Scrub Hubs across the country (Scrubhub.org.uk) developed after lockdown began to provide equipment for their local NHS workers and some relief from lockdown for those who helped create them.



Tina Dempsey

This work was written up in the book *Handle with Care*.

**The book was a way of the meeting each other, a sort of remote meeting where they could get a sense of each other from reading their stories.**

Tina Dempsey

A film<sup>47</sup> was made by Gillian and the scrub makers about the Scrub Hub itself to accompany the book.

Those who received the scrubs found them invaluable. One recipient said that due to the fluctuations in supply 'many staff wanted to have certain items that were "personal" and thus guaranteed to be available'. However, stocks had run low, disappeared, or become hugely expensive – or led to possible scams.

**Hopefully, when all this is clear...we'll all meet up for dinner, and get to know everybody...It's been a little community and that's been very sound. I think we should be very proud of ourselves.**

Participant, Scrub Hub

Scrub Hub improved participants' wellbeing during lockdown:

- Connected them when they felt isolated and gave them someone to talk to.
- Allowed them to feel proud of their work and the impact they had locally.
- Gave them a purpose – helping others (NHS) at a time of national crisis.
- Created a sense of community where they could share stories.

## 6.3. Connections to people

Lockdown meant that seeing people and making connections became very important to everyone involved, artists and participants alike. For example, Scrub Hub became a reason for participants to talk on phone to one another and the Artists in Residence. Beyond simply giving people a positive reason to communicate, those conversations began to alter notions of what art is and artists are as they were fully informed on and part of the way the 'art' of the project developed. Participants hope to meet up after this lockdown has ended, and a survey participant mentioned meeting someone new through LeftCoast who they will see outside the project.

Figure 4: Pages from Tina Dempsey's *Handle with Care*, the Scrub Hub project book

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<sup>47</sup> See <https://leftcoast.org.uk/scrubhub/> for full details on Scrub Hub and a link to the film.





artists themselves and the events enabled the community to come together and interact. The Doorstep Halloween project saw lots of people come out and connect, reducing feelings of isolation.

Artists were valued as a conduit for connection and thus valued.

**Conversation flowed freely, between residents, Sarah, Claire and I [artists and evaluator]; what would be a one-to-one conversation quickly involved others. "we'll have to start a petition for you to stay, Sarah!" Carol [local resident] shouted in her direction.**

Doorstep Halloween observation

Participants comments also show that LeftCoast was helping generate a sense of connection that was lacking pre-COVID 19 as well.

**It's just nice to have something different. The kids don't come around here. They don't come knocking on the doors. It's great to be outside, together.**

Hawes Side resident, Doorstep Halloween observation

Though only one example, this effect is reported as typical of the Artist in Residence work in that it prompts further connections for example prompted by the conversations during the Doorstep Halloween event, one resident took a broom from his house and began sweeping his neighbours' access ramp. Another man emerged from his house with a Dr Seuss Cat-in-the-Hat inspired hat on, which said 'goblin', much to everyone's delight. Another resident appeared clutching her dog, both wearing purple fluffy coats.

Artists also felt that connection was valuable for them, and highlighted the shared experience of lockdown:

**Being able to talk to and connect with some really special people in a time when connection was very difficult.**

Artist Survey response

They feel empathy with residents – going through the same things – and were able to adapt

**It reduced my possibilities of social interaction initially, but taught me a valuable skill of adaptation... it was also a poignant realisation of how isolation feels, and has given me a greater empathy with residents who exist in isolation in the everyday.**

Artist in Residence, Survey response

Through working with LeftCoast, artists felt a stronger sense of community, and of being valued by the community:

**Community is something very important to me, and a sense of place. It is extremely fulfilling as an artist to be able to contribute and give back to society. LeftCoast have given me the opportunity to realise this and I feel a sense of being valued within the community.**

Artist survey



## 6.4. Connection to place

Generally, people living on the estates where LeftCoast's work is focused feel a sense of pride in place and connection to their locality. Before Covid-19, they reported being generally satisfied with their locality and having a good sense of belonging (both scored an average of 3.4 out of a maximum of 5)<sup>48</sup>.

When asked, participants in LeftCoast activities were positive about their local areas and said:

- There were people they could call on for help or to socialise with, although they didn't have much contact day to day with neighbours.
- They valued the sense of community, variety of amenities in the area and that it was peaceful.
- There was still a sense of more work to be done, however. One participant in a LeftCoast project said 'a newfound respect and appreciation for the area<sup>49</sup>' would be the thing that most improved it.
- Others said they would welcome more activities similar to the ones they had engaged in, with one adding 'have more funded activities and groups, as certain areas of Blackpool are overlooked just because they are not considered the worst<sup>50</sup>.'

LeftCoast projects have highlighted both people's pride in their area and a positive sense of place. In conversations sparked by Doorstep Halloween, participants discussed between themselves having lived on the Estate for a long time, and were keen to compare notes. The residents showed a depth of knowledge about Blackpool over the past few decades. Some knew about the town even if they didn't identify as being from there, though they may have lived there for a while.

Projects also introduced people to new areas in their locality as this comment from a Fleetwood resident demonstrates:

**I've been blown away by this little area during lockdown. We didn't know it existed 'til we took our daily walks and it has certainly helped our 'mental health'. It's a wonderful resource for Fleetwood residents.**

Comment about Our Big Green, LeftCoast project.<sup>51</sup>

Artists also experienced a new or returning connection to place, and many reported having built up networks of new people. Involving locally based artists in their work is part of LeftCoast's aim of supporting local talent to stay local and activities local artists were involved in had strengthened the likelihood that the artist could stay working locally. This allowed them to become further embedded in the local community and cultural scene.

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<sup>48</sup> A 'Happy-O-Meter' door to door survey carried out by LeftCoast which covered questions around people's feelings around isolation and 'sense of belonging' to the local area, and gained 121 responses. In these questions, 0 meant 'not at all' e.g. 'not at all' satisfied with the locality and 5 meant 'completely'.

<sup>49</sup> Happy-O-Meter survey respondent.

<sup>50</sup> Happy-O-Meter survey respondent.

<sup>51</sup> See <https://leftcoast.org.uk/our-big-green/> for details of this project carried out by Artist in Residence Ocean Farini, which highlighted a forgotten and unloved large green area near the Flakefleet estate



**Local artists are creating their own responses and work based on personal experiences of their home which feels very empowering.**

Artists Survey

Previous work of LeftCoast is beginning to show dividends in a pride in place leading to agency, for example the Mereside 'Mafia' community group, set up through LeftCoast's Phase 1 work, remain a strong voice for local people. During lockdown, Mereside Mafia was one of the leads in 'Corona Kindness community hubs', supported by Blackpool Coastal Housing. Maggie Cornall, Director of Operations at Blackpool Coastal Housing, says Mereside Mafia 'has really taken ownership of the estate and the community'.





# 7. Conclusions and recommendations

**At the start of Phase 3, seven years into its ten-year vision, LeftCoast continues to develop its effective approach to delivering a CPP programme, appropriate to the specific needs and opportunities of Blackpool and Wyre.**

Considering the three ACE National CPP Research Questions:

## **1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?**

LeftCoast has reached new audiences, and inspired them to engage further in the arts. Even during COVID-19 lockdown, the proportion of audiences coming from the poorest areas of Blackpool and Fleetwood, already some of the poorest towns in England remains high. Focus on in depth engagement for change, and the cancellation of some planned large events means audience numbers were lower this year, but participation figures remain high.

## **2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?**

LeftCoast continues its commitment to deliver excellent engagement in the highest quality art, further developing its socially engaged practice that also supports partnership building beyond the arts. This work builds on local learning and best practice from elsewhere. This aspiration and achievement lie at the heart of the success experienced by LeftCoast in all areas.

## **3. Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?**

Phase 3 sees a refinement of the model undertaken by LeftCoast, focusing down to two main areas of work:

- Commissioning and inspiring new ideas and approaches in socially engaged practice through its residencies and commissions
- Building partnerships to sharing this learning, and inspiring partners to deliver in this model thus multiplying the benefits of the programme well beyond the core funding.

This approach builds on work and approaches developed over the previous six years:

- In depth, high quality locally resonant and socially engaged work attracts participants and leads to longer term partnerships and deeper engagement with local residents.
- A human-centred approach: The team continue to be a big part of what makes the difference. This included the support the team gave, the knowledge they shared and their general loveliness.



- LeftCoast has excellent cross-sector partnerships of trust which have embedded belief in the value of high-quality arts to make change.
- LeftCoast's new approach to embedding action learning, explicitly bringing together learning from artists practice, as well as self-reflection with monitoring data and making time and space for reflection along with the experience of the team in working together proved particularly effective during COVID-19 allowing them to quickly adapt their working practices and be flexible around how they programmed through a challenging period.

## 7.1. Recommendations

These are what we recommend LeftCoast continues to do, or to bear in mind, as it moves forward:

- 1) **Being committed, personally, socially and politically works – carry on.**
- 2) **Local resonance is very important in attracting audiences to potentially more challenging work – keep using it.**
- 3) **Carry on with the in-depth engagement – it makes a real difference to participants and brings art experiences to others through family ties.**
- 4) **Continue to work in partnership to develop a strategic approach to developing the arts ecosystem of Blackpool and the Fylde Coast.**
- 5) **Continue the new more focused approach developing innovative socially engaged practice through residencies, commissions and making space for artists to interact – along with building partnerships to share learning and multiply impact.**
- 6) **Use the partnership approach to get the full value of past projects – enabling you to fully realise their legacy even several years on.**
- 7) **Build on your relationships with a national and local network of socially engaged artists to act as artistic 'critical friends' to the programme, ensuring it stays at the leading edge of practice to maximise value.**
- 8) **As lockdown ends and audience access increases, restart the thorough data collection approaches developed over Phase 2 to ensure that all outcomes are clearly monitored to evidence the wide range of activities and impacts.**
- 9) **Carry on with the new more reflective approaches and embedding of action learning.**





# 8. Appendices

## 8.1. Appendix 1: Methodology

### Approach

For this phase, the evaluation is led by Ruth Melville Research (RMR) taking over from MB Associates who carried out the evaluation for Phase 2. However, this does not really mark a disjuncture as the RMR team has the same lead researcher (Ruth Melville, Director, RMR) and many of the key staff of the MB Associates evaluation. For this reason, many of the methods and all the analysis has been able to be neatly transferred across under GDPR guidelines.

RMR makes use of an embedded form of evaluation which is carried out across the whole period of a programme. The approach includes team reflection and review and thus the evaluation impacts on how programmes are delivered as well as evaluated. This is a good fit with the action learning and socially-engaged approaches employed by LeftCoast in their own programme.

We cover the three Arts Council England Research Questions developed for all of the Creative People and Places (CPPs):

- 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?

In addition, we look at the impacts LeftCoast has had in terms of its core aims and explore the working model which it is beginning to develop.

Our data gathering routes have included regular conversations between the evaluation lead and Director at LeftCoast, formative feedback of statistics and initial analysis on key areas, interviews and discussions with stakeholders and sessions which allow both gathering of data and reflection on findings. This report brings together learning from reflective, quantitative and qualitative data gathering, with analysis on impacts of LeftCoast as they are emerging. Due to its interim nature, in many areas the findings are a work in progress, and further analysis and development of learning will be included in future years' reporting.

### Story of Change

This evaluation builds on an evolving Story of Change, developed initially in 2018 with the LeftCoast team and building on previous work within the Phase 2 business plan. This Story of Change was reviewed twice in 2020 in response to changes to programming brought about by the need to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Story of Change is a shared, logical plan (or review) of the difference an organisation wants to make and how. There are four sections:



- Why (vision and outcomes)
- What (activity)
- Who (people who matter) and,
- How (commitments, investments and resources).

The Story of Change is a working document in the sense that it is reviewed regularly to check that it is as it should be. The evaluation framework was developed from the Story of Change.

## Adapting to Covid-19

As noted in section 1.3, the first lockdown was five months into Year 1 of Phase 3, and early in terms of delivery. The amount of delivery was scaled back to reduce risks of physical contact between participants, artists and audiences, and events were largely moved online. The modes of operation and what the Programme did were altered, but without fundamentally altering who was worked with and why (the outcomes).

This led to some alterations in our evaluation methods, as below.

Area of evaluation	Programme changes due to COVID-19	Original evaluation measure	Adapted evaluation measure
Volunteers	No use of volunteers in the programme	Volunteer survey and focus groups	No need for volunteer survey and focus groups
Artists	Work moved online largely after April	Artist and commission numbers and outcomes Artist online survey, focus groups and interviews – see below on 'artist embedded research'.	Online survey and interviews went ahead. Online focus groups where appropriate.
Participants	Work moved online largely after April – however, some socially distanced delivery continued 'on the ground'.	Participant focus groups, participant surveys (online and face-to-face) and research using LeftCoast's community researchers.  Event numbers and demographics.  Postcode analysis	Participant focus groups were no longer possible. Online participant survey took place but with far reduced uptake from previous years.  Event numbers and demographics continued.  Postcode analysis continued
Audiences	As above but vast reduction in audience-based events.	Use of data from online and face to face surveys Event numbers and demographics	These did not take place.





		AudienceFinder questionnaires for large scale events	Event numbers and demographics continued. Largely discontinued
Partners		Interviews	Took place
Population	LeftCoast Happy-o-meter population surveys (door to door) no longer possible	Use of data from Happy-o-meter surveys at beginning of programme and at intervals	Initial data collection (pre lockdown) only, acting as baseline for later years.

## Artist embedded research

For the developmental approach taken by LeftCoast in the Artist in Residence strands, an approach was taken that draws on the fact that artists' practice is inherently reflective and self-challenging, lending itself particularly well to assessing the second ACE National Research Question around approaches to quality of art and quality of engagement. The approach taken was to support each artist to develop the Story of Change of their residency or commission, as discussed above, reflecting on who they felt it would affect, and what the difference they wanted to make was. Artists asked themselves what their key approaches and values were, and from that, developed the 'what' of the planned delivery. Finally, from this they asked themselves how they know all this is working – and develop evaluation measures, often journaling but at times quantitative outputs – for these.

This process began before lockdown so initial Stories of Change were developed. Following lockdown, we moved from a quarterly 'in person' discussion to a monthly zoom discussion of experience and outcomes which has been shared with University of Central Lancashire research team and has greatly shaped understanding and analysis for both evaluations, as well as providing space for action research and reflective learning for the artists themselves.

## Director and team reflection sessions

We ran team reflection sessions on a quarterly basis to gather data on outcomes and learning on what worked and why. This also was helpful for the ACE quarterly reporting and following discussion between evaluator and team we moved it to suit this timing. The sessions are very useful in terms of practice and rethinking this so form a crucial part of the action learning cycle.

In addition, regular catch ups are held with the Programme Manager and University of Central Lancashire evaluation team for REAL ESTATES to ensure link up of data collection and learning. And regular one to one challenge and reflect sessions between Ruth Melville and Tina Redford, LeftCoast director are held every 6-8 weeks as needed.



## Primary data collection record

Data was collected by the evaluation team through a range of methods listed below

Data collection method	Collected from	Base (number of respondents)
Participants survey – these were sent to Scrub Hub participants (where approximately 200 participants are active) and Artist Residencies participants either directly or via a Facebook link.	LeftCoast participants	3 responses
Happy-O-Meter survey	Local residents	121 responses
Artist Surveys Developed for artists who had worked with LeftCoast in any capacity.	Artists	18 responses
LeftCoast team reflection workshops	LeftCoast team	4 workshops
Artist in Residence embedded research	AiRs	Approximately 12 reflection sessions plus phone calls and discussions via email with 3 AiRs
Reflection workshops (Small Radical Acts)	Small Radical Acts artists	3 workshops with a total of 12 SRA artists
Stakeholder Interviews Interviews were carried out with key stakeholders in the process, adding depth and range to the stakeholder workshop mentioned above. These included input from both local authorities, the lead organisation, housing, commercial, culture, community and leisure sectors.	Key stakeholders	10 interviews
Analysis of artistic outputs and other secondary data		Including: 'Handle with care' film and 'Scrub Hub' film from Fleetwood Artist residency
We also carried out an observation at one event, along with many informal discussions and regular reflection and catch-up calls with the Director.		