

# Evaluation Report

## The Upside

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Summer 2022



RMR



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**Credits**

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*Design and illustrations from The Upside by Nick Steel and Cait McEniff.*

*Thanks to the LeftCoast Team, The Upside Team, and the many partners and readers who contributed to this report.*

# Introduction

This document is a case study and evaluation of *The Upside*, a project run in the first six months of 2021 by LeftCoast, the Creative People and Places project for Blackpool and Wyre.

The aim of the project was to address issues of social isolation in some Blackpool's communities. It produced *The Upside*, a beautiful limited-edition, accessible newspaper that was hand-delivered to residents. The newspaper was designed to be engaging and entertaining but offer real world, practical support to help readers reconnect with their communities.

This document was co-written by Alex O'Toole, the editor and project lead, and Ruth Melville, the evaluator. The purpose is to show the thinking behind this innovative project, look at the positive impacts and inspire others to create similar projects.

We explore the following areas:

- o **Context** sets out the background to the work.
- o **Concept** looks at the ideas and thinking informing the project.
- o **Partnerships** outlines how the partners were involved.
- o **Responses from readers** reports on how readers and local contributors responded to the paper.
- o **Outcomes for readers** reviews the outcomes for resident readers and contributors.
- o **Outcomes for partners** explores the experiences and outcomes of partnership working.
- o **Conclusions and learnings** outlines the key takeaways.

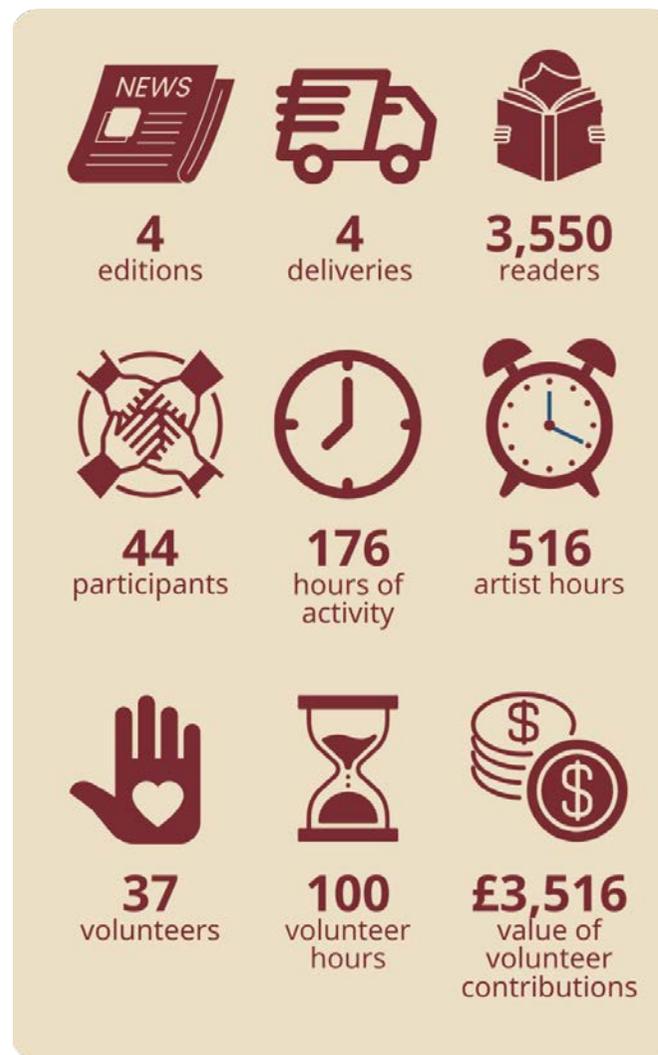


Figure 1: The Upside in numbers

# Summary

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**In Spring 2021, LeftCoast were invited to create a project that directly engaged with isolated, digitally excluded elderly people living in Blackpool, supporting them to transition out of lockdown.**

The project resulted in the production of a beautiful limited-edition, accessibly designed newspaper called *The Upside*. It was hand-delivered to residents by a group of volunteers across Blackpool in April, May and June 2021. Each step in the production and delivery was carefully planned to ensure what was produced had resonance with the readers.

LeftCoast worked with a range of community partners from across Blackpool to support the development of *The Upside*.

**Responses from readers** show the newspaper was extremely well received with very few negative comments. This positive feedback centred around design, authenticity, content and accessibility. Readers said they wished the newspaper was continuing.

**Outcomes for readers** were positive and led to reduced isolation and increased sense of community. This arose from a mix of the content and style of the newspaper itself, and the way it was delivered.

**Outcomes for partners** included the cementing of existing partnerships and the development of new ones – between LeftCoast and a range of local community groups, organisations and businesses.

## Conclusions and Learnings

The project made a real difference to people at a really challenging time. Reading *The Upside* brought them pleasure. It reduced people's sense of isolation and helped to (re)build a sense of community. For LeftCoast it has started to change how they work in the following ways:

### 1. Engagement

- The project extended their reach to older people and more with protected characteristics.
- It helped them to understand the impact of people's wellbeing on their willingness to engage in community activities.

### 2. Working with trusted associates

- The editorial team of associate artists were key in the success of the project – in planning and producing something of quality.

### 3. Artistic outcomes

- The artistic quality of *The Upside* was integral to the success of the project and the positive responses from readers.
- The importance of embedding accessibility into both the engagement process *and* the creative process.

### 4. Partners

- Partners came together to tackle local need with a shared purpose.
- It cultivated crucial partnerships that LeftCoast will continue to develop in the future.

# 1. Context

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To understand the background to *The Upside*, in this section we briefly explain LeftCoast and profile the communities they work with. Then we look at the impacts of Covid 19 on those communities and the social isolation and loneliness which the pandemic exacerbated.

## 1.1. About LeftCoast

LeftCoast is a project of arts and cultural activity in Blackpool and Wyre on the Fylde Coast. It is one of 39 Creative People and Places (CPP) programmes funded by Arts Council England.

The purpose of the LeftCoast programme is to understand how local people relate to their environment, to neighbourhoods and to each other by exploring collective skills, talents and ideas. In bringing people together, it aims to show how art can transform lives and places. The project commissions work that plays with pre-conceptions of the area.

The project operates within a challenging cultural ecology. Both Blackpool and Fleetwood (in Wyre) face significant socio-economic issues, with levels of deprivation amongst the highest in England. From the 1960s onwards, a continuing decline in both Blackpool and Fleetwood's fortunes has led to a negative perception of both places nationally. Local overemphasis on the visitor economy, coupled with national austerity and a reduction in funding opportunities for arts and culture, has resulted in a weak local arts sector. This has affected local confidence, impacted on opportunities and stymied the ability to retain and attract creative talent.



Despite these challenges, Blackpool and Wyre remain exciting places, with strong cultural identities and distinctive “place brands” that continue to resonate with residents and visitors alike.

## 1.2. The Covid challenge

During the pandemic, LeftCoast continued to work with communities in Blackpool and Wyre through their Real Estates programmes. Maintaining an embedded, but socially distanced, approach allowed LeftCoast to get to know these neighbourhoods and the residents in a different way. In some cases this was at a more intimate level than pre-pandemic.

LeftCoast identified that repeated national lockdowns, persistent social distancing measures and continued high risks to health resulted in a significant number of vulnerable Blackpool residents being housebound for over a year. This enforced, long-term social isolation had negatively impacted on residents’ overall physical, mental and emotional health.

## 1.3. Social isolation and loneliness

### 1.3.1. Definitions

Social Isolation and loneliness were serious social issues in many communities before the pandemic. Age UK’s work on social isolation and loneliness deeply informed LeftCoast thinking. *The Loneliness Briefing (2018)* provided useful definitions of both terms:

**“Loneliness is not the same as social isolation. People can be isolated (alone) yet not feel lonely. People can be surrounded by other people, yet still feel lonely. The distinction between these two concepts is often overlooked by policy makers and researchers, which makes it difficult to**

**understand what can help people reduce their feeling of loneliness.**

**Loneliness is a subjective feeling about the gap between a person’s desired levels of social contact and their actual level of social contact. It refers to the perceived quality of the person’s relationships. Loneliness is never desired and lessening these feelings can take a long time.**

**Social isolation is an objective measure of the number of contacts that people have. It is about the quantity and not quality of relationships. People may choose to have a small number of contacts.**

**When they feel socially isolated, this can be overcome relatively quickly by increasing the number of people they are in contact with.**

**Loneliness and social isolation are different but related concepts. Social isolation can lead to loneliness and loneliness can lead to social isolation. Both may also occur at the same time.**

**People can experience different levels of social isolation and loneliness over their lifetime, moving in and out of these states as their personal circumstances change.**

**Loneliness and social isolation also share many factors that are associated with increasing the likelihood of people**

**experiencing each, such as deteriorating health, and sensory and mobility impairments.”<sup>1</sup>**

Ultimately, this definition became the keystone of the creative concept for *The Upside*. In addition, the 2016 report *Hidden From View: Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness in Lancashire*, highlighted how:

**“Chronic social isolation can reduce life expectancy by an equivalent amount to smoking, with chronic loneliness increasingly recognised as having far reaching consequences for the health and wellbeing of both individuals and wider communities... [the] estimated to cost health and social services in the county at least £40 million annually and possible £100s of millions.”<sup>2</sup>**

The latter report reinforced LeftCoast’s own findings that loneliness was just one of many symptoms of social isolation that needed to be addressed in Blackpool.

### 1.3.2. Transitioning out of lockdown

During Covid, Blackpool Council’s strategy to support residents was primarily delivered digitally, with a digital device loan scheme for residents built into its strategy<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, this strategy was not suitable for everyone as some of Blackpool’s most socially isolated were also the town’s most digitally excluded, exacerbating instances of isolation to chronic levels.

For many people, the transition out of lockdown and the gradual lifting of restrictions brought a return to everyday life. But for some, particularly those who had been shielding because of their age, or

because of a medical condition that could make them vulnerable to Covid, the adjustment back to real life was not as straight forward, making the end of lockdown just as hard as the start was.

The initial invitation from Groundwork CLM (see Section 2) was an opportunity to create *The Upside* to support Blackpool’s most socially isolated residents to transition out of lockdown and reconnect with life outside their front door.

As LeftCoast explain on their website:

**“For many people, the transition out of lockdown and the gradual lifting of restrictions will bring the longed-for opportunities to see friends and family, to get back to the shops, to work, and to doing many of the things we liked to do before. But for some of us, particularly those who have been shielding because of their age, or because of a medical condition that could make them vulnerable to the Coronavirus, the adjustment back to real life might not be as straight forward. For some, the end of lockdown might be as hard as the start was.**

**We were keen to create something joyful that would provide gentle support to Blackpool’s most socially isolated and encourage fresh opportunities for real connection and meaningful interaction with others to help people, once again, feel part of the communities that they have been physically excluded from for much of the last year.”<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> AGE UK, *Loneliness and Isolation Understanding the difference and why it matters*, AGE UK Loneliness Research Briefing, February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Lancashire Public Health, *Hidden From View: Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness in Lancashire* (October 2016)

<sup>3</sup> Covid-19 | Support for residents (blackpool.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> <https://leftcoast.org.uk/covid19/the-upside/>

## 2. Concept

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In this section we explore the creative concept behind The Upside – how the approach taken by the Team created a tangible, relevant resource for residents that was as useful as it was beautiful.

### 2.1. Partnerships to address social isolation

In Spring 2021, LeftCoast were invited by Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside<sup>5</sup> to create a project that would directly and regularly engage with isolated, digitally excluded elderly people living in Blackpool, supporting them to transition out of lockdown.

Groundwork CLM aims to build more sustainable communities by helping people and organisations to create better neighbourhoods, develop their skills and job prospects, and to live and work in a greener way.

Their project in Blackpool, 'At The Grange', operates within a community centre on the Grange Park estate on the east side of Blackpool. They are highly networked to other community groups, organisations and support services across the town.

*The Upside* was one of several commissions they made as part of a wider strategy around social isolation and supporting Blackpool communities to ease out of lockdown.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/hubs/northwest/> - shortened to Groundwork CLM throughout this report



Groundwork CLM were the catalyst for the project, initially seeing it as something for The Grange but open to expanding it across Blackpool.

LeftCoast used match funding from Groundwork CLM to secure further funding from Arts Council England. This larger pot of funding ensured they could have real impact and extend the reach of the project amongst the target audience within the tight delivery timeframes set by funders.

**“At Highfield we concentrate on saying hello to people because I always remember I was told that if you live on your own you might not speak to anyone for that day, which is very true. We get a lot of people who really are lost, and they sit down and we start chatting and that’s it.”**

Enid Sharratt, *The Upside* reader and Highfield Park Community Gardeners, interview

## 2.2. The creative concept

LeftCoast were keen to create something joyful that would provide gentle support to Blackpool’s most socially isolated and encourage fresh opportunities for real connection and meaningful interaction with others. This would help people once again to feel part of the communities that they had been physically excluded from for much of 2020 and 2021.

Cognisant of the gaps created by Blackpool Council’s digital-first approach to Covid support for residents, LeftCoast were keen to adopt a more analogue route to reach the target audience. This would disrupt the isolation paradigm and encourage regular human connections within the constraints of social distancing measure in place at the time.

Ultimately, the decision to use an analogue approach was made possible by project partners, who collectively shared their knowledge with LeftCoast. As a result a target database of one thousand houses across Blackpool was created.

With a clear target audience and a clear idea of logistics, LeftCoast then commissioned Creative Director and Writer, **Alex O’Toole**, to lead the creative direction and production of the project.

Working in close collaboration with the team at LeftCoast, Alex developed the idea of a beautiful limited-edition, accessibly designed newspaper called *The Upside*. It was to be hand-delivered to residents by a group of volunteers (‘Upsiders’) via LeftCoast’s SOS Rescue Ship, a customised van designed as a spaceship. The deliver would be part of a series of neighbourhood ‘curtain-twitching’ events delivered across Blackpool in April, May and June 2021.

The newspaper concept was constructed around an organising principle connected to four spheres of social capital – personal, domestic, social and civic. It sought to take readers on an existential journey that would offer real world, practical support to help them move out of their socially isolated state and reconnect with their communities.

Conceptually, this was articulated in creative terms as taking people from a ‘winter state’ to a ‘spring state’. As a creative cue, this influenced every aspect of the newspaper production across the four issues – for example, language, layout and the creative evolution of the illustrations.

## 2.3. Editorial direction

Journalistically, the mechanism of finding and developing stories required real consideration. Editorially, content needed to do a number of things:

- Follow a consistent plan to help build trust and recognition amongst readers quickly.
- Tell similar stories in different and interesting ways for each distinct edition.
- Cover stories in each of the key partner areas of Blackpool.
- Tell stories that represented the diversity of people who are socially isolated in Blackpool.
- Connect both stories and readers to services which could support reader's wellbeing.

To achieve this, each edition of the newspaper was mapped on to an individual sphere:

- Edition 1: Personal Sphere
- Edition 2: Domestic Sphere
- Edition 3: The Social Sphere
- Edition 4: The Civic Sphere

Content was then planned across all four editions against a consistent editorial framework and curated around the theme of each edition to be a mix of inspirational, motivational and practical articles and signposting:

- **Mood Lifters:** Mood lifting news and stories from neighbours.
- **Life Shifters:** Life shifting support and advice from local partner organisations.

- **Curtain Twitchers:** Signposts to events, activities and opportunities to get involved in community life.

- **Time Twisters:** Time twisting creative challenges.

A set of editorial guidelines and principles were produced to develop a cohesive approach to language, style and tone of voice across submissions from multiple writers.

**“The project has gone really well for me personally. I've enjoyed making something tangible as much of my work is online. The management has been brilliant and has made my job really easy.”**

Nick Steel, designer, reflection log

## 2.4. Content

LeftCoast commissioned **Steve Fairclough** as Field Reporter to work with partners to identify and draw out stories from the community.

Stories included:

- An interview with local resident Elaine Smith about her commitment to volunteering.
- An article on Dave and Logan the dog's walks round Blackpool and how they have become a Facebook sensation during Covid.
- A feature on Blackpool Food Bank and its work during the lockdowns.

Once a list of stories had been established, Steve worked closely with editor, Alex O'Toole, to frame and develop them in line with the editorial framework and content plan. His role formed a vital link between LeftCoast, the community partners and residents

across Blackpool. Coming out of lockdown and working in-person made this process easier:

**“the team had a face-to-face meeting, and an in-person interview went really well. It was good to get to Blackpool and see the places there, actually see the people on the ground. It helped... Actually making a connection with the interviewee, being on their turf and allowing them to be at ease.**

Also how emotive some of the subjects are and how this comes across so much more in-person than over the phone. So, having to give a little time to the interviewee to compose themselves, or if they tell you something but then ask you not to include it in the article. Managing things like this in-person is so much better.”

Steve Fairclough, The Upside field reporter

## 2.5. Aesthetic and accessibility

From a design point, having a strong creative concept and clarity around the editorial plan enabled the creation of a visual blueprint. This tied all four issues together and supported the key narrative devices and narrative flow.

Designer, **Nick Steel**, created the newspaper aesthetic with a deliberately optimistic style and tone and considered the reader experience, including access needs, and colour psychology.

**“Nick was very responsive to needs of each issue and had a good respect for Cait's illustrations which he used to good effect within the layout. His creative input at the start of the project to layout ideas was great and helped to define the visual style of the newspaper.”**

Alex O'Toole, creative director and editor, reflection log

This was enhanced by a sequence of beautiful, original artworks from artist and illustrator, **Cait McEniff**, which provided a visual translation of the phased return to life beyond lockdown.

**“I have just finished the 4th issue cover; each of them work as a story. The symbol of plants/flowers was used throughout to represent hope. Winter to Spring, coming out of 'hibernation', isolation to social integration. So for issue 1 (The Personal Sphere), the 'seeds of hope' were planted. Each of the characters had a small plant growing on their head, representing individual stories and journeys.**

For issue two (The Domestic Sphere) the plants were again larger, this time growing out of household objects, representing the joy and comfort in daily ritual activities, e.g. cups of tea, cooking, books, pets. There's a window with the curtains open, hopeful. In the window is a view of Blackpool, to position the piece as something relatable and recognisable for the readers.”

Cait McEniff, artist and illustrator, reflection log

**“Working with Cait as a young emerging artist was a nice part of the project – providing creative cues, helping her to refine her ideas and creative decisions and then seeing how she responded through illustration.”**

Alex O'Toole, creative director and editor, reflection log

Pictures by local photographer, **Claire Griffiths**, captured residents in their homes and gardens, with careful social distancing measures in place in each issue.

Accessibility was an issue as many of the intended readers were likely to be visually impaired and may have lost some dexterity due to age or being cooped up inside their homes throughout lockdown. The Team made sure that every aspect of the newspaper – from the format, colourways, font choices to the method of distribution and access – were made as accessible as possible.

**“One noticeable difference is the text size. I had researched the standard font size from national newspapers and incorporated that into our layout. We later decided to increase the size by several points... having seen the paper in print it is clear that this was the correct decision.”**

Nick Steel, designer, reflection log

## 2.6. Distribution and delivery

The Upside was delivered across Grange Park, South Shore, Bispham, Revoe, Claremont, Hawes Side and Mereside estates (755 copies per issue), and also via Blackpool Football Club, At Home Library and Inllu (95 copies per issue). All seven estates are in areas of high deprivation even for Blackpool – which is one of the most deprived districts in England<sup>6</sup> and “faces major health challenges”<sup>7</sup> – on 24 of 32 health indicators it is worse than the national average<sup>8</sup>.

A great deal of thought was put into how *The Upside* was to be delivered to each community. It needed to align with LeftCoast’s ethos and embedded approach to social practice.

Careful consideration was given to the specific needs of each community and the landscape of each area. How could the delivery

process become a ‘curtain twitching’ event in itself, reinforcing the project’s wider objective of coaxing Blackpool’s most socially isolated out of their homes and into more interactions with their neighbourhood?

From the outset, LeftCoast favoured a hand-delivered approach utilising LeftCoast volunteers. This would allow them to create iterative, individual and meaningful ‘doorstep’ or ‘garden-gate’ moments with each target resident. These could be built upon with the delivery of each issue.

Two larger and more difficult to engage areas of Blackpool – Revoe, a highly built-up area in the town centre, and Grange Park, one of the biggest housing estates in the county – needed special consideration. To get curtains twitching, LeftCoast employed their SOS Rescue Ship<sup>9</sup>, a customised van designed as a spaceship, for the delivery of the first edition.

The sight and sound of the colourful van coming down the road created a spectacle that helped to spark the interest of residents and to signal that ‘something was happening’ on their street. It was a successful strategy. Residents came out of their houses to ask what was going on, before engaging in conversation with volunteers from LeftCoast and partner organisations. Signage on the van ensured that social distancing was maintained.

The people chosen to receive the newspaper were those identified by local groups as the most likely to be isolated – older, living alone or vulnerable in other ways. Groundwork CLM provided targeted addresses of people they felt were most vulnerable to isolation in lockdown. This enabled LeftCoast to ask partners working in Revoe, Mereside and Claremont for lists of similar people.

<sup>6</sup> Public Health England, Blackpool: Local Authority Health Profile 2018

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Blackpool-Profile/Life-Expectancy.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/health-profiles/2019/Eo6000009.html?area-name=Blackpool>

<sup>9</sup> <https://leftcoast.org.uk/save-our-stories/>

This core distribution strategy was supported by the efforts of individual partners and local councillors. They helped to distribute each issue through their regular engagement activities and their respective community settings, as well as through LeftCoast's wider work in Haweside.

 Mood Lifters

## GOING ANYWHERE NICE FOR YOUR HOLIDAYS?

CONVERSATION PRACTISE FOR  
THE UNDER-REHEARSED

By Ruth Cockburn



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I went to the hairdressers for the first time in a year this week. It wasn't as easy as I expected. It took me three coffees, a little cry and a damn good talking-to before I had the courage to go out the door.

I checked my handbag numerous times, singing...

Keys, wallet, tissues, face mask and phone

...to the tune of 'Favourite Things' from The Sound of Music, (and I know you've just tried to sing that — you're welcome!)

### 3. Partnerships

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In this section, we look at how *The Upside* was produced as a partnership project involving a range of local community organisations in all aspects of the project.

LeftCoast worked with a range of community organisation partners from across Blackpool to support the development of *The Upside*, providing an opportunity to extend existing and relationships and develop new networks.

Sixteen partners helped deliver a total of 850 copies of the first edition in seven major areas of Blackpool, including South Shore, Clarendon, Mereside, Bispham, Hawes Side, Grange Park and Revoe.

Many of these organisations had been known to LeftCoast previously, but they had never worked together. They included, commissioning partner, Groundwork CLM via The Grange at Grange Park, as well as The Hub at South Shore, Freedom Church in Mereside and Revoelution, Blackpool's Big Local Project. LeftCoast's host organisation, Blackpool Coastal Housing, was also involved as a key partner.

As the project developed, additional partners were brought on board to support content development and distribution. These included Blackpool Football Club Community Trust, The Green Doctor Service, Blackpool Libraries, Blackpool Public Health and Blackpool Foodbank.

Partners engaged in five different ways which we discuss below.



### 3.1. Content development

At the outset, each partner worked with the editorial team to develop ideas for stories about their community. The stories were connected to their work and the support they offered to people in their area of Blackpool – and were also tied into the organising theme of each issue.

The editorial team then curated these stories across the four issues to ensure an equal representation of each partner area of Blackpool, and to ensure that the content for each themed issue had equal weight within the agreed editorial framework.

**"we were given a large amount of autonomy by LeftCoast management to deliver this project... This enabled us to develop good collaborative relationships with community partners rather than relationships that could quite easily have been transactional."**

Alex O'Toole, creative director and editor, reflection log

### 3.2. Connecting contributors and readers

When the content plan for each issue was confirmed, partners connected the editorial team to relevant community members so that they could make contact directly and arrange interviews and photographic shoots accordingly. This process was reliant on local social networks and intrinsic community knowledge.

Through this word-of-mouth approach, both the partners and the editorial team made important connections with people who were living at arms-length from the local community and had not previously connected into local community offerings.

### 3.3. In-person interviews

In a small number of instances, a combination of Covid restrictions and a resident's lack of internet access prevented the editorial team from contacting them in-person.

On these occasions, the editorial team provided at-a-distance support to enable the partner organisation to obtain community interviews themselves so that they could capture the information needed for the article. This support included providing questionnaires, training them in interview techniques and advising on how to make and send digital recordings.

**"[We] were flexible with when and how long we spoke to residents on the phone. Many of them were lonely so a 10-15 minute interview would stretch to 30-45 mins – all part of the engagement process and building relationships. We took care to represent interviewees as they wanted to be represented."**

Alex O'Toole, creative director and editor, reflection log

### 3.4. Distribution

All partners supported the distribution of *The Upside*. They used it as an opportunity to develop and deepen connections with their communities.

This was achieved by integrating *The Upside* into their ongoing doorstep work to support vulnerable residents and by making copies available to visitors and users of their respective venues and wider engagement programme activities. The Hub at South Shore even included *The Upside* in a special Easter support package that they hand delivered to their most socially isolated residents.

### 3.5. Extending reach and readership

Partners helped to extend the reach and readership of *The Upside* into their communities by leveraging their existing mechanisms for engagement.

These activities included:

- In-person activity within their respective community settings
- Doorstep outreach
- Using their social media channels and newsletters to highlight opportunities to get involved, get a copy of *The Upside* and where to view it online.



## 4. Responses from readers

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In this section, we look at the readers responses to, and their experience, of *The Upside*.

Generally, the newspaper was extremely well received with very few negative comments. The level of careful thinking, design and editing that went into *The Upside* clearly paid off.

The feedback fell into four broad areas:

- o The design worked for the audience
- o It felt authentic and worthy of trust
- o It had the right content in it
- o It was accessible to read.

It should be noted that readers giving feedback said they wished the newspaper was continuing.

### 4.1. The design worked

The look of the newspaper received a positive reception. In particular, the illustrations had been very carefully thought through. This shows the value of the editorial decisions as well as the quality of the illustrator.

Nearly everyone gave a comment about the illustrations,

**“Comfortable illustration, it’s nice to look at.”**

**“The illustrations are modern, suits the type of editorial.”**

The Upside readers



A few people even said they had kept the illustrations for their walls:

**“The pics didn’t go in the bin!”**

The Upside reader, survey comment

And the design:

**“It’s not complicated, not too much on the page.”**

**“I like the use of colour.”**

**“The photos are a good size, they draw you in.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

Readers also liked the size and feel of the newspaper itself – particularly that it was a broadsheet. For some this brought back good memories. People enjoyed receiving a ‘real’ newspaper rather than accessing something online. When the local newspaper was mentioned, The Upside compared favourably.

**“It’s a good size, I like it, it looks nothing like the Gazette.”**

**“All good – the print size and paper size.”**

**“I get the Gazette online but its nicer to get a real paper.”**

**“It’s the size of the old Gazette. Makes me feel nostalgic.”**

**“It’s broadsheet which brings back memories.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

## 4.2. It felt authentic

It was interesting how much it was welcomed as being different from “the usual junk mail” people regularly received:

**“Refreshing not to see ads.”**

**“It’s not a scam.”**

**“Free and there’s no strings attached!”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

Also that it was positive and not making political points:

**“It’s not political, just a good read.”**

**“I don’t read the Gazette, its doom and gloom – this is more like a mag to flick through.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

## 4.3. The right content choices

The stories themselves were welcomed, and people really felt like the newspaper was “written by someone who knows you”.

In addition people liked:

- o Reading about what local people were doing during the lockdown, and how their own community was affected
- o Seeing content relevant to their own area so they could keep up to date with what was happening locally.

**“It’s local people in lockdown with something to say.”**

The Upside readers, survey comment

One aspect of the stories that attracted readers was that 'people like them' were featured – often people they knew personally. Plus they found what people were doing inspiring.

For example, Angie Buss, who was both a reader of the newspaper but also Chairman of the New Revoe Residents' Association and the Revoelution Partnership, liked that the articles were specific to a person, but also that "a lot of people could empathise with it". Angie said her favourite bit was reading about Elaine walking a little bit more each day.

**"I thought that was brilliant. She's an elderly lady, and it was brilliant. It just come through, the old Bulldog spirit, like the wartime! That was one of my favourite stories."**

Angie Buss, The Upside reader and Chairman of the New Revoe Residents' Association and the Revoelution Partnership, interview

Readers also liked the different types of content and that information about local services was included. Some were quite selective in the parts they read but others read the whole newspaper.

**"Didn't read the stories – I liked the football articles."**

**"I have done all the puzzles, I am going to be the Brain of Britain by the end of lockdown!"**

**"People like information about services."**

**"Information about the library was good."**

The Upside readers, survey comments

#### **4.4. It was accessible**

Several people mentioned their eyesight and that the text size and layout meant the newspaper was accessible to them. Overall the newspaper felt 'inclusive, inviting':

**"It's lovely and clear – I can read it even without my glasses on."**

**"My eyes aren't too good but I can read bits."**

**"It's colourful & you don't need your glasses."**

The Upside readers, survey comments

However, a couple of people found the paper a little difficult to handle, with one saying that the only "downside to Upside" was that it was too big and a bit hard to hold.

## 5. Outcomes for readers

This section sets out the outcomes for *The Upside's* readers and contributors.

People's positive experiences can be grouped into three main areas:

- o Increased their number of weekly contacts
- o A greater sense of being part of a community
- o Encouragement to try new things and take steps to re-enter society post lockdown.

Amongst the readers, these experiences led to reduced isolation and an increased sense of community. This arose from a mix of the content and style of the newspaper itself, and the way it was delivered.

### 5.1. Increased number of weekly contacts

As explained above, the focus for *The Upside* was to reduce isolation – as an achievable step towards reducing loneliness. This is defined through the number of social contacts people have in a day, rather than how they feel, although these are clearly linked.

**“I have felt let down a lot in the past year. I suffer from depression and I find it hard to meet people. I have missed interacting.”**

The Upside reader, feedback to team

*The Upside* was definitely successful in this – both in terms of explicitly giving moments of contact through the team knocking on

## Time Twisters

### ACTIVITIES WORD SEARCH

X V F W Y F B J F U A T G W S R I  
S U T O O Q K A A E A N L J G C L  
M T L A E N B W R Z I B S Y N M F  
N Z F D Q G W U H D I F W T I E W  
I N J A T B S A I M H Q I Y T E R  
O S W X R I T R L A W W M P A T M  
R F E M E C E C I K V S M T K I O  
K S Y L E L D P B J I X I L S N L  
J Q Y I C V W N R U F N N C R G Z  
C C R Y X M L E A E X V G M E F Z  
C E C Y O O A G R S G J K E L R H  
V I F P C T N Z Y O T X D W L I A  
B K H W K I B E V N T R R J O E G  
Y E P W C X A C I K L T A W R N T  
C Z I N D A Z W S L A M N M G D M  
V G A N R D B Q I K M X K Q Z S W  
G D P I F R X V T M E R M F G A H

arts and crafts  
meeting friends  
library visit  
swimming  
bicycle riding  
rollerskating  
walking  
dancing  
leisure

### HOW IT STARTED...



Where was this in Blackpool? Can you guess, or do you remember?  
This indoor swimming pool and remedial baths, café and dance hall was built in the 1930s and demolished in 2006.  
Do you know what stands there now?

Image reproduced with kind permission from Blackpool Heritage.

### SPOT THE BALL



Blackpool's greatest ever game?  
FA Cup Final, Wembley Stadium  
Blackpool/Bolton Wanderer's Game  
Perry scores the fourth goal for Blackpool.

Image: Coloursport/Rex/Shutterstock

doors as they delivered the newspaper, and also from the sense of 'contact' which arose from reading the newspaper itself:

**"It gave me a bit of a lift, because I'm not the only one in the situation. When you're housebound, you're isolated to a degree and it's a terrible thing. You need people! Because of Covid, we haven't got the human touch. It's getting better but the isolation was very bad at the beginning wasn't it! A human touch and a human voice were so important – because we're humans, we feel like we're suffocating without that."**

Jean Scott, The Upside contributor and reader, interview

What's more, those who were a little more confident felt it would be particularly useful for their neighbours who were more isolated than them.

**"Can I have a newspaper for my friend? She doesn't get out at all."**

The Upside reader, feedback to team

It was particularly appreciated that the newspaper was hand delivered:

**"People have not been able to get out, and you brought information to the doorstep. I'm a widow, I'm normally out but not now because of Covid."**

The Upside reader, feedback to team

In several cases, the doorstep contact enabled the Team to check on houses nearby that neighbours were worried about but hadn't felt able to visit themselves as they were isolating.

**"I worry about other neighbours. Go and knock on that dirty looking door, down there, it looks burnt. I often wonder if**

**anyone is looking after him. I'd come to a coffee morning or some bingo. I used to have a friend to go out with but you do begin to feel lonely when you can't. I think this is a friendly neighbourhood."**

The Upside reader, feedback to team

What is particularly important is that the 'contacts' were done thoughtfully and appropriately. Care was taken to ensure people felt safe as the newspaper was brought to the door. In addition, the style of writing was considered, so that people didn't feel stigmatised or typecast for being alone. The interviews with people featured in the newspaper were carried out extremely sensitively and carefully so people felt that contact was appropriate and safe.

For example, Brett Kensett, who was asked about his experience of the local befriending service, found the interview process very easy. He was impressed with Steve's interviewing style – it was "very friendly" and the process was "neat and tidy".

Enid Sharratt was originally somewhat nervous about the process of being interviewed, fearing that what is said in interview can sometimes be presented differently in print. However she was "very pleasantly surprised" by the final article. She appreciated what she had said "wasn't distorted" and that the interviewer and the process had been good.

## 5.2. A greater sense of community

A sense of being closer to others and knowing more about what is going on in the area was an outcome that most readers mentioned in feedback.

Elaine Smith was interviewed for an article in the 'Portrait of a Neighbour' feature in the first edition of *The Upside*. She said that

lots of people rang her and said they had seen it. She thought the article alone “made them smile” as they knew her. Readers said that seeing local people they knew in the newspaper was something they really enjoyed.

The main thing readers talked about was the effect it had had on them, and that they thought it had on other people like them.

Of a group of eleven people who gave feedback via the Team, all but one agreed that it made them feel that if they wanted company, or to socialise, there were people or services in the community they could call on – helping to reduce their feelings of isolation.

All but two agreed that that initiatives like The Upside helped them feel both a stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhood and that if they needed help there were people who would be there for them.

In particular, people appreciated the fact *The Upside* featured people they recognised or knew were local to them:

**“Been nice to see neighbours in it.”**

**“Interesting because they live here.”**

**“Brings people closer together – it’s how it is, neighbours have come together in lockdown. It reminds me of that.”**

**“We know Enid, it was nice to see her in the paper.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

They also appreciated finding out about what was on locally:

**“I don’t get a paper, so this informs me about what is going on locally.”**

**“Lets you know what’s happening.”**

**“It’s interesting as no-one comes to inform you of anything and this has.”**

**“Nice to be told what’s going on.”**

**“It’s brilliant - it helps me know what’s happening in the local area and receiving it is enjoyable.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

The content itself was helpful in starting or continuing conversations:

**“It gives you a topic of conversation, like today.”**

**“You pick up bits and pieces to talk about.”**

**“It’s given me and my wife something to else to chat about!”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

It was clear there was a strong sense of community generated:

**“Nice to read positive things so close to home.”**

**“Takes me back to community times!”**

**“The community has on paper what they do.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

A lot of this arose from the style and content of the newspaper itself:

**“It feels like it is written by someone that knows you.”**

**“I call it the Uplift!”**

**“It broadens your horizons - it’s not political, just a good read.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

People often welcomed the chance to chat to the people delivering the newspaper on the doorstep. One said of Tina from LeftCoast:

**“She’s become a friend even though she’s only been three times!”**

Jean Scott, reader and contributor, interview

### 5.3. Encouragement to try new things and re-enter society post lockdown

Five people said it had given them the confidence to try new things as a result of reading about them in the newspaper. Three said they had new ideas of things to try in the future. These show that *The Upside* gave people hope and a vision of what might happen once lockdown finished.

One said they had newly become a volunteer and gone along to the focus group to feed back about the newspaper. Another had taken up a new interest.

**“This is inspiring, you can start anything, don’t give up just keep on. They dare do it, so I dare do it!”**

The Upside reader, survey comment

Emma Jackson of Revoelution said that several people at a focus group, collecting feedback around the newspaper, came forward and said they wanted to be involved in things “after we’re all let out properly again”. A couple of people said, “it had saved their life”. These were younger people speaking to the community involvement team. They said they felt this because they knew that somebody cared, and that was through both the community engagement team and the newspaper.

**“As well as a few big inspiration moments, lots of people had done something in the paper, including trying something new – sometimes in a small way.”**

**“Wordsearch is good - my son bought me a puzzle book from me doing it.”**

**“Yes, you can see what’s going on and it’s a way to stop boredom.”**

The Upside readers, survey comments

People who felt confident enough to come along to speak, also felt that the newspaper would inspire other people, and in particular those feeling isolated or more isolated than them. Others had contributed poems and ideas.

**“It would cheer them up a bit. Sometimes I read it twice”**

The Upside reader, survey comments

## 6. Outcomes for partners

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In this section, we explore the experiences and outcomes of the partnership working and the impacts that had.

Working on *The Upside* cemented existing partnerships and developed new ones between LeftCoast and a range of local community groups, organisations and businesses.

The partners valued the way it supported them to reach people they wished to support through lockdown in a new and creative way.

They valued the design and care which had gone into the newspaper itself, and the way it was developed and distributed. They appreciated LeftCoast's approach and most are working with LeftCoast in the future – some directly as a result of the project. All the partners felt they'd learnt from the project and there were elements they would use in other projects when needed.

### 6.1. Reaching target communities

Partners were already interested in reaching out to the community and felt that *The Upside* was something engaging, different and locally focused that could help them do that.

For example, Debbie Kerr of Blackpool Coastal Housing was involved in planning the distribution by taking LeftCoast staff around the estates. She is often 'on the ground' and this helped reach potential readers in sheltered accommodation.



Cath Powell of Groundwork CLM was looking for partners to help target older people, thinking “How can we reach out to the older ones who aren’t on digital?” *The Upside* as an ‘analogue object’ fitted perfectly.

Reverend Linda Tomkinson of Freedom Church was contacted to help guide distribution. She was concerned about people being anxious about coming out of lockdown, especially those who might not be able to engage with social media. She provided volunteers who could help with delivery and took copies to give out at the community centre.

**“I was actually quite pleased [to be contacted] – initially when I was approached, I thought ‘Is this something that’s going to take up a huge amount of my time?’ but actually it wasn’t in the end, it was a nice project to be involved with – I think it was of benefit to our community and I think they did a grand job of it.”**

Reverend Linda Tomkinson, Freedom Church, interview

## 6.2. Extending partner reach

In speaking to contributors, The Upside Team were able to extend partners’ reach into their target communities.

In many instances, Steve was the only person participant contributors spoke to in a day and this responsibility was keenly felt by the editorial team. Though communicating at a distance, Steve’s phone calls and emails with residents created real connections. He was in a unique position to identify personal interests, histories and needs that could be met, supported or developed by one or more of The Upside partners.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Cath Powell, Groundwork CLM

Keen to ensure a joined-up experience for residents, and to build on the partnerships that had developed through the project, both Alex and Steve made referrals to partner organisations to make direct contact with specific residents and extend an offer of support or connection. This was a positive development that further supported both the aims of The Upside project and those of the project partners.

## 6.3. Communicating and informing

Partners commented that getting coverage in *The Upside* was positive as it let them communicate with new audiences.

**“It was good, we appreciated it happening because it’s probably a different audience that we could reach through our own social media stuff.”**

Dave Marsland, Social Inclusion Officer, Blackpool FC  
Community Trust, interview

Readers such as Enid Sharratt also found it useful to read about where organisations “got their bits of funding from” and their volunteers. For Enid, this related to the Highfield Park Community Gardeners Group, where she sits on the Board.

## 6.4. “A lovely keepsake”

All the partners were positive about *The Upside’s* design, saying it was a lovely newspaper that engaged people and “made you want to pick it up”<sup>10</sup>.

Partners said readers were positive about the newspaper generally and found it exciting when local people were featured because it made them feel important and heard.

It was appreciated that it was more like a local magazine than a newspaper, reflecting local people and communities. Others commented on the production quality, and that as it didn't resemble junk mail it was more likely to be valued.

**“It was just what we expected and more. It was a lovely keepsake; it went down really well with people in the area, and they were looking forward to the next edition and the next edition.”**

Cath Powell, Groundwork CLM, interview

## 6.5. LeftCoast delivers

Partners felt that LeftCoast were “proactive, positive and hands on, and delivered all that was promised”<sup>11</sup>. This included senior staff, and their active involvement in the project made LeftCoast an organisation partners would want to work with again.

Overall, LeftCoast were seen as easy-going but professional and grounded with good communication.<sup>12</sup> Brian Coope from South Shore Community Partnership liked the fact that LeftCoast came and spoke to users to get their input, and small touches such as covering the cost of lunch for attendees at the focus group were appreciated.

Timescales slipped a little inevitably, but it wasn't seen as a problem. Partners would work with LeftCoast again, and some said they would now like to develop the partnership further to help support their users.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Cath Powell, Groundwork CLM

Both partners and community contributors, who had often worked with LeftCoast in other projects, expressed their support through *The Upside* feedback.

**“I have to thank Tina and her team because she is very hands on, which I think is really, really important. She's so hands on and she's a doer. Often you get people who talk about things, but they don't follow up whereas she does. So I'd just like to say that!”**

Angie Buss, The Upside reader and Chairman of the New Revoe Residents' Association and the Revoelution Partnership, interview

**“LeftCoast do an absolutely fantastic job in Blackpool with all sorts of things, so I'll always do anything I can to help them. Tina does a magnificent job. When LeftCoast first started, I was Chairman of the Civic Trust at the time and I thought 'Now what have we got now?' – because we have all sorts of things starting up in Blackpool and then they don't do anything, but I hold my hands up, this has been one of the good ones.”**

Elaine Smith, contributor and The Upside reader

## 6.6. Learning from the collaboration

Partners had new learning as a result of the collaboration. For example:

- o Revoelution found that when they held the focus group relating to *The Upside*, many people wanted to come and join in. This made them aware that people were actually ready to come out even during the uncertainties of lockdown and get involved.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Debbie Kerr, BCH

- Reverend Linda Tomkinson felt the project helped their thinking around the age demographic on the Mereside estate. A community centre was being developed and tablet devices bought to help people get to grips with the technology.

**“We are doing more to help people learn to engage with social media and digital because it’s raised awareness amongst us of people who do not have access to the internet and social media, for them it’s a whole new world.”**

Reverend Linda Tomkinson, Freedom Church, interview

### 6.6.1. Developing the project

Suggestions made for developing *The Upside* in the future included:

- **The newspaper should continue:** Both partners and readers wished *The Upside* would carry on. Local artist Ruth Cockburn commented on the value of continuing as social isolation affects people beyond lockdown, especially the older generation.
- **A smaller, post-lockdown follow-up edition should be produced.** People suggested the creation of a ‘reflection edition’, similar to a memory box, and looking back over past issues. This would consider the challenges of Covid and bring people together again.
- **Share the concept:** Partners were interested to do something similar in the future, with one organisation saying they may use the ‘newspaper toolkit’ - produced as part of the project – in the future.



## 7. Conclusions and learning

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There are a number of conclusions we can draw from *The Upside* and how it has started to change the way in which LeftCoast works.

The project was a very welcome initiative for the socially isolated across Blackpool's communities and made a real difference to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of people at a very challenging time. It reduced people's sense of isolation and helped them to (re-)connect with their community.

It also cultivated crucial partnerships that LeftCoast will continue to develop in the future. There's real potential for the concept of the project to be picked up and used again – and a toolkit is being developed.

The learning – particularly around style, partnerships and engagement approaches – is now embedded into LeftCoast's plans for Phase 4 which run until 2025.

### 7.1. Engagement

**Not just Facebook Families:** LeftCoast has traditionally worked with the Facebook Families demographic. *The Upside*, amongst other projects developed in this phase, has extended their reach to older people and more people with protected characteristics.

This is true to the extent that LeftCoast now have an impressive reach of 50% into the 'Supported Communities' audience segment for 2020-21, which is traditionally extremely hard to engage in arts activities.



**Cognitive load as a barrier to engagement:** Valuable learning and intelligence has come from meeting and working with people on their doorsteps. It has helped LeftCoast to understand the impact of people's mental, physical and emotional health on their willingness and ability to engage in community activities and events, including art and culture.

**The importance of immediacy:** *The Upside* reinforced learning from LeftCoast's Real Estate programme about working with communities at a more intimate level in order to build relationships and trust. Furthermore it prompted them to think about the need to communicate differently with older people and people who are digitally excluded. This will influence future programming with more focus on LeftCoast creating amazing art on the doorstep.

## 7.2. Working with trusted associates

**Transferrable practice:** The editorial team of associate artists played a key role in the success of the project and the development of new partnerships. It has given LeftCoast confidence to repeat the experience for future projects and each of the associate artists continues to work with LeftCoast on an individual basis.

**“Being able to transfer our practice through associates with whom we had a mutual trust and relationship that had been built up over time and who understood what LeftCoast does, was a really important part of this project. We would do this again with the right associate team in place.”**

Tina Redford, Director, LeftCoast

## 7.3. Artistic outcomes

**Work that looks good and does good:** LeftCoast maintained their commitment to creating work with a dual purpose on *The Upside*

project. Due consideration was given by the core team in the selection of associate artists to ensure that *The Upside* held its own as a beautiful artwork and as a community resource. The artistic quality was an important element of the project. It was integral in encouraging residents to read and keep each issue, and to creating agency amongst them.

**Embedding accessibility:** One of the key learnings from *The Upside* was the importance of embedding accessibility into both the engagement process and the creative process. LeftCoast were constantly improving the accessibility in response to growing knowledge of audience.

## 7.4. Partners

**Shared purpose:** LeftCoast's approach to creating a project for lonely and socially isolated people in Blackpool during Covid lockdowns was conceived out of local need and shared purpose. It enabled relationships with partners to develop in a way that they had not done so before. It demonstrated an approach to co-working in the same space in challenging contexts, cementing LeftCoast's position as a reliable key instigator and lead for quality cross-sector partnership working in Blackpool.

**Sustainability:** One of the key legacies that has come from *The Upside* has been the continuation of key partner relationships beyond the project.

Both Revoelution and Groundwork CLM are now written into LeftCoast's four-year business plan. Further co-working opportunities have been created with The Hub at South Shore, The Freedom Church at Mereside, Blackpool Football Club and Blackpool Public Health.

# The Upside Team

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## **Creative director and editor: Alex O'Toole**

Alex is an independent creative director, producer, writer and facilitator who creates work that articulates a sense of place and enables communities to connect with their environment, their local heritage and with each other.

[alexandraotoole.co.uk](http://alexandraotoole.co.uk)

## **Field reporter: Steve Fairclough**

Steve is a creative facilitator, producer, writer and actor specialising in community, health and heritage arts.

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## **Design: Nick Steel**

Nick is a graphic designer specialising in brand development, animation and illustration.

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## **Illustration: Cait McEniff**

Cait is a freelance illustrator who works with collage to create playful images inspired by stories, historical photography and folklore motifs.

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## **Photography: Claire Walmsley Griffiths**

Claire is a photographer who uses the camera as a tool for conversation to explore the psychology of people, place, identity, what community is, was, and what it might become.

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