

5. Makers in Residence

Exploring how to create opportunities for connection through making.

[It's] one of those [projects] that on the surface it looks like two inches wide, but actually, it's a mile deep

Jodes, Platform Thirty¹, Salcare Makers in Residence Project Lead



About the project

The Makers in Residence strand came out of a wish to:

- Build connections between local organisations – with strong roots in the towns of Heanor and Alfreton – and creative organisations
- Create opportunities for connection through making.
- Allow Make/Shift itself to have a more of a presence in these communities.

Heanor and Alfreton were chosen as they had been identified as focus areas in the Business Plan. In addition, the local partners, Salcare – a domestic violence refuge – and Alfreton Library already had positive relationships in their communities and were interested to work with Make/Shift.

Locally-based creative organisations No Jobs in the Arts and Platform Thirty1 were included as partners. The latter had worked with Make/Shift to develop the overall concept from the start.

Alfreton Library wanted to find a way to attract more people – particularly young people – into their building and to be seen as a useful civic venue. Make/Shift paired them with No Jobs in the Arts as they are passionate about zines. They worked with the library to create a pop-up Zine Library in their main entrance space – which was then used to display community made zines, created through a series of monthly drop-in zine making workshops with different Midlands-based artists.

Salcare²⁵ were excited by both the practice and the opportunities to build on Platform Thirty1's previous work – in particular their work in Women's Refuges and bring it into their HQ. Salcare

provide support and wraparound services for women who have experienced and are escaping domestic abuse situations. Therefore, they work with people who are often unlikely to have access to creative activities in the community.

Platform Thirty1 identified two experienced locally-based artists who became 'Makers in Residence', based at Salcare every Friday, running drop in creative activities for residents.

Project Activity

Platform Thirty1 | Salcare collaboration: 3 lots of 8-weekly sessions, with two artists, and there is one more lot of 8 sessions currently running. 25 participant sessions with 152 attendees.

No Jobs in the Arts | Alfreton Library collaboration: 6 workshops, 75 participants

Those who attended rated the sessions highly for inclusion (100%), experimentation (86%) and local networks (79%).

150 creative kits distributed in Amber Valley.

Outcomes

For participants

For community members attending the Makers sessions:

- People were gradually **prepared to have a go** – in both residencies, needing support to do that. When they did, they had fun and wanted more.

[although it can be hard to get passing people to join in]...anyone that sits down, nobody ever gets up after a minute and [they stay] for the next, say, hour or two hours. Because ...they realize ... how cathartic it is, how relaxing it is, how enjoyable it is. And just the simple, simple joy of making something

NJITA, Interview

- It **ignited curiosity** and showed people what creativity and an artist-led creative offer could look like:

A person with SEN [said] that they've attended a 'colouring group' and things but they expressed that they hadn't done anything as freeform and open as what we were doing in terms of the materials we were sharing ... often libraries do have a colouring station. However, it was very kind of stripped back seat, some odd supply of crayons and some basic kind of printed paper. But I suppose by coming in and delivering this workshop, we came armed with a variety of creative materials that

branched out a little bit more than what's traditionally provided in their spaces.

NJITA, Interview

- At Salcare, **people came back repeatedly** and gradually **got more confident in making** and effectively **seeing themselves as makers** or able to make things.
- There were **definitely moments of social connection** – even at the drop-in workshops in the library. This was a strong feature of the work with Salcare, connecting both with other participants, and also with the artists themselves.

One lady shared that she was really nervous about coming to the table to join in. A couple of sessions later, she talked about this with a young girl who was struggling with her mental health and wasn't sure whether she could join in or not. She did then join the table and the two women chatted for the whole session.

Maker in Residence, via interview

- Connections deepened with the support of the artist facilitation, meaning some really **difficult conversations were had and connections made**.

For partners

In terms of outcomes that build partnerships:

- Salcare in particular can **see the value of this sort of work to achieve their aims** and are keen for it to continue.
- Alfreton Library is supporting the continued hosting of the Zine Library and is talking to Make/Shift about potential future work.
- There is evidence of a **shift in organisational thinking** at least one of the arts organisations involved. No Jobs in the Arts had a strong belief in the potential of community-led practice but were unsure how to go about this while retaining their focus on developing artists in the region. The experience of working as a Maker in Residence – and the support from Rachel – allowed them to reflect on their plans, and trial different small moments of engagement and different artists' practices. It helped them see potential in shifting to enable further work with Amber Valley and similar communities.

I think it's worth saying that me and Ryan have done quite a bit of debriefing ourselves around this project. And Make/Shift, [through] the funding and support that we've had, has allowed us to trial project formats that we haven't had a chance to do before in terms of resources and, and things like that. So it's definitely been a learning opportunity for us as well.

NJITA, interview

Approaches

How did the Make/Shift approach work?

Making

Making acted as an anchor point for engagement. In both settings, the artists noted that initially people took a while to come over and interact. But once they did the act of making – and *making together* – acted as a focus and a way into enjoyment (at Alfreton Library) and/or deeper connection (at Salcare).

Connecting – person to person

Personal connection came out of skilled facilitation. The artists supported people to engage and connect with each other, not just the activity. Connections were also built by spending time together and from regular activity.

Platform Thirty¹ were careful in choosing Wendy and Sally to be the artists in residence on this project because of their style and approach, as well as their previous experience. It required their expertise, thoughtfulness and ability to adapt for what was very much a pilot project.

They had worked as a team before and, having worked in refuges, had an understanding of how vulnerable people could be. They appreciated that it was a pilot and a space to test and learn – fitting with the action learning approach of CPPs. They found the setting of Salcare particularly interesting. Previously they had worked explicitly in refuges where people live – and thus it was 'their own home space'. For these workshops, held in the Salcare café, the space it felt 'owned' by the participants, but was not 'their home'.

They recognised the need to take time and give people space to make the first move. Sometimes it took “weeks and weeks and weeks” to get people to join in – but this was achieved by making things easy and friendly.

We've had people there that have been shaking, absolutely shaking... [if they don't come] we have a laugh and a joke ... and say [to them] 'No, not this week, but I'll get you another day!'.

Maker in Residence, via interview

There was a recognition of the need for consent. People were given the space to walk away if and when they felt like it. There was no sense at all of coercion or a requirement to stay and finish work. The artists' sensitivity around this – and other aspects of working in this sort of setting – were particularly important to Salcare staff in their feedback.

It was clear that once people had taken that first step to come over and start making, it was often the connecting which was most important for them. Wendy and Sally shared the example of someone opening up about a particularly significant personal challenge as they were making at the session. This caused another participant to share her story and similarly significant experience, and...

...They then had that bond between them, and they were talking for maybe 15,20 minutes, so each of those through just a conversation had found somebody that they could connect with.

Maker in Residence, via interview

Connecting – building relationships between potential partners

There were a number of challenges working with an organisation for which a creative project was not their main goal:

Time: This way of working is heavily based on relationships and 'making time' for these to form. This can be hard for projects with a fixed timescale, particularly when working with organisations for which creative activity of this sort cannot ever be the immediate priority. This was evident in the time it took to set up the relationship, the shifts in staffing and who had time to be involved.

Space: There was a need to fit around the space needs of the organisation's 'main role'. In this case, as it was in the Salcare HQ, this involved fitting space for the sessions in between café, warehouse and charity shop activities. Initially Wendy and Sally understood that they would be based in the café, then the warehouse, then back to the café and charity shop. The artists' skills and flexibility were key in keeping things going – the space they were in changed every week, depending on what else was happening and even as furniture was sold.

We've been sat at the table, and we've had to move the table because they've sold the sofa that's next to us! And we've ended up helping them carry the blooming settee out!

Maker in Residence, via interview

They also had to adapt to the space in terms of the sessions they ran. They could not do arts activities which make too much mess or had to pack up each week after the session. However, as a result of

their flexibility and patience, they have built relationships with Salcare workers:

We were just two randoms coming in...we made sure we learnt all their names, the staff's names, and now they come and join in the sessions. And if they find something, if something comes into the charity shop, we'll get a bag of fabric from them. Or...a bag of hair bobbles or something that they think, 'Oh, this would be good for the craft leaders'.

Maker in Residence, via interview

Resourcing: Most Salcare staff are project funded and have other priorities. There is a need for significant input in building these more strategic relationships beyond the artist-staff-participants and into the organisations. However, Salcare is very keen that the workshops continue. This is not something which Make/Shift can fund on an ongoing basis, but they are looking for funding to continue the work as a partnership between Salcare and Wendy and Sally.

Potential: The potential for this approach to deliver on wider Salcare aims is clear in how it has galvanised involvement from Salcare participants and volunteers.

Fridays have become really popular for not only the residents who visit the 'one stop shop' to access the panty, charity shop and community cafe and services in the building, but also for many volunteers at Salcare too who participate during their volunteering hours and outside these commitments too. The sessions have become a place where people involved feel a sense of connection to

others and with the making for themselves. They return weekly for the ritual and the shared experience.

Jodes, Platform Thirty¹, Salcare Makers in Residence
Project Lead

Learnings

- A slow build up and **taking the time to develop the relationships is invaluable** – you need to build trust.
- It **takes a long time to embed this sort of work** so there's a need to 'hold your nerve' over the short term to see long-term results.
- **Being active in building relationships is vital.** This needs time and expertise.
- **Recognising that you are entering other people's 'space'** and respecting this really supports relationships.
- **Good facilitation is essential.** The style and experience of those facilitating the relationship and the direct connection to the community are vitally important. Facilitators need to be friendly, relaxed, low key and accessible.
- **Communication matters.** Ensuring sessions are appropriately advertised – with clarity about what they are for, for how long and what the future plans are – really helps people to feel comfortable engaging.