

# Make/Shift

## Phase 1 Evaluation Report Summary

Dr Ruth Melville, Dr Rob Fellman  
and Dr Rebecca Ranson

April 2026



## **This is the Summary of the Phase 1 Evaluation Report of Make/Shift, the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme for Amber Valley, Derbyshire.**

The programme began in April 2022, and this summary reviews the whole funding phase.

The project is funded by Arts Council England (ACE) and hosted by the University of Derby.

### **About Make/Shift**

Make/Shift wants Amber Valley to be a **“place full of makers, where everyone’s creativity matters”**.

Their approach is based on an Asset-Based Community Development model – recognising and building on the strengths of local communities to carry out change in their local area.

Central to the work is the fostering of networks and collaborations. To this end, they have developed a number of key delivery partnerships over the phase. These include Platform Thirty1, Infinite Wellbeing CIC, Maison Foo and Grow Outside – all based in, or close to, Amber Valley.

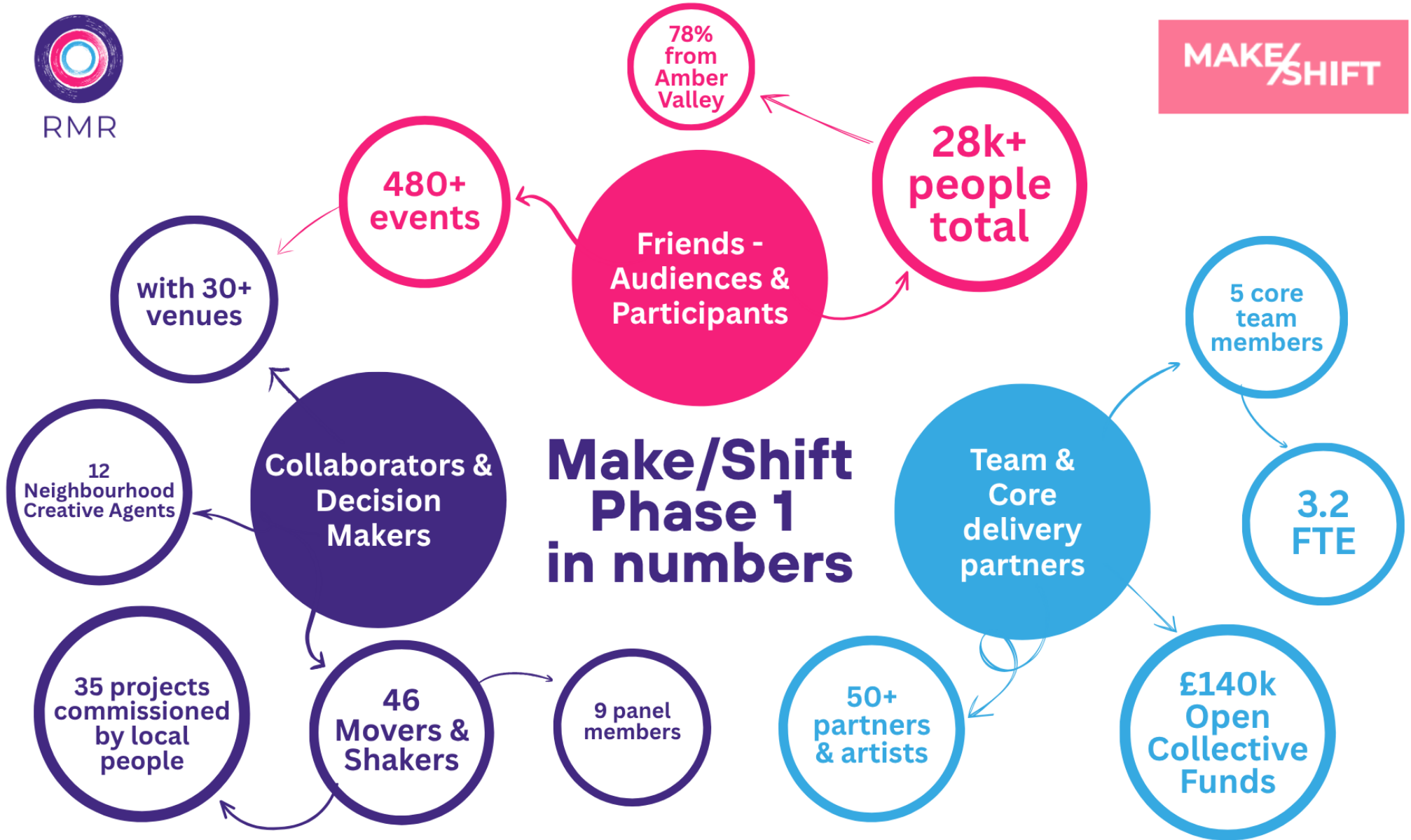
Make/Shift seek to unite their communities with these networks and partners – making new connections and fostering growth through three core levels of participation:

- **Friends:** Neighbours who get involved with activities generated by the network and invite their friends along too.
- **Collaborators:** Makers, creators and doers working with Make/Shift to create spaces and opportunities which invite people to get involved.
- **Decision Makers:** Stewards, co-creators and guides shaping the direction of projects and how resources are allocated, and inviting collaborators to get involved.

Ecological thinking is key to Make/Shift and how it thinks about the world. Therefore, it uses language rich in words and phrases from ecology.

**We will use nature as a model and mentor to re-imagine how we are being, doing and learning together.**

Make/Shift Business Plan



# Reaching and inspiring

*Addressing Arts Council England's Research Question 1: Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by creativity and culture and what are the most effective ways to achieve this?*

We find that:

- **Make/Shift's events attracted people who don't normally attend cultural events** – 56% say they don't regularly attend arts and culture events.
- **People enjoyed the events and want more** – 95% rated events as excellent or good, 97% would attend again and 77% felt their expectations were met or exceeded.
- **The audience was predominantly local**, with 78% of audiences and participants coming from Amber Valley.
- **Audiences and participants were more likely to come from more deprived areas** – compared to the local population as a whole.
- **Participants experienced something new** – they interacted with new people, learned something different and felt an increased sense of wellbeing.
- **Make/Shift are successfully reaching local creatives and business owners** who are becoming 'collaborators' in delivering change.

**I love the Make/Shift events. They are always fabulous and I appreciate all the little things you do as well as the big, i.e. the homemade sustainable name badges.**

Participant

**The buzz of the room, full of like-minded creative people all snuggled together... This group has really helped me feel less alone.**

Participant

# Delivering community-led high-quality art

*Addressing Arts Council England's Research Question 2: What approaches enable us to deliver on our aspiration for excellence, both in the process of community engagement and the creative and cultural experiences on offer?*

Excellence in practice and process runs throughout Make/Shift's approach. This fundamentally challenges the implied dichotomy of engagement and production in this question.

We find that:

- **Make/Shift plan and program with care and intention**, continuing to iteratively adapt and improve both processes and practices from their reflection and learning.
- **They nurture relationships with people who have a similar commitment** – to the area, the community and high-quality work – thus ensuring a high quality of collaboration.
- **The aim is to shift decision-making power to local communities as much as possible** – which is achieved in both immediate, concrete ways and by less visible, structural means.
- **Considerable time is dedicated to overcoming barriers to engagement** when working on arts and culture projects and leading change – including taking a considered approach to developing relationships with different communities.

- Key metrics show **Make/Shift are creating high-quality events and activities that allow people to connect** – both with those around them and Amber Valley itself.
- **All work is presented in a way that ensures there is a sense of quality** – with considerable thought going into every event and everything which is produced.

**Everybody felt like they were co-creating the evening together. It [...] wasn't my show. It was everybody's show.**

Clare, Creative Agent

# Making time, taking care

*Addressing Arts Council England's Research Question 3: What else are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?*

Make/Shift has consistently gone beyond the Creative People and Places model of exploring how best to work with local people, local creativity and local place.

In evolving a complex mix of ideas, principles and partnerships, it offers a successful model for sharing at a national level and from which others can learn.

We find that:

- **Make/Shift has developed a unique model addressing the underlying inequities within Amber Valley** through making, and protecting, space for local assets and ideas to grow.
  - **It puts making, sharing and celebrating arts and culture at the heart of this development** – reducing barriers to engagement and encouraging new ways of working.
  - **This is now paying dividends with a deep, rich practice emerging** – showing the possibilities beyond the phase.
  - **The approach is rooted in weaving together different practices, centred on Asset-Based Community Development and ecology** – and underpinned by an intensity of focus and clear belief in meaningful change from where we are, with what we have available.
- **Successful methods have been developed to encourage engagement and provide inspiration** – the key ones being:
    - Everyone's a maker – talking about 'making' (rather than 'art') offers a more universal way for people to recognise how creativity connects to everyday life.
    - Belief there *is* a better way – testing new ways of working and taking the risk that the true impacts will only show over time.
    - Start with local assets – the value of building from an individual's starting point, working within the specific environment of Amber Valley.
  - **Creating a complex, conceptual and evolving model results in significant challenges** – these include:
    - An intricate and theoretical model takes time to explain – and this can act as a barrier to action.
    - A fluid model makes planning, oversight and evaluation problematic.

## The work of 'shaping change' in creative and cultural engagement is living and learning work.

Karen Birch, Associate (Development),  
Make/Shift Team

# Conclusions

**Make/Shift is an exciting programme that raises ambition for the full potential of what Creative People and Places programmes can achieve.**

**It has reached and inspired people from all backgrounds** and across the different communities of Amber Valley, with a focus on those least likely to engage in arts and culture.

**The reach goes beyond simple one-off engagement.** Nearly everything involves at least some 'making' or telling of stories – and many people have taken a community leadership role.

**Underpinning everything is an approach to excellence** which threads through every element of the work.

In this phase, the following approaches have been particularly valuable for Make/Shift in achieving their aims:

- **Using the concept of 'everyone's a maker'** – rather than more initially off-putting terms such as 'arts' and 'culture'
- **Recognising, celebrating and building from the assets of the place** – whether people, locales or stories

- **Holding to a strong belief and determination to get around barriers**, particularly structural ones, to community involvement and leadership
- **Making space and time to reflect and change direction** – as a group, including communities involved
- **Allowing the time needed for ideas and projects to grow** – especially when co-created
- **Distributing delivery from the start**, to build a distributed leadership.

Considerable challenges do arise from the complexity of the model.

Some will remain as structural issues for constant adaptation and work around. Others offer opportunities for Make/Shift to explore ways to work with or around and then, with time, ultimately to overcome.

However, with support and critique – external as well as internal – the programme is well set up to learn from these challenges in the next phase and continue to flourish.

Overall, Make/Shift shows how a programme can **engage and deliver on national agendas while working deeply and meaningfully with communities in a place.**

# Recommendations

## Programming

- Continue to **improve the programme's reach with people living in the most deprived areas of Amber Valley.**
- Continue testing options for **more accessible and egalitarian 'spaces' for thinking and co-design.**
- **Keep reflecting on and addressing the challenges arising from the inbuilt inequality in power** within the way Make/Shift delivers.
- **Develop a considered approach to safeguarding and support.** Existing infrastructure requires additional adaptation or moderation.
- **Consider the tensions between remuneration and expectation.** 'Pay for involvement' could have positive effects that reduce the need for extra pastoral support.
- **Continue to explore a circular economy of resources.** Intentionally support the shared use of community assets to amplify impact without extra spending.

## Data and evaluation

- **Collect substantially more data to ensure more robust findings around quality.** Current results are promising, but more data is needed to be meaningful.

- **Continue to collect the additional 'dimensions' (datasets) that allow for a deeper analysis** of how events connect between people and place over time.
- **Make more space to reflect and learn as a group.** Invite challenge and strengthen community ownership of Make/Shift's ideas, approaches and programming.
- **Build on the excellent embedded evaluation and reflection practice of 'Wayfinding'** – combining more formal evaluation with reflective learning in iterative "plan, do, review" cycles.
- Ensure more embedded and creative approaches are supported by a **clear evaluation framework and an external eye, to give validity and avoid inadvertent 'group think'.**

## Organisation

- **Maintain flexible delivery rhythms.** Continue to be willing to redesign program delivery, extend timelines, or provide informal support if needed
- **Address the multiple issues around staff retention.** Being based in Amber Valley may offer the opportunity to review working practices.
- **Decentralise power away from the Director,** sharing responsibilities more evenly within the team to mitigate risk.
- **Future developments need careful consideration.** The Consortium should consider the next 5-to-8-years and how Make/Shift continues to successfully grow and flourish.

**This report makes clear that sustained commitment was critical.**

**Continued support for Make/Shift from the Consortium and Lead Organisation – when participation was still emerging and outcomes had yet to materialise – gave the approach the time and space it needed to take root.**

**That belief in the programme has paid off, enabling Make/Shift to develop into a confident and impactful model of civic practice.**

Professor Rhiannon Jones,  
Head of Civic and Communities, University of Derby,  
Make/Shift Consortium Member



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

### **Credits**

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

### **Project team**

Project authors and researchers: Dr Ruth Melville, Dr Rob Fellman and Dr Rebecca Ranson

Report development and editing: Ben Morgan

RMR would like to thank the Make/Shift team, Consortium and partners for their help in compiling this report.

*For more details, please see the full Evaluation Report, Case Studies document and complete Appendices. These are available from <https://rmresearch.uk/makeshift-reports/>*