Creative Citizens: A Photo Collection

Photography by Sara Lyndsey
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Introduction

Creative Citizens are everywhere. They are active in book clubs, fan networks, planning, design and dance groups. They devise innovative services for the elderly and campaign for new playgrounds. They knit, garden and make things. They sing in choirs, run community radio stations and provide on-line community news services.

These people do what they do not because they are paid to but because they want to. Their motivations are diverse - from doing something because they believe it has a social, cultural or economic benefit to the community to more personal motivations such as developing new friendships, learning and gaining skills or because it is something they enjoy.

Throughout our research project ‘Media, Community and the Creative Citizen’ we have been exploring what these people do, why they do it and what the value of their activities is. We have worked with groups of Creative Citizens and individual Creative Citizens across Wales and England who are engaged in a myriad of activities from a hyperlocal news service in a small Welsh port town to the saving of a local market in the east end of London. These people have been hugely inspiring to us in their dedication, energy and ideas for their particular project. We found it interesting the different ways people contributed with some taking on the leadership role, initiating and running their project and standing at the front of a campaign while others preferring not to be singled out as individuals but rather to be recognized as part of a group of Creative Citizens working together. Still others are invisible, hidden behind their computers at home but their contribution evident in the creation of hyperlocal blogs, coding of community websites, running of local forums and numerous other digital online activities.

We wanted to capture some of this diversity and the opportunity arose to create this special collection of photos for our Creative Citizen conference and exhibition, which took place at the Royal College of Art in September 2014. These twenty-five photos were taken of Creative Citizens on location in their communities in London, Bristol, Birmingham, Wolverhampton and the surrounding areas of Cardiff. They contain images of some of the people we worked closely with through the research and others who we came across through our networks and those of our community partners.

In selecting people to invite to take part we were keen to represent as wide a spectrum of activities as possible and to convey the different dimensions in which these activities take place be this in an amateur or professional context, on a volunteer basis or as paid work. We have found that there is a fluidity in the activities of Creative Citizens between informal and professional practice. Everyday creativity feeds into professional creativity, by enhancing it through the gaining of practical experience, skills and increased confidence. Examples of this include Tom Bryson who used to scribble down stories as a hobby but who is now a successful novelist. Vince Baidoo, whose film and music making has recently culminated in him setting up his own production company. In the other direction the professional skills of individuals come to the service of everyday creativity and we include many examples of this too - Frank Kennedy, who uses his expertise in advertising to help raise revenue for the Tyburn Mail, and Annette Naudin provide expertise to small creative enterprises through the Moseley Community Development Trust.

In June 2014 photographer Sara Lyndsey travelled to each of the different locations to take the photos. She worked with each person to choose a backdrop for the photo that they felt represented the activities or the community they were involved with. Each person was then asked to respond to a few questions that were then used to compile the captions accompanying each photo. We hope you enjoy these snapshots into the activities of Creative Citizens and that they perhaps open questions for you as to who are the Creative Citizens that you know, what is their impact and also whether there are types of Creative Citizenship that are not represented here, that perhaps fall under the radar, and therefore whose value is not known or considered. These are questions we would like to explore further.
Carol Miller

Carol is involved in Moseley in Bloom, a volunteer group that aims to make Moseley cleaner and greener. They undertake horticultural projects and work in collaboration with other groups to integrate horticultural achievement, community participation and environmental responsibility.

Carol believes this helps to encourage pride and engagement in the community and creates a safer environment. Carol got involved initially after retirement and feels it is has enabled her to get to know a lot more people in the locality as well as becoming more engaged in local issues. She also finds she has the possibility to influence local problems.
Cleo Lake

Cleo is Chair of St Paul’s Carnival and a dance leader. Having been involved professionally as a dance artist with the Carnival she joined the board in 2012 when the carnival was cancelled causing chaos within the community, in particular the Jamaican community who had the most to lose. Her work with the Carnival has helped her to reconnect with her Jamaican roots giving her the chance to make good friends and work with older people from the Caribbean. Cleo considers herself creative in terms of her artistic expression and in navigating life’s obstacles.
Elliot Lord

Elliot is the founder of Our Own Future, a group who have a community garden in Wednesfield which provides meaningful activity for local residents and promotes healthy eating. He also runs an enterprise called We Love Crafts selling the arts and crafts of local people. Elliot wants to give people hope that they can do things differently and for the benefit of everyone. He enjoys seeing opportunities being created from these projects and knowing that people have got something from them. Creativity in all forms is his passion and he wants to bring out the imagination in people.
Frank Kennedy

Frank is part of a group who produce the community newspaper and blog the ‘Tyburn Mail’. They report local news and events and aim to give local organisations a direct voice to the local population. They are able to do this as the newspaper, delivered to everyone door to door, reaches most people in the area. Frank initially got involved as an employee to raise advertising revenue to help support the running costs of the Tyburn Mail and is happy to have played a part in it’s success.
Jane Hearn

Jane sums her role up as introduction agency for local groups and people, matching their needs and initiatives and encouraging them to share, volunteer and work together. She has worked in the local area for nearly 25 years, initially in IT training and latterly in community development and projects. She is interested in new technology and its ability to connect people with groups and organisations for mutual benefit. She aims to improve communication and access to local events and services by local people. With a background in graphic design Jane considers herself to be a creative and challenging thinker and likes to turn ideas and accepted wisdom upside!
Wei Ong

Wei aka Silent Hobo is a street artist and illustrator. He paints murals either by himself or with others. They do these without the help of funding and Wei believes that it is this DIY mentality that has helped Bristol to become the graffiti capital of the UK and he is proud to play a small part in it’s evolution. Wei believes the graffiti adds colour and makes the city spaces more visually interesting. Nowadays there are street art tours and council backed events celebrating graffiti. Wei does it because he loves it.
Jess Wright

Jess came across this empty church and decided to try and buy it to keep the building alive for the community. Now, as the Zion Community Art Space, it hosts a huge range of events and activities – everything from kids art and craft, theatre, food markets, to writing groups, music nights, Cabaret and flower arranging. Jess’s focus is on the café and deli serving freshly cooked foods and local produce. Jess says it is a privilege to have this job, it is unique and changes daily but it is also very hard work and always challenging.
Joyce McQuarrie

Joyce is part of a group of knitters at the Mill in Walthamstow. She lives locally and when the council wanted to turn it into a drug centre she joined the campaign to stop the plans. She has been part of The Mill ever since. The knitting group provide a great social service bringing all sorts of people together. While they discuss and share their skills in knitting they also provide a relaxed, welcoming and safe atmosphere where people feel comfortable to discuss other things. The knitters will offer advice where needed and in this way look out for each other in an unobtrusively supportive way.
Edson Burton

Storyteller, poet, playwright, historian, writer – Edson is involved in numerous activities connected with Bristol. He is currently working at the Trinity Centre coordinating a project called Vice and Virtue which is about discovering the history of the area of Old Market. Connected through his work to the University, local community groups and media and heritage organisations, Edson finds he is able to facilitate relationships between these different groups and different aspects of Bristol culture. Edson says that while no two days are the same at the crux of all these activities is thinking about how we communicate and how to do this creatively.
Catherine Greig

Catherine is involved in activities in her local area but she also runs a business ‘make:good’ that puts these skills to use in other areas. Her philosophy is that people should be at the heart of change in their neighbourhoods whether that is about big change to the physical environment or changes to activity and street life. She considers herself lucky to be able to spend her time on the creative activities that are her passion. Through this she says she meets interesting people, gets to hear wonderful stories and finds she is constantly amazed by the human spirit.
Makala Cheung

Makala is a singer and producer making pop music with a Bristol Bass influence and oriental sounds. She puts together music videos for the songs working with other creative people to celebrate her local area of Knowle West, her city of Bristol and her own oriental roots. She wants local people from her estate to be proud of where they live. Alongside her music Makala does work around regeneration with the Knowle West Future group. She believes everyone can be creative, not just in the artistic sense, but in being open minded, experimenting or trying something new.
Gareth Jones

Gareth founded a centre in Caerphilly called ICE (Innovation Centre for Enterprise) in 2012 which has, since opening, brought together over 100 businesses into one location to work in collaboration in an area of extreme economic inactivity. Gareth’s original motivation for doing this was to create a space where he wanted to work when he was starting up. Now he is focused on normalising the process of starting a business and helping more people realise they can – making success seem more realistic and failure as a stage of development, not a definition of character.
Maureen Gallaccio (Mo)

Mo is part of a team of people who run the Mill, a lively community hub in Walthamstow. When Mo moved to the area in 2007 the local library had just been closed down. She became part of the campaign to re-open it eventually negotiating to take over the building themselves. The week they received the keys to the building was the week she supposedly ‘retired’. Mo instigates the creative activities at the Mill running exhibitions and workshops for all ages and abilities. Initially feeling anxious about integrating into a new place her involvement with The Mill has brought her a wide support network. She feels valued and finds it rewarding to know that she is also helping others.
Paul Perkins

Paul works at a children and young people's organisation in North Camden called the Winch. He also volunteers as a Trustee for a mentoring and drama charity and helps out at local events when the opportunity arises. Paul says ‘I've always had a commitment to seeing children and young people achieve their potential, and it's a real privilege to be able to work doing just that’. As well as the frustrations and successes of the work, I get to feel connected to the community in which I live. In London that's not always possible, but it's a really nice part of the type of work I do and where I do it.
Rachel Howells

Rachel helps to run a local community news service for Port Talbot called the Port Talbot Magnet. They have run the website for over four years, and recently launched a quarterly newspaper. Rachel’s involvement began when she was made redundant from her job as editor of a current affairs magazine. Together with others who had recently lost their jobs at the local newspaper they set up the Magnet as a way to keep their skills in the profession and also to ensure the local towns that were losing their weekly newspapers did not miss out on quality local reporting. Rachel enjoys being part of the many campaigns to improve the town and knowing that her journalism is making a real difference.
Richard Gurner

Richard is the publisher and editor of the Caerphilly Observer, a fortnightly newspaper and website. Richard set it up in 2009 as a means to keep up-to-date with his home community while he worked and lived 200 miles away in Brighton. They aim to cover as much community activity as possible for the benefit of their readers. Richard says he gets a tremendous sense of pride and achievement in knowing that he is contributing to the community and the difference this is making to local media in the area.
Roger Kneebone

Roger is a surgeon who uses simulation and performance to bring the closed worlds of surgery and science into view, inviting the public to participate in activities they can’t normally access. Passionate about education, his early work on simulation provided new opportunities for teaching and learning within healthcare. The current work in engagement grew out of this. He is particularly interested in using simulation as a way of exploring surgery as a practice that is also a craft and a performance. Throughout his career he has been fascinated by connections – between medicine (especially surgery), the arts, performance and craft. Linking these in new ways is a highly creative process and his diverse team of researchers, clinicians, scientists, artists, performers, designers and craftsmen have resulted in many exciting and unexpected new directions.
Rosalind runs facilitated walking and talking or ‘netwalking’ as she also calls it. Having spent many years observing how people communicate (or not) she wanted to try to create something that allowed people to have a conversation and really be heard. So she developed her experimental walking and talking methodology and runs two versions of this. The first involves walking with a particular speaker and the second is an alternative networking experience. She enjoys how her work brings her into contact with so many different people and organisations and gets satisfaction when she sees the difference it can make when people are given the opportunity to walk together and actually have a proper dialogue.
James and Steph Clarke

James and Steph set up and developed the hyperlocal website WV11.co.uk which serves the community of Wednesfield. The site came about initially in response to their mutual desire to improve the perception people had of the town. There was a lot going on and they wanted to share this with others. The site has helped bring people together and also now acts as a springboard for their involvement in other activities such as arranging local Fun Days and fundraisers. They have both gained a great deal from running the website – helping improve local services, meeting some fantastic people and Steph even got her job because of her involvement in it.
Tom Bryson

Tom has loved reading from childhood and has been a ‘scribbler’ for a lifetime. But a few years ago he got serious and as a result has now written four books. When he is not writing his entertaining crime thrillers he participates in local writers’ groups, gives talks in local libraries to community groups such as the University of the Third Age as well as using social networks to provide tips and advice on writing.
Vincent Baidoo

Vince is a ‘trans-media’ story-teller. He tells his stories through film-making, music making, and lately in the format of a comic. His stories are influenced by his community of young creative media makers in Bristol. To show-case his stories Vince created the YouTube channel South Blessed. It also shows the work of other young people in the community around him. Vince enjoys involving people in the filming and production. However his main motivation for doing these things is that he is doing work that he actually likes and ‘not just working for the sake of work’.

Jack Pugh-Waters

Jack produces videos for the South Blessed YouTube channel. He sees these videos as giving the community a voice on a channel that is getting lots of online traffic. He likes what he does and can’t imagine sitting in an office working a 9 to 5 day. He would rather earn a little less money and do something that he wants to and which he sees as having a chance to benefit the community and make a change no matter how small.
Ward’s Corner

Ward’s Corner are a group who campaign to halt the demolition of a city block in Seven Sisters, Tottenham. The space is currently home to independent businesses, heritage buildings, residences and an indoor market. They believe that the best approach to planning is one that takes its lead from the local community and have worked to produce an alternative and viable plan. Much of the work they do is about finding new and innovative ways to engage people in the planning and regeneration issues. This requires a lot of creativity and thinking beyond, often obtuse, plans and official policy documents so they try to use visual social media and interactive platforms whenever possible. Using this approach, their Community Plan was granted permission by Haringey Council in April 2014.
Annette Naudin

Annette is on the board of trustees for Moseley Community Development Trust (MCDT) in Birmingham. She lives locally and was keen to be involved in the community. Through her work she is interested in small creative enterprises and felt that she had some skills and knowledge to offer MCDT. Her contributions to MCDT are mostly in relation to the co-working and events. Annette feels that being able to contribute has given her a sense of belonging in the community as well as gaining new friendships and skills.
Angela Lewis

Angela belongs to Bootstrap Artisans Co-operative, a group of local artists, makers and creatives that decided to join forces and work together rather than working in isolation. Many of their members had struggled with redundancy, health or family issues which made traditional employment routes tricky so this was a way of creating their own work with the support of a peer group. They aim to open their first arts hub later this year offering studio space, business incubation units, employment opportunities and teaching spaces. Working in shared space will allow them to offer collective purchasing and hire large equipment enabling the group to increase their production.
Caroline Hill

Caroline is involved in several activities in and around Kentish Town. However her primary activity is as chair of the Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum. Having always felt that local people should have more say in how their area develops she was interested in the idea of localism and the concept of a Neighbourhood Forum. Caroline enjoys speaking to local residents and workers about how they envisage Kentish Town developing and gets satisfaction when a phase in the development of the plan or a public workshop has gone well. When adopted the plan will have a powerful influence on the future of Kentish Town.