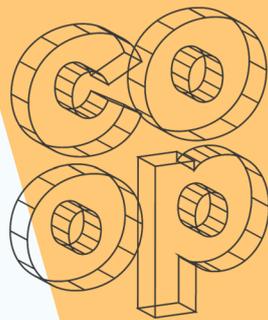




culture



***Our Place in the World: Cultural
& Creative Education Programme***
Creative Commission Report Year 1

Introduction

In 2020 the Culture Co-op (Lancaster District Cultural Education Partnership) sought proposals from Lancashire and South Lakes based independent artists and small organisations/ collectives not in receipt of regular funding, to produce four creative projects, resources and/ or outputs primarily aimed at young people aged 13-19 years (and young people up to the age of 25 with a disability or requiring additional support) across the Lancaster district.

Acting as a catalyst to inspire and empower, each commission enabled young people, especially those from working class backgrounds and vulnerable individuals, the space to make critical comment on their lived experiences during this time of unprecedented change and uncertainty.

Whether digitally and/ or analogue driven, we saw a number of unique proposals that were of high artistic, cultural and creative worth. Eager for the four commissions to be as diverse as possible, we welcomed a mix of art forms, creative learning resources, creative exchange initiatives, and craft/ making based ideas.

A diverse selection panel met (consisting of representatives from the cultural, education and youth & community sectors, as well as young people) and selected four projects to commission (out of 19 initial proposals); Our Place in the World Now (Charlotte Barber), Change in a Box (Theatre in the Rough), Double Life (leo&hyde) and Young Changemakers (GRAFT).

The four successful organisations/ artists received a budget of £2,000 and up to 10 hours' worth of support from the Culture Co-op project manager.

Creative Commission Outcomes

- The development of a new socially and artistically accessible product, resource or participatory product
- To connect meaningfully with young people (aged 13-19 and up to 25 with a disability) in a safe way
- To provide a platform to validate and celebrate young people's lived experiences and voice
- Create a conduit for young people to connect with peers through virtual, digital and/ or offline methodologies



'Thoughts' - Short Film by Eloise
Our Place in the World, Now

Statistics

65

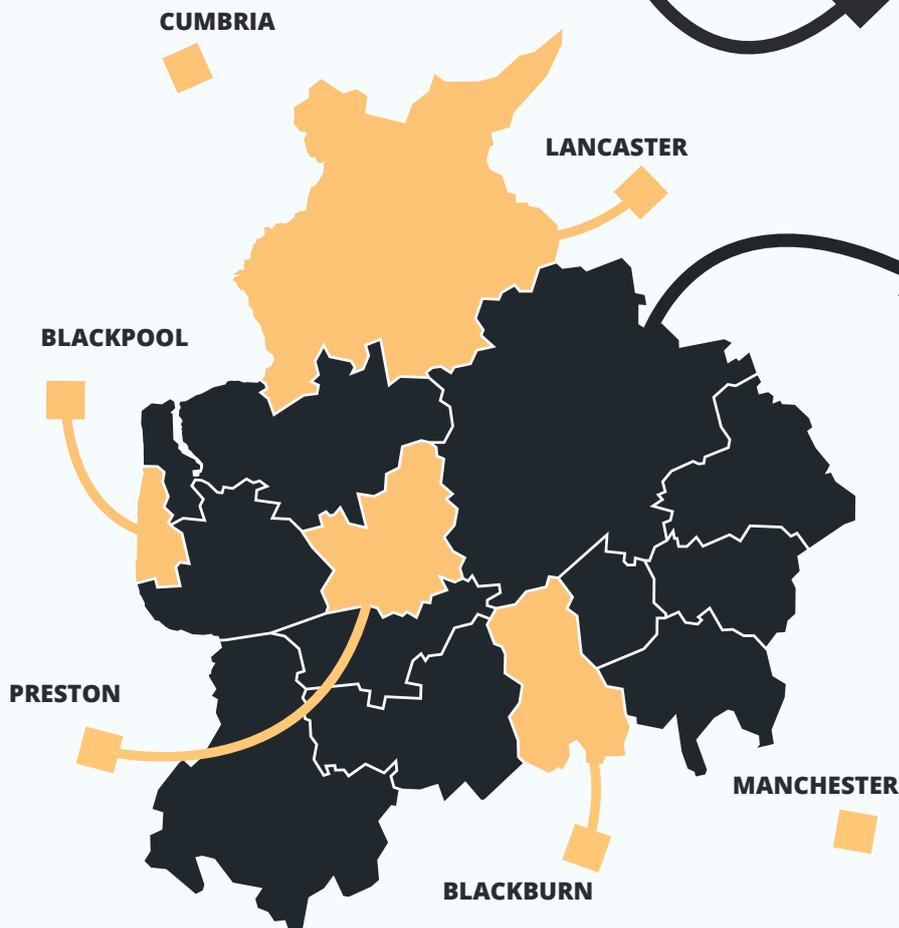
Direct engagement hours

Across all four projects 65 hours were spent developing the young people's skills and confidence in arts and culture.

93

Young people engaged

Across the four projects a total of 93 young people were directly engaged in arts, culture and creativity.



Geographic Reach

Whilst a local initiative, the commissions were able to reach young people across multiple areas of Lancashire, and as far as Manchester and Cumbria.

2490

Online reach

Across three out of the four projects, 2490 individuals engaged online (site visits, views and comment).

Outcome 1: The development of a new socially and artistically accessible product, resource or participatory product.

Change in a Box (Theatre in the Rough)

'Change in a Box' is a creative kit which promotes active citizenship. Each kit comes with a magazine, introducing the reader to key moments from history that made the world a fairer place. A craft activity accompanies each case study (instructions and pre-prepared materials are all included). The kit also provides advice for young people who want to make a difference in their community and provides links to further resources.

To ensure the kit was accessible (both socially and artistically), we ran Box Developer workshop sessions with a small number of local young people. Across three online workshops, we asked participants to identify social issues they wanted to learn more about and choose an appealing visual style. We also asked prompt questions to help identify barriers to accessing art. As an example, the prompt, "Art is..." generated answers such as, "Art is personal." and "Art is hard to understand." From this answer, we knew that the resource had to be highly customisable and jargon-free.

We made further accessibility efforts when designing the kit. The magazine uses high-contrast colours, large text, and carefully calculated line-height/width. Written articles have all passed a readability test - and we set an average article-length of 1,500 words. Audio book versions of each article are hosted online, with a safety flyer (including Braille sticker) directing users to the website. We selected craft materials which can be differentiated by size and texture. To complete crafts, participants can use items from home if they wish. Some activities also include differentiation for learners who cannot use scissors or complete detailed drawings.

Our Place in the World, Now (Charlotte Barber)

The project was completely focused on facilitating the young people's creativity. We ran creative sessions based around music production/sound design, film and creative writing, with the

prompt of "Your Place in The World Now" at the heart of it. We used free accessible resources throughout the project so the young people could create their piece with the technology and accessibility we knew they had. Jo and I planned the creative sessions with activities that sparked the young people's imagination, we navigated conversations about their physical spaces during lock down and also about mental and emotional health and about navigating the world at the moment as a young person.

Young Changemakers (GRAFT)

We recruited and worked with a group of young people to: 1) Explore connections between art and activism, in particular related to the Black Lives Matter movement; 2) Research racial inequalities in the art world, think about why it would be important to commission emerging Black artists, and research and select three early-career Black artists to be part of an exhibition; 3) Decide on how to exhibition the work of the chosen artists in a way that would be possible under local restrictions and have an impact on the way the community considers the issues we explored.

The group of young people took the lead on every decision made as part of the project. They were passionate about ensuring there was a physical exhibition as well as a digital output, they selected the artists and artworks that resonated with them and thought about the message the works would send at different historic locations around Lancaster. They designed posters and a map for the exhibition, contributed to a press release, and have written their own articles about the project for school projects.

Double Life (leo&hyde)

The Double Life Project was about providing a digital safe space for LGBTQIA+ young people in Lancashire through the open creative digital devised acting and dancing workshop space, and a public celebration of LGBTQIA+ people and awareness-raising of feelings of isolation through a PR-campaign associated with a commercial music video release.

The song in the video touched on the issues of isolation, feeling trapped in your own head, having to hide yourself; it ends with a celebration of the amazing potential of this generation of

LGBTQIA+ young people.

For the project we consulted with several organisations to get the tone and messaging of the project right: More Music (funding partner), Lancashire LGBT, PYRO and Burnley Youth Theatre (specifically their LGBT group); for inclusivity we spoke with Deaf Rainbow (an LGBT d/Deaf charity) and freelance interpreters about how to make sure the project was inclusive and sensitive to the politics of the d/Deaf community.

Music Video

The music video itself was socially accessible in its inclusion of a BSL translation of the song, with closed captioning burnt into the video. We developed learning resources for young people to be part of a professional, commercially released musical theatre music video, distributed via national media. They were to record themselves at home on their phones/laptops and send it to us for inclusion in the video. There were resources that were appropriate for all ages and performance abilities, that allowed people of any ability to be involved. Instructions were also created in British Sign Language by the freelance interpreter we used for the music video.

The participatory workshops in dance and acting/devising were open to those of all abilities and this was made explicit and central as part of the advertisement. Participants were asked to self-assess their ability so we could group individuals based on age/ability to create a more equitable workshop space.



'Descend into the Dungeon' - Short Film by Joe
Our Place in the World, Now



'Testing' - Short Film by Mitch
Our Place in the World, Now

Outcome 2: To connect meaningfully with young people (aged 13-19 and up to 25 with a disability) in a safe way.

Change in a Box (Theatre in the Rough)

During development, we took several steps to create something which young people felt they could connect with. The initial workshops with Box Developers were helpful, but much of the work took place when writing articles and advice. For each article, we included an introductory paragraph which set-up any historical context. We kept the tone conversational and included recognisable cultural references wherever possible. In this way, participants could use existing knowledge to orientate themselves within the world of each article. A list of keywords and definitions follows each article and, where possible, the magazine includes area-specific information. We also carefully considered the well-being and safeguarding needs of participants, though this was tricky. The magazine occasionally references upsetting content (e.g. stories about protests which resulted in violence or death), which required sensitivity. We ensured that any such references never included graphic detail and added a safety flyer with content warnings.

Young people can also feel the pressure to 'solve' societal problems more keenly. We had to write carefully to ensure participants took care of their own well-being too. We included a chapter of advice for managing stress and anxiety for this reason.

Our Place in the World, Now (Charlotte Barber)

Throughout the project, the pastoral care for the young people became an imperative part of it, managing and communicating with young people outside of the sessions became a focus in order to drive the project forward, sometimes having 1 to 1 sessions just to prepare individuals for what was happening within the sessions in order to create safety. I think this was for a few reasons - I found within zoom sessions it is sometimes not always easy to manage everybody getting enough airtime and enough support to answer questions especially with the shyer ones within the group. I also found that not everyone always wanted to show back work/ or outcomes

from tasks within sessions for the same reasons which meant gauging where someone was up to with their piece was tricky and had to be done outside of the main sessions.

Questions and support were given within the sessions but not everybody felt comfortable asking questions at the beginning of the project, so would wait until the sessions were done and ask questions over email or message.

Young Changemakers (GRAFT)

The young people who signed up to the Changemakers project were particularly interested in activism - they had some awareness of the unfairness of the world and were passionate about making a positive change in their local area. They were less familiar with the connection to art, although some of the group were creative and enjoy creating art in their spare time.

We ran four initial workshops on Zoom exploring how art can be used as a tool in activism, how issues in the art world reflect those in society and deciding on how to use a socially distant exhibition as a way to send a message related to the Black Lives Matter movement in Lancaster. This helped to engage the group with high level issues about art (plenty of established art institutions struggle with diversity and inclusion) and they took real ownership of the artistic output of the project.

The project gave the group the opportunity to explore the issues we were looking at through their own creativity (designing posters and a map for example) but more important up skilled them as curators, and showed them the power of working with professional, early-career artists, using the work of others to send a positive message in their area.

Double Life (leo&hyde)

Workshop leaders worked collaboratively in preparation, drawing on their own experience of being young LGBTQIA+ people to craft workshops that were sensitive and inclusive, without pressurising young people to open up about their feelings. Questions were left open and didn't lead young people down a route they were uncomfortable with.

Acting workshops were left fairly open plan, with multiple directions it could go in depending on the skill level and engagement within the session of those involved. The art that was created in the session always came from what the Young People wanted to talk about. Workshop leaders were DBS checked. We tried to work with organisations to deliver workshops to young people they had trust with, particularly LGBT youth groups; these had mixed results. We connected with PYRO and Burnley Youth Theatre where we were going to deliver workshops of upwards of 30 people between the two, however COVID restrictions didn't allow this to happen. Our session with More Music's LYVE choir connected with them on a musical level, with many of them having an interest in musical theatre performance in the future.



'Block' - Photo by Mitch
Our Place in the World, Now



'You Got This' - Sumuyya Khader
GRAFT's Changemakers Voices
Exhibition

Outcome 3: To provide a platform to validate and celebrate young people's lived experiences and voice.

Change in a Box (Theatre in the Rough)

Our aim to platform the voices of young people had mixed results. On the one hand, the kit is full of stories featuring a hugely diverse set of characters. It offers context and meaning in a confusing world (e.g. illustrating the link between 1950s Britain and the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020). In that respect, a wide range of participants can see their own lives reflected, celebrate their own history, and better understand their 'place in the world'. Conversely, the kit does little to platform the view of young people in the here and now. We placed great focus upon explaining the past - and empowering young people for the future. This means that a current, youth-driven voice is sometimes missing. In future iterations of this project, it would be great to include quotes from young people about current issues - and even articles written by local young people. For example, an article about newly learned LGBTQ+ history written by an LGBTQ+ young person could be exceptionally powerful.

Our Place in the World, Now (Charlotte Barber)

Me and Jo created a safe space for open conversations about identity, mental health, their experiences and wider subjects such as poverty, politics and COVID. These conversations happened both in the group through creative activities the creative writing and also the check-in, check-out in every session and any icebreaker games we did throughout the sessions or chit chat within the group and on a 1 to 1 basis with me when giving pastoral care on an individual basis. We had a celebration event where the young people got to show their work to an audience, which included a Q&A session after the showing.

Young Changemakers (GRAFT)

We always wanted the exhibition to be as youth-led as possible - showing the exciting outcomes that can occur when letting young people drive a project exploring activism through art. One aspect driven by our group was that the exhibition should be physical as well as digital, despite the restrictions of the second national

lockdown. We took this seriously, and worked with the group and local organisations (Lancaster City Museums and The Cornerstone) to find a way of exhibiting the work outside in a safe and visible way. Youth voice was seen throughout all aspects of the exhibition. They selected the artists and artworks, decided how and where the work should be shown, came up with a title, designed posters and other marketing tools, decided on a social media plan and worked with us to create an accompanying website. They drove each decision that was made, working with us and the artists to plan and curate the exhibition.

Double Life (leo&hyde)

A platform was provided in three ways.

1) As a space that was created for an under-represented group, LGBTQIA+ young people from Lancashire, that act itself was validating for some young people. One said it was great that LGBTQIA+ people were finally getting 'heard' when discussing participating in the workshops. There was a sense they felt important by having 'proper' performers passing on skills in an intimate group-based space.

2) The workshop space (dance/acting) was facilitated by the leaders to allow for the content to be a reflection of the young people's creative and emotional responses. They used the song Double Life to reflect on the same theme - something as young people who grow up having a social media façade, and have struggled with coming out, has the potential to speak to a key lived experience for them a. The dance workshop allowed young people to express their emotional responses physically, and they were used to shape the choreography of the music video, thus publicly showcasing their work, which was validated by its sharing on national media platform WhatsOnStage by Ashley Luke Lloyd (West End Performer) b. The acting workshop allowed young people to channel their own emotional responses into digital performances within the workshop session, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences. Many of the devising sessions doubled as a space where participants got to say things like 'I do this too', 'I can relate to that' in the mind-mapping stage

3) The choir element of the video emphasised the collective (yet diverse and individual) experience of LGBTQIA+ through the lyrics and presentation. The participants who submitted

videos were seen to be part of a media campaign that raised awareness for LGBTQIA+ isolation for young people in rural areas (Lancashire specifically). All of the professional soloists in the video were LGBTQIA+, to further emphasise the aspirational nature of the video: to champion LGBTQIA+ voices and to show 'they can do it too'.



'Mikrokosmos' - Herfa Thompson
GRAFT's Changemakers Voices
Exhibition



'Change in a Box'
Theatre in the Rough

Outcome 4: Create a conduit for young people to connect with peers through virtual, digital and/ or offline methodologies

Change in a Box (Theatre in the Rough)

The final output for this project makes this a tricky question to answer. Ultimately, the kit is a tool which *can* be used to connect young people. However, the kit itself is not the thing which connects them. Disappointingly, there are no means embedded within the kit which directly connect young people. Initially, we had explored using online spaces to share the work created, but this proved hard to manage safely. What the kit does do is offer some common ground for all participants. Young people who have both used the kit have shared knowledge and a shared experience. The wristband, shoelaces, and craft activities are all highly visible and can be seen by other young people. The kit also helps young people understand their place in the wider world. To acknowledge and mitigate our shortcomings in this regard, we worked hard to distribute kits to groups of young people - rather than individuals. In this way, participants can share the experience together. We distributed kits to a Black History group at a secondary school, a group for LGBTQ+ young people, the local youth justice service, a local mental health services, and a youth group working with some NEET young people. So, although the kit cannot connect young people with new friends, it can strengthen connections within existing peer groups. Some of these groups will also be using the kits to run facilitated sessions together.

Our Place in the World, Now (Charlotte Barber)

We had an email chain and Google docs for any forms that needed filling in, most of the conversations took place in an Instagram open group I had created which me and Jo were a part of and moderated. There was also a lot of individual conversation happening between myself and individual participants through email and zoom.

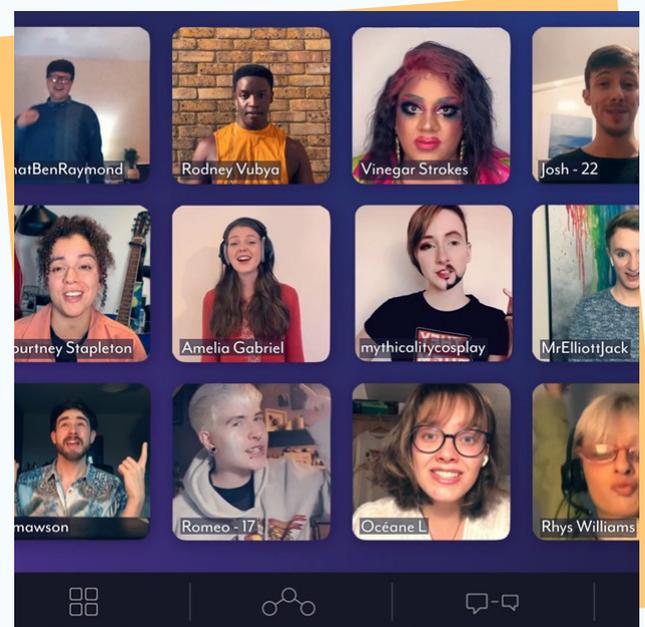
Young Changemakers (GRAFT)

The young people we worked with had not worked together before, so we used our workshops on Zoom to help develop connections between the group and develop the feeling of working as a

team as best we could. It meant young people were able to connect to peers who shared similar values about social justice and equality and work together to address these through the project. We used two tools primarily - Zoom for workshops and regular meetings, and WhatsApp for general discussion and sharing files and images.

Double Life (leo&hyde)

The acting/devising digital workshops facilitated connection with their newly met peers over Zoom. They were required to work together using discussion, whiteboards, chat, with each other to develop a short digital performance by collating their individual ideas from a discussion of the song Double Life and developing a short script. They seemed to respond well to having the stimulus of music and responding to it individually/emotionally, which led to the creation of a whiteboard of ideas that were melded into a performance idea with the facilitators, who allowed the young people to shape its structure.



'Double Life Music Video'
leo&hyde

Successes

- Quality of the work produced, as well as the process/ journey taken
- How meaningful each project was in terms of content/ subject matter and relevance to young people
- The connections that young people forged with peers during the life of each project
- How young people were listened to and understood
- Young people acting as makers, producers, curators and leaders
- Consistent attendance
- Made a number of new connections with businesses and other local organisations

Barriers

- The pandemic and having to lock down two times
- A lack of support from partners due to the ever-changing circumstances
- Digital poverty and online fatigue
- Financial uncertainty during pandemic (crowd-funders)
- Obtaining parental consent
- Delays to delivery and rescheduling due to shifting circumstances

Learning

- Allocate more time for one-to-one pastoral support
- Seek out advice from youth providers with more experience delivering digital (online) youth focussed initiatives
- Provide consistent communication with key partners to ensure smooth delivery and engagement with target groups
- Better self-care for those producing the work
- Adapting to deliver online (different style of planning required)
- Being more confident at online facilitation
- Lack of quality historical or political education tools for young people (gap in provision)
- Breaking big jobs down into small chunks
- Being firmer and more concrete with deadlines
- Be more clear around expectations
- Work with reliable partners to get better overall results
- Don't underestimate the amount of time it takes to produce CYP work

Feedback



"It's been an incredible honour to be part of this project! From when I joined the first session the atmosphere has always been warm and welcoming. I never felt like there was any pressure to show things back or judgement of what you'd created if you did. The way Char and Jo led the sessions created a really amazing and safe space to be creative in and the energy in the group was very positive and open. I always felt comfortable asking questions and for help with my project. It's just been an incredible project and I've met some people and learned skills that I'll never forget!" – Young Person (Your Place in the World Now)

"Personally, as a participant in this project I felt the support and guidance from people such as Charlotte and Jo were very helpful during the creation of my contributions to Your Place in the World Now." - Young Person (Your Place in the World Now)

"Overall, I enjoyed this project, and I would very much enjoy being part of it again in the future." - Young Person (Your Place in the World Now)

"I'm actually so sad it's over, it turned out really well. I really enjoyed everything about it. You and Jo were great- will miss seeing on Thursday nights!" - Young Person (Your Place in the World Now)

"I learned that I'm way better than I thought I was going through this process; it gave me confidence and I will definitely keep on using music software to write songs after this. It was great to have the challenge of showing my work to an audience and gaining positive feedback, I loved the experience of hosting the event too." - Young Person (Your Place in the World Now)

"It is really important and vital that the message is spread about Black Lives Matter and also for up-and-coming Black artists to get a chance. We chose these artists because they were the ones that we feel most represented our message – they had a story to tell that represented the project." – Young Person (Young Changemakers)

"The project was fun! I like the artists we chose because their work is good, and it relates to the message we wanted to send." - Young Person (Young Changemakers)

"Racism isn't a trend; it's still going on today. We want the project to spread a good message about stopping racism." - Young Person (Young Changemakers)

"I got involved because my sister signed me up, and I've found it really interesting to meet artists and learn about racism. I want this exhibition to spread awareness about racism in Lancaster". - Young Person (Young Changemakers)

"I was surprised by how much was actually in the box when it arrived. It has lots of different stories, that are all important in today's society but aren't talked about as much as they need

to be." – Young Person (Change in a Box)

"Change in a Box is a perfect example of a well-managed and expertly facilitated participatory and creative learning project, which provided manifold opportunities for young people to enhance their understanding of arts and social activism, whilst also empowering hundreds more to become positive changemakers." – Lancashire Youth Challenge (Change in a Box)

"I am so glad that LGBT youth are finally getting heard." – Young Person (Double Life)

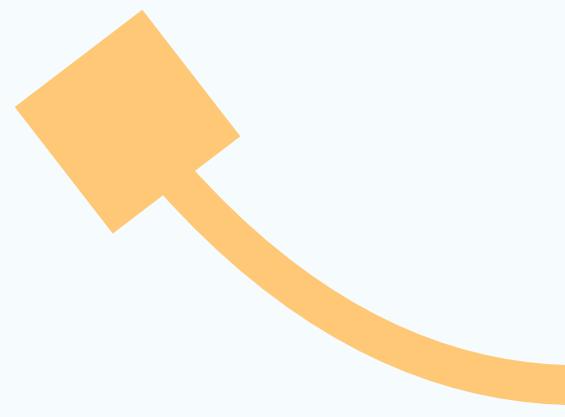
"I've really enjoyed myself so far. Loved being able to create a dance with an amazing performer, was still a bit scary though." - Young Person (Double Life)

"Really amazing to see high quality captioned and BSL interpreted content too when so many people aren't utilising how easy it is to be accessible online." – Performer (Double Life)

"I've just watched the video on you link below and it made me cry! We're in such desperate need of creativity and compassion for each other at the moment. And of course, it's a reminder of what we had only 12 months ago; and what we've all been missing for such a long time now. Beautiful." – YouTube Comment (Double Life)

"We appreciated the support offered by the Culture Co-op and Lancashire Youth Challenge throughout this project. It was great to work with you more as partners than funders, and would love to have the opportunity to do so again in the future! As a young, small organisation this support was really valuable, helped us move quickly and develop the project with confidence." - GRAFT

"Thanks to the hard work and support of freelance collaborators, The Culture Co-Op, and Lancashire Youth Challenge, this project grew to be much bigger than originally expected. Sixty kits were produced initially. Additional funding meant that a further twenty-five kits were produced for Lancaster, and another set of twenty-five may also now be commissioned. As well as this, Theatre Peckham sponsored fifty kits for young people in London, Liverpool Pride Foundation have commissioned fifty kits in Merseyside during Spring 2021, and Lancaster University funded two-hundred extra magazines." - Joseph Rynhart, Theatre in the Rough



The creative commission scheme has been developed via the **Our Place in the World: Cultural & Creative Education Programme**, in partnership with Curious Minds and Lancaster University.

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