



**CADA**

CREATIVE AGEING  
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

# GREATER MANCHESTER CULTURE CHAMPIONS

**Executive Summary**

# INTRODUCTION

**This research was commissioned by CADA, the Creative Ageing Development Agency.**

There are many Community Champions programmes across the country. Often associated with health and wellbeing, they are characterised by a focus on volunteers using their community connections and local knowledge, offering those involved the opportunity to share information and make a difference in their neighbourhood or social network.

To our knowledge, the Culture Champions programme is the only 'Champions' scheme that focuses on culture. It was launched in Manchester in October 2011 with support from the Baring Foundation. **CADA commissioned this report from Emma Horridge** with the support of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). It records how this programme, which began by connecting older people with Manchester's cultural organisations, has developed over the last decade and expanded across the city region. Thanks to all who contributed to it, particularly the Culture Champions themselves

This scoping report contributes to CADA's exploration of how to amplify the voice of older people in the cultural life of the country. The findings demonstrate the different contexts in which the Culture Champions programme has been delivered and shows how older people have created a range of cultural opportunities and developed new roles and networks in their communities, on the one hand, building bridges with existing arts organisations in town and city centres and on the other hand, generating their own activities and events in their neighbourhoods.



**THIS SCOPING REPORT CONTRIBUTES TO CADA'S EXPLORATION OF HOW TO AMPLIFY THE VOICE OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY.**

We hope that the findings of this report will encourage and inform more conversations about a citizen-led approach to creative ageing and generate the opportunity for older people who are actively involved in and leading a range of projects across the country to connect with one another.

Contact CADA if you would like to be part of that debate and get in touch with us if you have examples that you would like to share of:

- age friendly work where older people take the lead
- creating specific opportunities for older people to develop creative skills and leadership expertise
- exploring models that facilitate cultural activity that older people want to enjoy and share in their neighbourhood.

**Dr. Virginia Tandy OBE  
Director**

**CADA: the Creative Ageing  
Development Agency**

## 1.1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bolton Culture Champions

"It attracted people from different walks of life. I was chuffed to be asked to be a Culture Champion, it helps us find things to do as we get older. It gets ordinary folk involved, not those in the circles where decisions are made, helped us to have a say.", (**Bolton Culture Champion**).

Greater Manchester Culture Champions is a cultural engagement programme for people aged 50 and over. It was launched in 2011 with support from the Baring Foundation and developed from a single project based in the city of Manchester into a body of work involving 5 boroughs in Greater Manchester: Manchester, Bolton, Bury, Salford and Trafford supported by Ambition for Ageing, Great Place, Trafford Housing Trust and Bolton at Home.

The Culture Champions participate in, advocate for and shape cultural activity in organisations and their communities from volunteering programmes and workshops, to festivals and radio shows. The scheme echoes a community champions model often associated with health promotion and has an emphasis on reaching older people at risk of social isolation. It uses culture and creative activity as a vehicle to encourage active citizenship and chimes with the citizen led approach to creative ageing in Greater Manchester. Projects have involved a wide range of partners such as housing providers, voluntary and community organisations and a wide range of cultural organisations across the city region.

**This report set out to answer 4 questions:**

1. How has the concept and role of Culture Champions in Greater Manchester developed over the last decade and what aspects of the programme are valued by those involved and why?
2. What working models have been created and how have these informed an understanding of citizen-led creative ageing in a range of settings and locations?
3. What are the conditions for success?
4. How might this approach to creative ageing be developed in the future, building on the learning from the Culture Champions programme?

## Culture Champions were recruited by:

- holding information days in local shopping centres, libraries & community hubs
- attending community events and meetings
- local leafleting both through community networks and also targeting places – shopping centres, libraries, GP surgeries & community hubs
- working with existing groups working with older adults
- connecting to local religious and cultural organisations i.e., Shree Krishna Temple, African Community Association, Bolton Asian Elders Resource Centre

"I see [Culture Champions] primary purpose is to build bridges with the older population in Bury and culture", (Bury Culture Champion).

## Findings

The city region's commitment to improving the lives of older people created a positive climate for the Culture Champions to develop in. Key factors were:

- A cultural sector that is actively working together to include older people
- A supportive wider public and voluntary sector with an Age Friendly programme
- Existing strong networks focused on or led by older people
- Delivery organisations and individuals that are trusted and can develop meaningful relationships with potential Champions.

## Benefits

Interviews were held with Culture Champions, Coordinators, funders and a range of people working in cultural organisations and older people's projects and programme. Culture Champions felt strongly that they and others who engaged in a similar programme benefit by:

- Being less lonely & isolated – lots of opportunities to meet people
- Being more connected to local cultural activity, which in turn strengthens connections to the wider community

- Developing skills & confidence through social and creative activity
- Having a voice & role in culture, giving a greater sense of purpose
- Improved wellbeing – the projects help fulfil activities for the 5 Ways to Wellbeing
- Being encouraged to stay/become an active citizen

"Being part of the Pink Purse live stream event [part of Trafford Culture Champions] made me feel empowered that I could make a small change in how the queer community are represented. As an older black lesbian, I don't see people like me represented in mainstream media and to be able to create something that was so diverse was really special", (Trafford Culture Champion).

## Learning

The conditions for success were identified as follows:

- Time – allow enough time to develop relationships with a wide range of older people.
- Continuity of staff – finding, supporting and keeping knowledgeable staff to recruit members and build connections. Building genuine relationships between coordinators and Champions is key
- Have a range of roles – The majority of Champions wanted to 'advocate' or 'attend'; however, for the small number of Champions who did 'lead' and 'create' they found the experience extremely rewarding.
- Language – use terms used to describe the Champion role that are familiar to the participants
- Evaluation – keep it light touch
- Recognise that some people seem happier to be associated with groups that reflect their hobbies/ethnic identity/life experiences (e.g. male voice choir membership, religious affiliation, support post care responsibilities) rather than simply joining a group based on age" (Bury Culture Champion)

## Models

Each project was tailored to local need and opportunities and 3 models have emerged:

- Creative Local Communities model – By delivering a programme that focuses on a small geographical area and working in a hyper local manner the benefit can be seen in the local community and projects have thrived

*“Culture Champions energised my love for Stretford, it made me feel differently about my area.” (Trafford Culture Champion)*

- Age Friendly Cultural Organisations model – By using the principles of the Culture Champions programme, organisations can become more age-friendly and diversify both their audience and their programme of work

*“Some Culture Champions have lived in Stockport all their life but had never visited the art gallery, the project opened up places in Stockport. In the past you’d pass the buildings on the bus and never go in but with Culture Champions you have an invitation”. (Stockport Culture Champion)*

- Active Older Citizens model – This model can empower and support older adults to become more active and have more agency both within the local cultural offer and in the wider community

*“In the beginning, I started getting other older people from my area involved in cultural activities that they wouldn’t have traditionally got involved in. Then I ended up speaking at a symposium in London about why that’s a good idea! I wouldn’t have done that before”, (Manchester Culture Champion).*

## Activity

“The variety of projects is amazing.. being open to that is important”. – Trafford Culture Champion Coordinator.

The Culture Champions created a wide range of activities in neighbourhoods and communities such as:

- Weekly music lessons for guitar, drums, keyboard and ukulele
- Regular craft sessions
- Club Nights – ‘night out’ for older people including live acts, dj and dancing
- Bus tour of taking in musical highlights and heritage of the city
- Celebration of South Asian food and music
- Regular meetups to help generate ideas and give Champions opportunities to socialise
- Cabaret night for local older LGBT+ community
- Volunteer Pop Up Cycle Project which offered bike maintenance training, cycling support and social cycles.

- Wall of Fame – A celebration of people connected to an area who have contributed to arts, culture & social change in our community and beyond
- Bring On the Brass: An interactive brass performance that toured the streets

## The impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic forced cultural organisations to change how they worked with older people. Those interviewed said they quickly adapted their practices and where possible moved activity to online platforms such as Zoom. All reported having seen a greater uptake in older people not only using Zoom, but also Skype, email and apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp as a way to stay connected. Although not being able to meet face to face was difficult, some Champions have experienced the benefit of using online platforms

*“We have learnt a lot about online working over the last few months which enables people to join directly from their own homes. This may remain useful after the pandemic is over.”, (Bury Culture Champion).*

However, there are still a considerable number of older people who are not digitally connected in Greater Manchester and projects were progressed via radio, post and telephone.

In recognition that for some older people there will be multiple barriers to returning to public spaces, a number of organisations expressed a willingness to go into communities to help re-establish relationships with older adults, and deliver activity at a more local level, with a view that over time people's confidence will grow and anxieties around being in public spaces and using public transport will lessen. Champions did express a desire for local activity.

"keep things local and close to [older] people and in a community" (Manchester Culture Champion).

"I can relate to cultural institutions, but I'm more interested in grass roots things and implementing at a community level and avoiding the elite." (Manchester Culture Champion).

## Conclusion and next steps

Despite the disruption of the pandemic, it is clear that many Culture Champions have experienced a wide range of benefits from participating in the programme. They have an appetite for creative activity and making a difference in their neighbourhood. As we emerge from lockdown and shielding and the vaccination programme is completed, Culture Champions offers a model that could encourage older people back into civic life and build their confidence to return to and gather in public space.

Given the range of ways in which older people have engaged with the possibilities offered by Culture Champions, there appears to be an opportunity to harness the collective energy of those involved in both creative ageing in their communities at this time of change. This has begun with the 'Future Fires' training programme organised by Contact Theatre. 10 culture champions are developing skills and a small grant to produce an event in their community.

"We want learning and support. All round learning - nothing intimidating, something that will help us build confidence", (Manchester Culture Champion).

Informed by this research CADA plans to explore bringing those Culture Champions interested in leadership together with other older people who lead creative ageing projects identified elsewhere in the country, to begin a conversation about creative ageing from their perspective and to encourage networking and knowledge exchange across England. A future development might be a reference group based on lived experience for CADA and others to draw on, amplifying the voice of older people in the cultural life of the country.

The emergence of social prescribing in the context of the arts may offer another opportunity for the Culture Champions model and highlights the importance of people in the community who are championing the value of creative opportunities and advocating for and making creative ageing projects that develop confidence and connections, combat loneliness, support wellbeing and encourage older people to contribute to the cultural life of their neighbourhoods, towns and cities.



## Postscript – next stages of Culture Champions

Following completion of the report, on 30 June 2021, CADA brought a group of Culture Champions and coordinators together on Zoom to review the findings and comment on proposed next steps. In those conversations the following points were emphasised:

### Start local – create or tap into existing networks across the country that can then be linked up on a regional or national level

- Groups could then visit others around the country to share ideas and best practice
- Could empty shops be used as a space for meeting? Somewhere central and safe that increases the visibility of the group and reconnects older people to busy spaces

### Conferences – welcomed opportunity to come together

- Want to share and participate in activities rather than being spoken at or lectured to
- Creating a buzz, getting others involved and meeting others in the network

### COVID-19 changes – need to build people's confidence when coming back

- Zoom still a popular way to connect

### Wording is important – Culture Champions could put people off, would 'active' or 'engaging' work as terms to attract a broader audience?

- Being a critical friend/citizen researcher, a chance to discuss what older people want with service providers in cultural and other sectors
  - Need to ensure this is an active role, sometimes feels passive, important that it can bring about change – highlighted Cultural Audit of age-friendly venues and introduction of matinee performances
  - Need to get 'gatekeepers' on board e.g. managers of sheltered housing schemes, to see the values of cultural activity
- Learning and sharing new skills with other people who have similar interests, having access to equipment they wouldn't otherwise have
- Stretching people, not just 'knit and natter'
- Providing an entry point to more activities and cultural engagement, making connections older people might not have access to e.g Royal Exchange programmes
- Building on people's new IT skills post pandemic
- Partnering with other organisations, particularly for intergenerational work
- Social prescribing – need to be careful it doesn't lead to activities being oversubscribed as there are already waiting lists for some programmes in Manchester

# CADA

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