



**CADA**

CREATIVE AGEING  
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

**GREATER  
MANCHESTER  
CULTURE  
CHAMPIONS**

# CONTENTS

Contents	2
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Executive Summary	4
1.2 Background	9
1.3 An Introduction into Greater Manchester Culture Champions programme	10
<b>2. The development of the Greater Manchester Culture Champions</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Manchester Culture Champion Case Study	21
2.2 The Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme	16
2.3 Trafford Culture Champion case study	20
2.4 Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme extensions	23
<b>3. The impact of COVID-19</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 COVID-19 Recovery	25
<b>4. Key Learning</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1 Greater Manchester Culture Champion Models	29
<b>5. What are the conditions for success?</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>6. Next steps</b>	<b>34</b>

# 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

# 1.2 Background

This piece of work was commissioned from Emma Horridge by CADA: the Creative Ageing Development Agency. CADA is the national development agency for creative ageing and exists to:

- Celebrate and champion the cultural contribution of older people
- Challenge ageism in the arts and heritage sectors and in society more widely
- Lead a fundamental rethink and reflection on ageing and creativity
- Harness collective energy and impact to support systemic change

The purpose of this report which was funded by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is to review the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme, a cultural engagement programme for people aged 50 and over and how it developed from a single project based in the city of Manchester to a body of work involving 5 boroughs in Greater Manchester. In order to do this CADA outlined the following questions to be addressed:

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?

The methodology used in this report was 1-2-1 interviews carried out in January and February 2021 with:

- Individual Culture Champions from each project
- Culture Champion Coordinators
- Funders
- Cultural professionals working in Greater Manchester
- Local authority officers
- Broader cultural and age-friendly sector beyond Greater Manchester

Stakeholders were consulted via 1-2-1 interviews over the phone and via email as this piece of work was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore government restrictions on social interactions meant 1-2-1 interviews could not be carried out in person.

## 1.3 An Introduction into Greater Manchester Culture Champions programme

The Greater Manchester Culture Champions programme is a cultural activism and leadership scheme for people aged 50 and over. The rationale behind the programme builds upon Manchester and Greater Manchester's Ageing Hub's citizen-based approach to ageing, promoting agency and active participation led by older people themselves. The ethos is to enable work across the ageing agenda by, with and for local people. This longstanding approach seeks to improve the quality of life for older people and make the city-region a better place to grow older.

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 programme was first developed in 2011 as a City of Manchester project, since then the scheme has grown with the support of the Great Place Scheme and Ambition for Ageing programmes and now spans 5 boroughs across Greater Manchester and the Champions are a powerful resource for mobilising older people, focusing on co-production across the cultural sector and democratising arts and cultural activity by, with and for older people.

The Culture Champions' scheme has an emphasis on reaching older people at risk of social isolation and uses culture as a vehicle to encourage active citizenship. This is achieved by working with a wide range of partners such as housing providers, voluntary and community organisations and a wide number of cultural organisations across Greater Manchester.

It takes a collaborative approach to place-making, with projects in Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Trafford and Stockport and supports localities across the region to develop an asset-based approach to developing new age-friendly cultural programmes in their local areas, creating a sense of local identity and developing new civic space in their communities.

The scheme has an internationally recognised track record in leading innovative age-friendly practice. The Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership (the Whitworth, Manchester Art Gallery and Manchester Museum) which pioneered the programme has shared its approach and work with colleagues across the world in Japan, Taiwan, US, Denmark, Australia and Hong Kong.

# 2.

## The development of the Greater Manchester Culture Champions

This section of the report discusses how 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.

For the purpose of this report when using the term 'programme' in relation to Culture Champions it refers to the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme of work that includes 5 separate projects and use the term 'project' refers to the individual projects delivered in the boroughs i.e., the Bolton Culture Champion Project.

### Background

The current Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme developed from a single project that focused solely on older people living in the borough Manchester. The case study below looks at the growth of this project and the climate and conditions that helped support its development and subsequently led to the forming of 4 further projects.



Manchester Culture Champions image  
from Manchester Ageing Strategy 2017-2021

## 2.1 Manchester Culture Champion Case Study

The Manchester Culture Champion project was launched in 2011, creating a cultural ambassador and advocacy role for people aged 50 and over or anyone working with older adults living in the borough of Manchester.

The project aimed to:

- Inform [older people's] networks and communities within Manchester about the variety of cultural events taking place in the city throughout the year.
- Encourage [older people's] networks and communities within Manchester to attend and try out a variety of culture events taking place in the city throughout the year.<sup>1</sup>

The climate and conditions surrounding the development of the project are an important factor in its longevity. The project was originally initiated by the Valuing Older People Cultural Offer (VOPCO), part of the Valuing Older People partnership. This partnership was set up to improve life for older people in Manchester and launched in 2003 by Manchester City Council, NHS Manchester and community and voluntary organisations.

Manchester's commitment to older people was recognised when in 2010 the city was granted Age-Friendly status by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) – becoming the first UK city to gain this recognition. The Valuing Older People partnership then transitioned into Age-Friendly Manchester, reflecting the city's links with WHO and the WHO ageing concept. This concept focused on healthy ageing through civic participation and employment, respect and social inclusion, social participation, community support and health, communication and information, housing, transport, outdoor space and buildings.

Culture was seen as a way to increase civic participation and encourage social inclusion and participation. The development of the Culture Champion project supported these aims and its launch in 2011 was funded by the Baring Foundation's creative ageing programme. In the beginning the Manchester Culture Champions were seen as cultural representatives for their local authority ward, attending bespoke cultural tours, receiving discounted offers, information about events and regular newsletters informing them of cultural activity in the city of Manchester. The Champions role was to then share this

<sup>1</sup> Audience Agency, [Valuing Older People \(VOP\)](#) – Culture Champions Scheme

information within their communities and networks and encourage other older people to participate in cultural activity.

The Champions also attended a Culture Champions Annual Celebration. This event was specifically aimed at bringing all Culture Champions from across the city together to network, share learning and pass insightful feedback to the VOPCO working group on how to improve the offer for older people in the city.<sup>2</sup>

The Manchester Culture Champions talked about a sense of purpose and duty in their role, one Champion spoke about having an aim to “get other older people to engage with culture, especially where there was low participation and to reach people who thought ‘not for us’. People didn’t know what arts and culture could offer – we wanted to change that”, (Manchester Culture Champion).

Another Champion who joined the project at a similar time in 2011 saw the project as a way to “promote awareness of art and cultural activities in our wards and neighbourhoods. Being a link between institutes and communities”.

The project was led by a part-time coordinator shared between Manchester City Council’s Age-Friendly team and one of the leading cultural venues in the city, [the Whitworth](#). The Manchester Age-Friendly Cultural Working Group was also formed at this time. This group was managed by Manchester City Council’s Age-Friendly team, with a membership made up of cultural venues across the city and a Culture Champion representative. The group focused on developing and supporting age-friendly culture in the city and provided a network for professionals working in this area. The group is still active today.

As the Manchester Culture Champion project was developing, so was the broader age-friendly sector in Greater Manchester, with the 10 boroughs becoming more closely linked under the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). In 2016, as part of GMCA [the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub](#) was launched. The Ageing Hub works towards 6 priorities aiming to improve the quality of life for older people. Each priority has a strategic lead that advocates and supports this work. One priority is culture and the lead for age-friendly culture in Greater Manchester is Esme Ward, now Director of Manchester Museum. Ward has helped steer the development of the Manchester Culture Champion project and in turn the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme.

From 2011 to 2019 the Manchester Culture Champions grew in number, with between 80 and 120 older people involved in the project. They were supported to take on more active roles within the local cultural scene. Culture Champions regularly spoke at regional and national conferences on the importance of older people’s inclusion in culture.

<sup>2</sup> Audience Agency, *Valuing Older People (VOP) – Culture Champions Scheme*



Manchester Culture Champions

The group carried out activities such as age-friendly audits of the cultural venues in the city and took part in age-friendly take over events at Manchester Art Gallery as well as attending events and consulting with the city's venues on how to include older adults. This relationship and influence of Champions on cultural organisations is exemplified by a group of Champions speaking to the Music Director of the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester about the difficulties for older people to attend evening concerts. In response, the Bridgewater Hall, the city's concert hall held matinee performances by the Hallé, to encourage a wider range of attendees. As time progressed there was an appetite for a more active role for the Champions and this journey for the Manchester Culture Champions helped develop the role for the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme.

In 2019 the Manchester project became 1 of the 5 projects that made up the Greater Manchester Culture Champions programme. The role of a Culture Champion developed from an ambassador role to one focused on leadership and creating opportunities for older people to directly influence their local cultural offer through co-creating and co-producing activities. These activities opened up space for older people to put forward their own cultural ideas and through the programme they were supported to bring these ideas to life.

In 2019 the coordination of the Manchester programme moved from the Whitworth to the [Royal Exchange Theatre](#) (RET). The RET is an experienced age-friendly venue, and is home to the [Elders Company](#), which brings together a group of older people (aged 60+) to take part in regular workshops, develop performance skills, create performances and intergenerational projects. When the Manchester project moved to its new home at the RET, the theatre employed a part-time coordinator to run the project. The first task for the coordinator was to contact all existing Champions to explain the development of the Champion role and also gauge who still wanted to be involved in the project. The audit found the number of Champions decreased, the drop in numbers could relate to the fact some Champions may not have liked the new role and that in some cases Champions had passed away.

The new focus of the Manchester project was across the whole borough of Manchester, and the RET focused on areas of North Manchester as both the project and the RET had low engagement in these areas. The project was able to blend the existing Champions who wanted to continue being involved along with newly recruited Champions. The coordinator held regular informal meetings so Champions could get to know each other and discuss creative ideas. The meetings were held in different cultural venues across the city, giving the Champions the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the city's cultural assets.



Manchester Culture Champions  
- My Generation Club Night

### **Whilst based at the RET the Manchester Culture Champions initiated and led activities such as:**

- The Brunswick Mill Studios Music Sessions – weekly music lessons for guitar, drums, keyboard and ukulele
- The Cheetham Hill and Crumpsall Culture Creatures Woodville Centre – regular craft sessions
- My Generation Club Nights – long standing ‘night out’ for older people including live acts, dj and dancing
- World Music Bus Tour Manchester-wide – bus tour of taking in musical highlights of the city
- Burnage Buddies Community Food and Music Event – Celebration of South Asian food and music

Following on from the Manchester project, the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme developed through a unique collaboration between local authority, public funding bodies and the cultural sector.

## 2.2 The Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme

This collaboration consisted of:

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) Ageing Hub
- The Greater Manchester Great Place scheme – based within GMCA and funded by Arts Council England and National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Manchester Museum, part of the University of Manchester
- Ambition for Ageing (AfA) – led by the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) and part of the national Ageing Better programme.

In order to support the projects the funding came from the following places:

- Great Place Scheme
- Ambition for Ageing
- Trafford Housing Trust

Through this partnership funding was awarded to develop 5 projects across the city region. This new funding allowed the original Manchester Culture Champions project to continue plus the development of 4 additional new projects. The partnership created a new post to support this work, the Greater Manchester Age-Friendly Culture Champion Manager. This post was the link between the funding partnership and the projects across the city region and was based between GMCA's Age Friendly Hub and Manchester Museum. Each project had a part-time coordinator based within a local cultural or community venue, with support from the Greater Manchester Age-Friendly Culture Champion Manager.

Ambition for Ageing created an opportunity for organisations across 8 of the 10 boroughs in Greater Manchester to bid for funding to develop a Culture Champion project. The public [invitation to tender](#), set out the purpose and aims of the new programme. Projects in Stockport and Trafford were supported by the Great Place programme.

Each project was awarded £40,000 with a start date between March and July 2019. The funding was for a fixed period of 12 months. Example budget:

Expenditure	
Project coordinator (based on 3 days per week)	£16,000.00
Age friendly culture commissioning	£10,000.00
Culture Champions producers' activity	£6,000.00
Transport	£1,200.00
Hospitality (for Culture Champions)	£800.00
Training	£1,000.00
Marketing	£2,000.00
Recruitment (events and workshops)	£2,000.00
Materials	£1,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£40,000.00</b>

The table below lists the 5 projects that launched in 2019.

Project	Funder	Host Organisation	Current Status /April 2021
<b>Bolton Culture Champions</b>	<a href="#">Ambition for Ageing</a>	<a href="#">Bolton at Home</a>	Activity currently being supported by BaH but future uncertain due to funding.
<b>Bury Culture Champions</b>	<a href="#">Ambition for Ageing</a>	<a href="#">Bury Art Museum</a>	At the moment there is no Culture Champion activity. However Bury Art Museum is keen to build on the learning from this project and is working towards including Champions in different aspects of its work.
<b>Manchester Culture Champions</b>	<a href="#">Ambition for Ageing</a>	<a href="#">Royal Exchange Theatre</a> (until May 2020) <a href="#">Manchester Museum</a> (currently)	Manchester Museum has now taken over responsibility for the Manchester project and is actively looking for ways to sustain the project
<b>Stockport Culture Champions</b>	<a href="#">Great Place Scheme</a>	<a href="#">Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council</a> (until July 2020) <a href="#">Arc Centre</a>	Likely extend to summer 2021
<b>Trafford Culture Champions</b>	<a href="#">Trafford Housing Trust</a>	<a href="#">Stretford Public Hall</a>	Coordinator 1 day a week until Mar 2021. SPH would like to incorporate age-friendly activity into their core work but this depends on funding

From 2019 onwards each new project recruited between 15 and 30 Champions but engaged with a larger number of older adults through their events. At the time of writing (April 2021) the full data from the evaluation to find out exact numbers has not been published, however it is estimated the programme had a total of between 80 and 100 active members. One Champion involved in the programme described it as "an opportunity to reinvent ourselves and challenge the perception of ageing!" (Manchester Culture Champion).



Manchester Culture Champions



Example of an ideas generating workshop for Trafford Culture Champions.

The projects all developed with a smaller core group of Champions that would meet regularly and generate ideas, surrounded by a larger more informal group that attended events and workshops.

### Coordinators recruited Champions by focusing on the local area for example:

- 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

The two major funders for this work – Ambition for Ageing and Great Place Scheme shared similar priorities such as making communities and neighbourhoods stronger through encouraging active citizenship, therefore the new projects were interested in, but not solely focused on reaching older people at risk of social isolation and those older people who did not currently access cultural activity in their local areas.

Champions who joined in 2019 spoke about being new to culture and felt the project was a good way to include a wider group of older people. "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).



Poetry in the Pub,  
Bolton Culture Champions

In Bolton, with support from the coordinator, Champions designed and led 'Poetry in the Pub' for other Champions and older people in the local community.

In Stockport one Champion talked about, "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".

As the Greater Manchester programme developed Champions still felt strongly about linking the work to their local communities, "Getting local people involved in different cultural activities helps them, it gives people something to take back to their communities, gives them a reason to connect to people", (Manchester Culture Champion).

The new projects focused less on Champions being advocates for the existing cultural offer and more on Champions driving the creation of culture in their local area. The new projects supported Champions to develop their own creative ideas and have a direct influence on local culture. For example, a Trafford Cultural Champion used the small payments scheme to develop this piece of artwork celebrating notable people from the area, the 'Stretford Wall of Fame'.



Trafford Culture Champions,  
Stretford Wall of Fame.

The small payments scheme had its pros and cons, for some this was a fantastic way to give autonomy to Champions however the logistics of setting up the payments was complicated and required a lot of financial administration from the coordinator and at times responsibility for the Champion. One Champion said they understood the need for keeping track of the small payments scheme but felt there was 'Too much bureaucracy with small pots and the evaluation', (Trafford Culture Champion).

A key characteristic of the new projects was that they differed from area to area, this was intentional as each project responded to the cultural needs of local older people and reflected each area's unique cultural and community assets.

## 2.3 Trafford Culture Champion case study

The Trafford project was delivered by [Stretford Public Hall](#), (SPH), a charitable community benefit society that is democratically run by a group of members<sup>1</sup>. In order to fund the Trafford project Julie McCarthy, the Great Place Scheme Project Manager for Greater Manchester and Emma Horridge, the Greater Manchester Culture Champion Manager actively sought funding to support this work and approached Trafford Housing Trust's Social Investment Fund. McCarthy and Horridge used the example of the Manchester project and set out the aims for the new Ambition for Ageing

and Great Place Scheme projects as models for a Trafford based project, highlighting how the project can empower older people and increase cultural capital.

An important aspect of the Trafford project was the deliberate focus on three wards that had been identified as having high levels of social deprivation and correspondingly high indices of reported loneliness - Clifford, Longford and Stretford.

The following information sourced from [Trafford Data lab](#)<sup>2</sup> was used to identify the wards most in need of Culture Champions.

Older people living in income-deprived households as a percentage of the population:	BAME residents:	Older people living alone:
Clifford: 41.7%	Clifford 64.6%	Longford: 40%
Longford: 23.3%	Longford: 40.6%	Stretford: 39.8%
Stretford: 20.9%	Stretford 20.3%	Clifford: 36.6%

[Info from Trafford Data lab](#)

1 [https://www.stretfordpublichall.org.uk/about\\_us](https://www.stretfordpublichall.org.uk/about_us)

2 <https://www.trafforddatalab.io/index.html>

These wards had also been identified as having low cultural capital and engagement. However Clifford, Longford and Stretford and the surrounding areas do have a number of key community venues, such as SPH, Limelight - a health and wellbeing hub located in the heart of Old Trafford and St Johns - an independent, community based, voluntary organisation. The location of these venues is key as they are close to or in the middle of residential areas.

Local people are familiar with them and they have a trusted reputation amongst the community. Trafford Culture Champions was run by a part time coordinator based at SPH, the Coordinator was employed to specifically run this project and hadn't worked for SPH before. They had experience of both community engagement and arts practice. Like the other projects, the Coordinator was also supported by the Greater Manchester Age-Friendly Culture Champions Manager.

Here are some examples of activity developed by the Champions and supported by the coordinator:

- Creative Cafe events: Regular meetups to help generate ideas and give Champions opportunities to socialise
- The Pink Purse Cabaret – Planned as a live cabaret night for local older LGBT+ community, due to COVID-19 the event was moved to a live stream and received over 200 views on the night and 400+ views the following week
- Trafford Volunteer Pop Up Cycle Project: Offered bike maintenance training, cycling support and social cycles.

- Stretford Wall of Fame – A celebration of people connected to Stretford 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 of Trafford.



Trafford Culture Champion flyer.

The information below shows the range of diversity and the scale of the project.

No of Culture Champions	New audiences	No of events and activities	No of organisations that increased working knowledge of age friendly practice	Diversity of Champions
30	500	32	9	33% BME 33% LGBT+ Age range 50 - 75

Info from THT Evaluation 1&2 (Sept 19 – Dec 2020)

The Trafford project differed from the other projects in a number of ways:

- Working hyper local within 3 wards of a larger borough
- Diversity of Champions
- Diversity of activities
- Host venue based within the community
- Area with low cultural capital but passionate grassroot venues
- Coordinator who brought own creative skills to the project

These factors resulted in a project that truly reflected its community and Champions felt like they had real ownership over the project.

## Quotes from Trafford Culture Champions

It gave me pride in my community. Living next door to Chorlton you felt like Stretford was a cultural waste ground, but Culture Champions energised my love for Stretford, it made me feel differently about my area.

Culture Champions has been the catalyst in us being able to secure funding to start a Community Cycle Café in Stretford Mall. The pop-up bike mechanic events that we have delivered throughout November has shown that there is a need for a project like this and now we can continue to help people stay safe on their bikes, offer friendly bike rides, train up new volunteers and tackle isolation.

Being part of the Pink Purse live stream event 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.

## 2.4 Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme extensions

In 2019 the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme was able to secure funding. It was only for one year's activity and from the early stages of the project the coordinators expressed concern over the ambition of the project versus the timeline.

Coordinators and their host venues were committed to this work and there was a collective desire to continue beyond the agreed end date of March 2020. However, this had to be agreed with the funders, therefore on behalf of the coordinators the Greater Manchester Age-Friendly Cultural Manager negotiated an extension; the projects received 2 additional months, which meant each Ambition for Ageing funded project was due to end by May 2020 and with the remaining projects ending in September 2020. During this time the management of the Stockport project moved from Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council to the Arc Centre.

The additional funding received as part of the extension and a project underspend allowed Arc Centre to plan activity until Summer 2021. From May 2020 the Manchester project moved from the Royal Exchange Theatre to Manchester Museum, where it currently sits.

Activity on all projects was temporarily paused / reduced when national restrictions were brought in during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in early March 2020. This allowed the projects to stretch their funding over a longer period of time.

In 2021 the programme is at a crossroads, however given the distinctive nature of the programme, CADA: the Creative Ageing Development Agency, with the support of GMCA decided to undertake this piece of work to understand the achievements to date and consider how to take learning from the programme forward.

# The impact of COVID-19

# 3.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced cultural organisations to make a sudden change to how they worked with older people. The cultural organisations interviewed as part of this work 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, one Champion said, "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 cultural organisations in the city region have responded to this in the following ways:

- [Sonder Radio](#) - Developed Buddy Line, which is a series of intergenerational telephone conversations between older adults and [Reform Radio](#).
- [GMCA Creative Care Kits](#) - GMCA worked with cultural venues across GM to develop creative activities for older adults to be completed at home. The activities could be done with simple materials found in the home and didn't require use of the internet.
- [Stockport Culture Champions - Culture Buddies](#) - Mail Art Exchange Project which buddied a Stockport Culture Champion with older isolated adults who are not digitally connected.
- [Trafford Culture Champions](#) received creative photography kits made up of a disposable camera and writing materials as a way to document their experiences during the pandemic.



Stockport Culture Champion project

## 3.1 COVID-19 Recovery

Moving forward into COVID-19 recovery, many organisations that were contacted as part of this study feel that so much is still unknown and are finding it hard to make concrete plans for the future. There is an awareness of the need to support older audiences to come back into their venues. Organisations understand 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. This way of working highlights the need for community hubs and venues and suggests that relationships between larger cultural venues and community spaces will be key. This also echoes what the Champions who contributed to this piece of work have said. In particular a Champion talked about how more than ever it's important to focus on “..our local area, keep things local and close to [older] people and in a community”, (Manchester Culture Champion).

# 4 Key Learning

**From the interviews carried out with Champions and coordinators the following points have been identified:**

- The projects thrived when embedded in a local community, i.e delivered from a venue that was either geographical based within a community or in an organisation that has strong community links and networks.
- Working 'hyper local' and concentrating on a small number of wards within a borough has proven successful. This gave coordinators more opportunities to meet and recruit people face to face and establish a relationship. Champions also spoke about the importance of this, saying - "[older] folk who attend events in their local community are more interested in getting involved in decision making". - Manchester Culture Champion.
- Time – Every coordinator expressed concern over the limited timeframe versus the ambition of the programme as stated in the invitation to tender. There was general agreement that the ambition was worthwhile and achievable if more time was available. It was also noted that finding older adults who were at risk of social isolation was labour intensive. Once this connection was made it took more time again to build a trusting relationship, then time to develop creative ideas. Coordinators also stated they needed more time to establish and grow relationships, especially when it came to developing and growing links with ethnically diverse communities.

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**The short timescales of the programme, which allowed for only around six months of engagement/activity in actual practice had an impact and there were many things we would have liked to do, many other communities we would've liked to engage with, if the Culture Champions programme had been longer than 12 months.**

**Culture Champion Coordinator**

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**It felt like we were just making headway when we had to start winding down.**

**Culture Champion Coordinator**

- The Culture Champion role is multifaceted, it offers the opportunity to advocate, create / produce, participate / attend and lead
  - To begin with, this was well received by Culture Champions however, when asked to participate in the different aspects of the role the majority of Champions preferred to 'advocate' and 'attend' rather than to 'create' or 'lead'. A number of coordinators observed that not everyone wanted to be a leader, however for the small number of Champions who did lead and create they found the experience extremely rewarding. Coordinators indicated that in some cases not all ideas developed however, there was still a good level of engagement - and coordinators felt it was not just about the end product but the journey.
- Relationships – Building genuine relationships with the Champions was one of the keys to the success of the project. Again working locally with opportunities for face to face, informal meetings with coordinators was important in the early stages. This helped build both confidence but also a greater understanding of the aims of the project for participants and the aims behind it. Once that relationship was established between a coordinator and a Champion, the next step was to create opportunities for Champions to meet with each other.
- Social, informal gatherings proved to be popular, such as the initiative used in the Bury Culture Champion project - Coffee & Culture, which was a monthly event taking place at a partner venue, involving tours, workshops. The Manchester project did a similar activity, arranging informal but regular meetups at a range of cultural venues in the city, as did The Trafford project. Coordinators said that as well as providing a much sought after chance to socialise, the meetups provided a good climate to generate ideas for the co-producing and co-creating element of the projects and an introduction to different cultural venues in their locality.
- Keep an open mind – "The variety of projects is amazing.. being open to that is important".
  - Trafford Culture Champion Coordinator. The Bury Culture Champion programme designed 'Mapping and Small Things' sessions, through these sessions the coordinator was able to gauge the type of creative activity older people wanted and found there was significant interest in generating activities that provided opportunities for interaction between generations. The Culture Champion Coordinator said the Champions felt "less concerned with identifying with their age than connecting more with their interests and communities. For example, 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 AfA evaluations.
- Language – During the interviews carried out, the coordinators and Champions both made reference to the type of language used to describe the Champion role and the project. The language was seen as not inclusive or accessible. The terms 'advisor', 'advocate', 'co-production' and 'co-creation' were off



Bury Culture Champions

putting to some Champions. Also the term 'culture' was problematic, as some people considered culture to be related to their cultural background and customs rather than relating to the arts. In addition some felt the word was too exclusive and 'not for them', possibly relating to 'high culture'.

- Evaluation – the level of quantitative evaluation was felt to be excessive by both the Champions and coordinators. The evaluation requirements were set by the funders parent organisations and were linked to national funding programmes i.e. – the Great Place Scheme, part of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England programme and Ambition for Ageing, which is part of the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better programme. Champions and coordinators felt that the amount of information and the frequency it was required to be gathered was unnecessary. For example, lengthy baseline questionnaires had to be completed by new Champions. Coordinators felt this was a really intrusive activity to carry out at an early stage in the relationship. This

questionnaire was followed by more forms that needed to be filled in at every level of participation, producing a lot of administrative work for coordinators as they had to input the data into an online system. In order to capture more qualitative information, the Great Place Scheme commissioned a number of films to be made for evaluation purposes, this process was well received by both coordinators and Champions.

# 4.1 Greater Manchester Culture Champion Models



## Creative local communities

**Host organisation:** Embedded in the local community

**Way of working:** Hyperlocal

**Works well in:** Areas with low cultural capital

**Benefits:** Local people and – community, grassroots organisations, personal impact can be higher

## Age-friendly cultural organisations

**Host organisation:** Known cultural venue

**Ways of working:** Building an age-friendly audience

**Works well in:** Areas with cultural assets but low engagement

**Benefits:** Cultural organisations

## Active older citizens

**Host organisation:** Any with a good established, age-friendly practice

**Ways of working:** Long term development supported by age-friendly sector

**Works well in:** Areas that have established cultural assets and age-friendly framework

**Benefits:** Older people, organisations and wider community

The Greater Manchester projects were encouraged to base their plans on the cultural and community assets that were local to them, “we are looking for bespoke approaches to developing a cultural offer which matches the diverse interests of older people in specific Greater Manchester districts. Proposals should build on existing cultural provision and where little or no appropriate provision exists, consider how need can be met with new activity.” – [Ambition for Ageing Invitation to Tender](#).

Inviting older people to develop their own creative ideas for cultural activity, the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme supported a citizen-led approach to creative ageing. By looking at this way of working and how each project developed over the 12 month period, 3 working models have been developed. Each model is framed to suit a stakeholder, such as a cultural organisation, a local authority or voluntary sector organisation.

## Creative Local Communities

The Trafford Culture Champion programme is an example of working in a hyper local manner, with a focus on a small geographical area. The project concentrated on 3 wards and was based within a venue in the heart of the community. The Bolton project is another example of this model. The host organisation, Bolton at Home was embedded in the local community, a housing association with both strong community links and a long standing trusted reputation. Champions felt that having a strong local focus could help tackle social isolation and loneliness, for example "Loneliness! This [project] can reach people. We're seeing the need for this during COVID". Also another Champion talked about how "Culture Champions gave me pride in my community...made me feel differently about my area."



Bolton Culture Champions –  
Poetry session

## Age-friendly Cultural Organisations

In Stockport and Bury there was not only benefit to older adults but also benefits to the host organisation. As delivering Culture Champions gave the host organisation the opportunity to diversify who was coming into their building and who was accessing local culture, it was able to help venues to better understand the needs and interests of older audiences.

Culture Champions talked about how the project could link the cultural sector with other audiences, "It could introduce art and culture to minority and closed communities" (Manchester Culture Champion) and "I see [Culture Champions] primary purpose is to build bridges with the older population in Bury and culture", (Bury Culture Champion).

## Active Older Citizens

In Manchester the Culture Champion programme has had the longest time to develop, the Champions started as cultural ambassadors and over time became leaders and advocates, speaking at conferences and sitting on advisory boards, etc. They rightfully became a critical friend to cultural organisations, with a strong presence on the city's cultural landscape and had a real sense of belonging within the city's cultural assets and in time had a greater sense of belonging to the city itself. Through Culture Champions, older people in Manchester have been able to stay active through creative activities and engagement with cultural venues.

"In the beginning, I started getting other older people from my area involved in cultural activities that 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).

# 5.

## WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS?

*From researching both the Culture Champion programme and other successful creative ageing activity in Greater Manchester and beyond a number of conditions have been highlighted that have contributed to this success.*



Bury Culture Champions

## A summary of these conditions are outlined below:

- A cultural sector that is actively working to include older adults – many of the cultural organisations have dedicated age-friendly programmes and staff who support and develop programmes for older people, for example the [Royal Exchange Elders](#) Programme Producer and at [the Whitworth](#) the Age-Friendly Coordinator who supports a regular age-friendly programme
- A supportive wider sector – Greater Manchester is part of the [WHO](#) age-friendly network and the city-region is well connected through the [GM Ageing Hub](#). All GM boroughs are age-friendly communities.
- Networks – The GM Older Persons Network, which is a long established forum run by and for older adults in Greater Manchester. Also both the cultural sector in Greater Manchester and the city of Manchester have set up networks to link age-friendly cultural practice. In Greater Manchester there is the recently formed GM Creative Ageing Forum, managed by GMCA and in the city of Manchester there is the long standing Manchester Age-Friendly Culture Working Group, managed by the Age-Friendly team at Manchester City Council.
- Trusted community or cultural organisations – can develop meaningful relationships with older adults

### There are also challenges:

- Funding – longevity of funding that allows time for programmes to develop and grow. A lot of age-friendly activity isn't core funded and therefore has to rely on short-term funding. This has created an environment of insecurity for the activity, the staff and the participants.
- Commitment – To date the Manchester Culture Champions has continued through the commitment and dedication of individuals and organisations. The quality of the idea was recognised when dedicated funding for older people was available leading to the Greater Manchester Programme.
- Time – enough time to develop relationships with older people and time to connect to interested groups like community groups and cultural sector. It takes time to recruit older people who are at the risk of social isolation and it takes time to form relationships.
- Staff – staff who are truly engaged in the age-friendly ethos and whose roles are secure. Unfortunately, the nature of short term and fixed term funding means there is a high turnover of staff in this sector, facilitators and coordinators are finding themselves moving on to other roles not necessarily always connected to the age-friendly field and connections and networks can be weakened or lost.

# Next steps.

At the heart of the Culture Champion programme is providing genuine opportunity for older people to shape their local cultural offer and engage in citizen-led creative ageing. One Champion said, "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).



The Culture Champion programme across Greater Manchester showed a desire from older people to produce their own cultural activities, however many said they felt they needed more training and support. "We want learning and support. All round learning – nothing intimidating, something that will help us build confidence", (Manchester Culture Champion).

In response to this Great Place, Manchester Museum and Ambition for Ageing have collaborated with [Contact Theatre](#) to create Future Fires: Culture Champions (FFCC), which launched in Spring 2021. A cultural production training programme based on the Contact's model for young producers. FFCC was designed in consultation with Contact, Culture Champions and Culture Champions project coordinators. Two facilitators who have experience of working with Champions will deliver the project and will be supported by Contact staff. Champions will be able to submit their proposal for a micro project and successful project proposals will be awarded up to £200. Twelve participants will be recruited from existing Culture Champions networks which are active in Manchester, Trafford, Stockport, Bolton and Bury.

Developing and supporting creative ageing opportunities has additional benefits for both older people and the cultural sector, which have been discussed in this report. However, there are also benefits to the wider society. One Champion felt "it's good for people to engage like this, I can see the health benefits, it prevents social isolation by giving us opportunities to connect to other people.", (Manchester Culture Champion).

Helping older people to stay active and connected is a priority for many sectors including public health and housing associations. The value of the Greater Manchester Culture Champion programme lies in the unique partnership formed between local government, the cultural sector and other interested parties such as socially motivated housing providers and community venues.

## Other models of creative ageing

As part of this research other models of active creative ageing were explored. The network of theatres that have longstanding programmes of work with elders include the Royal Exchange Theatre, Leeds Playhouse, New Vic in Stoke, the Belgrade in Coventry, Southwark Playhouse and Entelechy Arts in London. These programmes are characterised by a relationship with a single venue. Some have also developed graduate schemes that encourage participants to move on to leadership roles while freeing up places for new participants. During the pandemic, when some theatres furloughed the staff that coordinated the programmes, groups self-organised to keep activity going online and shared IT skills.

Contact was made with Ageing Better programmes in Leicester and Bristol, where low cultural engagement amongst older people had been identified. A call out to Age Friendly Communities network generated enquiries from York and Newcastle. Both cities are working on age friendly and inclusive cultural strategies. Beyond England, initial contact was made with

Glasgow, where the culture trust, Glasgow Life has set up an Age Well group and in the Republic of Ireland, Age and Opportunity's 'Culture Companions' creates place based local and voluntary networks of older people interested in arts and culture to attend events together.

Celebrating Age, the Arts Council England programme jointly funded by the Baring Foundation, has also initiated a range of projects such as the Culture Club at the MAC in Birmingham, that are currently being evaluated. Age UK is also actively exploring new approaches to creative ageing across its national network.

### Conclusion and next steps

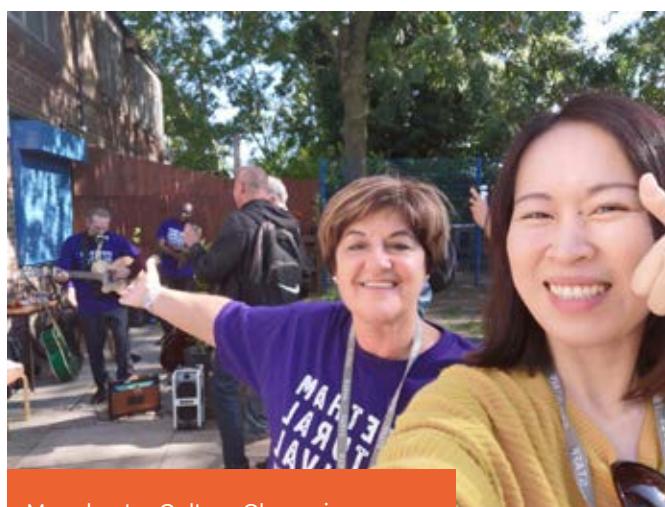
Despite the disruption of the pandemic, it is clear that many Culture Champions have experienced a wide range of benefits from participating in the programme. They have an appetite for creative activity and making a difference in their neighbourhood. As we emerge from lockdown and shielding and the vaccination 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 have 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.



Manchester Culture Champions

# CADA

CREATIVE AGEING  
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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