

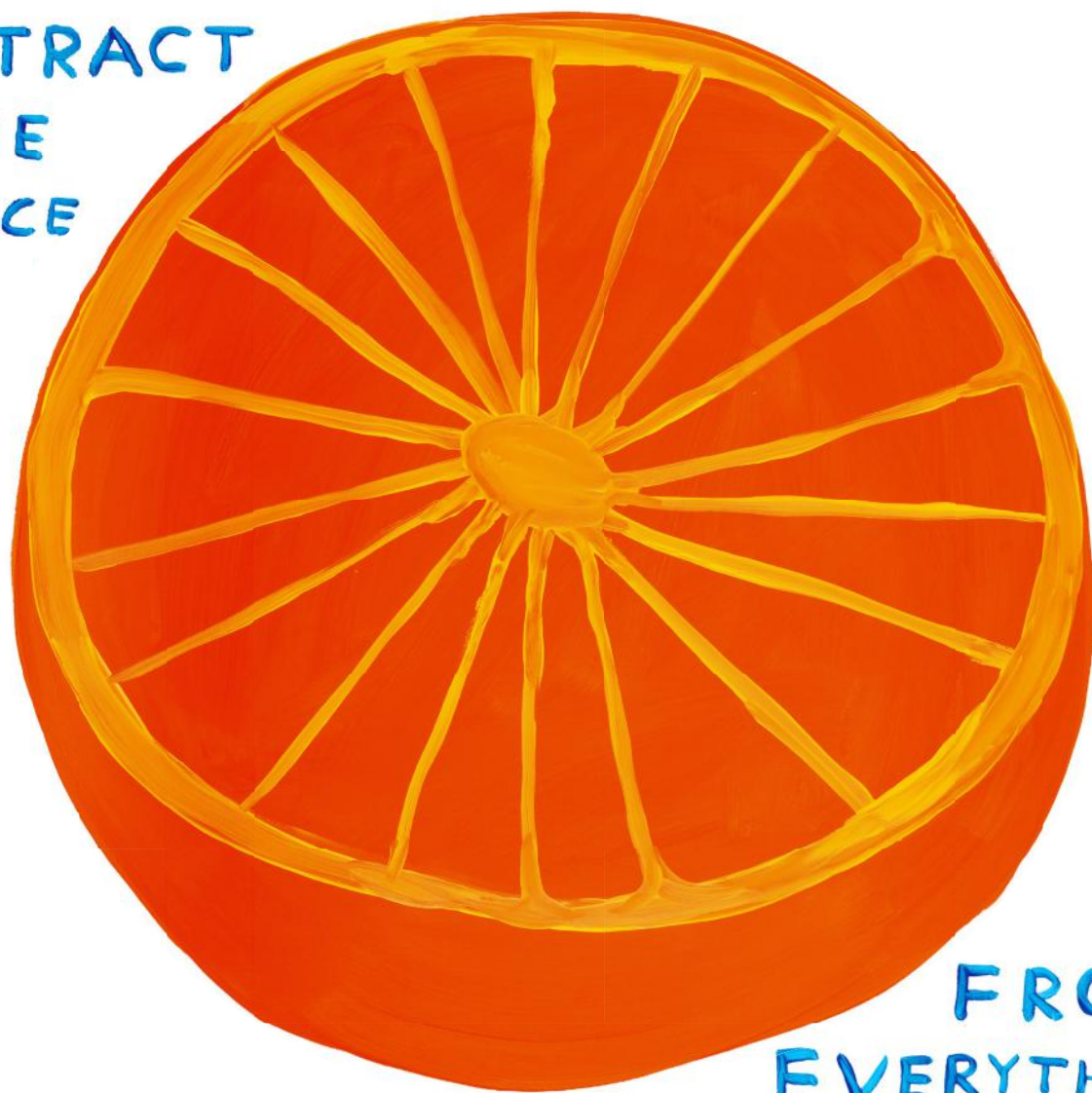
NEW EVERY WEEK

ISSUE 1718 / 18-24 MAY 2026

BIG

EXTRACT
THE
JUICE

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FROM
EVERYTHING

ISSUE

OUR CREATIVE HEALTH EDITION Cover by David Shrigley



URGENT MEDICAL RESPONSE



“WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT NOW MORE THAN EVER.”



DR MUSTAFA OMER IDRIS IS MSF'S MEDICAL ACTIVITY MANAGER IN TAWILA, SUDAN.

“The fighting in Darfur has been intense. Two years ago, the town of Tawila in North Darfur came under attack. I'm a doctor from North Darfur and I decided to go and assess the medical situation.

When we arrived, we found devastation. There were dead bodies everywhere. Everything was burned. Buildings had no doors or roofs and the town felt empty. When we got to the hospital, we found it burned and ransacked.

Our first task was to bury the dead.

There were still people who needed medical care so I reached out to other healthcare workers in the region and asked them to come and help.

At the beginning we had nothing, not even paracetamol. I started making phone calls to old colleagues, asking if they could send us basic medication: painkillers, antimalarial medication, antibiotics. Among our team, we pooled our money to buy meals for ourselves and our patients.

Our patients frequently had severe acute malnutrition, or malaria. Others arrived with injuries from the war, but we had no functional operating theatre or surgical supplies.

We did everything we could, but we saw so many preventable deaths. I still think about the three women who died because we had no way to perform a caesarean section that could have saved their lives. Losing them hit me hard. I couldn't talk about it.

The fighting intensified and soon we had more patients than we could treat. I knew it was more than we could manage alone, so I made a call to MSF.

It was just in time. On the day the MSF team arrived, we had run out of the last of our medications. We had nothing. Then the MSF coordinator showed us the medical supplies they had brought in the cars. I can't tell you how happy I felt in that moment. Soon, we had a growing team of Sudanese and international MSF medical staff.

Tens of thousands of people have fled to the town as the fighting worsens. Many are war-injured, malnourished, dehydrated and exhausted. Some have lost their entire families. At times we have treated over 500 patients a day.

The war in Sudan is brutal and unpredictable, and thousands of people are still at risk. When we first opened I was the only doctor here. Today, there are 26 of us in the MSF team saving lives and doing everything we can to ensure people fleeing terrible violence get the medical care they desperately need.

We need your support now more than ever. We can't do it without you.”

Dr Mustafa Omer Idriss treats a patient at MSF Tawila Hospital, Sudan
Photo: Muhammad Hussain Mattee / MSF

WE CAN'T MISS A LIFE-SAVING MOMENT

Right now, MSF teams are working in volatile crisis zones around the world. From rapidly changing conflicts to sudden natural disasters, our teams are on the ground, providing essential medical care.

Whether it's the few vital seconds that stop a major haemorrhage, or the race to contain an outbreak of deadly disease, our teams know that a moment lost can mean a life lost.

Please donate today to support our emergency medical teams

£190 could pay for emergency splints to immobilise injured limbs for 22 patients

£84 could cover the cost of an MSF surgeon working in a hospital for one day

£40 could pay for 40 IV bags which provide life-saving fluid and blood during surgery

THANK YOU

MSF UK receives no government funding. It's your support that enables us to provide medical care where it's needed most.

DONATE NOW

CALL 0800 055 79 84

**Scan the QR code
Or search MSF QUICK
to make an online donation**



“MSF's ability to act quickly and decisively in emergency situations is made possible by individual donors giving what they can.”

Dr Jennifer Hulse, MSF Emergency Doctor



YES, I would like to support MSF's medical teams

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DONATION OF £

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Card number Expiry date

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HEAR FROM MSF BY EMAIL Sign up to our Frontline email, which provides first hand accounts of our work. You will receive Frontline, occasional emergency emails, asks for donations and event invites. 105667

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THIS WEEK'S BIG ISSUE

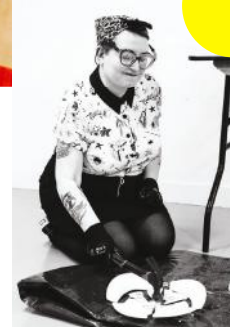
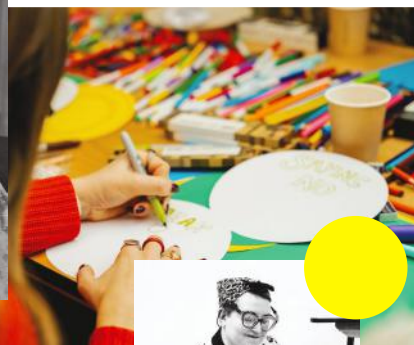
THIS MAGAZINE WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER

18–24 May 2026

Art in action

This week's edition of Big Issue is designed to get your creative juices flowing. There's a lot squeezed in; from smashing plates to LEGO interpretations of homelessness, pieces by Professor Daisy Fancourt and Andy Burnham, all celebrate the amazing power of creativity. Thanks to those who have curated this special edition, especially Anna Woolf, Victoria Hume, Matt Peacock and, of course, David Shrigley for the delicious cover. This is also an interactive magazine – follow steps to make a collage and colour in a lotus flower – and show us your results!

→ Drink it in from page 12



Also inside

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They then **sell**
each copy for
£5
keeping 100% of the profit

The money they give us is used to **provide support**, including financial and housing advice, and sales training. It also funds the production and distribution of the magazine.



My Pitch

Hamish in Abergavenny loves sailing and philosophy **46**

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THE DISPATCH

HOMELESSNESS

There are enough homeless kids to fill Wembley twice over

By LIAM GERAGHTY
BIG ISSUE DEPUTY EDITOR

→ The number of children growing up in temporary accommodation has been an escalating crisis in recent years – but new statistics in England reveal the staggering scale of the problem.

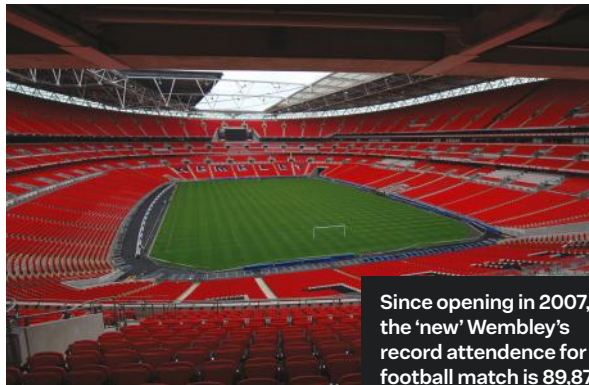
Statutory homelessness statistics for October to December 2025 found 176,130 dependent children were living in temporary accommodation. That's almost equivalent to filling Wembley Stadium two times over and more than the population of Oxford or York.

It means that almost two-thirds of the 134,210 households in temporary accommodation in England now include dependent children.

While the total number of homeless households living in a temporary home provided by their council fell slightly over the period, the number of children increased by 5.9% annually and 0.1% compared to the previous three months.

Labour's homelessness and child poverty strategies, released at the end of last year, both raised the alarm over the issue.

A pledge to reduce the number of children growing up in bed and breakfasts has seen numbers drop 23% since last year to 12,550 households living in B&Bs. There was also a 63% annual fall in families spending more than six weeks in B&Bs.



Since opening in 2007, the 'new' Wembley's record attendance for a football match is 89,874

Homelessness minister Alison McGovern told Big Issue: "While the figures show progress being made, with fewer families becoming homeless and a sharp reduction in children in B&B accommodation, there is still much to do to break the heartbreaking cycle of homelessness and bring down the unacceptable number of children in temporary accommodation."

But the sheer number of households growing up in temporary accommodation is wreaking havoc on daily lives and local authority finances: English councils spent £2.8 billion on temporary accommodation in 2024.

It's a crisis that is hitting London particularly hard. There are 21 households living in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households in London, compared with 2.8 households per 1,000 in the rest of England.

London Councils estimates homelessness is costing boroughs £5.5 million a day with temporary accommodation accounting for £5m of that cost (see page 8).

It can be costly for households too, especially if they do not have access to cooking or laundry facilities. A total of 43,040 households are living in temporary accommodation out of their local area – up almost 5% in a year – and may face travel costs and other barriers too.

The answer to the crisis comes with more social housing and efforts to prevent families from falling into homelessness in the first place.

Labour has provided almost £700m to councils in England in homelessness prevention grants in 2025-26.

Lord John Bird, Big Issue founder and crossbench peer, said: "The government's investment in homelessness is beginning to turn the tide" but there is still much to be done to address the issue.

"Our councils are spending up to 60% of their so-called homelessness prevention grants on temporary accommodation," he continued.

"I fear 'homelessness prevention' is becoming a buzzword, a false promise by politicians with no new ideas. We need to invest resources in encouraging radical, innovative, challenging ideas that change the landscape of homelessness, like Big Issue did 35 years ago."

It's far from an England-only problem: 18,092 households are in temporary accommodation in Scotland while Wales has 6,426 households in the same position, equivalent to 10,818 people.

Keep your eye on Big Issue over the next few weeks as we dig into the state of the temporary accommodation crisis and solutions to the problems thousands of families face every day.

IN NUMBERS
176,130
children are growing up in temporary accommodation
134,210
households are in temporary accommodation
85,800
households with children are in temporary accommodation



SNAPSHOT
When the streets were playgrounds

→ Well, what else do you expect a bunch of kids to do with an abandoned Bedford van? This photograph, taken by Paul Kaye in Balham, South London, in 1961, is one of over 70 objects featured in Play Power, a new exhibition which explores the impact of play on societies and how it helps us discover what it means to be human. Kaye is in good company: among the other artists included are André Breton, Paul Klee, LS Lowry, Yoko Ono and Germaine Richier.

Play Power is on until 4 October at the Sainsbury Centre, Norwich

PHOTO: PAUL KAYE, MID-20TH C ANIMAL AND STREET LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY, PAULKAYE.COM

NATURE
Bee warned

→ What's all the buzz about World Bee Day?
 This day of celebration takes place every year on 20 May, when modern beekeeping pioneer Anton Janša was born in 1734.
 His birthday was chosen by the United Nations to raise awareness of bees and their importance to global ecosystems.
 Along with their fellow pollinators, bees are increasingly under threat because of the climate crisis, pesticides and habitat loss.
 You can help save the bees by avoiding synthetic pesticides, letting your garden grow wild, and simply by learning more about how to look after your neighbourhood bees.



24%
 of Europe's bumblebee species are at risk of extinction

Almost 90%
 of wildflowers and 75% of leading global crops depend on pollinators like bees

£690 million
 is how much bees are worth per year to the UK economy

There are around **270** types of bees in the UK

One in three
 mouthfuls of food depend on pollinators like bees





**BIG
ISSUE
BULLETIN
BOARD**

→ **World. War. Me** won the Children's Non-Scripted Bafta – and Big Issue played a small hand in it. The Sky Kids Investigates series focused on child refugees, including Tumukunde Uzomukunde, who featured in last year's young people's takeover of the magazine.

A representative for OnSide youth zones, the organisation behind the takeover, told us: "Tumi's involvement wouldn't have happened without the platform in Big Issue."

→ **Big Issue Invest has been named** one of the country's top 100 social enterprises in Pioneers Post's NatWest SE100 Top 100 Index. The list shines a light on the businesses doing good around the UK.

→ **Our interview with Sadiq Khan** (Issue 1717) got the media across the UK talking. Khan said it's "absurd that President Trump is obsessed with me". Laurie Laird, a US political commentator living in London, told LBC: "Khan's response was actually rather grown up, rather than to engage in the personal, which Donald Trump loves to do."

A MODEST PROPOSAL

What could we do with BP's quarterly profit?

→ The Iran conflict – which has already caused thousands of deaths and triggered severe global economic disruption – shows little sign of ending soon. But someone is benefitting: the fossil fuel giants. BP's profits more than doubled in the first quarter of 2025 to \$3.2 billion (£2.4bn), driven by a surge in oil prices since the outbreak of the conflict.

As bills rise, we think you could better spend the money elsewhere. So what else could you do with £2.4bn?

→ Pay off almost half the UK's energy debt

Around two million UK households are currently in debt to their energy suppliers, owing a staggering £5.5bn – a figure that has doubled over the past three years. Arrears now account for around 75% of all unpaid bills, meaning most of the debt sits without a repayment plan in place.

"This is not a story of widespread 'won't pay' behaviour," a spokesperson for the End Fuel Poverty Coalition said earlier this year. "It is overwhelmingly about people who simply cannot afford the bills landing on their doormats."

→ Clear half the Great Pacific Garbage Patch

The floating vortex of marine debris – three times the size of France and containing 1.8 trillion plastic pieces – remains one of the defining images of the ecological crisis.

Cleaning it up is projected to cost around \$7.5bn (£5.5bn) over a decade. BP's windfall would fund roughly half the effort.

→ Double the UK's offshore wind budget

In 2025, Labour set aside £1.1bn a year for offshore wind developers investing in new projects. BP's quarterly profit alone could double that annual budget.

The Institute for Public Policy Research think tank has argued that renewables are the only lasting fix for energy price shocks, stating: "Wars can't raise the price of wind."

IPPR senior research fellow Pranesh Narayanan said: "The transition to net zero is the only way to protect the UK from international conflict driving up energy prices."

→ Cover the UK's entire annual flood bill

Flooding costs the UK an estimated £2.2bn in damages and management costs every year. By 2050, that figure is expected to rise to £3.6bn annually as the climate crisis worsens. Around eight million homes are projected to be at flood risk by mid-century, up from six million today.

BP made more in a single quarter than it costs to deal with all annual flood damage across the country.

→ Put on 35 Glastonburys

The titan of the British festival scene Glastonbury Festival costs around £60m to stage.

This year is a fallow year, meaning there is no festival. But with BP's profits, it could return next year on an entirely different scale – funding a festival 35 times the size.



"No, the queue for the new NHS dentist is over there. This is for a jacket potato shop on TikTok."

READ MORE ON [BIGISSUE.COM](http://bigissue.com)

“HOW MANY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TO BE FAILED UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT GIVES SEND STUDENTS A TRULY EQUAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION?”

→ Katie Nellist is a young autistic woman who has been out of school since she was 13 because of a lack of special education support. As the government consults on reforms, she writes about what must change.



EMPLOYMENT

The NEET crisis’s ‘scarring effect’

→ Young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) are at risk of long-term “scarring” to their finances, work and health, a new study has warned.

University College London (UCL) researchers found that it has “long-term consequences”.

People from Generation X, born between 1966 and 1980, experienced worse outcomes at 51 the longer they had spent NEET in early adulthood.

Those who were persistently out of work or learning between the ages of 16 and 24 were six times more likely to be out of work in midlife than their peers who were always employed or in education.

Dr Alina Pelikh, co-author of the study, said the findings were “particularly concerning” given that nearly a million 16- to 24-year-olds in the UK are currently NEET.

Big Issue Recruit helps people facing barriers to work to secure jobs. bigissue.com/big-issue-recruit/

THE BIG NUMBER

27,000

← That’s how many solar installations were completed in March 2026 – the highest monthly total since 2012 – as the Iran war sparked a surge. Solar capacity increased by 11.7% over the past year across Britain, adding 2.3 GW to the country’s capacity. Energy secretary Ed Miliband said installations are “helping families weather global energy shocks”.



To get your weekly Letter To My Younger Self fix, you can sign up to our new newsletter for exclusive behind-the-scenes info and extended versions, plus a classic from the archive delivered to your inbox every Friday. Visit bigissue.com/LTMY-Extra



HOUSING

Social Bite star power

→ Social Bite was hoping its new homeless village in Rutherglen would attract the attention of councils in the UK. Instead it’s reeled in household names. George Clooney (right, with founder Josh Littlejohn), Sir Bob Geldof and Rob Brydon all visited the Harriet Gardens village to see how its 15 new residents are getting on in their one-bed Nest House homes.

Gavin and Stacey favourite Brydon said: “I’d like to be told the reason why there’s not more places like this throughout the country. Scotland’s leading the way.”



Above from left: Josh Littlejohn, Rob Brydon, James (resident), Bob Geldof, Chris (resident)



ANALYSIS

The 'rent-to-rent' housing model is driving up market rates – and council tax-payers are footing the bill

By PETER APPS

a fee for maintenance costs and their profit margin. This housing model has been a way of providing homeless accommodation in London for more than two decades, but its use has exploded in recent years as homelessness numbers have risen.

By September last year, 75,800 homeless households were in temporary accommodation in the capital – 56% of the country's total. This is a 205% rise since 2010. London has nine times as many families who have been in temporary accommodation for five years as the rest of the country combined. London Councils, the umbrella body for London's 33 local authorities, says the model of 'guaranteed rent' housing had been around for at least 20 years, and helped councils secure the accommodation needed to meet their statutory duties.

"However, over the past few years the cost of that accommodation has risen dramatically," a spokesperson for the group said. As a result of the rising demand, the agencies were shifting units that had been let to councils on a long-term basis to much more expensive 'nightly rates'.

"Boroughs tell us that for properties that they've leased previously over a number of years, when those leases come to an end, the landlord comes back and says 'you have to pay on a nightly rate now,'" the spokesperson told us.

"That's because the demand is so strong. There's a constant stream of new homeless households – and the supply of accommodation remains relatively limited. Local authorities have little option but to pay the market rate because they have a legal statutory duty to house these households."

The cost to London boroughs for temporary accommodation now exceeds £5m each day, with much of the money coming from the councils' general funds

→ Middle-man estate agency firms are being paid millions in public money every month to house homeless families in London, research by Big Issue has found.

An analysis of transparency data published by all London's councils shows some agencies received in excess of £1 million in a single month last year through the 'guaranteed rent' deals they broker between private landlords and boroughs' homelessness departments.

The data – covering October last year – shows estate agent Stef & Phillips was paid a total of £3.49m by London boroughs, Elliott Leigh was paid £1.65m, Theori received £1.14m, ZFA received £979,000 and Finefair took £832,000. Much of this money is then passed to private landlords, with the agent taking a cut. Each firm operates a similar model: landlords sign contracts under which agents offer 'guaranteed rents'. They then lease rooms to councils to provide to homeless families and charge

Demand is so strong. There's a constant stream of new homeless households

Spokesperson
London Councils

– which means it comes directly out of the cost of other services for Londoners. London Councils commissioned analysis from the London School of Economics estimating that the annual shortfall in government funding for temporary accommodation is equivalent to £202 per household in the capital – or 11% of the average council tax bill.

“We didn’t have anything like the scale of nightly paid housing we have now even three or four years ago,” said one director at a London local authority, speaking anonymously. “Boroughs need to find temporary accommodation, the borough has a duty to provide emergency accommodation, they have got no option but to find somewhere. It’s a sellers’ market.”

Danny Turner, founder and director of the charity Keep It Moving, said he had seen ‘rent-to-rent’ agencies charging councils upfront cash payments of as much as £7,000 to take certain households – on top of the rents they charged. He said the housing model was becoming so widespread in parts of London that it was driving up regular rents and undermining neighbourhoods.

“It’s so much more lucrative to convert property into temporary accommodation than to lease in the general market,” he said.

“In some parts of the city it’s this, rather than gentrification that causes rents to go up. It’s the state pushing up rents from below. If you are getting £1,100 a month for a studio flat, then that is what you can charge. This feeds what people are experiencing all the time in London: inflated rents, broken communities, people having to move out of the city.”

Stef and Philips, the largest recipient of cash in our research, says on its website that it began as “a small family business”, but now operates UK-wide with 4,500 units of accommodation worth more than £1.1 billion managed from its offices in Enfield. It markets itself to corporate investors as a means to build their “social housing asset portfolio”. While our research does not show anything about the quality of the properties offered, ZFA previously faced protests from a renters’ union about the quality of accommodation provided in Newham.

Tenants in guaranteed rent accommodation can find themselves caught between the council, the managing agent and the actual landlord when they seek repairs.

“A lot of these nightly let, privately run places have a lack of accountability and a lack of scrutiny. So we see some of the worst inhumane conditions that you would ever want to live in,” said Sam Pratt, policy and communications officer at charity the Shared Health Foundation – although his comments were made in general terms, not directly in relation to the specific agencies listed in this article.

“Just this week we were supporting a mum who had just had a pre-term baby, and came back home from hospital, to find rat droppings on the bed and vermin underneath the bed. We raised it with the council and raised it with the private provider. The rat is still there. No one has moved it. And we see these stories time and time again of overcrowded, mouldy, damp, dark, unsuitable places without the right facilities, no decent kitchens or bathrooms.”

Susie Dye, housing lead at the charity Trust for London, said there are increasing signs that landlords are moving properties that had been regular private rented accommodation into the temporary housing market instead – which has resulted in existing tenants being evicted and becoming homeless.

“Evicting people from their homes in a mindless rush for profit only worsens the housing crisis,” she said. “We need emergency measures to move towards the long term, not push the solutions further away.”

Big Issue gathered the data by analysing publicly available spreadsheets detailing expenditure above £250, which are published by each local authority. Camden’s data could not be downloaded, while eight London boroughs publish their data quarterly. For those, the figures were divided by three to give an estimated value for a single month.

All five companies have been contacted for comment.

peteapps.com

It’s so much more lucrative to convert property into temporary accommodation

Danny Turner
Keep It Moving

75,800
homeless
households were
in temporary
accommodation
in London last
September

205%
The increase since
2010

£8m
In total was paid to
five agents in the
study over
one month

£5m
The cost per day to
London boroughs
for temporary
accommodation

£202
The average annual
cost per household,
or 11% of their council
tax bill

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BIRD'S WORDS



Starmer is facing troubled times, but government ineptness is nothing new

→ One hundred and twelve years of governmental ignorance explain Starmer's demise. Starting 112 years ago, the First World War began by sacrificing hundreds of thousands of men to a disastrous idea that Great Britain needed to stay in the game. And rule supreme. Pumped up by Victorian and Edwardian pomposity, GB was adamant it needed to rule the waves rather than accept the fact there were three other powers – Japan, Germany and the US – challenging a cardboard British Empire.

That dreadful and deadly war meant that over the course of the next 40 or so years, the UK lost two world wars, economically if not militarily, and an empire. It arrived in the 1960s with only The Beatles to defend it from the charge of being irrelevant and having no say in the world. In the ever expanding industry of youth culture, at least, the UK ruled the airwaves if not the sea waves, and was a mighty pop music world power.

Every government since the Second World War has pussyfooted around the social chaos thrown up by a defeated economy and a collapsed empire. Always trying to look strident and world class on the back of former military and economic wins, the UK started to lose its way.

Starmer, posturing on the word stage without a robust army, navy or airforce, and without a growing economy to back him up, made himself look inept. Facing

UK society could do with a reinvention, you might even call it a revolution

Putin, Xi and Trump meant displaying impotence rather than virility. Especially when limping ships couldn't protect the remnants of what was left of British overseas power.

So 112 years of history should teach us that former glories don't pay the bills today. Starmer's ineptness is greatly influenced by his involvement in world events, from which he emerges looking wet. Even his rush to not look too closely at Mandelson was due to him looking for an insider, however damaged, to face Trump in Washington. Rushing, not thinking through, exposed Starmer to charges of not being in control of his own governmental apparatus.

We have to accept that government ineptness is not new. Cameron felt he had to leave office after losing the referendum. Johnson ground to a halt over garden drinking while people were banned from seeing their relatives who were dying of Covid. Truss imploded whilst imagining herself as Thatcher Mk II. Sunak's moment of unfitness for office seemed personified in announcing a general election in the rain without an umbrella.

Seemingly ever U-turning, bullied by world leaders, a disastrous loss of confidence with business over such things as the rise in national insurance, coupled with workers' rights putting employers off employing; add to this potholes and inflatables crossing the channel, and Starmer looks dead in the water.

Bringing in 112 years is to underline that UK society could do with a reinvention, you might even call it a revolution. But not one full of the old-fashioned revolvers of yesteryear. It means doing an audit of what works well in the economy, and the society that is butressed by that economy.

It means repairing the fabric destroyed by Thatcher's government closing down of the old industrial UK and replacing it with benefits for many rather than employment.

It means challenging the disastrous practice of recruiting our leadership from Oxford graduates, including the much-maligned chancellor and her PM – and the civil service that backs them up. Eighteen of the last 29 PMs are coated with the Oxford brush (since Gladstone was elected in 1892).

It means accepting the appalling reality that since Thatcher we have been growing social security into an inefficient dumping ground for people, rather than giving them the chance of a secure future. Accepting the fact that crippling people who aspire to university with vast debts means social security will be loaded down with young people worn out by state-created worries.

Poverty is a growth industry and alas, Starmer has not seemed to grasp this nettle which cripples our schools, hospitals and justice system. Not once have they indicated

that they have a plan to tackle the toxicity thrown up by the spread of poverty into new sections of the community.

Truthfulness is not put to use as a tool of government. Promises uttered before the reins of government are attained are parroted in government, steadfastly maintaining that all is well in the ship of state. But we know it's not.

Government itself needs a vigorous reinvention. Parliament also. Why is it so obsessed with creating new laws when many existing laws are ignored or unenforceable? Filling government business with law-making rather than governing.

There's a lot to achieve, but honesty and truthfulness would go a long way. And admitting that we've yet to get over the last 112 years or so might be a good beginning. Let's be real about our history. We happen to live in one of the most creative and rich economies in the world. But it's not looking like that.

THIS WEEK JOHN WILL BE

READING
The Worst Exhibition in the World: Degenerate Art, 1937 by John-Paul Stonard

WATCHING
Professor T on ITVX

LISTENING
Edvard Grieg's Lyric Pieces

DOING
Attending a Big Issue fundraiser dinner

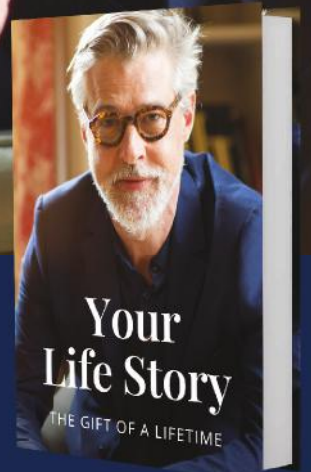
John Bird is the founder and Editor in Chief of Big Issue. [@johnbirdwords](https://twitter.com/johnbirdwords) [linkedin.com/in/johnbirdwords](https://www.linkedin.com/in/johnbirdwords) john.bird@bigissue.com

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WELCOME TO THE CREATIVE HEALTH SPECIAL: THIS IS CRITICAL HOPE

By ANNA WOOLF, LONDON ARTS AND HEALTH CEO
 VICTORIA HUME, DIRECTOR OF THE CULTURE, HEALTH & WELLBEING ALLIANCE
 KATIE LANGFORD, MATT PEACOCK, NATASHA STEER, SAMRA SAID
 ARTS AND HOMELESSNESS INTERNATIONAL

→ Today marks the opening of Creativity and Wellbeing Week – nearly 15 years in the making, and more vital than ever. Born from a simple but radical conviction that creativity and health belong together, this free festival from London Arts and Health and the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance exists to shine a light on the grassroots practitioners, freelancers, artists and healthcare workers quietly transforming communities. This year, as every year, hundreds of events will unfurl across the country: a living map of a sector that refuses to stay on the margins. Our organisations exist collectively to support all things arts, health, culture and wellbeing, and alongside Arts & Homelessness International we are curating this amazing edition of Big Issue to explore the impact that culture can have on our health and wellbeing.

So this issue and our festival is more than a celebration. It's a showcase, a catalyst, and a launchpad for people doing essential, often invisible work in their local communities. Creativity, we believe, is not a luxury. It's a barometer of collective health. Creative communities are demonstrably healthier communities – and the act of creating itself carries real, measurable benefits for mind and body (you can read more about the 'measurable' side of things in Daisy Fancourt's article on page 14). It can happen anywhere, at any time, by anyone. We hope this issue sparks something in you: a flicker of curiosity, a door left ajar.

The theme of this special edition is critical hope – and we chose it deliberately. Coined by the educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, critical hope is neither wishful thinking nor passive optimism. It is a clear-eyed, justice-oriented commitment to imagining and building a better future, even – especially – in the face of hardship. That hardship is real. Impending NHS redundancies, chronically unstable funding for creative health and the mounting pressures of climate and planetary crisis are reshaping the landscape in which this work is done. We are not looking away. Inspired by the Marmot edition of Big Issue from October 2025, our creative health edition takes its place in that tradition: rigorous, hopeful and unafraid.

We're thrilled that David Shrigley – who is a patron of the National Centre for Creative Health – has designed this edition's cover. For us, it speaks to finding a way to get at the creativity that's deep in all of us. Our work is all about helping all of us to unlock that potential; sometimes that means addressing



↳ MUSIC IN HOSPITALS & CARE

The charity improves the health and wellbeing of children and adults through the healing power of live music. With over 75 years of expertise, the charity's professional musicians share live music experiences which support people's mental, physical and emotional health.
 → mihc.org.uk

barriers that can stop us from getting there. Tola and Jemilea's article (see page 30) touches on this. We are also pleased to partner with Thrive LDN, who have provided money to commission articles particularly on the theme of climate change and creativity. Candy's article about the role of community gardens (page 19) particularly leans into this theme.

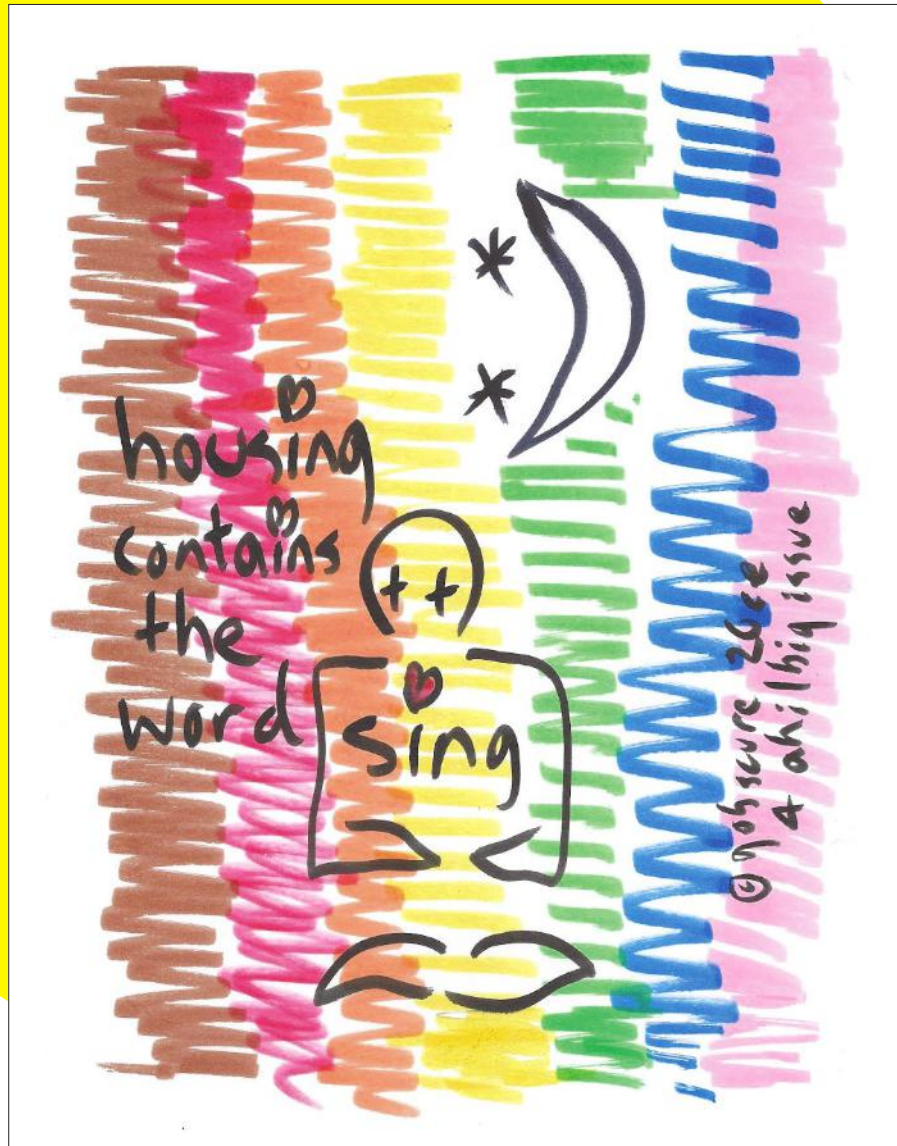
In the homelessness sector, we've always known that arts and creativity are positive forces for good – nurturing and building wellbeing, social connections, pride and purpose. The movement has grown from a handful of recognised projects in the 1990s, to over 500 worldwide (see them mapped at artshomelessint.com) – choirs, theatre groups, artists with lived experience, homeless centres and more. We platform their incredible work in these pages.

The vast majority of content in the magazine relating to homelessness has been created by people who are or have been homeless – an exciting generation of leaders and artists who illustrate that the homeless sector and the creative industries benefit hugely from having lived experience at the centre. You can also read how creativity is becoming more integrated in policy co-creation using Legislative Theatre (page 27) and how the capacity of creativity to heal is now becoming more centralised in recovery and trauma support (page 22).

In this special edition you'll read about many different kinds of art-making and creative activities – from choirs to poems, to cooking and gardening. We

→ HOUSING CONTAINS THE WORD SING

By gobscure
 "Being creative as gobscure, we use plural as reflection on our broken mind, we write in lowercase. gender-neutral mx pronouns, ta. live in a council flat on tyneside, north-east england with our rescue dog (they rescued us), our backyard is a sanctuary."
 → gobscure.wixsite.com/info



ran an open call through our three organisations to see who would be able to send in articles and creative work. Thousands of people are helping us do creative things that support our health in libraries, museums, hospitals, community centres, theatres and anywhere else they can find all around the country; but still not enough of us are able to access this.

The three membership organisations that have brought this special edition together are part of a whole world of groups who are trying to make this more possible for more people. The government's new 10-year plan for the NHS talks about a shift to prevention and tackling health inequalities; two things that creativity and culture are uniquely well placed to tackle.

This edition is just a glimpse of the huge number of different kinds of organisations and individuals coming together to make change. There is still a way to go until creativity sits at the very heart of our health and social care systems, but there are so many glorious examples in this edition where that change has already happened – we just need to join the dots.

Creativity and Wellbeing Week runs 18-24 May
creativityandwellbeing.org.uk
 @culturehealthandwellbeing
 @londonartsandhealth @artshomelessint

← DEMENTIA DISCO

Dementia Disco is a Stockport-based charity determined to change the narrative around dementia. Using the power of music to create spaces where people living with dementia can experience the well-documented physical and mental health benefits of music, dancing and social connection, we show that a diagnosis does not mean you have to stop the joy of a great night out.
 → dementiadisco.org



→ GET OUTSIDE!!!

Bryony Attenburrow is a cartoonist, comic book artist and disability rights activist. *Get Outside!!!* asks what the relationship to nature looks like when you cannot leave your bedroom.



ADVICE

Why arts are the must-do activity of summer 2026



By DAISY FANCOURT

→ As we head into warmer weather and bid the darkness of winter farewell, it's a wonderful time of year to plan how we're going to make use of the longer days and enjoy a restorative summer. And this year I have a top piece of wellbeing advice for you: let 2026 be the summer you indulge in arts and creativity.

As a scientist, I spend my days researching the behaviours that most impact our health. And while you're no doubt familiar with many of them – diet, exercise, sleep, nature – you may not be aware of how substantial the evidence base now is that arts are a core health-promoting activity too. That's right – dancing, singing, writing, drawing, crafting, reading, enjoying exhibitions, attending festivals and going to gigs are all activities you should be immersing yourself in as a valuable tonic.

As just a taster of this scientific evidence, did you know that when we

engage in the arts we activate the same pleasure and reward networks in the brain activated by food, sex and drugs, and release happy hormones like dopamine. We help our brains to regulate our emotions so we can deal with day-to-day stresses more effectively. Engaging in arts can also give us a sense of meaning and purpose, enhancing our sense of wellbeing and reducing our risk of depression. Engaging in the arts is also a whole-brain workout. It builds new neural pathways, building our resilience against cognitive decline. And the novel emotions, storylines and sensations we get through arts experiences build the ability of our brains to respond to the complex world around us. For our bodies there are benefits too. When we breathe deeply for activities like singing, we improve the strength of our respiratory muscles. When we dance, we have decreases in blood pressure and cholesterol. Arts engagement even



improves our immune activity. Can you imagine if a drug had the same catalogue of benefits as the arts? We would be telling everyone about it, fighting to get our hands on it, and taking it every single day. How wonderful, then, that instead of being a non-descript pill, arts engagement is in fact a joyous activity for us to participate in. So, if you want to increase your own arts engagement this summer, I suggest thinking about your arts engagement just like you think about your food. Here are my 10 top tips.

1 Crash diets don't work. The way to integrate more arts into your life is not to start bingeing on art, cramming creativity into every crevice of the day, starting new artistic hobbies and signing up to lots of classes. Just as with food diets, these large behavioural changes rarely stick. Regular, sustained engagement is the goal. Change starts with doing a little, often.

2 Work out your 'five-a-day' equivalent. Decide on a simple rule you can apply to your life to make sure you engage with the arts every day, like the five-a-day rule for eating fruit and vegetables. Maybe that's just 10 minutes of sketching at your desk before you start work each day, 15 minutes of a crafts activity each evening, or 20 minutes of listening to an evening concert on the radio. Whatever amount of time you pick, make it small and achievable every day.

3 Work around your energy levels. Are there times when your attention drifts or you start to feel stressed or overcharged? Or when during the week you feel in a rut – when you have too many evenings at home in a row or are short on social company? Just as we structure our daily food intake to recharge our energy, work out how you can use music, art, reading or culture to regulate your energy or mood.

4 Make the easy swaps. For many people, the key to a good diet is making simple substitutions for healthier alternatives. In the same way, think about the swaps you could make, like putting your phone down on your commute and picking up your book. Or turning a social gathering with friends into a trip to an exhibition or gig.

5 Plan your meals out. Maybe you treat yourself to a monthly takeaway or a meal out for special occasions. Plan your arts treats the same way – plan the time to go to a museum or gallery once a month, or book tickets to a concert as a treat to look forward to. These treats will also add novelty to your creative engagement, which is itself beneficial to health.

6 Diversity is key. We used to say 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away', but now the advice is to ditch the daily apple and sample as many plants as you can a week. In the same way, don't rely just on one arts activity. Mix things up with lots of contrasting activities. Watching, making, listening, creating all have different health benefits.

7 Experiment with new flavours. Just as it's fun to try out a new ingredient or cooking technique in the kitchen, have fun with

novel arts experiences. Fortunately, in the same way that it's not necessary to be a gourmet chef in order to cook food that is healthy, being good at – or knowledgeable about – the arts is not a prerequisite to experiencing their health benefits.

8 Be a mindful chef. It's all too easy to eat a meal without tasting it, much like plugging into our headphones and then zoning out of our music. Take time to savour even the background arts experiences. When you turn the radio on, take the time to sit and listen for a few minutes, not allowing yourself to multitask. When you're making art, spend at least some time trying to think of nothing else other than the art and being entirely present.

9 Avoid the UPFs (ultra-processed foods). Screen-based arts opportunities are proliferating. And while there are many documented health benefits from watching dramas on television, viewing art on our phones, or participating virtually in activities, screens may be the UPFs of the arts, negating or diluting some of those health benefits. So try to make your daily arts engagement real, not virtual where you can.

10 Identify your chicken soup. When we're ill, we all have a food we believe will get us better again – home-made chicken soup or a vitamin-packed smoothie. Work out what your equivalent is for when you're feeling stressed, anxious, low or tired. Pinpoint what music or books lift your mood, what arts or crafts activities are cathartic, or what events you like to put in the diary to look forward to.

So, whether you're attending a festival this summer, booking tickets to a show, picking up a new craft or building your party playlist, I wish you a joyful, health-enhancing summer of creativity.



Daisy Fancourt is professor of psychobiology & epidemiology and head of the social biobehavioural research group at University College London. She is also the newly appointed first associate scientist at the Royal Albert Hall.

Her book *Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Save Lives* is out now (Cornerstone, £22)

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➔ I spend much of my time as mayor talking to people about the pressures that they face and the inequalities that shape their lives – poor health, insecure work, caring responsibilities, loss. Across Greater Manchester I meet people every week who are carrying a lot, often quietly.

People tell me about struggling to get by when work is insecure, about caring for loved ones, about the toll that poor health or loneliness can take.

What I've learned is that while services and systems matter deeply, they are not enough on their own. People also need ways to make sense of what's happening in their lives. They need space to speak, to be heard and to recover a sense of agency for themselves and their communities.

That's where creativity comes in.

Culture is sometimes dismissed as a distraction, a 'nice to have'. But culture isn't just about a good night out or escaping into another reality. It's about making sense of your own reality. Making something new. Saying things differently. Feeling connected when everything feels fragile.

Across Greater Manchester, we're seeing just how powerful this can be. We believe deeply in creative health, because we know that creativity can genuinely support people's health and wellbeing, helping them rebuild confidence, express what they're going through, find balance and regain a sense of agency when life has knocked them off course.

This way of thinking runs right through our Live Well approach. Live Well is about prevention and neighbourhood health, but it's also about dignity. It recognises that health isn't just shaped in hospitals or GP surgeries, but in everyday places: libraries, community centres, arts spaces and in the relationships we have with one another.

Across the city region cultural organisations are working side by side with health services, social care providers and the community and voluntary sector, so that creative health is part of how we help people feel better and stay well.

These ideas come to life in our work supporting neurodivergent young adults to move closer to good work. Too many talented people are locked out of employment – not because they lack ability, but because traditional routes into jobs simply

don't work for them. Across Greater Manchester, creative organisations like Venture Arts show what's possible when difference is recognised as a strength, not a problem to be fixed. Through creativity people build confidence and begin to imagine working lives that feel achievable and meaningful.

This work doesn't sit in isolation. It reflects our wider push for fair, inclusive employment shaped by people with lived experience themselves, and the

work we are doing through the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter and the Bee Neuroinclusive Code of Practice. The message is simple: talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not – unless we design systems that work for real people.

We also see our creative health approach clearly in Breathe, which is run by the English National Opera. This programme supports people living with breathlessness

and long-term lung conditions by using gentle breathing techniques drawn from singing and voice work. In small, supportive groups people learn how to breathe more confidently, manage anxiety linked to breathlessness and feel less alone in what can be an overwhelming experience. For many, it helps them regain a sense of control over their bodies and everyday lives, rather than feeling defined by illness.

Manchester Camerata's Music in Mind is another flagship creative health programme, using live music making as a form of in-the-moment, person-centred care for people living with dementia and their carers.

The sessions are led by professional musicians and music therapists, supported by trained community 'music champions'. We now have music cafes across Greater Manchester providing these informal, welcoming sessions, creating moments of joy and connection, relieving loneliness and isolation, reducing fear and stress and supporting identity, expression and emotional wellbeing.

These initiatives are not about art as a distraction, but as a practical form of support – helping people living with breathlessness, anxiety or low mood to regain confidence, connect with others and feel back in control of their lives again.

Through music, voice and shared creative experience people find ways to manage their health that feel human, dignified and sustaining.

Programmes like these show what prevention really looks like when it is rooted in people's lived experience and everyday lives, not just in systems and services. They help people build relationships, feel connected to others and access support in ways that are right for them.

What I find most powerful about creative health is that it creates space. Space to rebuild confidence. Space to breathe again. Space to be heard. Space to reconnect with others and talk about what really matters. That's prevention in the fullest sense – long term, human and rooted in place and people.

Greater Manchester is becoming a creative health city region because it reflects who we are: creative, caring and rooted in community. We know the challenges people face are often complex and long-standing, and we don't pretend there are easy answers. But we do know that when people feel connected, valued and able to express themselves something begins to shift. Often, it's that shared space to create and connect that helps people find a way forward.

If we're serious about prevention, dignity and fairness, then making space for people to create, connect and be seen isn't optional – it's part of how we build a healthier, more hopeful society.

greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/the-mayor

OPINION

Creativity is a way forward



By **ANDY BURNHAM**
MAYOR OF GREATER MANCHESTER



← WORTH A LOOK

The Booth Centre in Manchester created this artwork that featured in the 2026 Banner Exhibition at the People's History Museum, which

celebrates community, creativity and self-belief in a world that can often leave people feeling unheard. Each patch was created by a different artist, offering a chance to share a personal, positive message – on display throughout 2026. → boothcentre.org.uk

↳ AJ IN A WHALE

"I always feel proud of myself because my work is fun and it makes people happy." Andreas Johnson is an artist from Suffolk Artlink's programme for learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists. The charity's artist-led sessions support people to develop their artistic practice and express themselves through visual arts, while also bringing the social and wellbeing benefits of being creative together.

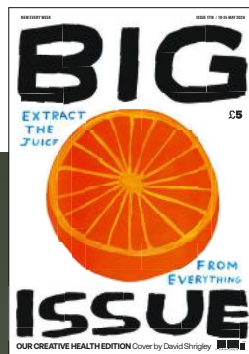
→ suffolkartlink.org.uk/artists/andreas-johnson



DAVID SHRIGLEY

THE JUICY DETAILS

We asked the visual artist and cover creator some questions about art. His answers were pithy



How do you extract the juice from everything?

With big hands and a vice-like grip and determination and assertiveness. But at the same time with great courtesy, perhaps wearing perfume and a light blouse and slacks.

↓

How do you refill the juice when you feel a bit squeezed artistically (or emotionally, or just sucked dry by the general state of THINGS)?

Take a nap.
Eat porridge.
Do yoga.
Get cuddles.
Watch one of the Muppet movies (possibly *The Muppets Take Manhattan*).

↓

How can everyone be refreshed by indulging their artistic side?

Write a play.
Write one of the parts for yourself.
Memorise your lines.

Try to use them in everyday conversation.

↓

What advice would you have for people who haven't been arty since school? Why do people stop being arty?

I'd advise them never to use the word 'arty'.

Substitute it for the phrase 'entirely myself'.

"I haven't been entirely myself since school."

↓

What's the most important thing art can do?

If Nigel Farage had continued his promising career as a sand sculptor rather than going into politics we would all have been better off. Including Nigel.

↓

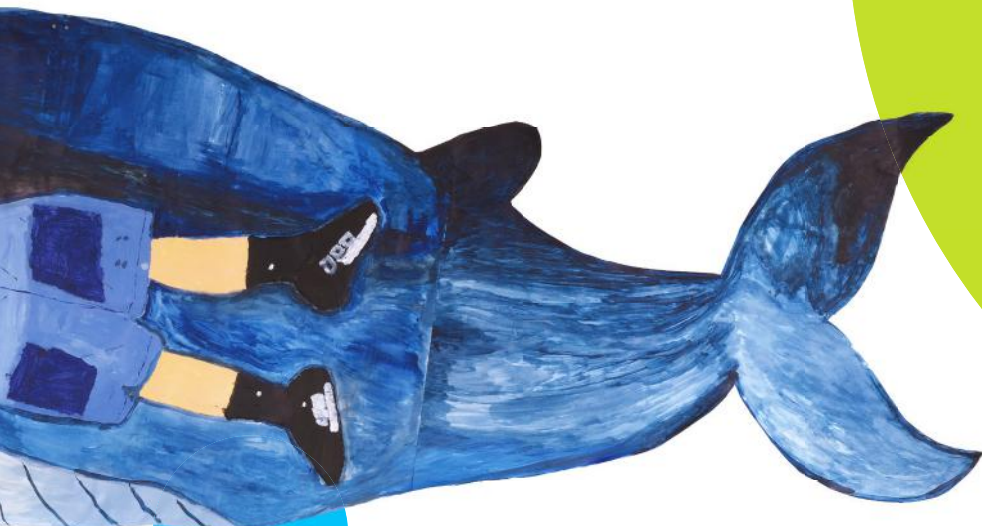
How do opportunity and access shape art in the UK?

It's all very unfair. The Irish have it right with their Basic Income For Artists.

The best idea they've had since Zero Guinness.

→ davidshrigley.com/shrigshop.com





↑ PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

By CANDY ZHANG

In many community gardens across the UK, a familiar pattern repeats: people arrive, plant, water, talk, then leave. The following week, most do not come back.

Community gardens are visited and enjoyed, often only once. Workshops, volunteering days, seasonal events happen in isolation. People rarely come back after they end.

In our work at AAGarden with migrants and international students, this becomes more visible. People want to return, but life is unstable. Even when there is intention, return is not always possible.

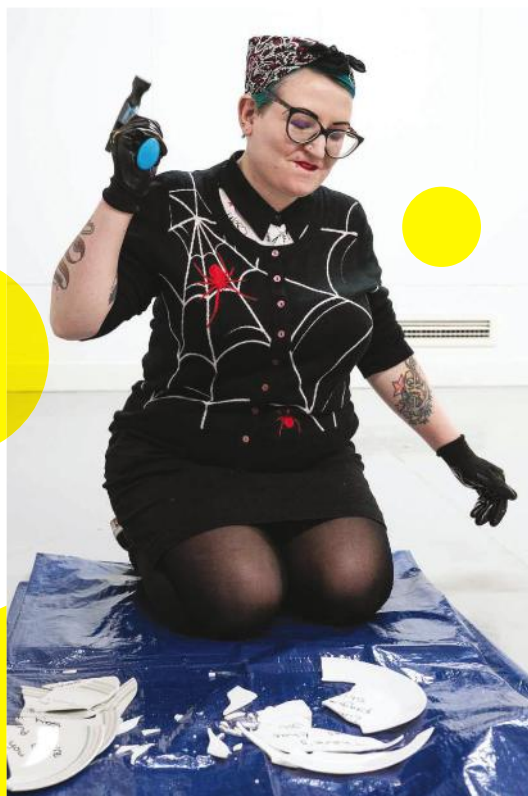
One participant, Zora, a PhD student, first joined during a period of intense academic pressure. A year later she returned, not for a workshop but to look for the spring onions she had planted. "I think this is the patch I used to look after," she said.

Nothing was formally assigned, only a remembered trace of care.

Instead of adding more events, we introduced something smaller. Each time someone cares for a plant, they leave a simple digital trace. It can be seen again. Over time, these traces accumulate.

Community gardens become less a place to visit, and more something that people return to in fragments. Participation circulates in everyday life through small acts of care, return and repetition.

→ aagarden.org



↑ PICKING UP THE PIECES BY SMASHING PLATES

By GEMMA LEES

Cut It Out And Smash It Up is part performance, part workshop, part catharsis, part breaking everything down in order to start anew. The audience watches as I read aloud my poem, *Floorboards*, off crisp, white plates. The poem is an honest and painful examination of the time after the hostel; the time in which you live in homelessness limbo, in an empty flat with bare floorboards, sleeping on a blow-up mattress, really just wanting to return to the relative safety, the companionship, furniture and carpets even of hostel life. One stanza at a time I share my experiences and then smash each plate with a hammer. The splinters are me, the anger is me, the hammer is me, I am actively destroying these memories and it feels amazing. Meanwhile, the audience are each given a sealed envelope of mixed-up lines of my poems. They are invited to cut, tear, rearrange and stick them down in any order they desire. Their actions mimic mine, they are involved, active and supporting me in processing this trauma live in front of them. The ending is triumphant, my knee is bleeding but I feel reborn.

→ gemmalesartist.co.uk



SEE ME NORTH

What happened to you? How childhood trauma shapes the brain – and the future of trauma-informed care

By CHRIS COOPER, MONIQUE LHUSSIER
and the SEE ME NORTH TEAM
NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY

→ “I can recall the abuse from years ago – in fact it is my earliest memory – in vivid detail. But if you were to ask me what I was doing last Tuesday, I couldn’t tell you.”

These words, shared by someone with lived experience of homelessness, cut to the heart of something that is rarely talked about: the profound and lasting impact that childhood trauma has on the brain.

For many, homelessness begins in childhood with experiences of instability, neglect and abuse, leaving deep wounds that have lasting impacts. Around 90% of people with experience of homelessness have had at least one such adverse childhood experience, with more than half having had four or more. When those experiences involve the very people who are supposed to keep a child safe, the damage runs especially deep. Without a caring adult to provide safety and comfort, a child’s brain remains in a permanent state of ‘fight or flight’. Over years, this rewires the developing brain. The parts responsible for processing emotion become overdeveloped. The parts responsible for logical thinking, organisation and decision-making fall behind. It’s a biological reality that has lasting impacts across the life course, and which many of the services designed to offer support are failing to understand.

At See Me North, a UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded research project in the north-east of England, we are undertaking work to understand the lived experiences of these impacts and to develop a set of tools for support services to better meet the needs of those who have experienced childhood trauma. This includes



↑ THE MAGPIE PROJECT

The Magpie Project supports mums and under-fives at risk of homelessness in London. The mums and minis worked with artist and fashion designer Bethany Williams, illustrator Melissa Kitty Jarram and poet Eno Mfon to tell their stories from the margins, mothering on the move, and longing for ‘home’.
→ themagpieproject.org

PHOTOS: HELIX ARTS 2026; JENNA SELBY



promoting access to, and participation in, creative activities.

Losing keys, phones and money were common problems among those we talked to. Then there was forgetting to pay bills, missing appointments, struggling to retain information or even forgetting to eat until the hunger becomes impossible to ignore. But it goes beyond memory. Planning ahead feels overwhelming. Managing time is a constant battle. Controlling emotional responses – the flash of anger, the wave of anxiety – can feel impossible. These are not moral failings of the individual; they are the lasting footprints of trauma on a still-developing brain. Footprints which impact almost every aspect of life – relationships, education, employment, health, criminal justice involvement – contributing to deepening social exclusion.

There has been a shift towards the adoption of trauma-informed practice in services outside of clinical settings. This centres safety, trust, empowerment, autonomous decision making and cultural sensitivity (including the avoidance of negative stereotypes), and asks services to move from asking 'What is wrong with you?' to 'What happened to you?' It is a welcome change, but our research suggests that this doesn't go far enough.

When attending services, many service users report experiencing retraumatisation, feeling judged, stigmatised and misunderstood and not receiving enough support. Despite the neurological impact of trauma being included in definitions of trauma-informed practice, service providers are not being given the knowledge or tools required to deliver meaningful and targeted care for people with these experiences.



What does homelessness look like when you build it, not explain it?

People who have experienced homelessness shared their realities using Lego during a recent See Me North workshop with Helix Arts. This playful process gave them the confidence to tell their stories publicly for, in some cases, the first time.

See Me North is working to change this. We are developing practical tools to help services understand the cognitive impacts of trauma and adapt accordingly, offering the kind of extra support and structure, or 'scaffolding', that makes engagement genuinely possible. Helping services to strengthen and mainstream good practice, underpinned by sound scientific understanding. What's more, we suggest a shift from 'What happened to you?', which can be retraumatising, to 'What matters to you?', a question which moves away from past experiences and places people's present needs and experiences at the heart of engagement. Here creativity can shine too. Supporting emotion regulation, strengthening executive functioning, providing a means of self-expression, and challenging stigmatised narratives and identities, the arts are not just nice to have but an essential part of trauma recovery.

People who have experienced homelessness are not defined by what happened to them. They are whole people, with strengths, talents and ambitions.

But to see that, services need to understand the invisible weight many carry and build systems that hold them up rather than let them fall through the cracks.

Our ambition is to make trauma-informed care the norm in every service, and to make creativity a more normal and valued part of the support offered to people who experience homelessness.

seemenorth.org



← RESPONSE ABILITY THEATRE

Response Ability Theatre is a boldly survivor-led theatre and participation arts charity that supports and platforms people living with or at risk of post-traumatic stress to lead on how stories like ours are told and learned from. We run monthly sessions open to anyone who identifies as a survivor (no diagnosis or proof required) in which we explore creative ways to understand and express ourselves without retraumatisation, and inform the direction of the charity's wider work for lived experience-led storytelling and change-making.

→ responseabilitytheatre.com



→ I will never tire of seeing the confused look on most people's faces when they find out what I do for a living. When asked, I casually say that I work in a hospital and am inevitably asked if I'm a nurse. It is then that I explain that I manage an arts programme. What usually follows is an unavoidable and lengthy explanation as to why a hospital needs an arts programme in my attempt to justify my role to a complete stranger! This continued advocacy and justification comes with the territory, it is something all art managers in hospital settings are used to, but imagine if it was considered normal?

Have you ever been in a hospital that has no arts offering? Blank clinical walls, long dark and depressing corridors. If you have been in a hospital that does

ART AS THERAPY

CREATIVITY CAN GIVE PATIENTS A BETTER OUTLOOK

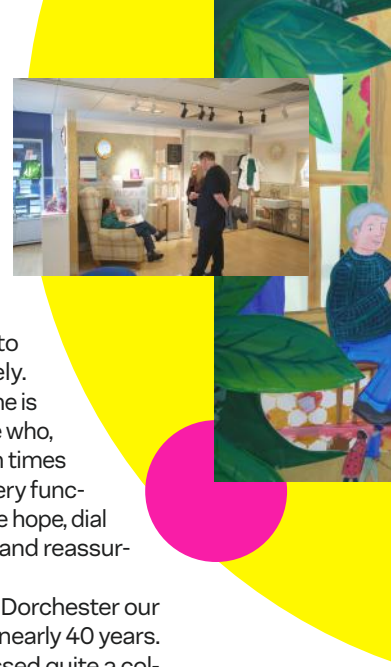
By **SUZY RUSHBROOK**
ARTS IN HOSPITAL MANAGER AT
DORSET COUNTY HOSPITAL

engage with the arts, you'll be able to recognise the difference immediately. The aim of any hospital arts programme is to enhance the environment for people who, often very suddenly, find themselves in times of crisis, uncertainty and distress. In very functional, clinical settings we aim to inspire hope, dial down any fears and provide comfort and reassurance in a subtle but meaningful way.

Here at Dorset County Hospital in Dorchester our art programme has been running for nearly 40 years. Over this time, the hospital has amassed quite a collection of important artwork. We manage this collection, making sure it is cared for and displayed in the best way possible to support our patients, staff and visitors. The artwork we have reflects directly the community we serve. We don't want to alienate people with high art but provide inspiring, recognisable images that our community can relate to. The arts team is also involved in the design and enhancement of new spaces, making sure they are friendly, approachable and calm. However, one of our most visible roles is encouraging active participation in the arts, supporting patients and staff via therapeutic art projects. We also work with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra to bring interactive music sessions onto the wards.

Through our work we are tackling wellbeing at the root, reducing recovery time and increasing positive health outcomes as well as staff retention. Some of our current activity on stroke, elderly care and dementia wards involves patients smelling herbs and reminiscing about meals or their own gardens. They might then print or paint the leaves

to create a little keepsake to sit by their bedside. It might be making paper planes, cutting out and sticking down pictures or drawing detailed flowers, but these activities increase dexterity, grip, control, observation skills and problem solving. These all contribute to improved independent routine actions, such as getting dressed or using a knife and fork. Patients are encouraged to make choices and design decisions, in a situation where much decision making has been taken out of their hands. This can all result in feelings of pride, increased self-esteem





↑ PATIENT LIFT

Strike a Light: The Art and Science of Occupational Therapy was the first UK exhibition charting the history and impact of occupational therapy, running for the last month at Rugby Art Gallery and Museum. It highlighted how creativity can improve quality of life for people living with dementia, developed by visual artist Jessica Hartshorn.

The exhibition explored how creativity and science come together, aiming to shift public understanding of the profession away from a purely clinical image towards a recognition of its human and artistic dimensions.

and significant cognitive improvement, therefore lessening frustration and aggression.

We strive for and aspire to a better future for our staff, patients and rural community. We're endlessly proactive and entirely necessary, though not always considered a priority among the higher echelons of the NHS, who are juggling increasing financial pressures. In our profession we are facing redundancies in arts teams, a lack of regular funding and a reliance on individual allies within our NHS Trusts to continually advocate for our work. There is no national recognition for our roles, despite an overwhelming amount of evidence showing the huge return on investment for what we do.

It is not all doom and gloom, we focus on positive actions, patient-centred care and an increasing awareness of the work we do – supported by celebrations such as Creativity and Wellbeing Week. We carry on regardless and encourage not only recognition but the training and succession planning that needs to accompany it.

As a visual arts curator and historian, I have come to this work through lived experience, and it's surprising how many arts managers have. Without firm career paths or specific routes to this type of employment, it is a matter of finding your way. I have learnt the hard way that to keep myself well and free from crippling anxiety I need to be creative – I need the release that focusing on a small artistic project for a few hours can give me.

I am so passionate about how this activity can help people that it is infectious, to find work that is focused around this goal is incredibly rewarding. Art doesn't have to be about selling expensive paintings to wealthy people from smart galleries. Art is for everyone and can be used for good, to help in times of adversity and to heal.

dchcharity.org.uk

MAKE YOUR OWN COLLAGE

Disrupting pattern with Hospital Rooms

Follow the steps below or scan the QR code to view a video guide to a workshop run by Hospital Rooms, which brings world-class art into NHS mental health hospitals.

1 Pull out the geometric shapes designed by Toby Ziegler (see over the page)

2 Experiment by tearing out sections of the paper – Toby suggests folding in half and tearing a hole in the middle or tearing strips.

3 Begin to arrange and then stick your pieces of torn paper onto a base of colour paper or another patterned sheet. Spend a little time trying out different combinations.

4 You can take sections of other pages from this magazine and experiment with how they fit together.

5 Once you are happy with your collage, stick it together and if you have paint, try watered down washes of colour, allowing patterns to show through.

6 Continue experimenting, maybe try adding thicker paint or tearing and sticking new pieces of paper.



→ hospital-rooms.com/video/disrupting-pattern-with-toby-ziegler/

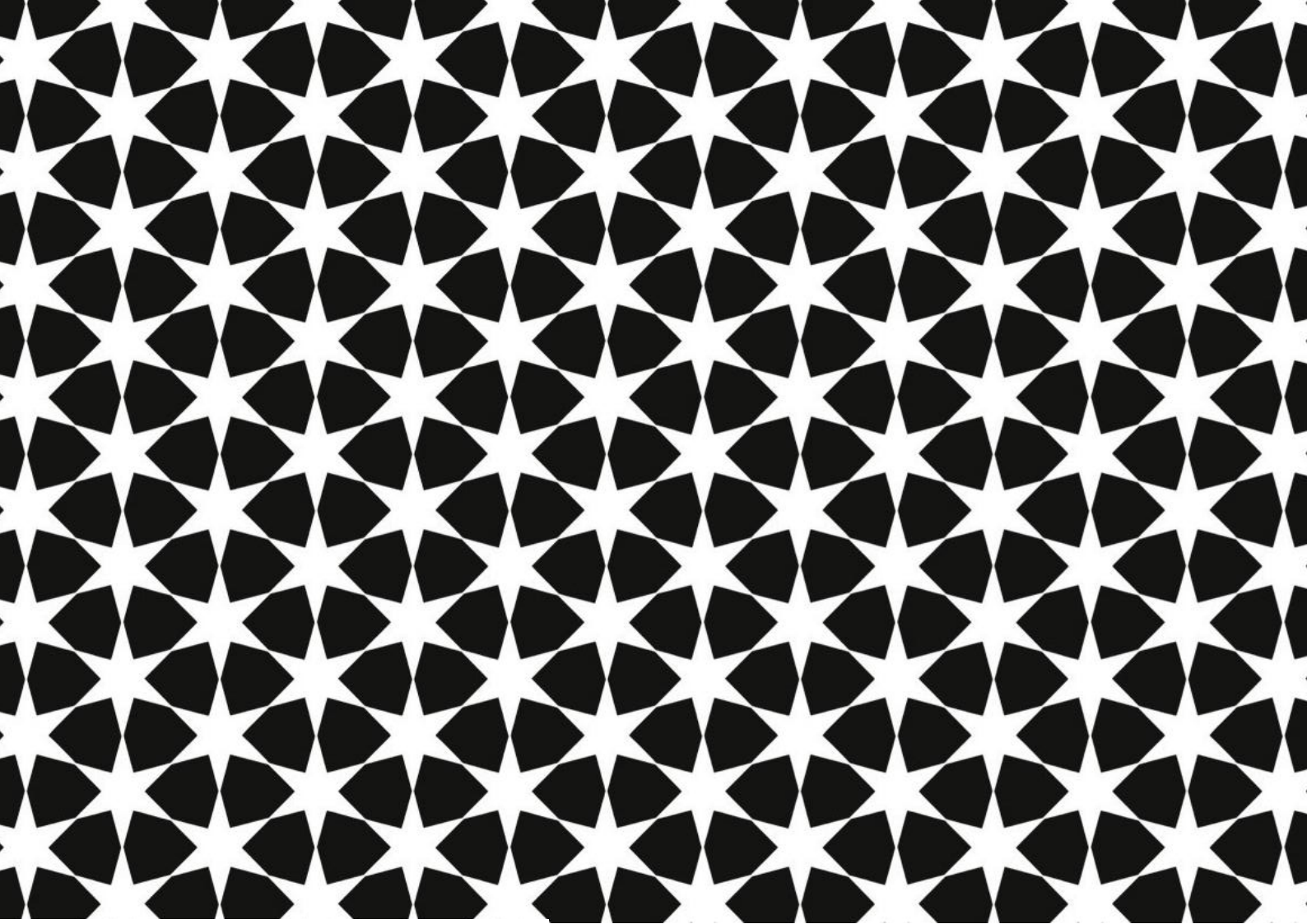
You will need:

- Paper
- Paint
- Brushes
- Gluestick
- Pot of water
- This magazine

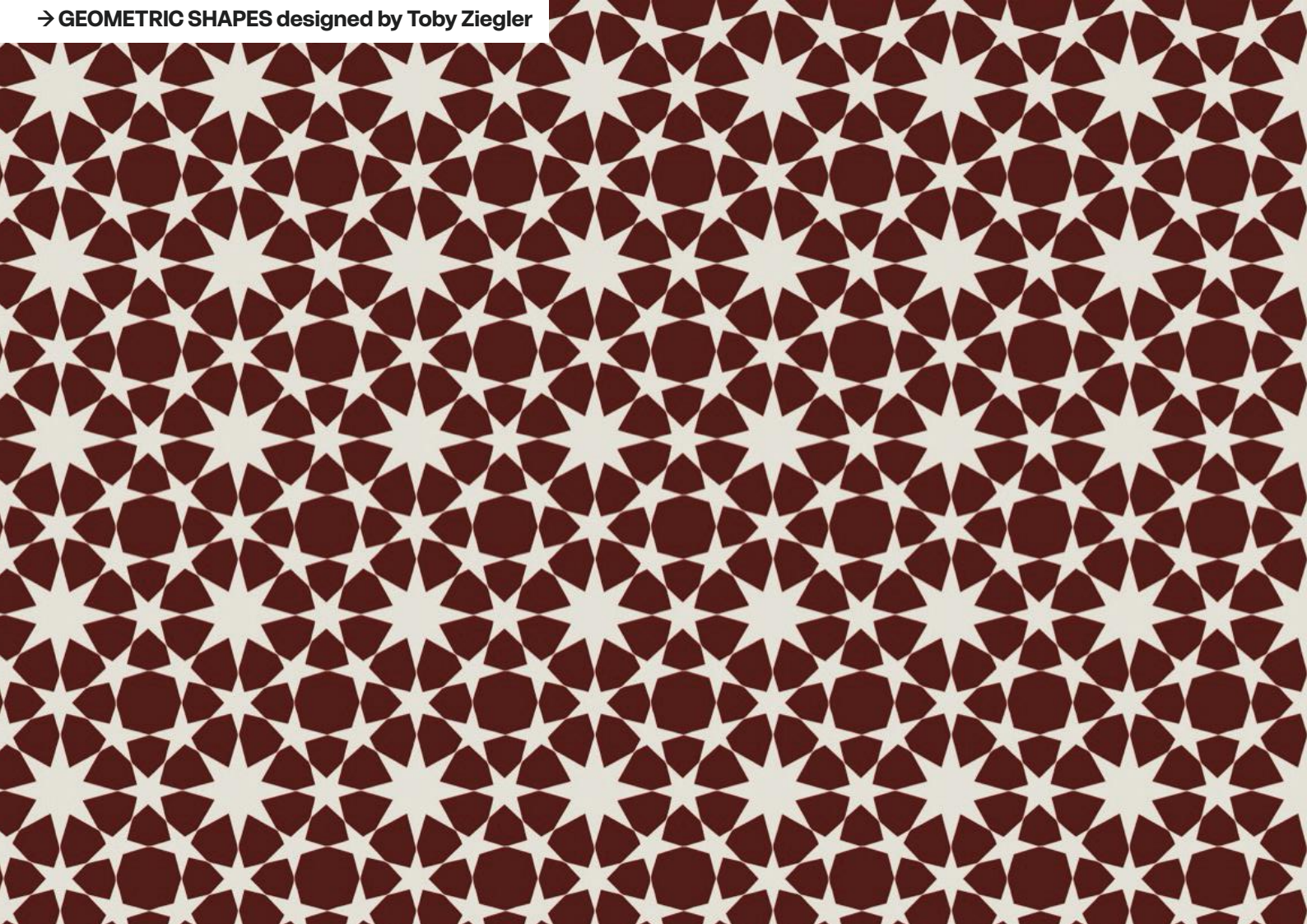
HOSPITAL ROOMS DIGITAL ART SCHOOL

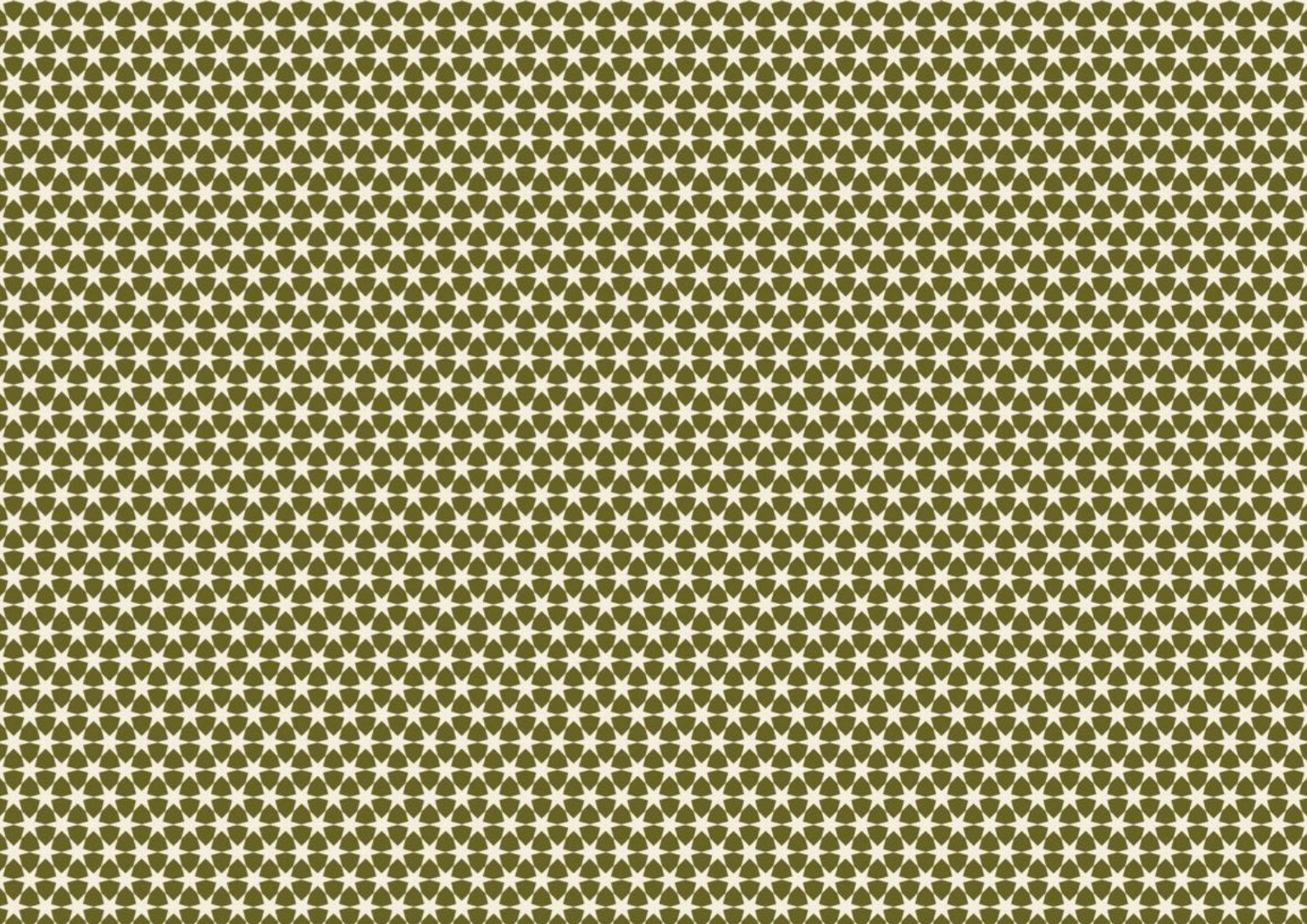
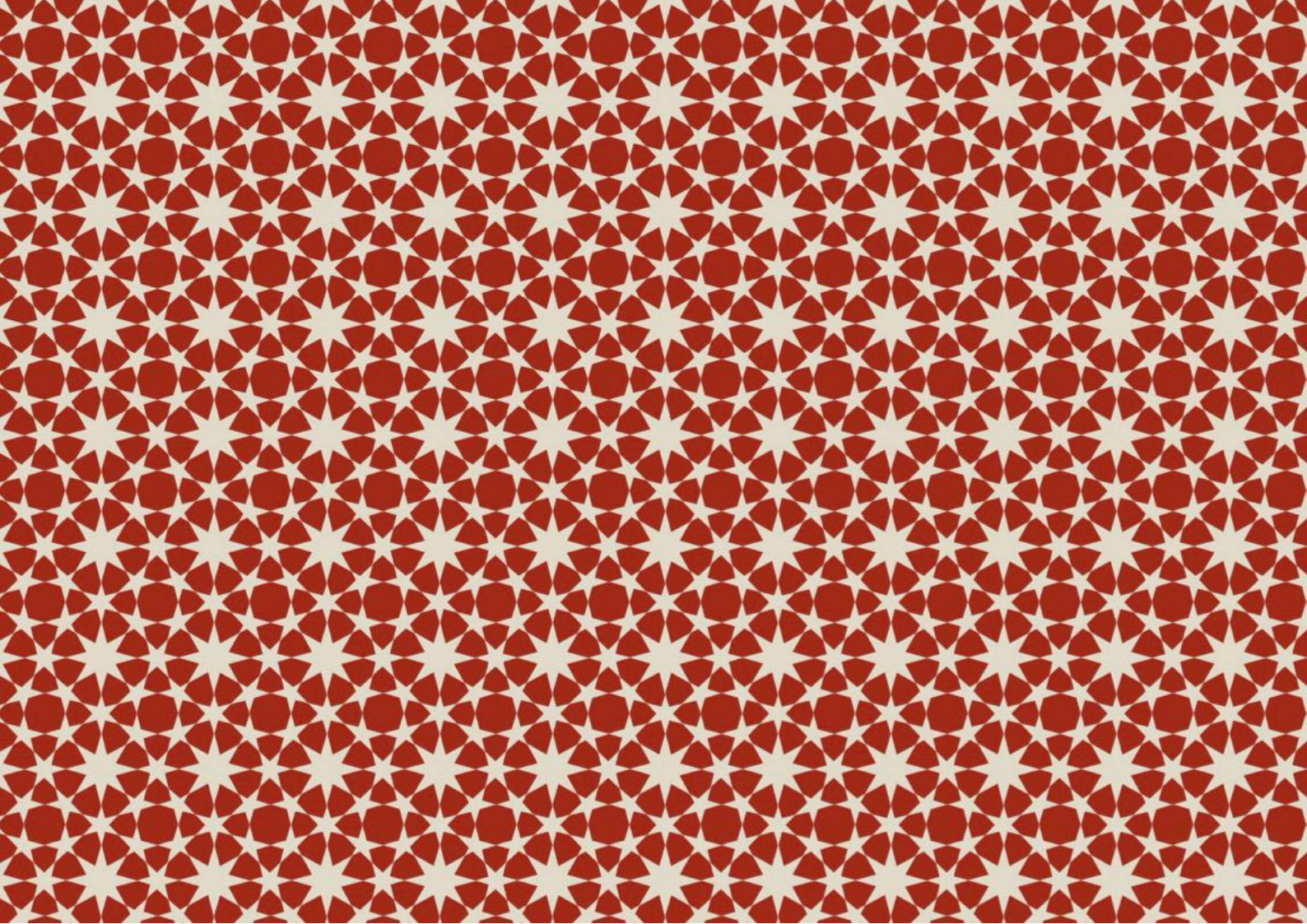
↳ Here are some artworks created by participants who followed along with the workshop in NHS services





→ GEOMETRIC SHAPES designed by Toby Ziegler





➔ **Thahmina Begum:** The theme of this issue is 'critical hope'. They're two very powerful words. What does critical hope mean to you when you think about creative health, policy and politics?

Simon Opher: What comes to mind here is that, really, we have lost hope. So we've got to regain that. How can we build hope in our society? The 'critical' bit is important, because you don't want to pretend everything's lovely. We have to do the gritty bit – rebuilding honesty into what we do is very important. I've noticed that when I'm quite honest about stuff – if I say, "I think I made a mistake voting for that", people go, "Yeah, we all make mistakes. That's fine." And you don't lose kudos. Being critical about yourself can be a really important thing. But I think there's hope in all creativity; it's a future-based thing, isn't it? It's always based on a little bit of hope because you're creating something new. As a GP, I've been referring people to creative support for about 26 years. And what I notice is that patients go in thinking "I'm terrible at drawing," or whatever it is. And we almost always surprise ourselves when we try and do something new; that's keying in a little bit of hope for the future.

TB: The evidence is there that creativity supports our health, but how do the artists, practitioners, freelancers who do this work have hope when the money isn't there?

SO: What's brilliant about the new *Art Cure* book [see page 14] is that I don't talk about evidence any more. I just say, "Read that." When things like singing for postnatal depression have been compared to normal care and found to be better than normal care, you know, let's just shut up and do it. That's my feeling. We can't pretend it's

a panacea for everything – so let's not overclaim – but on the other hand, it might help. I know there are moves to discuss how creative health can better connect with the Treasury Green Book, which could be really important. I think

TB: There's something about galvanising and getting together as a team. As an MP, as the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Health, you're saying, we've got your back, we see you, we hear you; we're part of a movement, and I'm sitting on roundtables and fighting every day just a little bit... Whatever role you've got, everybody's doing something to try and evolve the system.

SO: It's about culture change, rather than just simply winning an argument. I always caveat this with the fact that some people for example get very, very depressed and that's a clinical situation and they need antidepressants. Some bits are definitely medical. But when I started doing this in 2000, I brought a potter into my surgery. And my colleagues were saying "What the hell are you doing? This is madness" and I said, "Well, let's just see what happens." I think that gradually you can change attitudes. The whole idea of 'social prescribing' was laughed at initially. And now it's widespread. Really what social prescribing means is de-medicalising. So you can have a prescription for medicine and then a prescription for all these

other things including creativity – and that's quite exciting.



IN CONVERSATION

'WE HAVE LOST HOPE'

Thahmina Begum, co-chair of the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance and Simon Opher MP, co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Creative Health, discuss how we find our way again

the message is: we know it's difficult, but don't lose hope. We will try as a group of people to get the funding, but don't lose the hope of creativity.

TB: What role do you think politicians have to play in making this happen?

SO: As politicians, you always do better with hope. The big question is how do we get hope back into the population? It's partly based on economic wellness, isn't it? But I don't think that's all it's about. The most hopeful bit I remember in my life is probably 1997 with a new [Labour] government; and also the Olympics [in London in 2012]. So what was that about?



↑ VOICES OF HOPE

Love is Everything is the first release from UK charity Women for Refugee Women's newly established choir: Voices of Hope. Facilitated by Fatima Lahham, the choir focuses on communal singing. → refugeewomen.co.uk

LEGISLATIVE THEATRE

Policy making on stage



By **SAMRA SAID**
CO-DIRECTOR, ARTS
& HOMELESSNESS
INTERNATIONAL

Imagine a scenario where politicians co-created homelessness policy and legislation alongside people who are or have been homeless. It's not as far-fetched as it seems and is beginning to spread around the UK through organisations like Expert Link, Expert Citizens and others. And over the last few years, Legislative Theatre has been part of this movement of participatory democracy, using theatre to bring decision-makers and people with lived experience together to co-create new legislation.

Legislative Theatre originated in Brazil in the 1990s, developed by activist and creator of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal. Now used around the world, it is a fun participatory democracy process where people with lived experience shape policy discussions. Arts & Homelessness International, in partnership with Katy Rubin, creative civic change and legislative theatre practitioner (The People Act), has been using Legislative Theatre over the last five years in local councils in Coventry, Medway and Haringey (funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation) and on a national level with Housing Rights in Northern Ireland, to shape public policy and create new Homelessness Strategies.

Here's how it works: A community directly impacted by a harmful policy, practice or law co-creates a play to articulate their lived experience, for example of homelessness or domestic abuse. Residents, advocates and policymakers are invited into performances where they watch the play, talk about the problems and analyse what they have seen. Anyone in the audience is then invited to come on stage and improvise a new rule, policy or proposal to address the problem. Through improvisation, policies are tested to see how they might work in practice. Each improv becomes a way of developing a policy proposal.

Co-creating legislation is particularly important in housing and health, where policy decisions can have long-term consequences for wellbeing. Legislative Theatre helps highlight where systems are not working and where prevention work can take place. This chimes with Paulo Freire's idea of critical hope which is about recognising injustice while believing change is possible and working together to co-create it.

Our last project was in Belfast, which focused on homelessness prevention for women experiencing domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. The project was commissioned by Housing Rights and delivered in partnership with The People Act and North Down & Ards Women's Aid.

The play was co-created and performed by women with first-hand experience of domestic abuse and homelessness. Over four workshops, participants devised a play based on their collective experiences, which they then performed to an audience of stakeholders and policymakers.

A number of concrete commitments came out of the process, bringing tangible changes to policy and practice including: the Northern Ireland Housing Executive appointing domestic abuse leads; further training for police officers including dealing with breaches of court orders; and a new housing rights service to support people experiencing domestic abuse is being piloted with hope of further expansion.

The project had a personal impact on the women involved, says Satania Rowland-Miller: "Every participant had a story and a voice. But not all stories had been told or all voices heard. Legislative Theatre gave survivors of homelessness and domestic abuse that opportunity to tell their story. Every step of the process, and every scene we co-created, made an impact on us as participants and actors, and then on decision-makers and policy in Northern Ireland.

"The whole process allowed me to take what was meant for harm, what was meant to hurt me, and turn it into something good. Those experiences that

Those experiences that nearly broke me were used for change

nearly broke me were used for change. It gave my pain purpose. Legislative Theatre shows that co-creation can lead to real-life change."

We have since held follow-up meetings with actors and policymakers to review progress on commitments, helping

hold decision-makers to account and track change. This ongoing engagement sustains momentum, strengthens trust and creates space for more equitable, human-centred policy and practice.

Twenty years ago, it would have been almost impossible to imagine policymakers co-creating with people affected by homelessness to shape decisions that impact their lives. And although the power divide between communities and decision-makers is still too great, Legislative Theatre and other lived-experience-led initiatives in the sector are showing that participatory democracy is not only more equitable, but also more effective.

@samrasaid



INCLUSION

Access to the arts is not a luxury. It's a necessity



By ELAINE BEDELL
CEO OF SOUTHBANK CENTRE

→ I've always believed that culture only really works when it belongs to everyone. Not in theory, but in practice: who walks through the door, who feels welcome to stay, and who sees themselves reflected in what is on offer.

Yet for many people, accessing cultural spaces still feels unattainable. Whether or not someone takes part in cultural activities depends on what they can afford, where they live, or whether they feel that these spaces were for them. There is a growing body of evidence for why access to the arts matters: Daisy Fancourt argues in her new book *Art Cure* that arts are the forgotten fifth pillar of health – improving the function of every major organ system in the body (see page 14). More broadly, creativity helps to build community, civic pride, connection and self-confidence.

At the Southbank Centre, access and inclusion is at the core of how we operate, designed around the principle of access at the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Royal Festival Hall, for example,

famously has no front door. Instead, there are doors on every side of the building, sending out a message that everyone is welcome. Furthermore, the concert hall within the Royal Festival Hall takes up just a third of the space. The rest is open to the public to enjoy as they wish.

It's an ethos that goes through our programming too, encouraging those who feel excluded from the arts to join in through our free programme. In 2025, 55% of our events were free, because cost should never be the deciding factor in whether someone can take part in cultural life.

More than 11.6 million people visited our 11-acre site last year, showing the power of open public cultural spaces in the heart of a bustling city. This kind of scale matters because it shows that when cultural spaces are accessible, people utilise them. At a time when many feel priced out of participation – financially, socially or culturally – civic cultural institutions play an increasingly important role in public life, offering places where



people can gather and feel welcome.

If we are serious about access, it has to be understood more broadly. Affordability is one part of it, but so is whether people feel comfortable entering, staying and returning. Removing those barriers is essential if creative spaces are to support connection and a sense of belonging.

Creating an environment where people feel comfortable spending time – whether working, meeting friends or bringing their children – matters just as much as what is ticketed. It is also about ensuring there are meaningful opportunities once people are there. I have long believed that creativity exists in everyone; what many people need most is the chance and space to express it. Take our Undercroft space – better known as the birthplace of British skateboarding – this is a community

space that was ‘occupied’ by the skateboarding community 50 years ago, and this shows cultural identity and belonging can be built from the ground up (An exhibition, Skate 50, runs until late June).

Programmes like Create Space, developed with The Well Centre, point to a wider shift in how creativity is understood as a core part of supporting wellbeing, particularly for young people facing complex mental health challenges. We know that one in five young people in England has a probable mental health disorder.

Research increasingly shows that creative engagement can build confidence, reduce isolation and strengthen social connection, which is why partnerships between the arts, health and education sectors are becoming more important.

Research increasingly shows that creative engagement can build confidence

As well as inviting people onto our London-based site, we’re also taking our work to over 40 towns and cities across the UK. For example, we’re taking the National Poetry Library on tour for a project called A Poet in Every Port. This project celebrates the role creativity can play in fostering civic pride in coastal towns across all four nations of the UK and gives people a voice in the places they live [read more in next week’s magazine].

Taken together, these examples are not about individual projects, but about a broader principle: when people are given the opportunity to create and participate, the impact extends beyond culture into stronger, healthier communities.

Crucially, creativity is not separate from the bigger questions we face as a society. It is inherently connected to wellbeing, opportunity and more connected communities.

We know there is always more to do, and we remain committed to widening access for our audiences, artists, staff and visitors alike. However, if we want a fairer and healthier society, creative opportunities must be genuinely accessible to everyone.

southbankcentre.co.uk



← MAKING THINGS UP

If you’ve done comedy, you know it’s all about reading the room. But what if there is no room for you? At Making Things Up CIC in Manchester, we create a space where participants feel comfortable to laugh, learn and hang out. Working in partnership with homeless service Coffee4Craig, we use improv, creativity and ‘Yes, and...’ thinking to build bridges out of isolation.

→ makingthingsup.org

A poem about poverty



Jason N Smith is a poet of Jamaican and English heritage who has performed at London’s National Theatre, the Roundhouse and Royal Festival Hall. He has a poetry collection called *Beyond Words*.

“I wrote *Poverty Streets* while attending hardship research meetings with Expert Citizens CIC, which is led by, and for, people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage, including homelessness, mental ill-health, addiction, domestic abuse, poverty or criminal justice.”

Poverty Streets by Jason N Smith

*Bags weigh heavily walking through night, searching
For warm places or at least warm light,
because many
Meet their maker in night times cold,
where youngest
Bones feel old*

*‘Some’ boldly try changing lots,
become more daring,
Take risks and caught within an
imprisoning matrix
Seemingly to really exist, while some
will beg to buy a fix
To not have to sit and think of
hardships millions have to live,
Because the alternative is a hungry
hole in which too many sink*

*Trudging with struggles through days
and nights, like a wilting
Flower dreams begin fading, because
of falling down ladders in life,
The populace stride past ignoring,
maybe they don’t see the entirety
Of society’s lack or little provision for
millions displaced, just the pages
Daily snippets played on a device or TV
as news feeds regurgitate*

*But today, as sleeping bag clouds
sweat down onto tenement yards
Without boundaries, the big belly of
the treasury, never empty,
Is an industrious foundry belching
such bounty, while marginalised
Grumbling hunger rumbles on
thundering feet to food banks loudly*

*Astoundingly, world economies
relentlessly flood markets of minds
With credit, card, obligations, gadgets,
any garbage they can find,
Which impoverished below austerity’s
line, cannot even afford to buy,
So I close my eyes, sigh, try imagine
tranquil lakes and shady trees,
But reality sees rain filled rusty
buckets, high tangling weeds and food
In cupboards, like society’s forgotten*



Beyond Words by Jason N Smith is available on Kindle via Amazon for £3 expertcitizens.org.uk

➔ So many words have been spoken about the need to increase diversity and inclusion in creative health, that if they were placed in a row, they would probably circle the globe.

Advocates for Representation in Creative Health (ARCH) are changing talk into action. All of the ARCH members have lived experience of the barriers encountered within the creative health sector. These include fewer opportunities to win commissions, low levels of funding and greater levels of scrutiny of their practice. For the global majority community, this leads to less effective and culturally relevant experiences of creative health.

The strategic and policy conversations about this issue are often about how to effect change on the current health system. But should this change come from the ground up – and lessons provided by organisations such as Writerz and Scribez?

Writerz and Scribez exist to disrupt the meaning of art, where it belongs and who it belongs to. In 2019, our SWITCH project placed black artists in residence in black barbershops across Tooting, responding to research showing that less than 1% of audiences at theatres, galleries and museums were

black men. We didn't expect people to come to us, we took art to their places of safety. Between clippers and conversation in a space of self-care and well-being, these black men engaged in live art: visual, literature, music, spoken word. What emerged wasn't just engagement, but ownership. The barbers themselves began to see their craft differently too.

Whether we're placing artists in barbershops (pictured right) or sickle cell



↑ REFRAMING HOMELESSNESS: A GUIDE TO ETHICAL REPRESENTATION

This guide responds to the need for responsible and accurate visual portrayals of homelessness. It was co-created by Anthony Luvera, Owen Clayton (University of Lincoln) and Rey Trombetta (Streetwise Opera) to challenge harmful stereotypes and offers prompts around intention, consent, and context. Luvera's assisted self-portrait of Mauvette Reynolds (above) shows the diversity of people facing homelessness in Birmingham.
→ reframinghomelessness.com

DIVERSITY

Talk into action – the importance of increasing diversity in creative health

By **JEMILEA WISDOM-BAAKO** and **TOLA DABIRI**

wards, holding space through poetry and loss workshops, decolonising institutional organisations or working within homeless services and community settings, our approach is consistent.

Through Culturally Mindful, we embedded 10 Global Majority artists in health and community spaces in Wandsworth, co-producing work with the people it's for. This is about more than representation, it's about dismantling systems and bringing change. There is still work to be done to recognise diasporic relationships to art as equally valid and vital; held with the same weight as opera, galleries and westernised traditions and to properly resource the richness, culture and creativity



our communities already carry.

ARCH is working to empower global majority artists and communities so that the power of creative healing is truly available to all. We are taking this initiative from the meeting room to the community through a series of events and webinars. Join us and take part in the conversation. Our next webinar is on 9 September. Check out London Arts and Health's newsletter or website for details on how to join closer to the time.

Jemilea Wisdom-Baako is director of Writerz & Scribez writerznscribez.org

Tola Dabiri is a cultural sector consultant londonartsandhealth.org.uk/portfolio-item/advocates-for-representation-in-creative-health



↑ JOURNEY LGBT+ ASYLUM GROUP

For Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group, a support group for West Midlands LGBT+ asylum seekers, collaborative creative activity builds identity and belonging despite trauma and discrimination. Joyful creativity becomes resistance, showing they are here, queer and unwavering.
→ journeylgbtasylumgroup.co.uk

ADDICTION

Finding Rat Park - a way through the maze of recovery

By DENISE HARRISON



➔ Admission into detox was never a goal of mine. I didn't aspire to become an alcoholic. They were the guys sleeping in doorways or sitting on benches clutching cheap cans of lager or extra-strength cider. Not me. It was never, ever supposed to be me. Only it turns out that it didn't matter what I thought – because I became one anyway.

My name is Denise and today I am an award-winning writer and filmmaker. Which is quite an achievement given that 10 years ago I was an end-stage alcoholic sleeping on a borrowed sofa.

Detox saved my life back then, but writing about my addiction as a way to help me process things was the thing I think that kept me 'saved'. Having that outlet, something tangible that I could turn to, any time, day or night no matter where I was or what was happening around me, was huge, and over time it became something that I could rely on at a time in my life when nothing else was left. I spent hours sitting writing in coffee shops or in my room in the hostel looking at ways I might have done things differently if only I had understood the process. I thought if I could understand why

I was susceptible to becoming addicted, I could learn to avoid the pitfalls and make sure that it couldn't come back for me again.

And then I remembered Rat Park, and suddenly it felt as though I had all the answers. In the 1970s, scientists were asked to prove that drugs cause drug addiction. Rats were kept isolated in empty cages and given the option of plain drinking water or water laced with drugs. And when the rats repeatedly overdosed and died, the scientists believed that they had their answer.

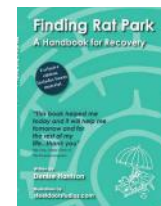
But when this theory was challenged by placing healthy rats into 'Rat Park' – an environment where they had company, things to do, and safe places to rest or raise their young – the opposite happened. None of the rats got addicted. None of the rats overdosed and died. In fact the majority of rats refused the drugged water. But here's where it gets interesting.

Heavily addicted rats were introduced to Rat Park, and if what the scientists believed was true, then we would expect them to continue to feed their addiction. Except that they didn't. Instead, they shunned the drugged water, choosing to go through painful withdrawals to try and get themselves well again.

Why? Because the rats weren't taking the drugs because they liked being addicted; they were seeking an escape from a life that they hated.

I've spent the last 10 years digging into trauma and trying to understand addiction, and while I don't claim to have all the answers, I do know what it takes to rebuild a life from scratch and live a happier, healthier life rooted in recovery. I realised that all the thoughts and ideas that I'd written over the years had the potential to become much more. They were tips and tools. Suggestions and strategies. A roadmap which could help someone find their own Rat Park. And so, *Finding Rat Park: A Handbook for Recovery* was born. A book that has found its way into hostels and refuges, HMOs and prison cells and which has helped countless people begin to find their own way through the maze of addiction recovery. A book that helped create so much connection and community in HMP Guys Marsh that it is now on the curriculum.

A book that led to Sparks in The Dark: The Prison Project, co-written with the men I worked with there, which is currently shortlisted for two awards in this year's True Crime Awards. And a book, born out of one of the darkest periods of my life that offers hope to anyone going through hard times that recovery is possible and that brighter days lie ahead.



findingratpark.co.uk
With huge, grateful thanks to my friends at steeldoorstudios.com for the incredible artwork and illustrations

↓ CREATING CONNECTION ON YOUR DOORSTEP

By CREATIVE LIVES

Voices ringing through a village hall window; music drifting under a community centre door; a library displaying exhibits by a local art group. People have always found ways to be creative, setting our minds free from daily worries in the process. But with stress, anxiety and isolation reaching epidemic proportions, these outlets are more important than ever.

Between 2023 and 2026, Creative Lives funded creative activity in 22 disadvantaged areas. Through the UK government's Know Your Neighbourhood programme, we distributed over £1 million to tackle loneliness and increase volunteering. Recently published, the evaluation proves every penny was well spent, showing that engaging in local creative activities improves wellbeing and increases social connection.

All the funded projects offered welcoming spaces where people could connect. Those connections were made through shared creative endeavours, providing an easy way to build friendships, without the pressure of small talk. Projects such as dance classes for teenagers in Hull, craft sessions in County Durham, and quilting workshops in Doncaster saw lives changed. When a disruptive young person turns into a volunteer, a person too unwell to work for a decade has renewed confidence to return, or somebody suffering chronic anxiety feels "normal for the first time in a long time", it's time to recognise the transformative power of collective creativity.

→ creative-lives.org



Five things I wish I'd known

Three leading creatives from the arts and homelessness community share five things they wish they'd known before embarking on their careers



David Tovey is a former army chef and now an artist, activist and educator.

Tovey says: "If you're going through homelessness, illness or feeling like everything's against you, I won't pretend there's an easy answer. But your story isn't finished. Things take time. Longer than feels fair. Your path is your own. Not everyone will understand what you make. Some won't like it. Sometimes you won't even like it yourself. But that doesn't mean it's not worth making. Because one day someone will see it. And it will connect. And that can change everything."

Five things I wish I'd known:

- Success is personal. Some days, just getting up and creating is enough
- You don't need funding to start. Make the work first
- You don't need permission. Just begin
- It takes time. Everyone moves at their own pace – don't give up
- Not everyone will like your work. That's fine. Keep making it anyway

davidtovey.com



Surfing Sofas is a poet and artist whose work reflects a history of homelessness, racism and trauma. He has performed at venues from Tate Modern to Saatchi Gallery and has been artist in residence at Museum of Homelessness and Centre for Homelessness Impact. He says: "I didn't know I was an artist until my friends told me I was. Writing was something I did to communicate how I felt, and to let people know they weren't alone. I believe success is where preparation and opportunity meet. Years of writing have prepared me for opportunities to succeed."

Five things I wish I'd known:

- Skill stacking – learning new skills that were helpful to my work
- Applying for funding – to turn ideas into impactful projects
- Having mentors – their guidance saved time and missteps
- Working in partnership – collaborations opened doors
- Servitude – helping others led to more meaningful work and opportunities

@surfingsofas



Natasha Steer is a freelance creative health practitioner based in Medway. She founded Creatabot 15 years ago, a project which supports people with health and wellbeing through creativity. Steer says: "Creativity is my absolute anchor during difficult times, including during a period of sofa surfing and whenever I have fibromyalgia flare-ups. I feel like it runs through my blood.

"I love helping others discover their personal creative outlets and seeing it improve their wellbeing. I feel very lucky to work within creativity as a freelancer, but as I read a while back, it isn't luck... it's the outcome of a lot of hard work."

Five things I wish I'd known:

- It's a process – not all your work may be creative at first (or even all the time); don't presume that everyone is earning all their money by only working in the arts, that's actually very rare
- Turning up makes a huge difference – being reliable and making work will actually be the thing that makes you stand out
- Mistakes are fine – they're part of learning and growth, share what was learnt, and don't let it become a roadblock. It also helps you become aware of limitations
- Take time to reflect – don't rush decisions; the rule of 'sleep on it' is really true when trying to decide whether to take work on or how to do something is good advice
- Get all the training you possibly can – this builds skills and confidence, helping you feel prepared when challenges arise

creatabot.co.uk

↓ YOUR WRITE TO WELLBEING IN BARRY

The makings of a group poem created in Barry Library, where people come together to strengthen wellbeing through the grounding ritual of writing, facilitated by Helen McSherry.



↑ RAW MATERIAL

Young people taking part in co-production workshops that helped design Creative Communities, Creating Change (4Cs), an innovative three-year mental health programme launched last month.



Create your own space

By **ANDRE ROSTANT**
BIG ISSUE VENDOR AND COORDINATOR
and **JAKE CUDSI**
EDITOR OF THE PAVEMENT

➔ On a grey, windswept day, people tear around Camden in every direction. Like a scene from an LS Lowry painting, they're all apparently in a rush to get out of the cold. Down a backstreet, the red bricks of Arlington House are dulled by the overcast clouds bulging overhead. But step into the warmth of the building, find your way down to one of the basement studios and an explosion of colour greets you as you enter.

This is one of the many art workshops for people experiencing homelessness in the UK. In London alone, your schedule can be filled every day of the week with a visit to Drummond Street Artists, Farm Street Church, the 240Project and many other similar art groups, home to vital creative communities. But these communities are at critical risk.

Funding for the arts in Britain has ebbed away in recent years. Local government art funding totalled £539 million in 2024-25, down 55% from 2010's £1.19 billion. The grim tale is part of the wider story of

austerity and cuts to services since the financial crash of 2008. Charities and services for homeless people have been disproportionately affected by funding cuts and austerity measures. Combined with fewer donations (down £1.4bn from 2024 to 2025) to charities, difficult decisions are constantly having to be made.

Regrettably, as charitable organisations feel the pinch, art spaces are often viewed as more expendable than core services. Speaking to guests at surviving art workshops, so many have been on artistic odysseys that have taken them across London, jumping from one abruptly closed service to one at risk.

People also embark on journeys to find the right kind of class. At every workshop we've visited in the past 12 months, there is no one template that each works from. Some groups, such as the Museum of Homelessness, approach workshops as creative spaces to be explored and interpreted by guests. There is a loose structure and numerous options open to visitors: on a recent visit people were painting pictures on T-shirts, working on a Kineku filmmaking project or focusing on a work of their own using the supplies in the class.

At other workshops, the emphasis is on an instructive approach that resembles a classroom dynamic. We have attended workshops that consist of a room with a table full of art supplies and no rules (a rule in itself). It's all fun and games until clean up. At every workshop you will talk to people who sampled others until they found one that chimed with what they were looking for in an art space. There isn't a big secret to making a creative space that works for people, it's just about creating that space.

But what does all this art in all these carefully curated spaces say? Themes emerge: seeking, fostering self-expression; challenging perceptions of social exclusion, of homelessness. One organisation works "to bring positive change to people, projects and policy in the homelessness community through arts and creativity". One to "educate on homelessness". Another is "empowering people through arts and recovery". It being implicit that the therapeutic value of art is a given. The broad motif is a petition for inclusion, rather than an assertion of equality.

Given that half the world's population lives in poverty, and a huge number of the remainder in comparative poverty, our art is, in fact, the mainstream. The projects we have visited are valuable, but only in the context of broader more "kinetic" resistance can they hope to truly bring about change.

In the meantime, amid the reliance on hard data and quantifiable metrics to justify budget spend in the UK, the importance of art can be difficult to measure. So it is a testimony to the hope these art groups provide that a startling sentiment shared by so many of the attendees is simply: this space saved my life.

More outsider art on our regular Street Art space, page 37

➔ BREAKS AND JOINS

Born Free is a poem by Juliet, a member of Make & Chat Mondays, who meet weekly at Telegraph Hill centre in South London. It came from the experience of stitching wild creatures, who "we felt we might need to accompany us in difficult times".

Born Free

Born from scraps of former lives

Wrapping, winding, stitching;

Making and chatting;

Twisting and joining;

Characters unfolding.

Stuffed, plumped up with feelings,

Telling tales;

Emerging, not broken.

Stitches want to be wild and untamed

Creatures are free born,

And want to be named

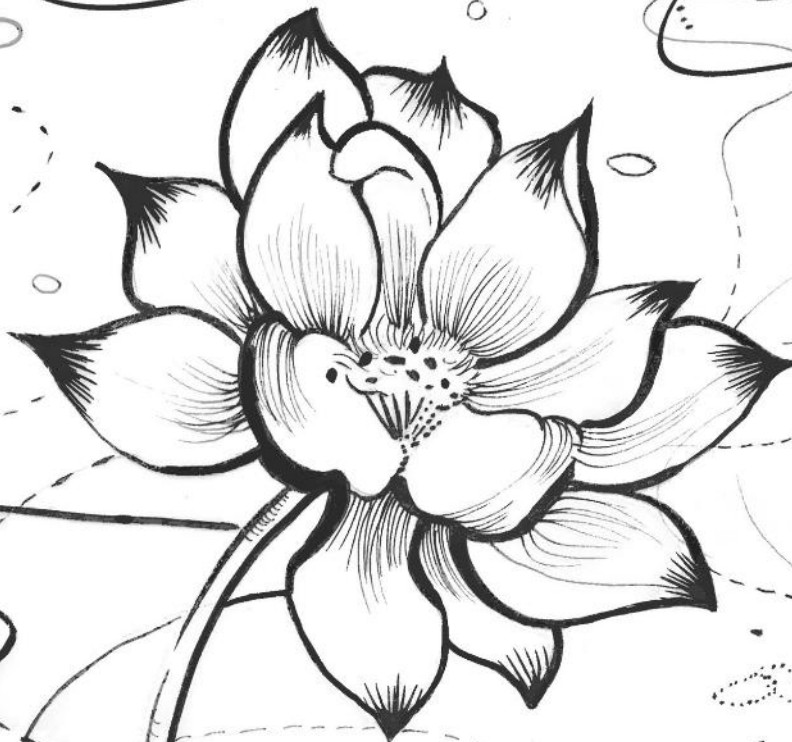


Pause. Breathe. Colour*

By MARION CHEUNG

This lotus represents hope emerging from darkness. It is a symbol of your own resilience and power to thrive. Take your time, choose the colours you love, and find a moment of peace on the page. Make it a mosaic of colour, or let the bright flower pop against a dark background.

*Did you know that colouring in supports mental wellbeing by inviting us to work slowly and relax?



→ ABOUT THE ARTIST

Marion Cheung studied at Central Saint Martins in London and specialises in arts for health and wellbeing. She believes that art has the power to transform lives and spark personal growth. Cheung loves inspiring everyone - especially those who think they aren't "creative" - to make art they love. Her work is held in public and private collections, including the National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales (Celf ar y Cyd).
→ marioncheung.com

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Interview

Nun Keeley Hawes and priest Paapa Essiedu embrace an unusual love story

ADRIAN LOBB

Arts

Bertrand Piccard recalls his remarkable round-the-world hot air balloon journey

BRONTË SCHILTZ

TV

True crime shows dramatise tragedy for entertainment. And it makes me feel icky

LUCY SWEET

This week's edition shines a light on those who use art to improve their lives. This page in the magazine focuses every week on an individual doing the same.



STREET ART

Kiln

By Zakia

→ “Funded by a local charity, I travelled to Marrakech to explore Morocco’s art and craft industries,” says regular Street Art contributor Zakia Chowdhury. “There, I visited a traditional pottery, where they do it all by hand. That, for me, was inspiring and joyful.”

Chowdhury submits this work via the 240Project – an activity centre empowering West London’s vulnerable community.

240project.org.uk; view more of Zakia’s artworks at [instagram.com/zakiasworld.1](https://www.instagram.com/zakiasworld.1)

→ The work on this page is created by people who are marginalised. Contact street.lights@bigissue.com to see your art here

OUT OF THE FIRE

INTERVIEW

Leap of faith

By ADRIAN LOBB

● If you didn't have 'a nun and a priest fall in love in a new drama by *Adolescence* writer Jack Thorne' on your 2026 TV bingo card, you are not alone. But **Falling** is that drama. What's more, it's a beautiful, fragile love story with a social conscience and deep humanity, told with supreme skill and maximum empathy by a cast led by Keeley Hawes and Paapa Essiedu.

Both lead actors agree that they didn't need to read beyond the title page, and the words 'written by Jack Thorne', to sign on the dotted line for Channel 4's new six-parter – which rewrites the rules of love and modern TV drama.

"I've been such an admirer of him as a writer, but also as a man, for a long time," says Essiedu, who returns to screens in the wake of an acclaimed performance in BBC One's *Babies*.

"With this story, he created something so delicate and vulnerable – which is maybe partly seen in your *Adolescence* or your *This Is England*, but to me, it felt like a voice that comes from Jack, which is very him, and that he doesn't often allow out or put into his characters."

"It's a no-brainer when something comes through the door from Jack," adds Hawes. "This is unlike anything I'd seen for such a long time. It's a thing of beauty about love in all its forms. Maybe we can't all relate to it being about a nun and a priest. But actually, love is the most relatable thing of all."

It begins with Hawes as Anna and Essiedu as Father David, living parallel lives. Both stories are already compelling before their worlds collide and sparks fly. She is a happy, spirited nun living a quietly fulfilling life tending to the convent vegetable garden and supporting the local foodbank, while he is a Catholic priest in a busy Bristol parish,



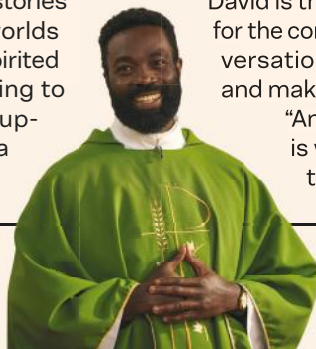
campaigning for a new needle exchange and basketball court – equal parts community champion and spiritual leader.

"It's wonderful to look behind the curtain of a world that we don't see very often," says Hawes.

"There's an awful lot of social work. Particularly for Anna, it was important for that character who has had less of a life outside of the church than David to be out in the world, so that when she falls so hard for David, it is not because he's the first man she's seen in a while."

"Whether you're within a religious community or not, you can imbue these figures with a kind of otherworldly quality," adds Essiedu. "But they are just people. They're people with compassion – David is the guy who wants basketball courts for the community, he wants to be having conversations with people, doing youth work, and making real world change.

"Another thing Jack does so brilliantly is write scenes which appear domestic and ordinary. You find yourself



talking about cauliflowers or scrambled eggs. But there is something extraordinary about the people he creates and imagines, and that he entrusts us to breathe life into.”

“And his take on love,” chips in Hawes. “We spoke to him before we started shooting. And hearing him talk about love for his son, for his parents, the way he met his wife – it was magical.

The resulting love story is as quietly, defiantly radical as its protagonists. Thorne’s script leaves space for so much unspoken emotion, the pace of storytelling going against the grain in an era of high-octane drama fuelled by a desire to keep us from glancing at a second screen, with cliffhangers compelling us to binge watch. By contrast, *Falling* is something to savour.

Both main characters appear content. Thorne took great pains to understand their devotion and faith. Neither is looking for love. But then, suddenly, whether they like it or not, there it is. At the recent Bafta screening, Thorne spelled out his own Damascene conversion to a belief in love at first sight, as his wife Rachel Mason watched on from the audience.

“I thought I’d always be alone, I’d always be writing and I was very happy with the sense of what my life would be,” he said. “Then I met a woman on the train, who was sitting just there, and suddenly, my life was completely different. I would never have believed in love at first sight.

But then something came along that hit me over the head with a brick.”

“From one perspective, it is the last thing Anna and David need in their lives,” Essiedu explains. “It’s not just a bit disruptive, it’s like a nuclear bomb going off in the centre of both of their lives.

“Jack never thought it was going to happen to him. And then it did. I feel like that is the fundamental of what it means to fall in love. When it hits you, it’s like something you’ve never felt before. And it’s something you don’t have an instruction manual for. That’s what you’re seeing in these six episodes, two people trying to navigate something incredibly complex without having any precedent or any training.”

The other relationships in their lives are similarly well drawn. There’s Anna and the older nuns,

It’s wonderful to look behind the curtain of a world that we don’t see very often
Keeley Hawes

including Niamh Cusack as their abbess, while David’s colleague Francis (Adrian Scarborough) is a delight.

David and his sister Susan (Sophie Stone) have a particularly important bond, which also showcases Thorne’s willingness to put his money where his mouth is – or maybe his words where his ideology is – when it comes to representing disability on screen, something he has campaigned for over many years.

“I really enjoyed, and I’m really proud of, working with my sister in the show, played by Sophie Stone, who’s this fucking incredible actor,” says Essiedu, who worked on his British Sign Language (BSL) skills for months ahead of filming.

“She’s profoundly deaf, and the way we communicate is using BSL. That’s written in the script. I’ve got to thank Jack for giving us the opportunity to create this relationship – which I feel is not shown on mainstream TV anywhere near regularly enough.

“It was about finding an intimacy between two people, between siblings, in the way that they use language.”

“He embraced it. He enjoyed it. And it mattered to him,” is Stone’s verdict. “He wanted it not just to look good but to be clear, for our relationship to be authentic. And because it mattered to him, our relationship outside of work was deeper.”

“Sophie is wonderful,” says Hawes. “And for those scenes, you really have to lean in when you’re watching. There’s no second screen with that. You’re entirely with the characters.”

Hawes has worked on every conceivable type of TV drama over her career, from the groundbreaking early romance of *Tipping the Velvet* in 2002 to her career-changing star turn as Lindsay Denton in *Line of Duty*, via retro cop show *Ashes to Ashes*, Russell T Davies’s masterpiece *It’s a Sin* and rollicking recent Netflix hitwoman drama *The Assassin*.

But this was a swerve no one saw coming, and it’s all the more rewarding for it.

“I’d been looking to do a midlife love story,” she says. “But I couldn’t have imagined for a second it would have come from Jack Thorne and be starring alongside Paapa. So that was beyond anything I’d hoped for.

“The older people get, the more interesting these stories become. There are so few love stories about people at this point in their lives, when their lives are more complicated.”

Amen to that.

Falling is on Channel 4 and available to watch as a box set from 19 May at 9pm



Lovin’ on a prayer: Keeley Hawes’s nun Anna falls for Paapa Essiedu’s Father David (below left)



Hawes and Essiedu were keen to be part of writer Jack Thorne’s ‘midlife love story’

PHOTOS: ROBERT VIGLASKY / CHANNEL 4 / THE FORGE



BERTRAND PICCARD

Super fly

By BRONTË SCHILTZ

In 1999, Swiss explorer Bertrand Piccard and British flight instructor Brian Jones became the first people to circumnavigate the globe non-stop in a hot-air balloon. Now, John Dower's documentary film, **The Balloonists**, retraces their remarkable journey. Piccard told us more.

Big Issue: How did it feel to watch your record-breaking flight unfold on film?

Bertrand Piccard: It brought me back to the real emotions, because for 25 years, I've been telling the story, and you start to have a little bit of distance. But when I'm in my seat, looking at the film, I'm really back in the emotions I had during the flight, and of course I knew the outcome, but I was stressed! I did not remember it was so difficult, I did not remember it was so dangerous, and it was funny, because I saw the film with my wife and children, and I felt almost bad for them, because I had never told them that it was so horrifying, and they looked at me and said, "But you said it was fun!"

You had some very wealthy competitors, including billionaire Richard Branson. What gave you the upper hand?

We were the underdogs, but because we were the underdogs, we had to be smarter. So our balloon actually was the best balloon, because we really studied the thermodynamic behaviour of the balloon, and we had the best sponsor with Breitling, because they were not here to pay for my dream, they were here to be a real partner with me, to develop something impossible, to fund something that would belong to us, not just to me. I think most of our competitors wanted to have done it. Brian Jones and I wanted to do it. And after that flight, we continued flying balloons. Most of our competitors never touched a balloon after their failure, because they just wanted to fly around the world.

The film emphasises the importance of human creativity and collaboration.

Are we at risk of losing those qualities in the age of AI?

In a balloon, when you change altitude, you will find other winds that will push you in other directions, and that's how you steer. Today, with AI, we're facing exactly the same thing. We can have one altitude at which AI will support human beings, will help human beings to do better, to understand better, to have access to more information. But you also have an altitude where AI can take the power, can take the control, can get rid of human beings, get rid of a lot of jobs, and put humankind behind technology, and this is really an altitude that leads to a disaster, like in a thunderstorm where the balloon is destroyed, and we have to be aware of this. We

have to be responsible with what we do with technology and with AI. We should not have technology leading us. We should lead it. Technology has to be at the service of humankind, not humankind at the service of technology.

How did your flight change your relationship with the natural world?

I think we have lost our sense of marvel in front of nature. We've lost the sense of marvel for the elements that we cannot control, and we think that human beings are the centre of everything, which is wrong. Human beings are just part of something bigger than them. We have to remember we are not the big kings on Earth. We're just one element, and we have to be really careful, because by destroying the other elements, we might destroy ourselves.

After the flight, you founded Wings of Hope foundation.

What is it? We support children who suffer from neglected causes. The first one was Noma, this atrocious sickness that destroys the faces of children in the poorest regions of the world through chronic malnutrition. We now finally have the World Health Organization working on it, so now we can go to our second cause, which we are launching this year, which is fighting poverty thanks to renewable energies and clean technologies. Our first action is to replace oil stoves and wood stoves with renewable energy stoves in order to reduce pollution in huts, to



The Alps seen through the window of the Breitling Orbiter balloon

reduce deforestation, and to allow the poorest populations to get rid of dependence on oil and kerosene.

What impact do you hope the film will have?

My goal is not to push people to fly around the world. But it shows the importance of curiosity, because without curiosity, you do nothing new. It shows the importance of perseverance, because without perseverance, you cannot succeed in trying something new. It shows the importance of respect, because without respect, your success has no value. And it shows how much it's important to believe in your dreams, not to listen too much when people say it's impossible, and to go further than we think we have to; get out of our comfort zone. Everybody in this team went out of their comfort zone, and this is why we could write history and do something that had never been done before.

What's next for you?

The next project is to go further, to do better than Breitling Orbiter [the winning balloon they piloted] and Solar Impulse [a solar-powered aircraft]. With Breitling Orbiter, it was non-stop around the world, but we had emissions, because we were burning propane. With Solar Impulse, there were zero emissions, but 16 stopovers, and it took a year and a half to fly around the world without fuel. The next project aims at flying around the world nonstop, zero emissions with a hydrogen-powered aeroplane. A lot of people say zero-emission flying is impossible, so I want to show it's possible. A lot of people say, "It will take 50 years before all the aeroplanes can fly on hydrogen." And I answer, "Yeah, it will probably take 50 years. This is why you have to start today and not tomorrow, otherwise it will be 50 years plus one day."

The Balloonists is in cinemas from 22 May



I've always felt icky about the way true crime has become a fun and cosy genre, dissected by gleeful amateurs with tiny fuzzy microphones and packaged as a perverse form of relaxation. Ooh look, a body in the woods! Lol! The problem with true crime documentaries is that they turn everyone into a character in a story. They invite you to put a metaphorical deerstalker on and do a crime jigsaw, and by the time you get into the juicy details you've completely forgotten they're real people.

I was sitting on this particular high horse when I started watching **Should I Marry a Murderer?** And now, I will relate what happened, and everyone in it will become a character in a story. See how it works?

Dr Caroline Muirhead is a young, gregarious and smart pathologist with a penchant for posting her every breath on Snapchat. She meets a Highland farmer on Tinder called Sandy McKellar, who along with his twin brother Robert, works on a vast remote estate in Argyll. Despite the fact he lives in the middle of nowhere, owns firearms and can gut a deer, she drives hundreds of miles from Glasgow (alone) to visit him for their first date. Mind you, Caroline can also gut a person – she memorably describes the postmortem process as “having a tongue in one hand and an anus in the other”.

At this point I was agog and all other plans for the evening were cancelled.

Caroline and Sandy fall in love, as evidenced by hundreds of social posts of them with Snapchat filter hearts dancing around their eyes. They get drunk, take drugs, hunt, shoot and fish, and quickly get engaged in 2020 (the year everyone went mad). You could decorate a car showroom with all the red flags. Even when Sandy's brother tells Caroline he's “not right in the head” she thinks she can save him. Before they get married, though, Sandy divulges that in 2017, he and his brother killed a cyclist in a hit and

run while driving home from the pub. The victim's name was Tony Parsons, and he was cycling 100 miles from Fort William to Stirling for a cancer charity. Sandy tells her it was an accident – that he was killed on impact and they panicked and buried the body in a peat bog.

It's safe to say that by this point, my tea had gone as cold as my blood.

Caroline reports the brothers to the police, but with no physical evidence they're released without charge. With zero witness protection, Caroline feels compelled to carry on her relationship with Sandy, getting deeper into drink and drugs to cope – all the while creating a breadcrumb trail of evidence for the police to help them locate the body.

She soon finds out that the accident didn't kill Parsons outright. Instead, the brothers left him to die and went home to get changed before bringing a digger to bury him. She lays a Red Bull can at the



Caroline is repaid for her fearless detective work with a dawn raid by two officers who almost blow her cover

spot where she thinks Parsons is buried and records Sandy's confessions when he's wasted. She continues to stay with him during the long hunt for evidence. And she's repaid for her fearless detective work with a dawn raid on her home by two police officers who almost blow her cover. By the time

the court case comes up, she literally runs for the hills.

Not to be sensationalist, but... wow. Caroline and her family's full participation, plus the sheer amount of footage she captured of every moment of her time with Sandy – and her subsequent slow-motion breakdown – make this more than compelling. I was physically rooted to the spot for three hours. What an insanely brave badass she was. What a story. I mean, real-life murder case.

Afterwards, I felt a bit grubby. By focusing entirely on Caroline and Sandy's horribly doomed 'love' story, it left out the person who should have been the main character – Tony Parsons. But that's the way of true crime. Some things don't fit the narrative arc, including murder, which actually isn't very entertaining at all.

Should I Marry a Murderer? is on Netflix. Lucy Sweet is a freelance journalist and copywriter lucysweet.substack.com lucysweet.org

Trustee Circus Eruption



Deadline for applications: 29th June 2026

Circus Eruption is looking for a range of people who can support us through a phase of development, growth and change. These people will need to be constructive, committed to our vision, mission and values and willing to play a part in ensuring the charity continues to thrive. Circus Eruption creates opportunities for people to mix with others on an equal footing, actively promoting inclusion and challenging segregation and stigma.

What we are looking for:

We need people to be part of our group of trustees, who collectively make sure we maintain momentum, stay on task and keep going in the right direction.

We don't need you to have any previous experience of being a Trustee. We are keen to recruit people who value the work we do, recognise the potential of our organisation and are able to contribute to the work of the board. We are committed to supporting you to develop your skills.

Other details:

The role is voluntary, but reasonable out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed. Circus Eruption is based in Swansea, South Wales. Trustees meet online every 6 weeks. In person meetings including all Trustees will be held at least twice a year by arrangement. We will provide an application pack to prospective applicants including more detailed background information.

How to apply:

Please email **Karen** (contact@circuseruption.org.uk) and **Alfie** (alfie@circuseruption.co.uk) for more information and an informal initial chat

www.circuseruption.co.uk/jobs

Project Officer (Supported Employment – Vale of Glamorgan) SustainAbility Project



Position available: 39 hours per week

This role is permanent with funding secured until June 2030 through the Dormant Asset Scheme administered by The National Lottery Community Fund

Accountable to: Project Manager

Salary: £27,381.51 - £28,786.21 per annum

Location: Providing support to individuals living in the Vale of Glamorgan. Occasional travel to Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf to support wider project activities

Overview: Innovate Trust are seeking to recruit an enthusiastic person to join the SustainAbility project as a Project Officer (Supported Employment - Vale). The SustainAbility project, in partnership with ELITE Supported Employment, will work with 400 disabled people aged 16 to 30, to enable them to develop their vocational skills, awareness, knowledge and employability in terms of careers in Green Industries.

The Project Officer will provide person centred one-to-one job coaching to young people with disabilities, in line with the National Operating Standards of Supported Employment. Individuals will be supported to achieve vocational experience, paid internships and sustainable paid employment in line with their goals.

You will be part of a project team and will work closely with your colleagues to meet project aims and objectives.

The project will sit within the Skills & Wellbeing department at Innovate Trust which incorporates a range of innovative projects that seek to support the skills development of people with learning disabilities and other additional needs.

To apply for either role, please visit <https://innovate-trust.org.uk/careers/>

If you meet some but not all of the person specification, we would still encourage you to apply.

Closing date: 26th May Midday

Interviews scheduled for: 1st – 2nd June

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BIG Kids

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BIG Question

Where does the fruit we eat come from?

There's a big orange on the cover this week. It reminds us we all should be eating five portions of fruit and veg a day to stay healthy and strong. Fruit is packed with vitamins and minerals that help our immune systems and hearts. But only one in three of us regularly eats that much fruit and veg every day.

The British weather isn't ideal for growing many fruits. They tend to grow in hot countries rather than the often rainy and cooler weather we see in the UK.

→ What fruit grows in the UK?

Strawberries, blackberries, apples and raspberries are all grown in the UK. So are grapes, blueberries, pears and plums as well as rhubarb. You might see some growing on trees or bushes as you walk around.

→ What fruit do we import?

Around 84% of the fruit we eat in the UK is imported, mostly from warmer European countries like Spain and Italy or South America and the Caribbean. Bananas and

citrus fruits like oranges, lemons and limes are shipped here, as are melons, mangos and

pineapples. But climate change is having an impact. Warmer temperatures also mean some exotic fruits can now be grown in the UK, such as avocados and kiwi fruits.

→ Can I pick fruit?

You can pick fruit as long as it is not growing on private land. This is known as foraging and lots of people will go and pick berries to turn into jams, for example. Some farms also pay seasonal workers to come and help them pick fruit during the harvest. It's an important job as otherwise unpicked fruit will go rotten and be wasted. There are also pick-your-own farms where you pay for what you take. It can be a fun day out in the summer!

✓ GET IN TOUCH

What is your favourite fruit? How much fruit do you eat every day? Tell us by emailing editorial@bigissue.com

Word search

How many fruits can you find hidden in the grid below?

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Q | E | H | S | V | R | W | Z | M | S | T | E |
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| Y | Q | F | A | Q | C | Z | Z | L | R | B | A |
| H | V | U | I | R | D | H | O | O | A | G | N |
| A | P | P | L | E | G | R | P | N | W | Q | A |
| T | W | V | C | E | A | K | A | S | B | I | R |
| I | W | I | K | N | M | N | Q | M | E | R | G |
| W | L | R | G | H | A | O | P | Z | R | S | E |
| V | H | E | Z | O | Z | X | N | W | R | S | M |
| R | A | S | P | B | E | R | R | Y | Y | K | O |
| M | N | E | V | J | D | W | I | U | F | V | P |
| V | U | H | E | O | W | A | O | X | D | Y | I |

Find the words in bold

→ **APPLE** Crunchy. They float when you put them in water

→ **LEMON** Its juice is very sour and used for flavouring things – or cleaning your house!

→ **MELON** Comes in many types and colours, and it grows on a vine

→ **BANANA** Yellow and bendy. Don't slip on the peel...

→ **KIWI** Hairy on the outside, green and seedy inside

→ **GRAPE** If someone asks you to peel one of these, they are being very lazy!

→ **POMEGRANATE** Filled with bright-red 'jewels' called arils

→ **RASPBERRY** Makes a great syrup for ripple ice cream

→ **STRAWBERRY** Grows in fields. The 'seeds' on the outside are actually tiny fruits

→ **ORANGE** Can you think of a word that rhymes with it?

Quiz

Q1

What colours do you mix together to get orange?



Q2

What species of animal is a flying fox?



Q3

In Peppa Pig, what is Candy Cat's favourite food?



Q4

Who is the current president of the United States of America?



Q5

According to the myth, which vegetable can help you see in the dark?



Answers: 1: Red and yellow; 2: Fruit bat; 3: Fish fingers; 4: Donald Trump; 5: Carrot.

BIG challenge

This magazine encourages everyone to get creative. Make a collage with the middle pages, colour in the flower on p34 and let us see how you get on!

Take a photo of your artwork and email it to editorial@bigissue.com

WIN

Rivers of Imprisonment

Rescuing the 18th century texts of Adam Smith (the father of the industrial revolution) for the pro-"green"-neo-industrial revolution!

- a free audiobook by David Roderick
- also available in paperback



Please help us find

Andrew Dill - Birmingham, West Midlands



This week marks the 23rd anniversary of Andrew Dill's disappearance. Andrew was 38 when he was last seen in Birmingham on 20 May 2003.

Andrew, please call Missing People on 116 000 for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Carmel Fenech - London, Greater London



This week marks the 28th missing anniversary of Carmel Fenech, who was 16 when she was last seen in London on 23 May 1998.

Carmel, please call Missing People on 116 000 for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Elena Zhagorova - London



This week marks the 18th missing anniversary of Elena Zhagorova, who was 38 when she went missing from London on 21 May 2008.

Elena, please call Missing People on 116 000 for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Roger Simons - Glynneath, Neath Port Talbot



This week marks the fourth missing anniversary of Roger Simons, who was 78 when he disappeared from Glynneath on 18 May 2022.

Roger, please call Missing People on 116 000 for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Elaine Taggart - Ferring, West Sussex



This week marks the birthday of Elaine Taggart, who was 48 when she disappeared from Ferring on 3 January 2008.

Elaine, please call Missing People on 116 000 for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Hung Van Vo - Bournemouth, Dorset



It is Hung Van Vo's birthday this week. Hung was 22 when he was last seen in Bournemouth on 21 March 2018.

Hung, we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message on for you and help you to be safe. Please call or text 116 000.

Call or text **116 000**

It's Free and Confidential

Missing People would like to thank The Big Issue for publicising vulnerable missing people on this page.

To help Missing People bring them back to safety text SAFE to 70660* to give £3 a month.

Our free 116 000 number is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

*Subscription costs £3 a month + network charge until you text STOP. Missing People (Charity No. 1020419, SC047419) gets 100% of your donation. Bill payer's permission needed. Missing People will send updates. CS line: 020 3404 7273.

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www.missingpeople.org.uk/help-us-find

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Another headliner to be announced!

- 🌸 Talisk x Gardiner Brothers: Unleashed
- 🌸 Andy Fairweather Low & The Low Riders
- 🌸 Ferocious Dog ft. The Celtic Folk Orchestra
- 🌸 Cara Dillon 🌸 The Seeger Sessions Revival
- 🌸 Slambovian Circus of Dreams 🌸 Cut Capers
- 🌸 Steve Knightley and The Winter Yards Band
- 🌸 Dustbowl Revival 🌸 Goitse 🌸 Chris Wood
- 🌸 Steve Knightley with Daniel Salvatore
- 🌸 Katherine Priddy 🌸 Natu Camara 🌸 The Hunch
- 🌸 Man The Lifeboats 🌸 Kerr Fagan 🌸 Malin Lewis
- 🌸 Blowzabella 🌸 Edith WeUtonga 🌸 Sāwol
- 🌸 Adriano Adewale and Friends: Rooted and Rising
- 🌸 Thunder and Rain 🌸 Cable Street Collective
- 🌸 Rum Ragged 🌸 Kellie Loder 🌸 Taff Rapids
- 🌸 Sam Carter sings Nic Jones
- 🌸 The Lost Notes 🌸 Daisy Chute
- 🌸 Holly Clarke 🌸 Jess Silk
- 🌸 The Zydeco Diamonds
- 🌸 Pressgang Mutiny
- 🌸 Greg Russell & more!

nefolkus
Youth Festival

P@ndemonium!
Children's Festival

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shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk



Puzzles

ALAN'S TRIVIA CORNER

How many African countries begin with the letter N? And name them too. (Answer below)

Crossword

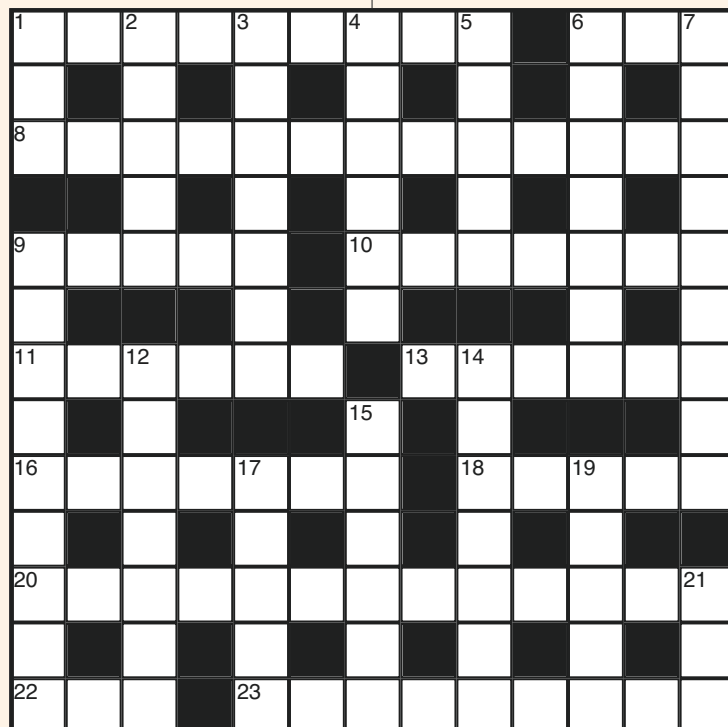
Cryptic clues

Across

- Formalised version of the catechism (9)
- Got the present (3)
- Finished the school book almost when over the hill (4,4,5)
- They come together for a bite (5)
- Many who went fishing held out bait temptingly (7)
- Look! A rabbit is outside its social group (6)
- Three letters in succession for a political leader (6)
- Always going on about the fast train (3,4)
- Burrowing animal, rodent the Spanish followed (5)
- Tidy up on board? (5,3,5)
- In general I tend to be enlightened! (3)
- The team on a bender appeared much the worse for wear (4,5)

Down

- Step back for some vital juice (3)
- Male crosses a street with speed (5)
- Bird getting hormone treatment (7)
- Aim in attempt to be smart (6)
- Bird only partially dressed? (5)
- Was under fire from an interrogator? (7)
- Old convicts took steps to make it work (9)
- Specialised chat-line organised by involving community leader (9)
- Indulgent to allow another nine inside (7)
- Curtail a card game (7)
- Result in the cup's hotly disputed (6)
- Bits of coarse yarn on drum (5)
- It goes without saying that cat goes up to it (5)
- Error in passing (3)



Quick clues

Across

- Holy city (9)
- Lout (3)
- Enlargement (13)
- Military trainee (5)
- Pull out (7)
- Travel document (6)

- Frenzied person (6)
- Complete circuit in game (7)
- Essential (5)
- Avocado (9,4)
- Non-clerical (3)
- Pact (9)

Down

- Preserve (3)
- Stiff (5)
- Ninepin (7)
- Dawdle, lurk (6)
- Intended (5)
- Folded paper art (7)
- Over-enthusiastic (9)
- Yowl (9)
- Barbarity (7)
- Unfavourable (7)
- Author (6)
- Principle (5)
- Topic (5)
- Furrow (3)

Sudoku

THE SECOND-TOUGHEST SUDOKU IN BRITAIN

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 8 | | | | | | | |
| | | 4 | | | | | 1 | 9 |
| | | | | 8 | | | 4 | 3 |
| 2 | | | | | | | | |
| | | 9 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | | |
| 8 | | | | 1 | | | | |
| | 9 | | | | 7 | | | |
| | | | | 2 | | | 7 | |
| | | 6 | 4 | | | | 2 | 5 |



The first correct drawn entry to the crossword will win a copy of this week's random book selection, *Tiny Gardens Everywhere* by Kate Brown

Send entries to:
Crossword competition,
Big Issue,
43 Bath St,
Glasgow, G2 1HW
Closing date: 27 May

Winner Issue 1714
20-26 April
Karen Woollard
from Warminster

Answers

Issue 1717
11-17 May

Cryptic

- Across** - 1 Slapdash; 6 Body; 8 Moat; 9 Streaker; 10 Side-splitting; 11 Star; 13 Tabu; 17 Collaboration; 20 Conclude; 21 Howl; 22 Here; 23 Describe.
Down - 2 Look in; 3 Patient; 4 Aesop; 5 Harriet; 6 Blast; 7 Duenna; 12 Rebound; 14 Butcher; 15 Morose; 16 Cobweb; 18 Lucre; 19 Reeds.

Quick

- Across** - 1 Start out; 6 Bush; 8 Prig; 9 Innocent; 10 Belligerently; 11 Drop; 13 Move; 17 Alternatively; 20 Vertical; 21 Lark; 22 Hewn; 23 Adroitly.
Down - 2 Turkey; 3 Regular; 4 Owing; 5 Tantrum; 6 Bacon; 7 Single; 12 Panacea; 14 Vivaldi; 15 Sleeve; 16 Floral; 18 Eaten; 19 Tiler.

Sudoku

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 9 | 3 |
| 9 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 7 |
| 7 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 8 |
| 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 4 |
| 4 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 7 | 2 |
| 3 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 5 |
| 8 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 1 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 6 |
| 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 9 |

Answer: Three - Namibia, Niger and Nigeria



MY PITCH

HAMISH SCOTT, 68

OUTSIDE VISION EXPRESS OR BOOTS, ABERGAVENNY
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I like French philosophy – Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre

➔ **I came back to Big Issue in October.** But I have had stints before, going back to Cardiff around 20 years ago. I sold it for 10 years, then. I had Penarth, which is a good pitch.

I'd had a good job. I was a sales rep for a French company. But then I had a nervous breakdown and had to leave.

I was homeless in London for a while after my breakdown. I used to sleep on the 25 bus that goes to Ilford and back in the early 2000s.

I'd tell my younger self that employment is the main thing. You've got to be employed to have a good life. I was very well off as a sales rep, so it was a bit of a shock. In London, a lot of people become homeless, and some of them are like me and have had good jobs. It's a tough place. I was shocked by how quickly it happened.

There were some good day centres in London. I used to go to one off Brick Lane. The people there were really helpful. Then I came back to Wales, where there was less pressure on housing and started selling Big Issue. It was an interesting experience, to be honest. The Big Issue money helped a lot, I got a flat and stuff. And I'm OK now, which is the main thing.

I think as a magazine, it's socially useful. It has a social conscience. And I always like what John Bird has to say. You get to meet people, you are

out in the open, so I do enjoy it. And I want people to read the magazine. It looks into really important areas of society.

I married a Welsh girl and she passed away four years ago, but I stuck around in Wales. I've got a daughter in Cwmbran and a son in America, so my daughter keeps me here, really.

I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm pretty safe. I have a private pension, which helps. So I have quite a good living. I go down to Marseille quite a lot. I love it down there. And I have a nice Monmouth Housing Association flat, which is a really good place, an over-60s block. But I enjoy selling Big Issue as something to do. It really suits me.

I'm also a music fan. I like The Stranglers and Lou Reed, David Bowie. I saw a lot of them when I was younger. The best gig I went to was probably Knebworth, when The Rolling Stones played there [in 1976].

When I'm not working, I love dinghy sailing. I'm a qualified sailing instructor and there is a reservoir nearby where people can sail. I grew up in Poole, which is a great place for sailing. I'm not out on the water much at the moment. But I love to travel. I like the French way of life, I like French philosophy – Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. And I like the weather. But Abergavenny is better.

In the future, I'd like to buy a place in Sicily. I've had a look around Messina and Catania, and you can get a nice place for not much money there. I'm Italian by blood but I can't speak the language yet.

I'd like to say thank you to my regular customers. They help to keep me going. Welsh people tend to be very kind anyway, and that's what I've always found. There's beautiful countryside for walks; people always stop for a chat. And I'm very grateful to the people who buy a magazine.



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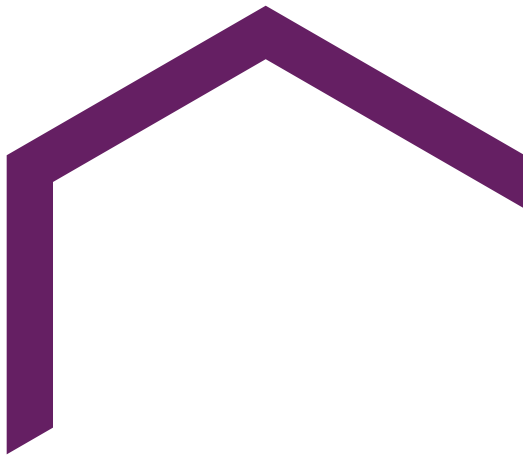
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