

## Kirkley Creates



*Kirkley Creates creative team at First Light's Longest Days of Summer event in June (l-r Hayley Field, Suffolk Artlink / Kasia Posen, The Third Person / Carrie Phoenix, The Third Person / Jon Tyler, Wild for Woods / Amarnah Amuludun, Casson & Friends / Ella Fleetwood, Casson & Friends / Bryony Mason, participant / Tim Casson, Casson & Friends)*

## Impact Report August 2021

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*An early session at the Pantry engaging Pantry members in edible plants and tea-making*

**“It has given me a great start in life, of growing my own things...  
meeting lovely people and learning a lot about our natural world.”  
(Pantry member)**

**About the project**

Kirkley Creates is a partnership project between Suffolk Artlink, Community Action Suffolk, First Light Festival and Kirkley Pantry. The project's vision was to connect the local community with the First Light Festival through engaging people in creative activities that lead to the production of a high profile work at First Light Festival.

Originally planned to be part of First Light 2020 and to have the bulk of its activity at Community Action Suffolk's Kirkley Centre, Kirkley Creates was delayed for a year and considerably changed to work within the restrictions brought in by government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the limitations of how we could reach people we developed a new partnership with a food project 'Kirkley Pantry', which had recently started operating and offered a way for Kirkley Creates to connect with local people.

Lead artists, The Third Person (Carrie Phoenix and Kasia Posen), developed a programme which focused on exploring Kirkley through its green spaces and its architecture. From sharing seeds and plants, to making inks from them, the artists led people through a series of sessions which included planting out, tea-tasting, drawing plants and architecture and developing a colour palette informed by the area. By collaborating with expert forager Jon Tyler, sessions also included foraging walks of Kirkley and sampling a menu of locally sourced foods. The projects' focus on nature, being outdoors and exploring Kirkley with new eyes really resonated - especially regarding what had become meaningful for people during lockdown.

***"This programme is good for our wellbeing and social status"** (Patricia, Pantry member)*

Work with participants informed the design and making of two new planters that also serve as a seat and a table, created to offer new spaces to rest, share and socialise. The planters featured as a key part of an installation / performance to celebrate the project as part of First Light's Longest Days of Summer event which took place on the beach on Saturday 26 June.

At the event dance company Casson & Friends presented a unique dance which incorporated the planters and canvas shapes referencing local architecture and geographies made by The Third Person. Inspired by the ideas of the project and created in response to conversations with project participants, the specially made performance explores our relationship to nature, foraging and what we love about where we live. A film of the dance has been produced.

The planters are now sited outside the Kirkley Centre and in the garden of Kirkley Pantry. A specially devised map 'Explore Kirkley', which includes participants artwork, invites people to follow Jon Tyler's foraging walks and a walk created by The Third Person to note the architecture and natural assets of Kirkley, whilst also offering ideas for activities (this will be launched as part of Heritage Open Days in September, which has the theme of 'Edible England' and will be located at the Kirkley Centre, Kirkley Pantry and in local schools and libraries).

## **Artists**

## **The Third Person**

Carrie Phoenix and Kasia Posen are visual artists, having worked independently on a variety of interactive installations and performance projects in the UK and abroad. Their collaborative practice, which began in 2019, aims to explore and share identities of locations through new eyes. This was the artists' first major project.

## **Jon Tyler**

Jon Tyler is an experienced forager and bush-craft practitioner. As a freelance practitioner of outdoor activities and hedge-craft he leads an array of wildlife awareness, mushroom identification and wild-food courses across East Anglia.

## **Casson & Friends**

Under the direction of Tim Casson, Casson & Friends create 'People Powered Performance' - unique performances that are accessible, interactive, joyful and start with a conversation. With a passion for bringing dance to people in new and unusual contexts.

## **Partners**

### **Kirkley Pantry**

The Pantry model is a national initiative to create a sustainable and long-term solution to food poverty. Members pay a small weekly fee for which they can choose at least ten items of food each week, along with additional opportunities of volunteering and training. Established during COVID, Kirkley Pantry has over 80 members

### **Community Action Suffolk**

The Kirkley Centre is owned and run by Community Action Suffolk as a community hub for the Kirkley and Lowestoft area. The Centre provides a warm welcome to residents and tourists to the area through its visitor and community information, along with space for a wide range of charities, community groups and training providers.

### **First Light Festival**

First Light is a multi-arts festival that celebrates the first light of the summer solstice at Britain's most easterly point - Lowestoft. The festival team works closely with local authorities and stakeholders to create and deliver an event that contributes to the regeneration of Lowestoft and its seafront. The aim of the festival is that it will be a place making event both regionally and nationally.

### **Suffolk Artlink**

We are a participatory arts charity. We develop and deliver inclusive arts programmes that support peoples' health and wellbeing. Our creative projects help people transform their lives through the arts by bringing skills, support networks, confidence and joy to communities in the East.



*“Lovely to take plants and seeds home to continue growing and try new things”  
(Pantry member)*

## Facts and figures

### Who took part:

Kirkley Pantry members	14
Kirkley Pantry volunteers	4
Kirkley People’s Forum	1
Friends of Wellington Gardens	2
Friends of Fen Park	1
Re-utilise volunteers	4
Family carers (through Suffolk Artlink)	8
CAS staff	2
First Light Longest Days of Summer audience	4500

Number of participatory sessions: 17

Number of artists: 6

Locations: Kirkley Pantry / Kirkley Centre / Lowestoft South Beach



*A painting of chickweed made by a participant using inks made from local plants*

## **The programme**

- Meet & greet at the Pantry - meet the artists and learn about the project
- Planting / making teas / recipe share - learn how to grow edible plants
- Drawing / meet the forager - drawing edible plants and creating a Kirkley colour palette using home-made inks
- Foraging walks / food sampling - tours of different parts of Kirkley followed by tasting menu of foraged foods
- Planter design - sharing ideas of local architecture to inform the shapes of the new planters
- Residency during First Light week - the artists were based at the Kirkley Centre to finalise all preparations for the 26 June event. The week included 2 participatory sessions: one at the Kirkley Centre where participants made tote bags for the event and one at the Pantry where participants helped plant up pots for the event and worked with Tim Casson & Friends to devise the dance
- Bag-making - making bags for Pantry members
- Garden party / forage - a final forage of the rectory garden followed by high tea
- Planters install / planted with edible plants - final sessions to site the new planters in their locations and fill them with edible plants.



*Pantry member Stuart came along to help plant up the new planters for Longest Days of Summer event and stayed to work with the dancers and tell them about his experience engaging with the project*

## **The impacts of Kirkley Creates**

**Improved wellbeing through participatory programme and focus on connection to nature**

**New social connections through shared creative activities and diversity of participants**

**Introduction to other opportunities through links with local offers**

**Greater connectedness with the local area through project's place-based focus**

**New skills and confidence through a varied programme of artist-led sessions**

## Evidence

Evidence was collected through:

- Session monitoring forms which asked for feedback / changes
- Artists logs to note down quotes or anything significant
- Most Significant Change stories were collected from a selection of participants, the artists and partners
- Anecdotal evidence from session de-briefs

## Examples of feedback from session monitoring forms

'Lovely to take plants and seeds home to continue growing and trying new things' *TG (11/5/21)*

'I really love everything about Kirkley Creates. It has given me a great start in life of growing my own things, knowing the edible things around my home, meeting lovely people and learning a lot about our natural world. I feel like a child in a chocolate factory eating chocolates' *PB (4/11/21)*

'I loved tasting all the edible plants and testing of the natural teas. Learning how to make natural ink and also using them to do some painting was very interesting. To crown it all the artists and Jon (the forager) were very approachable and very good informants. This programme is good for our wellbeing and social status.' *PB (11/5/21)*

'Feel happy, useful, nice to meet new people and create together' *JS (23/6/21)*

'Meeting people in the community, sense of reward from helping and networking. Great time meeting new people / social and therapeutic. Very enjoyable' *JS (6/7/21)*

'Learnt how to use a sewing machine after not using one for forty years' *CL (23/6/21)*

'It was great to be able to taste the herbs and teas. Great to meet some local people who might be interested in gardening in Wellington Gardens' *RB (18/5/21)*

'Good to talk to other people and experiencing the dance making reminded me of how I used to enjoy creating dance before my depression, I now feel more positive' *KM (25/6/21)*

'It was an interesting way to experience the past sessions, and it was great hearing what others remember. I'm feeling more confident to put myself out there and socialise' *BM (25/6/21)*



## Artists log example

Reflections 1<sup>st</sup> June

Shapes design for Kirkley Plates,  
Tansyn, Honor, Elenor participated in  
the activity.

Tansyn came along with an  
image she had taken especially for  
the project. She had taken a pic of  
chimney pots and then created a  
shape with guidance from Corie.

Norman engaged in the ideas of  
the project and chatted about  
paper plates he like although  
he didn't take part in the activity.

Elenor came for more experience,  
it was lovely to introduce her to  
the project.

We collected enough shapes to  
create some interesting designs  
for the plates.

Stuart, Honor, young family Tansyn  
Norman, signed up for plotting  
the plates to get ready for  
Fis' light festival on 25<sup>th</sup>.

Mums with kids on half term.

Kasia's notes from 1 June session exploring local architecture

23rd June

- Re-Utilise people joined us for sewing.

Really knowledgeable dressmakers + sewing teachers.

- So lovely to see Claire + June learn to use a sewing machine, sew at least one tote bag + build their confidence.

- Claire said "I think I'm going to go a make a dress" after today's session because she was so much more confident.

"I haven't sewn since I was at school, so this has been brilliant."

- I had a lovely long chat with Jo too - her areas of interest really resonated with KC, + she signed up to the next foraging session as a result.

- Jo talked to me a lot about botanical dying - which would be amazing to get her involved with should the work continue.

- I loved how the two groups so smoothly worked together

- Covid - as the hoop was tricky!
  - Tania was amazing too - so much knowledge.
  - Pauline too - she came + went off with fabric to make screens for the table + bench.
- 
- Bryony took a massive leap today.
    - turning up solo
    - heading out to the Re-ut. group for other opps.
    - Carving on Sat too w/ sister.
  - Super happy vibes today
  - opportunity to cross entities over felt really positive. (Re-ut, A+T, KC)

Carrie's notes from 23 June sewing session

**“There have been so many opportunities for space to be created: space to include people; space where people can make together; space in which other artists can interact” (Carrie Phoenix)**

**“The opportunity to think big, and be supported to think big, was really positive” (Kasia Posen)**

## Stories of change

### N, Pantry member

#### **'A new connection with nature'**

N is a Pantry member. He has engaged with the project from the beginning, showing particular interest in edible plants. He has a long-term mental health condition that he explained to us when we first met him. We have seen him over several weeks and he has engaged at different levels and for different lengths of time depending on his mental wellbeing. He was particularly enthusiastic about learning more about healthy eating and foraging.

#### **What stood out most for you?**

The foraging stood out - that was fantastic - it should go global!

#### **What struck you most about it?**

Being with nature, breathing fresh air, feeling positive mentally. I found a few friends out of it and I've become active in the area I live in.

#### **Is there anything new / different?**

Being closer to nature and touching nature, hands on - spiritual in a way.

#### **Tell me about anything that has changed for you**

It's been a big change. It's gone from the world of concrete and tarmac - on the way up here I was studying the plants. Also, I am eating more greenery in my food now - and enjoying it! It was therapeutic going to the cemetery (to forage).



*N foraging in the Rectory garden at one of the final sessions*

## B, family carer

### 'Bravery to socialise'

B is 22, she is a family carer for her twin sister and has taken part in Suffolk Artlink's project Around the Table previously. B is autistic and is seeking employment (she has not worked since leaving school). The situation re: COVID over the past year has led to B retreating into the home more. B has used Kirkley Creates as part of her plan to try and get out and do more.

B engaged in several sessions as part of the project - foraging, painting, sewing, planting and working with the dancers, also attending First Light's Longest Days of Summer event on Lowestoft Beach. B attended some sessions with her Mum (and sister) and some sessions by herself.

### What has changed? What were things like before?

Getting to know other people. I stopped talking to a lot of my friends after leaving the 6th form. COVID led me to breaking up with my boyfriend.

### What have you noticed?

It's nice to get out and do things that are creative and to socialise. Nice to know there are going to be some familiar faces - name badges would be useful (to get to know people better).

### What stood out most for you?

Feeling more confident - putting myself out there and networking today (at the sewing session with Re-utilise volunteers). Talking to new people without Mum.

### Tell me about anything that has changed for you

Confidence of being able to socialise. It's a big change to being stuck at home with family all of the time (and being autistic). Being unemployed I have a lot of time.



*B taking part in an activity to record her experiences on a map during the Garden Party*

## H, Pantry member and local volunteer

### **'Finding the real home around your home '**

H is 44. She has been on sick leave and unable to work since having a breakdown 7 years ago. She has recently started doing voluntary work in a local park (which is how she heard about Kirkley Creates) which has helped build her confidence and motivation to get involved in more opportunities in the community. H is a member of the Pantry.

H has engaged in several sessions as part of the project - both foraging and visual art sessions held at the Pantry and at the Kirkley Centre.

### **What has changed? What were things like before?**

It has been really nice to get more involved in my local community - to feel more included and more involved.

### **What have you noticed?**

I feel happier about being in Lowestoft - experiencing and enjoying the world around me.

### **What stood out most for you?**

The foraging particularly appealed - being in nature and the mental wellbeing benefits of that.

### **Tell me about anything that has changed for you**

It has helped me feel more involved in my area - helped to make home feel more like home.



*H at one of the final sessions filling the new planter at the Kirkley Centre*

## P, Pantry volunteer

### **'Finding my place in the community'**

P volunteers at Kirkley Pantry, working during sessions that are open to members coming in to collect food and also ordering food / organising volunteers to collect food from suppliers. Her hours add up to about 2 days a week.

P has lived in the local area for about 2 years after retiring from a job with the local authority. She enjoys gardening, sewing, cooking (especially baking) and reading. P joined Kirkley Creates sessions to get involved in more things in her local area and make more local contacts. Since taking part in sessions (P has joined all of the foraging sessions and a sewing session) P has connected with the Friends of Fen Park and plans on getting more involved in the future. At the sewing session P also found out about a local project Re-utilise (who provided volunteers to support the session) and plans on going there with a friend to find out more about what they offer.

### **What has changed? What were things like before?**

When you retire you need to find out who you are and your place in the world (having been defined by your job). Because of COVID that was very difficult. Only now, things are beginning to happen.

### **What have you noticed?**

Kirkley Creates enabled me to network and make local contacts.

### **What stood out most for you?**

The foraging was great fun. I met people and I really enjoyed it (in an in-the-moment way), going round the local area. I really enjoyed the sewing session, and the connection that the bags we made have come to the Pantry.

### **Tell me about anything that has changed for you**

It's all about linking things in my local area.



*Kirkley salad created by forager Jon Tyler, made at a session P attended*



*A guessing game of foraged items played by participants at the Rectory Garden Party*

## **Partner feedback**

**“This project has shown how valuable it is to work together and to see things from different perspectives – Kareena and Kirkley Centre and Maggie’s focus on the day to day needs of Kirkley people, Suffolk Artlink’s artist led approach for this project, FLF’s community celebration.”**

*Genevieve Christie, First Light Festival*

**“It was great to be involved with this project during a very difficult time, it raised the spirits in the community, being able to be involved in the run up and the actual day for First Light in a safe and enjoyable way when many groups hadn’t been able to return”**

*Kareena Chapman, CAS*



## **Notes from partner evaluation meeting - 28/07/21**

Genevieve, Kareena, Maggie, Hayley

**Hayley** raised the difference in how our partnership has been developed (and the process led by Take Note in supporting that), compared to working with the Pantry, which - both as a volunteer-led grassroots organisation, and as one more focused on a very clear and singular goal - was a different experience (it felt more of a passive relationship - which was possibly more about their capacity).

**Maggie** said that there has been a positive knock-on effect at the Church - that they have had people come that have attended a KC event, or have heard about them through awareness of the project.

**Kareena** - to have the end product of the planters, to have that legacy, has been really positive.

**Genevieve** - felt the KC performance / installation was beautiful and played a central part at the Longest Days of Summer event. Very aware of the care that Carrie and Kasia took as part of that day.

We had a discussion about audience and the disadvantage of having a barrier around the installation / performance area (which was necessary for COVID plans) - that it possibly may have put some people off in coming closer to the performers. But, we agreed that many people up and down the beach were clearly watching the performances and enjoying them.

**Hayley** said that on the day she was reminded of how contemporary dance is quite niche, but the beauty of having it in such a central and public space on the beach meant that people could watch and enjoy it, overcoming some barriers.

**Genevieve** - from East Suffolk Council's perspective, the whole event was pitch perfect and they were very happy with it. Getting people involved ahead of the event really helped develop momentum towards it.

**Kareena** - we've now had our first community groups back into the centre. It was great to be able to have people in (as part of Kirkley Creates) ahead of that.

**Genevieve** - plans for next year - can we grow the ambition of our partnership and of the outcome of the project? Energy and Power and our links with nature and the outdoors are key themes for next year.

## **Suffolk Artlink's learning**

- **An embedded partnership**
- **Working in an ever changing environment**
- **The difference of an artists residency model**
- **The benefits of a diverse group of participants**
- **Seeing a place with new eyes**
- **Public outcomes**

### **An embedded partnership**

#### **What worked?**

The approach from Take Note of developing the partnership over time and supporting that development throughout the project was a very different and positive experience for Suffolk Artlink - to have mutual buy-in, total understanding of the project's aims and outcomes, and to all be equally invested in it brought huge benefits and was a great learning experience.

#### **What was challenging?**

This did make the development period of the project more time-consuming for all, but possibly also saved time through the shared understanding it embedded in the partnership. This was contrasted by our partnership with the Pantry, who had not been involved in the same way in the development of the project, and also lacked capacity to invest time in it. The relationship with the Pantry was positive, but very much restricted to a venue and conduit for connecting with participants.

#### **How could things be improved next time?**

To commit to continue working in this way - ensuring strengthened partnerships is an aim for Suffolk Artlink's development.

### **Working in an ever changing environment (due to COVID)**

#### **What worked?**

Benefits of having such regular sessions meant that we could adapt things from week to week and respond to the changes - both because of guidelines and how our plans operated within the current climate (e.g. at first, sessions were delivered during Pantry operating hours and had a more drop-in format to engage people as they came through, so expectations of levels and length of engagement were different. As the project developed more of a presence, sessions felt more formal and people's commitment to them changed).

Working with such sensitive artists, with a person-centred approach meant that we could all read how things were going, we could prompt each other if we felt anything needed addressing or anyone needed extra support. Carrie and Kasia were also flexible about their artistic plans. The Kirkley Centre provided an amazing sounding board re: changing guidance / how to operate safely.

### **What was challenging?**

Reading a partner's (specifically the Pantry) expectations - as volunteers were very busy with the operational issues of the Pantry and they were often under pressure, we didn't want to feel like we were adding pressure.

Some participants were very vulnerable and required a high level of support (e.g. a regular participant who had long-term mental ill health and had very varying needs from week to week). Reading the room - being sensitive to how people feel about engaging in activities with other people (especially at the moment) - the situation could vary for individuals from week to week. As we were mainly working within another organisation (the Pantry) we needed to be sensitive to people who did not want to engage.

### **How could things be improved next time?**

Partners - taking time if there is any question of how to operate in an unexpected circumstance, not to feel pressure to immediately come up with a solution and communicating any concerns or worries.

Briefing artists about the make-up of the group as much as possible - which although it was fluid and unpredictable at times - would have helped with their expectations of their session.

Always sharing thoughts / feelings with each other to make sure we are picking up on any signals from people (I feel we did do this and it would be something to continue doing).

## **The difference of an artists residency model**

### **What worked?**

The commitment of the artists, because they took the project on as a whole, was exceptional, and I can see is very different from the way Suffolk Artlink usually works, in designing programmes and contracting artists to deliver specific parts of them. This also felt beneficial due to current circumstances, in that we were reliant on the artists re-modelling the project.

### **What was challenging?**

It was a more time consuming model to manage, Suffolk Artlink underestimated the amount of Project Officer hours, this is due to being in a more 'following' role re: direction of project / communicating session details / clarity with other artists in the programme.

### **How could things be improved next time?**

The artists having a budget to work with a Producer may be preferable, so the line of management / communication is clearer and the artists are more in control of instructing others (e.g. commissioning other artists / preparing info for comms). Suffolk Artlink could then have a more managerial role in overseeing delivery / maintaining the focus on impact.

## **The benefits of a diverse group of participants**

### **What worked?**

This was an unusual project for Suffolk Artlink in that we aimed to recruit a diversity of participants, rather than focusing on one specific target group. It felt very positive to have an intergenerational group, who were coming from different perspectives - the new networks, skills

and experience people could offer each other was positive, which impacted the learning and social opportunities and mutual support participants offered each other.

Recruiting participants from other interest groups also meant they were great advocates for other opportunities in the area e.g. Re-utilise volunteers supported sewing sessions and also encouraged participants to come along to the project / participants who attended local gardening projects also encouraged people to join their groups.

### **What was challenging?**

At times, some participants were particularly vulnerable / their behaviour could be considered challenging - others were sometimes wary of this and we needed to ensure everyone felt safe.

### **How could things be improved next time?**

With a diverse group always having a member of staff present to support the group is essential.

## **Seeing a place with new eyes**

### **What worked?**

Introducing an area to its residents from different perspectives ie. exploring edible plants / looking at architecture / going to new venues; really helped develop a sense of place and connectedness for participants.

Extending the activity to First Light's Longest Days of Summer event allowed a different level of engagement, where the wider public could enjoy the performances and participants were thrilled to be part of.

### **What was challenging?**

Some initial ideas were very ambitious and we planned on delivering in numerous public spaces - the organisation of this was complex (needing to apply for permission to local authorities). Also, openly recruiting to activities in spaces without an audience felt risky.

### **How could things be improved next time?**

Awareness of the need for a long lead-in time for planning activities in public spaces.

## **Public outcomes**

### **What worked?**

Creating a piece of work for a large scale public event raised the aspirations of the artistic output and was an exciting thing to be part of for everyone.

The fabrication of the planters has meant that the project has a legacy for people to enjoy.

A map / leaflet is still to be produced. We will launch it as part of Heritage Open Days to benefit from the publicity of the wider event and also to reach new audiences with this resource from the project which includes work by artists and participants.

### **What was challenging?**

The time pressure of having something made for the event obviously gave the participatory element of the project a strong focus, but also meant the drive was very much on getting things

ready for the event. Some pressures were alleviated by moving the timeline (e.g. the map is being produced at the end of the project).

### **How could things be improved next time?**

The additional sessions following the event meant that there was more opportunity to focus on legacy for the participants, which felt positive and is something we would ensure is in future project plans.



*A planter in place outside the Kirkley Centre (l-r Kareena / Kasia / Hayley / Carrie / Maggie)*



*The first foraging session around Kirkley which ended in the Pantry garden for tasting*





*Looking at the architecture and colour palette of Kirkley*





*Drawing edible plants with inks made from foraged plants and materials*







*Planting up the new planter at the Kirkley Centre*



*Jon Tyler leads a foraging walk of Kirkley*



*Casson & Friends perform at First Light Longest Days of Summer, 26 June 2021*

