



Impact Report

2025

fun
palaces



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1. About Fun Palaces and this report

Fun Palaces is a national and international campaign for cultural democracy, promoting culture at the heart of community and community at the heart of culture.

The first weekend of October every year is the Fun Palaces Weekend of Action. Fun Palaces are free, participatory events created by the community for the community.

Fun Palaces include arts, craft, science, tech, digital, heritage and sports activities, all led by local people - Fun Palace Makers - sharing skills, hobbies and encouraging active participation from everyone. Fun Palaces can happen anywhere and can be made by anyone. They can last an hour or a weekend, involve just one activity, or a programme across a city.

The Weekend of Action is a catalyst for change at a local and grassroots level.

Since 2014 there have been **2,809 Fun Palaces, made by 49,823 Makers, and attended by 881,824 people.**

This report tells the story of Fun Palaces since 2014; through numbers and stories, sharing the difference the movement has made to people and to places.



Fun Palaces have changed the way we think about the arts and participation. They remind us that relevance and diversity arise naturally and the arts become a significant part of everyday life when the arts cede power and agency to ordinary people to express their own creativity and harness it to bring about personal and community change. It's radical, far-reaching and transformative

Lyn Gardner, journalist and critic

The Fun Palaces Vision

A world where communities have an active role in culture. Where everyone's brilliance is recognised and valued; where people create, connect, learn and have fun; where communities have what they need to be active and equal leaders and collaborators.



© Bath Fun Palace

Our Aims:

- ▶ To change how we all see and fund culture so that the culture made and enjoyed by all communities counts.
- ▶ To make the most of all talents, spaces, local and national strengths, and assets so that we live in a culturally richer and fairer world.
- ▶ To encourage creativity and connection so that we have vibrant, confident, and strong communities.



233
Fun Palaces,

2,500
Makers and

68,500
participants

▶ Stella Duffy and Sarah Jane Rawlings step down after seven years as co-directors, and Makala Cheung and Kirsty Lothian (Fun Palaces Producer) are appointed.

195
Fun Palaces,

2,300
Makers and

71,750
participants

▶ #FUNPALACES trends on Twitter and has **8.7m views** across social media.

140
Fun Palaces,

1,850
Makers and

60,300
participants

Fun Palaces celebrates 10 years!

▶ **January**
Makala Cheung and Kirsty Lothian step down as co-directors and Amie Taylor takes over. Both Amie and executive producer Orla Nicholls are long-time Fun Palace Makers.

Dr Katy Pilcher's research reveals that people involved in Fun Palaces are more likely to engage in civic activism.

▶ **August**
Fun Palaces launches 'Creative Voices, Activist Voices' at the Albany; a creative showcase of the findings from Dr Pilcher's research.



391
Fun Palaces,

6,256
Makers and

111,552
participants

More than 500,000 people have now taken part in Fun Palaces.

▶ Fun Palaces receives funding from The National Lottery Community Fund to expand the Ambassador programme, with new appointments in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Gateshead, Wales, Rotherham and Devon.

▶ **January**
Arts Council England publishes 'Let's Create' their ten year strategy which marks a significant shift towards valuing 'everyday creativity'.

▶ **March**
The world goes into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This doesn't deter Fun Palaces from happening - '1000 Tiny Fun Palaces' is launched and people find ways to connect through 'Tiny Revolutions of Connection' - small acts of creativity encouraging socially distanced, outdoor and online connection.

▶ **October**
152 online Fun Palaces, **109** offline, and **101** both online and offline

364
Fun Palaces,

2,000
Makers and

85,500
participants (77,500 online, 7,500 in person)

24% of Maker teams include someone who had been shielding.

175
Fun Palaces,

2,272
Makers and

34,258
participants

▶ Fun Palaces receives funding from The Centre for Cultural Value for sociologist Dr Katy Pilcher from Aston University to research the links between Fun Palaces and community activism.

▶ Fun Palaces receives funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to tour 'Creative Voices, Activist Voices' exhibition to five Fun Palaces venues across the UK.

▶ Fun Palaces receives 4 years of funding from The National Lottery Community Fund to continue their work and create a network of Makers, Organisations and previous Ambassadors across the UK.



3. Where Fun Palaces Happened



© Kieran Eaglesham



© Jamie-Lee Buttershaw



© Roswitha Cheshier



© RedruthFunPalace



© Adam De Salle



© Edward Armstrong



© Brockwell Fun Palace



© Jamie-Lee Buttershaw

4. Fun Palaces Activities

The sky is the limit! Since 2014 Fun Palaces have included...



5. What difference has Fun Palaces made to people?

Built community cohesion

Fun Palaces involve local people from all walks of life working together to create a Fun Palace in their community. Since 2015, The median (average) number of people that come together to make a Fun Palace is 12 people, though this has ranged from as many as 38 people in 2017 to 4 people in 2020 (during the Covid-19 pandemic).

“The beauty of the Fun Palaces is that you can capture a really diverse group of people who come together for a certain period of time while it’s running and they all forget their prejudices for that time that they’re involved.”

Fun Palaces Maker.

Between 2022 and 2025, 70% of Makers had people they didn’t know beforehand getting involved with making their Fun Palace.

A catalyst for further community action

Fun Palaces support people from all backgrounds to shape the future of their community, both in terms of the cultural offer available, and social action more widely.

In 2024, Dr Katy Pilcher researched the connection between making Fun Palaces and civic and / or community activism.

“...the Fun Palace provided a springboard for more community action in collaboration going forward.”

Fun Palaces Maker and Research Participant

“

I always tell people Fun Palaces are ‘of the people, by the people and for all people’.

Fun Palace Maker

“

It was fantastic! It brought together members of the community who don’t usually get the opportunity to get together. I spent time with people of all ages and I think one or two re-discovered their passions because they had the chance to try out some activities that they hadn’t done for a while. Today, I really felt that I had something to offer my community and that it was valued by those who participated.

Fun Palace Participant

In 2023

98%

of Makers agreed that their Fun Palace created a stronger community spirit

“Our collaborative research project has demonstrated that there is a clear link between people finding their creative voice through Fun Palaces, and them going on to engage in wider civic activism. Research participants told powerful stories about participating in Fun Palaces when they were children, and how they have gone on to spread their learning through wider community activism – such as through putting on art workshops themselves.

For some participants, participating in a Fun Palace was their first experience of a community event. As one participant framed it, they saw Fun Palaces as ‘catalytic events’ for people finding their activist voice.

For example, people spoke of the Fun Palace inspiring people to challenge policies in their town, and a number of participants had gone on to join local grassroots community organisations after experiencing a Fun Palace, even taking up positions as board members in these community organisations. As one participant said: ‘it’s events like Fun Palaces that make it a community because everybody has that opportunity to join in, to play, to work together, to make suggestions, to be considered equal’.”

Dr Katy Pilcher, Senior Lecturer in Sociology,
Aston University.

If you want things to change, you just have to make them change, don’t you?

Fun Palaces Maker and Research Participant

A few of us were inspired to challenge policies in the town.

Fun Palaces Maker and Research Participant

I have built relationships in the community and it has inspired more working together for common goals.

Fun Palaces Maker and Research Participant

Reveal the skills, talents and assets of local communities

“Quite often...people don’t actually realise the skills that they possess themselves...until they start thinking about sharing things.”

Fun Palace Maker

Fun Palaces involve a vast array of different types of activities, as communities come together to share their skills and learn with and from each other; from kite making to dowsing; from share and repair to henna; from yarn bombing to coding. In areas that may not be considered rich in community or cultural assets, this is particularly important.

“Thank you for inviting my Dad to do a talk - it’s been really good for him”

Fun Palace Participant

“I’ve never felt capable of playing a music instrument before (and I’m 45 years old!) but in just an hour I realised I could”

Fun Palace Participant

“It was a lot of fun. I don’t usually do creative things but it was fun to do something different”

Fun Palace Participant

© Gemma Reid



Community action Swell, Portrush

A relatively new community group, Swell was established in the North Antrim seaside town of Portrush in 2020 by Gemma, a self described ‘blow in’ to the town who, together with a group of friends, started to organise an annual event to bring people together around arts and culture, heritage and the environment.

“It felt like Fun Palaces has always been an inspiration for that idea that everybody is creative, everybody can tap into something, and offer something to their community and connect with people that way. And so it made sense for us to time it alongside Fun Palaces.”

Now the annual Swell Festival incorporates a Fun Palace.

Swell’s community consultation revealed that local people wanted a community centre in the town, however Gemma reflected...

“It really niggled me, because we have a town hall, and it’s owned by the council. That is community owned, as far as I’m concerned, but people don’t see it as theirs. So I was like, right, we need to use the town hall...and we just fill the town hall with as much as we can...We invite people to take a table, and do whatever they want in it.”

For the Swell volunteers who organise the Fun Palace, knowing they are part of a bigger UK wide movement supports their conviction about the power of community;

“

It helps to know that we’re not crazy, like this stuff works, and that there’s precedent, and that’s worked elsewhere. And just being able to have that confidence and faith that when you offer an opportunity, when you just invite people in and go, ‘you can do this, you know, you can do this with us, and what you have is of value’, that’s really powerful.”

Now five years on, with the Swell Festival loved and appreciated, the group are revisiting their original community activist intentions to consider what’s next, asking themselves:

“How do you bring a community together in a more cohesive voice and cohesive action to build the town we want? In an environment where we have a barely functioning government, local councils are so staid and dysfunctional, tourism is taking over, and we have quite a transitory community, because second home ownership is skyrocketing, and all that kind of stuff, and then very vulnerable communities as well...What happens next?”

The ‘Creative Voices, Activist Voices’ exhibition is coming to Portrush and they hope it will be the ideal vehicle to have these conversations and plan a collective future for their town.

6. What difference has Fun Palaces made to organisations?

Fun Palace Ambassadors

Between 2016 and 2024, Fun Palace Ambassadors were hosted by a variety of organisations around the UK to promote the Fun Palace movement and support cultural democracy at a local grassroots level.

Amongst many positive impacts, Ambassadors helped their host organisations to...

Think creatively about their spaces

Bethan, the Fun Palace Ambassador with the National Trust in Wales, had the good fortune to be in post when the Trust were restoring and re-thinking how to use Tŷ Aberconwy, a 15th century merchant's house in Conwy North Wales, the oldest non-religious building in Wales. Formerly housing a gift shop and with tours and talks accessible only to National Trust members, the Trust wanted to test being more open to the whole community.

Bethan spent lots of time talking to local people about what Tŷ Aberconwy could be, and when a fellow Ambassador told her about **Camerados Public Living Rooms**, that's when things really took off. Furnished with spare items from other National Trust properties and with charity shop finds (all appropriately quarantined and checked to meet the strict conservation protocols required for such an old building) the first floor is now a warm and welcoming Camerados Public Living Room, open every other Thursday for tea, company and chat.

Read the Tŷ Aberconwy Case Study



© Iolo Penri

Change their programming approach

Trinity is a community arts centre in the St Judes area of Bristol, and they have hosted a Fun Palaces Ambassador since 2019.

The work of their previous and current Ambassador has helped to shift their thinking to foreground community voices and community needs, as Jen, the Arts Engagement Manager, explains

"It has become something that just is part of the makeup now of being here. So if we're ever talking about an event, there will always be a 'well, where do the community voices come into this?', 'how are we engaging with the community?'"

For example when planning their annual International Women's Day Market, rather than inviting specific people to host a stall they issued an open call out and were 'inundated' with people getting in touch; and an existing employability course now includes more creative activities as Esther the Ambassador discovered how many local women were involved in crafting.

Similarly the internal team responsible for music events and club nights are now much more connected with the local community **"I think it's opened staff's eyes to the fact that there is huge talent and skill within the local community, and a really wide range of people who are interested to engage and get involved"**.



© Iolo Penri

Lighting fires in Rotherham

Rhiannon has been a Fun Palaces Ambassador in Rotherham since 2022. Hosted and co-funded by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, and working in the libraries section, Rhiannon's work has centred on supporting Fun Palace makers and supporting venues.

"Someone described me as lighting fires everywhere I go, lighting fires of enthusiasm"

She described how attitudes have shifted in the three years since she took up her role; from a focus on attendance numbers to a focus on the quality of relationships, with one colleague telling her "Oh, I get it now that Fun Palaces is a way of life. It's a way of working..."

In her first year, just a couple of organisations wanted to host a Fun Palace, now it's twelve. She has also seen new groups form as a result of taking part in a Fun Palace, and estimates that every year about two or three new groups are created, built on the success of their Fun Palace presentation. She shared a particular example;

"It was a sugar craft workshop.... And people turned up and they were like, 'Oh, I really like this, can we come back and continue, carry it on'. And it's two years later now, and it's still happening."

Venues taking part are now more connected with each other and share learning and approaches with one another. When Sense, one of the town's three centres for disabled adults hosted a Fun Palace, they invited staff and users from the other two day centres; this was the first time there had been any collaboration between them, and they now regularly organise joint activities. Others have been successful in accessing local funding to support their community work, thanks to Rhiannon's signposting and advice.

She has also connected groups who were priced out of their usual spaces, with venues who could offer free or affordable spaces to meet. One library wanted to reach out to their local community and get them involved

in developing the outside space; a shift in language in their social media posts, describing it as 'your space' helped to galvanise volunteers who are now a regular group growing vegetables and flowers, and changed the way that library staff view the space from being 'theirs' to belonging to the community.

Rhiannon realised very quickly that language made a difference too when talking about Fun Palaces to local people who were adamant that they didn't have any skills, but when it came to hobbies they were confident and happy to share what they could do.

Rhiannon sees it as her role to 'bang the drum' on behalf of Rotherham's creatives and community groups. In her conversations with the arts sector, she advocates for using local, Rotherham based, artists when companies from elsewhere are commissioned to do work in the town, and plan to work with their usual, existing contacts.

"I do take that quite seriously now, of saying, 'Hey, make sure if you're coming into Rotherham, doing stuff in Rotherham, make sure you've involved Rotherham makers and artists, because we do have them. We do have professional artists. We don't have many, but we do have some, and they're brilliant, so make sure they're involved."

She described how her confidence has grown in using her position in the Local Authority to advocate for meaningful rather than tokenistic community engagement, commenting **"If this doesn't benefit [a] group, I'm not going to do it just because it ticks a box."**



© Rhiannon Lister-Coburn

New ways of thinking (and doing) at SLIC



The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) is the independent advisory council to the Scottish Government on library and information matters, and is also the library membership organisation for Scotland; supporting, leading and advocating for libraries. SLIC hosted a Fun Palaces Ambassador from 2019-2022, and Lindsey Henderson, their Head of Programme, describes how it drastically changed their thinking.

“It’s definitely challenged our way of thinking and has made us more confident to push organisations to take the route that’s not always the easiest road... the one that yields much better results for everybody, for the people involved, and for the teams that are on the ground. I do think it’s completely changed the way that we think”

© Carnegie Library Fun Palace

Their Fun Palace Ambassador Lewis started just as the Covid-19 lockdowns began, so they pivoted their planned activities to create what became known as the ‘Community Wellbeing Network’ a series of regular webinars for anyone in the community and cultural sectors to come together and share ideas, exchange learning and support one another in their work. Once life was back to ‘normal’ Lewis continued his work promoting and supporting libraries to deliver Fun Palaces, culminating in a poverty awareness event for library and cultural practitioners to consider their role in communities experiencing poverty – of opportunity, economically, and aspirationally.

Lindsey describes how the values and approach of Fun Palaces has changed how SLIC work.

“I do genuinely believe that the way in which Fun Palaces delivers, and the way they encourage events to be run, that ‘for, by, and with’ communities, putting that at the forefront, I really strongly believe that that has changed the way that we think about working with communities, and how we encourage our members to work with communities”

Fun Palaces had tangible impacts on SLIC’s national library strategy; in both the thinking that informed it, and in the language used. Throughout the strategy there are specific aims that were a direct result of being involved with Fun Palaces.

“

It was about trying to change that narrative... not ‘hard to reach’ but ‘easy to ignore’... We’re not doing enough to engage with everybody in the culture sector, and it can become very elite and very selective, and we’re missing so many voices and so much cultural richness and so much heritage... through the work we were doing with Fun Palaces, so much of that we believe was down to the poverty gap.

Even though the Ambassadorship completed in 2023, the Fun Palaces approach is still informing SLIC’s own programmes, for example every stage of ‘Lend and Mend’ (<https://scottishlibraries.org/lend-and-mend/>) (a network of hubs providing free access to equipment and tools, funded by the John Lewis Partnership £1million Circular Future Fund) has involved community voices; from where the hubs should be, to what they should include. No two hubs are the same as they are rooted in what each community wants and needs.



7. What difference has Fun Palaces made to places?

“

In an area regularly labelled as economically, culturally and educationally deprived, a Fun Palace says you can learn, you can have fun, you’re welcome and you are worth celebrating. These things are vital if we, and the community we’re part of, is to flourish.

Fun Palace Maker

Fun Palaces reach people in all different types of communities across the UK and beyond, and are even more likely to take place in poorer, rather than richer areas.

Fun Palaces feel uncomfortable with the terminology of ‘deprived communities’ as many people in these communities consider them rich in ways other than economically. However, as a nationally agreed way of describing the context of people’s lives, the Index of Multiple Deprivation is a useful tool.

Since 2016 over a quarter of Fun Palaces have taken place in the 20% most deprived areas in England, and the 20% least deprived areas in England account for just 10% of Fun Palaces.¹



¹ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is based on 39 separate indicators organised across seven domains of deprivation (for example income, employment, housing and health) which are combined to produce an overall measure of multiple deprivation experienced by people living in an area. We mapped the postcodes of where Fun Palaces take place against the IMD map.



© Jamie-Lee Buttershaw

“

Bring diverse communities together

In 2024 84% of Makers agreed that their Fun Palace brought people from different backgrounds together.

Since 2021, Fun Palaces have happened in Arabic, BSL, Bangla, Chinese, Cornish, Doric, English, French, Gaelic, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Moldovan, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tibetan, Ukrainian, Urdu, Welsh, and Yoruba.

“Lots of great energy across cultural boundaries.”
Fun Palace Participant

Since 2016, one third of Maker teams have included someone who is disabled or has a long term health condition.

In 2024, 21% of Fun Palaces Makers identified at LGBTQ+.

Since 2016, an average of 24% of Fun Palace participants have been from Global Majority backgrounds.

Fun Palaces are also intergenerational; in 2024, 21% of Maker teams included people who were BOTH under 25 AND over 65.

As non-British nationals, becoming Fun Palace Makers has meant going out and talking to our neighbours, connecting with our community and challenging their preconceptions and misconceptions. And ours.

Fun Palace Maker



case study

Reaching the whole community in Cwm Garw

Cwm Garw is one of a cluster of former mining villages in the Garw Valley in Bridgend in South Wales. First time Fun Palace Makers Abi and Laura got together in 2024 to make a Fun Palace; hoping that about 50 people would come along, on the day they welcomed over 300 local residents through the doors of the Garw Valley Life Centre, supported by 42 volunteers who made it all happen.

They describe how important an initiative like Fun Palaces is to Cwm Garw:

“[It’s] a resilient community, but there’s been lots of challenges since the mines closed. There’s not many opportunities socio-economically. And lots of the culture that built up around mining, after that left there was a bit of community dislocation. The social connections that used to be made in community hubs, they don’t exist as much anymore. And so finding something else that we can gather around and gather together and put something on for the community, and to make it feel like a real community where everyone comes together for this event, it feels like a really like positive thing”

Their planning involved two open community meetings to gather ideas, and a team of about ten people became the key organising group. 45 suggestions from the open meetings were whittled down to 19 different activities on the day, that ranged from hula hooping to macrame, heritage railway rides to BSL, dance lessons to vintage toy demos, and a scavenger hunt to music jam.



© Cwm Garw Fun Palace

Abi and Laura describe how the event reached all parts of the community:

“We had like, elders in the valley, youngest of the valley, everyone in between. We had people who grew up in the valley that have never left. We had people that had grown up in the valley and then returned. We had people who had family in the valley, and they came along, and then people who didn’t grow up here as well”

And shared some feedback from those who came along

“Like Disneyland, but better!”

“A lovely few hours, played, danced, read stories and crafts thoroughly enjoyed. Thank you!”



© Cwm Garw Fun Palace

Brilliant day thank you. Lovely seeing the community come together for crafts and singing. More please!

© Sydenham Fun Palace



Fun Palaces as part of the Civic Infrastructure in South London

Chris Best is a local Councillor in the Sydenham ward in the London Borough of Lewisham, and a long time Fun Palace Maker. Back in 2018 when Chris was the Cabinet Member for Community Services, she attended the Fun Palaces launch at The Albany, and, inspired by what she saw she convinced her other ward councillor colleagues to move their Sydenham Community Assembly meeting to coincide with Fun Palaces Weekend, and have done so ever since.

The first Fun Palace was at four different venues along Sydenham High Street, but now is focused on the Sydenham Centre, and local community and creative groups are invited to take a stall and showcase their activities. Being allied to the local authority has had advantages, for example covering the costs of the public liability insurance for the venue, but more recently funding cuts have impacted on the support they can provide, and Chris needs to rely on word of mouth, the Sydenham Assembly Facebook page, and her long standing local relationships (having been a councillor for 39 years!) to organise and promote the Fun Palace.

I enjoy being part of a community and I want to feel I’m part of a stronger community... You want people to feel engaged and part of a sense of identity, a place they call home. I know it’s a cliché, but that’s what it’s about

Chris Best, Sydenham Councillor

Over time, the Sydenham Fun Palace has showcased the variety of different groups active in the community; from a local art gallery and park users group, to hosting a pilates class and a heritage walk. It has enabled groups to grow, for example the Knit and Natter started a second group meeting at the Sydenham Centre after their Fun Palace experience; and for the Sydenham Society (one of 350 civic societies around the UK) it’s an opportunity to recruit members, and showcase their work as the community voice for Sydenham.

Strengthening local community and cultural infrastructure in Stratford-upon-Avon

In a very different context in Stratford-upon-Avon, four different cultural and community organisations, who didn't have a history of working together, now collaborate on a collective, town wide, Fun Palace, every year.

Laura from Warwickshire Libraries explains

"It creates a real atmosphere, a special occasion in the town, because it isn't just one place doing something that day. It's everywhere you go."

Other partners are Stratford Town Trust's Community Hub, the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Each year a different partner takes the lead on publicity, and they share resources through issuing a joint press release rather than trying to compete. The joint publicity makes it much easier for people to plan their visits, and participants are encouraged to visit all four Fun Palaces with a free coffee and pastry provided by the Town Trust's corporate sponsor Crowne Plaza hotel, who also provide free space for one of the Fun Palaces.

Although each partner is a very different scale, this hasn't resulted in any tensions, partly because of the ethos of Fun Palaces, as Laura describes;

"Nobody's thinking their space is more important than anybody else's. We're all prioritising our own organisations, as you would expect, but we're also really, genuinely interested and engaged and caring about what other people are achieving through it as well... it's not about showing off your own resources"

The partners started with having a theme each year, but by the third year Laura explained, they realised this wasn't necessary.

"So it's Fun Palaces Weekend, there's all this stuff that you can do around Stratford. It's all free. It's mostly just drop in, and it's absolutely about sharing the creativity of our community, and that was enough"

They've also had to flex over time. When the Community Hub could no longer host a Fun Palace at their venue, the Crowne Plaza Hotel stepped in to help, but now, with such a demand from makers to be involved, Sarah from Stratford Town Trust says they are 'bursting at the seams' and the Community Hub may need to find another venue, or think of a different way to stay involved.

The partners have also become more hands off, handing control to the local community; the 2025 library Fun Palace will be led by River

Hope, a new grassroots movement 'nurturing relationship with the local water ecosystems through creativity, ceremony and action', and the 2023 Fun Palace was planned and delivered by Welcome Here, a local refugee and Asylum seeker group. Laura describes how important this was;

"People who've lived in Stratford all their lives coming in and then being shown how to do a craft by somebody who'd been in the country for six months. That was really powerful."

Inspired by the success of their Fun Palace - when they realised the appetite of local groups to share and showcase their activities - the Community Hub now hands over its spaces free of charge to local groups to deliver school holiday activities for families and children.

Sarah commented how the Fun Palaces partnership "has definitely opened up other opportunities for us to work together", and Laura agreed that there is now improved communications and connections between the four organisations. It has also been the catalyst for other joint working (on the Great Big Green Week and as Warm Hubs); and even helped to inform the development of the local cultural strategy.

“

It creates a real atmosphere, a special occasion in the town, because it isn't just one place doing something that day. It's everywhere you go

Fun Palace Participant



© Stratford Upon Avon Fun Palace

8. Fun Palaces and environmental sustainability

“That is what a Fun Palace is, right? It’s not about producing new stuff, it’s not about buying stuff; it’s about sharing. And I think that sharing ethos is the most environmental thing.

Fun Palace Maker

Sustainability is a key priority for Fun Palaces, and we are making significant efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of the organisation. A climate pledge has been published on the Fun Palaces website along with a more detailed climate policy, and some specific actions include:

- Encouraging low carbon travel options for staff and Ambassadors funded by a land travel fund, and with extra paid time to account for the difference
- Carbon literacy and sustainability workshops for Makers
- Sustainability toolkit for Makers

Beyond policies and processes, the whole ethos of Fun Palaces aligns with sustainability; it is about local communities celebrating culture that already exists and making the most of existing community assets. Fun Palaces are mainly organised and attended by local people which means that travel mileage is low.

Since 2021, the majority of Makers reported in the annual Maker survey that sustainability and the environment were a factor in their planning, mainly in terms of minimising the amount of new material purchased by re-using or recycling existing items; sourcing re-usable items; or if items couldn’t be re-used ensuring materials were recyclable. Energy and water usage at Fun Palaces is generally low; they often take places in public buildings that would be open and operational anyway, or even outside.

“We actively encouraged attendees to use sustainable modes of transport to get to the Fun Palace and car-shared where possible to get to the planning meetings, which we could roll out further next year. The advertising/postering was made with recyclable materials and posters were delivered by bicycle or on foot as much as possible. Some of the activities also used materials already available to minimise the cost and maximise re-use. For example, the ‘make a macrame plant hanger’ activity used leftover materials the Maker had at home. The waste cord from the activity was given to the craft table and was used in their activities. Plants were also donated from volunteers from cuttings they had at home. Additionally, the locked suitcase to open at the end of the Scavenger Hunt was sourced from a call out on Freecycle.”

Cwm Garw Fun Palace Makers

“I really believe that we keep culture local, and we’re not travelling, and we’re not flying in experts and using carbon heavy ways to engage with culture, that it’s really good for the environment as a kind of unexpected side effect of Fun Palaces.

Fun Palace Maker

Some Fun Palaces focus specifically on environmental issues;

- In 2024 Telegraph Hill Fun Palace worked with the local repair cafe to make their Fun Palace.
- In 2022 Fleetwood Library remade unwanted items into new things.
- In 2022/23 The Boulevard of Broken Dreams Fun Palace, Harrow, saw a team of Makers repurpose broken objects, as well as providing broken biscuits and locally grown pears, both saved from becoming food waste.

- In 2023 Creative Croydon Fun Palace held two nature-based Fun Palaces, sharing skills and activities encouraging people to appreciate the outdoors.
- Greener and Cleaner, an environmental charity in Bromley, South East London hosts a Fun Palace annually as part of their mission to equip local people with the inspiration, tools and resources to combat the climate crisis.



In 2022, Campsea Ashe Fun Palace in Suffolk ran a whole host of nature-based activities, including building a bug hotel.



9. What have Fun Palaces learnt and what's next ?

That trust in communities is paramount

We often speak to people who are apprehensive about the things that might go wrong if they hand over to their local community to make a Fun Palace, and although there's always a risk it could, in eleven years of Fun Palaces there have been no major disaster stories as of yet. We provide resources on safeguarding, risk assessment and insurance, which Fun Palace Makers have responded to and taken on board. We understand that trusting communities with space, power, and resources can seem daunting, but time and again, we've seen that when communities are given the tools and freedom to lead, they do so with care and commitment, in turn creating meaningful and lasting change. The success of Fun Palaces over more than a decade proves this: with more than 2,600 community-led events, all shaped by local people who know their locality better than anyone.

People know what they want for their community

We've repeatedly found that people know exactly what they want and need for their own communities and that they are more than capable of making it happen. Fun Palaces Makers show this through the activities they share, the spaces they take-over, and the neighbours and organisations they bring together. Yet too often, communities are overlooked and under-resourced, asked for input but rarely trusted with actual decision-making power. If we truly want to see meaningful, lasting change, we need to shift this dynamic, by giving communities not just a voice, but tangible power, along with the funding and resources to lead the work themselves. When trust is backed with resource, communities are able to have an active say in the future of their locality.

That change is slow and takes time, but is always worth it

Positive social change doesn't happen overnight; we're not going to change the culture sector in a weekend, or even in months, and that's okay. When we're working to shift deeply rooted mindsets, challenge long-standing systems, and build more equitable approaches to culture, the process can take years, even generations, before we see real transformation. We've seen through our work, particularly with the Ambassador programme, that progress often comes in quiet, small, and persistent steps: building trust, nurturing relationships, and modelling new ways of doing things driven by the Fun Palaces ethos. The pace can at times be frustrating, but this work is deep; we're working together to make lasting change, carried forward by communities long into the future, and that takes time and care.



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That there's hope in grassroots action

Grassroots action is where real change begins. Every tiny revolution of connection, every Fun Palace, every shared skill, every new meeting, might seem inconsequential on its own, but together, they form a powerful movement. These moments of connection and creativity are not just frivolous events; they are acts of resistance and hope in a time when larger systems often feel distant, unresponsive and inequitable. When top-down change fails communities, it's these small, local steps that keep us moving forward. By coming together, Fun Palaces connect us to one another and remind us that we already have the tools we need to shape a better future, through consistent, collective action from the ground up.

Communities are already rich in culture, skills and ideas

Through thousands of activities we've seen shared at Fun Palaces over the years, we know that every community is already packed with skills and talents; the mainstream alongside the weird and the wonderful, which is what make Fun Palaces so special. Whether it's dance, carpentry, coding, poetry, or gardening — the talent and creativity are already there. Fun Palace's role is not, and never has been, to bring culture to communities, but to offer an invitation and support for communities to create space for the culture and knowledge that already exists to be shared, celebrated and shouted about.



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What we're planning next

With thanks to continued funding from The National Lottery Community Fund for the next four years, Fun Palaces will:



Continue to offer year-round support for all Fun Palaces Makers

We'll continue offering one-to-one support, free workshops (online and in person), toolkits, printed materials, marketing, and peer connection to help Makers create Fun Palaces.



Build a UK-wide learning network

We'll bring together Makers, researchers, partners, and funders four times a year to share learning, shape the programme, and grow understanding.



Develop our learning with Makers in key areas across the UK

We'll work intensively with seven areas to grow Fun Palaces activity and support local leaders. We will collectively develop and share tools, resources and learnings so others can do the same in their area.



Create more chances for Makers to be heard

We'll support Makers to attend events and conferences, connecting their work to the wider Community Power movement.



Research and share our impact

We'll commission and collect research to understand and explain the impact of Fun Palaces — and share it in ways Makers can use in their own advocacy.

Thank You

Fun Palaces couldn't have achieved all these incredible things without the passion, creativity, commitment and huge amount of hard work and support from so many people over the last ten years.

Fun Palace Makers

And everyone who has taken part in a Fun Palace

All our funders

Arts Council England, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Centre for Cultural Value, ESRC, Foyle Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund, The Wellcome Trust.

Our team, both past and present

Adam De Salle, Alex Marshall, Ali Fell, Alis Ballance, Amber Massie-Blomfield, Amie Taylor, Amy Merrigan, Ayesha Chouglay, Becky Pereira, Beverley Nunn, Bethan Page, Celine Elliott, Connie Rosewarne, Daniel King, Danny Calihan, Ellie Allen, Ellie Shipman, Ellie Smith, Esther Afikuruweh, Freya Taylor, Hannah Lambert, Hannah Nicklin, Jack Morrison, Kirsty Lothian, Lewis Hou, Makala Cheung, Mandy Colleran, Meirion Davis, Neelam Chhara, Orla Nicholls, Rachel Attfield, Ravina Bajwa, Rhiannon Lister-Coburn, Ria Patel, Ruari Gordon, Sadie Green, Sarah-Jane Rawlings, Sasha Abrahams, Siobhan Kearney, Stefan Boakye and Stella Duffy.

Our Advisory Group and The Albany Support

Tracey Sage, Emma Rucastle, Gavin Barlow, Shenay Gaul, Mary Nri, Hayley Murphy, Mark Blay, Mark Allan, Ceri Payne, Vicki Amedume.

Our Ambassador Host Organisations

The National Trust (Cymru), Libraries Unlimited (Devon), Creative Kernow (Cornwall), SLIC (Scotland), Science Ceilidh (Edinburgh / Glasgow), Big Telly (Portstewart, NI), The Glasshouse ICM (Gateshead), Eden Court (Inverness), Trinity Arts Centre (Bristol), Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Cornwall Museums Partnership, The Crucible (Sheffield), FEAST (Cornwall), Ceramic City Stories (Stoke on Trent), Elizabeth Blackwell Institute for Health Research, University of Bristol.

With thanks to Dr Katy Pilcher, Aston University, Culture Counts, Derek Bardowell, François Matarasso, Lyn Gardner and The Lines Between.

Thank you to everyone interviewed for this report.

Report written by Sarah Boiling, with Amie Taylor, 2025.

Report design by Touch Design.

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Illustrations © Emily Medley

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