

New research finds cultural creative hubs key to supporting local communities during crises

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The research team at a recent Scottish Parliament event promoting their findings. Credit: University of Stirling

Experts at the University of Stirling are calling for the arts and culture to be prioritized in funding decisions after new research showed the significance of cultural hubs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A team led by Dr. Katherine Champion studied how arts organization, Creative Stirling, and the [social enterprise](#), The Kitchen at 44 King Street, transformed their activities, mobilized their networks and redeployed their assets to provide for their [local community](#) during COVID lockdowns.

Between March 2020 and October 2022 the organizations delivered creative packs for local children, distributed Christmas hampers to families, organized free online workshops to tackle [social isolation](#) and provided advice to those unable to work due to the pandemic, including local artists. The Kitchen at 44 King Street also set up Stirling Community Food—offering excess food for free—which was hosted in the Creative Stirling hub.

Dr. Champion said, "Creative Stirling and The Kitchen at 44 King Street played a vital role in supporting their [local communities](#), collecting and re-distributing resources, sharing information and connecting with local people in need. Their activities were integral to people surviving and thriving during an unprecedented time of crisis.

"This offers an important example of the power and role of arts and culture in addressing social need during a time of crisis, which other arts and cultural organizations can learn from. Worryingly, however, in the current context of economic uncertainty linked to the cost-of-living and public [funding](#) crises, opportunities to learn and expand from this period could be undermined."

The research, which included expertise from Dr. Maria Velez Serna and Dr. Susan Berridge also both of the University of Stirling's Faculty of

Arts and Humanities, highlighted the challenges the cultural hub faced and have produced a number of recommendations for [policy makers](#).

Dr. Champion added: "We need to look at how agencies, government and policy can help address the issues faced by cultural hubs, including access to funding and the physical spaces available to these organizations to operate from.

"There is a powerful conversation to be had about including arts from the get-go when talking about supporting communities. Arts and culture are still often seen as 'nice to have' or as an 'add-on' to areas of policy rather than being able to offer critical support right from the start—we hope this research demonstrates the sector's significant role."

The researchers' recommendations include designing appropriate funding mechanisms and support, giving more funding autonomy to community leaders who are attuned to local needs and protecting the physical spaces where cultural and creative hubs are housed.

The team will share their findings at a workshop on 2 June at Creative Stirling. They also recently attended an event at the Scottish Parliament, where they met First Minister Humza Yousaf, and discussed their insights with other MSPs and cultural organizations.

More information: Mapping Ecologies of Care in a Creative Hub during COVID-19. [static1.squarespace.com/static ... 08993/RSE+Report.pdf%20](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/08993/RSE+Report.pdf%20)

Provided by University of Stirling

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