

# **"There's always a way, isn't there?"**

## **Creativity, the outdoors and COVID-19**

One of the themes to emerge from the stories is the way in which folk took responsibility for their own wellness and wellbeing, particularly during the first national lockdowns across the UK back in March 2020. This insight briefing explores people's stories, experiences and emotions about the different ways they've been helping themselves and others during the last year.

### **"Making the best out of what we had"**

*Creation and appreciation during the pandemic*

The people we chatted with regularly spoke about how they used creativity as a tool for keeping them focussed and entertained, as well as an appreciation for outdoor activities for exercise and getting away from those screens.

Creativity, is of course a very broad term and the camerados have been creative in lots of ways, from learning to bake, to organising events, to simply re-arranging the furniture. "We've been discovering Dundee cake," David told us, although he took care to stress that it would be made without marzipan, with the jury out on whether we agree with this or not. Other folk talked about creativity as an escape from the realities of home-schooling and repetition. "I spent the first six weeks really focussed completely on work. ... I didn't want people to think I wasn't working," Jill recalled, saying she found home-schooling a challenge alongside her safeguarding role which she focused heavily on as she felt it was important. "My husband was at home as well. That was quite fun, there were some real elements of fun. He's a joiner so he built a skate park in the back garden and I was like, 'We're not doing school today, we're going to do construction.' So, there was all that kind of fun of it as well." However, she feels as if the flip side of this approach was that she was too focused on work and that her children weren't able to find a routine, suggesting that when it comes to balancing work, home-schooling and family life all at the same time there really is no right answer – perhaps accepting our limits in these extraordinary circumstances and doing what feels right at the time is the way through for many.



***Click on the TV to listen to some of the stories from the movement***

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This shows in Candice's story about setting up an online prom for the EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) young people who she works with. Pre-pandemic she had planned to set up an alternative prom but "then lockdown happened and we decided to do it anyway online, so they compiled a playlist and one of the boys was the DJ. ... We had dresses and everything and it was just really, really cool. So, I think making the best out of what we had was a really bonding experience, I think, and not letting it get in the way. There's always a way, isn't there?" A cancelled event turned into a video call had all of the potential to be a miserable, mundane experience, but some creativity and a very human capacity to turn an everyday occurrence into a party with some music and fancy frocks shows how folk were able to boost their wellbeing and mood despite restrictions.

Of course, while technology has helped us all stay connected throughout the pandemic – and given us a creative tool to “get around” restrictions – it has also created screen fatigue and many people have, instead, looked to the outdoors for their wellness. Sam told us about the benefits of taking the dog for a walk as a means of getting out and about while shielding. Normally he would attend a gardening charity but can't do that under current circumstances, so he uses his dog-walking time to “plan what I'm going to do in the garden and get it all looking beautiful, so that's what I'm positive about.” Gerry, meanwhile, had to spend a lot of time at home while recovering from COVID-19. As well as making friends with a fly in his room, Gerry also enjoyed his "life in the garden, to look out the window and see. I'm a wildlife gardener and there was a lot to appreciate." He goes on to talk about how getting out and about is a real lifeline for some: “I went for a walk yesterday in the countryside at a safe distance with a friend who lives on her own. It's tougher for her, she finds it a bit dreary. But she's taking steps. She's walking with me yesterday, she's walking with somebody else the day before. She goes out for walks on her own, goes out in the garden." Gardens have become a real haven as well. Whether it's making skate parks like Jill, planning what to plant like Sam, or re-imagining how to use the space for company like Gerry, the sentiment that outdoor space is necessary and shouldn't be a luxury is strong throughout.

**STORIES**  
FROM THE MOVEMENT

***Click on the TV to listen to all of the stories from the movement gathered so far***



**"I plan what I'm going to do in the garden and get it all looking beautiful, so that's what I'm positive about."**

*What we've learned from the stories*

The stories have taught us a thing or two about wellness and how creativity and outdoor spaces are key to it.

- People are using creativity to make events out of everyday things. Creativity needs to be seen and valued from the beginning, not added on to at the end of anything as a nice added extra.
- Encourage play, not just in children, as adults it's viewed as a waste of time.
- We should re-imagine how we use our outdoor spaces, both private and public, and make sure they are open to everyone.
- Technology enables creativity, but we need to balance our use of it so it doesn't become another negative.

## **A #BitOfAction**

Here's what we can do to get the most out of being creative and embracing the great outdoors:

1. Create space in your day to be creative in whatever you like – even if it is just 10 minutes, it can make a difference to how you are feeling.
2. Walk - Go on a 'Midday Meander', you don't need a purpose to go on a walk and you might find by doing so you can create connections with other folk you pass on the way.
3. Share your creativity and interests with others – you could make a playlist and share it with friends, family and folk you work with.

***You can watch A #BitOfCompany Chat episodes that explore these topics more on YouTube***

**Click on the TVs below to view the shows!**



**EPISODE 1**



**EPISODE 2**

## About The Project

Camerados is a growing global movement of people who get through tough times by looking out for each other. The movement's Public Living Rooms are a space for people to chat and be alongside one another and, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they've created virtual Public Living Room spaces known as the #SpoonRoom that keep these connections and conversations going.

People's Voice Media meanwhile, is committed to supporting folk to bring about positive social change through the Community Reporter movement. Community Reporting is a form of digital storytelling that focuses on the gathering and sharing of lived experiences, and using these stories to start conversations of change between different people, groups and organisations.

Thanks to the Emerging Futures Fund from the National Lottery Community Fund, the Association of Camerados and People's Voice Media have come together to look at people's experiences of the pandemic, and create spaces in which different voices could be heard. Over 65 stories have been gathered and we've produced five insight briefings summarising what we've learned from listening to folk. We also created an online chat show – #BitOfCompanyChat – where we've talked about some of the themes in the stories a bit more and thought of bits of action we can take to overcome them together.

Find out more at <https://www.camerados.org> and <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

The logo for Camerados, featuring the word "CAMERADOS" in a bold, black, hand-drawn style font on a yellow background.