# Croydon Snapshot:
## The Local Creative Health Landscape














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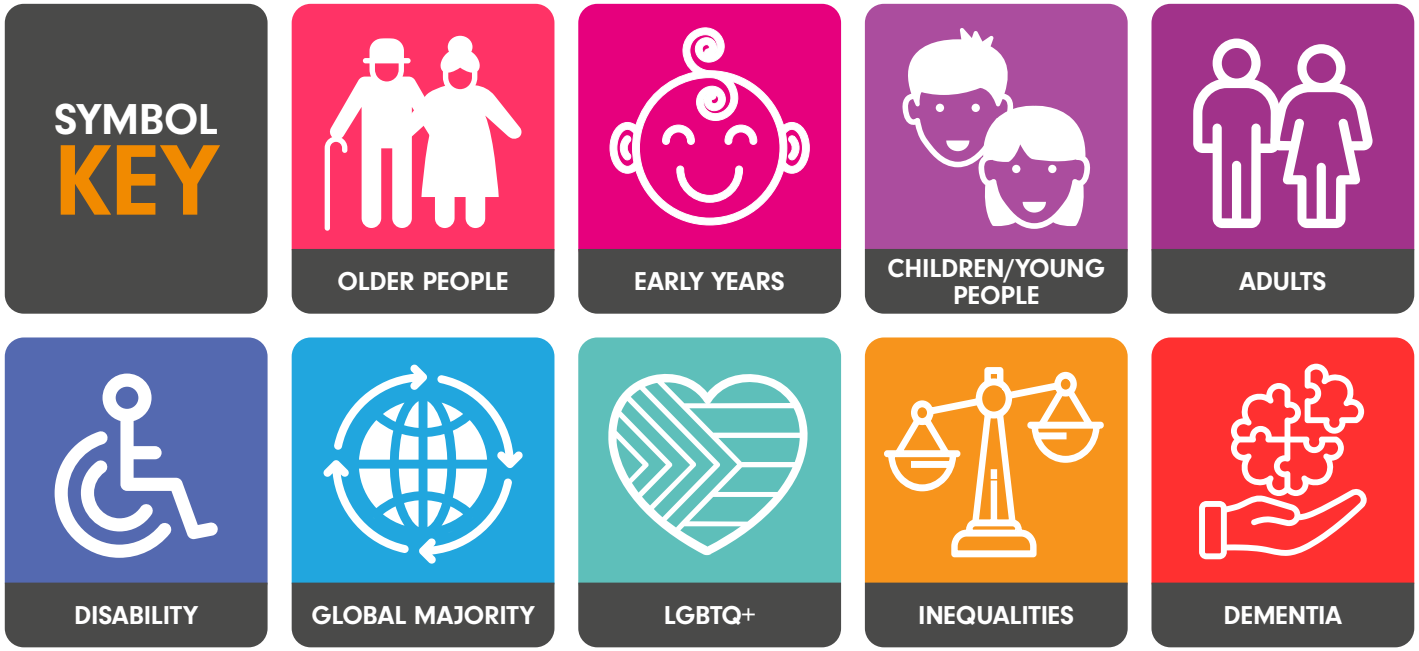

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# Croydon Snapshot:
## The Local Creative Health Landscape

**There are many individuals and organisations providing creative health support to residents across the borough.**

This booklet gives a snapshot of eighteen recent local initiatives, and is intended as an accompaniment to the 2024 Croydon Director of Public Health Report.

Symbols identify the main target population groups each project worked with. It showcases the wide range of communities and health outcomes creative health can support.



CASE STUDY

# Archipelago

**As part of Archipelago, autistic and neurodivergent participants were invited to create their own personal island eco-systems of likes and needs. Individual islands were then joined together to create a protective 'archipelago' representing the mix of the group's traits, likes and dislikes.**

Delivered by A Collective, an autistic-led creative health social enterprise, a series of online and in-person workshops supported participants to get to know themselves and others in safe, supportive spaces.

Different sessions targeted home-educated young people, members of the Autistic Youth Hub for 16-30 year olds, and adults, and included a number of participants identifying as LGBTQIA+ and/or disabled.

In addition to workshops, participants received a self-guided resource pack and website with creative activities to do at home, co-designed with Autistic Youth Hub members.

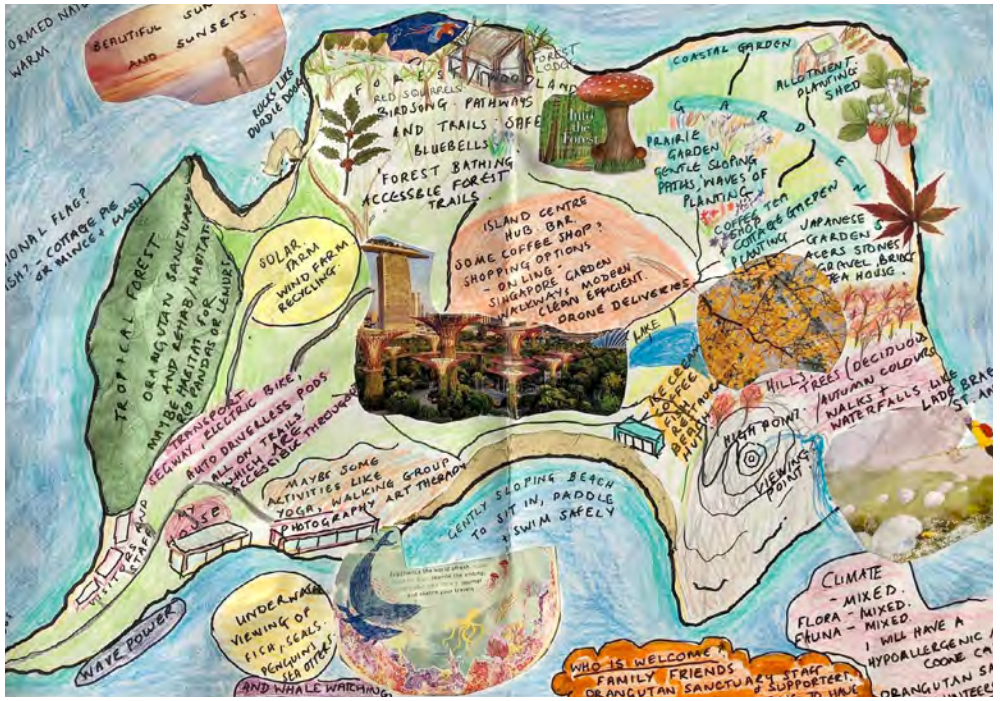
In total 39 attendees took part in workshops, with many more potential participants signing up to receive information about future activities.

Evaluation results showed promising signs of the project supporting longer-term improvements in wellbeing, with before and after scores improving across each of the five areas measured: energy, social, sensory, overwhelm and joy.

INEQUALITIES

DISABILITY

LGBTQ+



















CASE STUDY

# Art and Joy

**Art and Joy was a series of fortnightly creative activities at the Museum of Croydon aimed at those living with dementia and their carers as part of the 'Dementia, Art and Joy' project funded by Croydon Council.**

Delivered in partnership with social enterprise Good Wolf People, sessions were run by experienced facilitators and created a fun, celebratory environment to engage participants in art-making activities.

Participants used different techniques to respond to artworks in the Croydon Art Collection – which features more than 2,000 paintings, prints and sketches from as early as the 17th century – offering people living with dementia and their carers opportunities to gain unique shared experiences and spend positive time together.

Workshops culminated with the launch of a new exhibition at Croydon Clocktower during Dementia Action Week in May 2025 featuring participants' favourite artworks from the collection alongside some of their new creations. The exhibition aims to evoke joy for viewers and lead to greater understanding of the importance of arts to those living with dementia and their carers.

OLDER PEOPLE

DEMENTIA

CASE STUDY

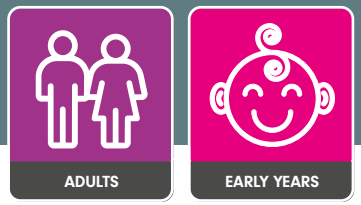
# Breathe Melodies

**Breathe Melodies for Mums, a national programme for mums at risk of post-natal depression, came to Croydon to deliver an Autumn Programme of ten weekly sessions between October and December 2024.**

Reaching 20 mums and 21 babies across two sites in South Croydon and South Norwood, participants were supported by specially trained musicians to take part in singing sessions in community family hubs.

The programme compared scores on three depression and anxiety scales at the start and end of the programme. 79% of participants' Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale scores reduced. 93% of participants' Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 scores reduced, of which 53% scored none or minimal symptoms (score of 0-4) in final assessments. 73% of participants' Patient Health Questionnaire-9 scores (assessing symptoms of depression) reduced, of which 67% scored none or minimal symptoms by the end of the programme.

Questionnaires also revealed overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 93% of mums stating they would be very likely to recommend it to others, and 87% reporting they had learned new techniques to calm their baby. 93% of mums reported feeling happier, with a recurring theme of the sense of community fostered through singing in rounds and learning songs from different cultures.



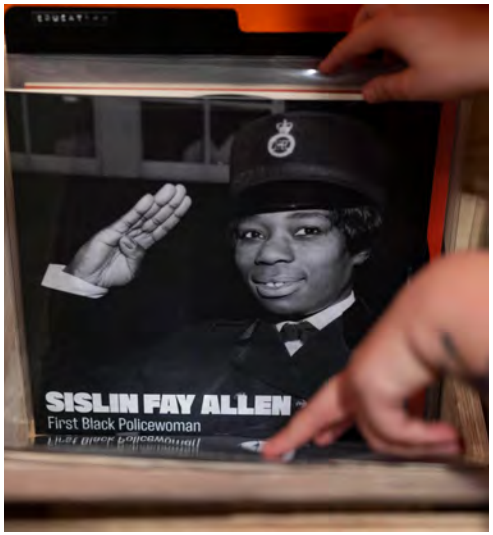





















CASE STUDY

# Citizen UK

**Citizen UK was organised by the National Portrait Gallery between 2020 and 2023 to explore waves of migration in select areas of the UK.**

Alongside the Museum of Croydon, local Poet Laureate Shaniqua Benjamin, artist Kyam, designer Abi Wright and a team of citizen researchers set about uncovering the stories behind the borough's Caribbean community.

Focused on ordinary residents and their lives, the team sought to explain how Caribbean migration to Croydon has impacted not just the borough, but the wider country and world, achieving this through capturing a mixture of oral histories, poetry, music and visual arts.

Beginning with a group of citizen researchers who scoured the museum's archives and interviewed local people, the next stages saw Kyam produce portraits to respond to these histories, Shaniqua complement them with poetry and Abi bring the works together with archive material to create the public exhibition Caribbean Influencers. First shown in the Museum of Croydon from April to July 2023, the exhibition later moved to the National Portrait Gallery between October 2023 and February 2024.

The programme was a timely way for residents from Caribbean communities to take ownership of their stories, build pride in their communities and be recognised on a national stage, contributing to positive wellbeing, connection and self-esteem.

GLOBAL MAJORITY

OLDER PEOPLE

CASE STUDY

# Creative Micro-Adventures

**Delving into local nature, Croydon photographer Ameena Rojee ran three Creative "Microadventures" for adults in Farthing Downs and Happy Valley as part of Croydon Council's Croydon Loves You grants programme in summer 2024.**

Focusing on photography, nature-based exercises, poetry and ecology education (delivered by local rangers), walks in rural areas aimed to allow participants to engage with nature in deeper, more mindful ways while supporting people to be gently active.

37 participants attended across all events, with some being introduced to the areas for the first time.

Participants reported events allowed them to meet others, socialise, and gain new knowledge and appreciation of Croydon's beautiful landscape.

Walks were inclusive and guided, ensuring they were accessible to residents who may face barriers to accessing green spaces or physical activity.

100% of participants reported feeling positive about their experience, using words such as "restored", "calming", "rested" and "more engaged" to describe their experience, highlighting the project's success at supporting relaxation and stress reduction for attendees.

ADULTS














Photos by Crisis Croydon.

CASE STUDY

# Crisis Croydon

**Crisis Croydon is the Croydon branch of national charity, Crisis, which supports local people with experience of homelessness. In November 2024, six service users took part in the Vessel Ceramics Project.**

This one-week workshop, led by ceramicist Agata Nowak and supported by Crisis Croydon staff, used ceramic materials and techniques to explore the theme of forced migration.

Participants began by producing images and shapes that captured memories and emotions relating to their experiences, transferring these to tiles and then working towards decorating a 'vessel'.

Participants spoke about the process of making the pieces of art and the 'healing' impact, including how the group helped let go of some of the stressors of outside.

A core theme from the project were the 'bonds' built between participants connecting them like a 'family', 'brothers and sisters'. This extended outside of the group and outside Crisis, supporting some of the participants to feel less lonely.

They described the sense of feeling like a weight had been lifted when they entered the space and described a movement of emotions from 'inside to outside' the body, leaving them feeling happy and calmer.



CASE STUDY

# Croydon Dementia Sessions

**Spare Tyre Theatre Company, London-based specialists in participatory theatre, hosted a series of six Croydon Dementia Sessions events in South Norwood in September 2024 to support residents with advanced dementia through creative use of sensory techniques.**

Funded by Croydon Council's Croydon Loves You grant programme, the team delivered three sensory workshops with 13 residents at Acacia Care Centre, two informal drop-in 'dementia cafes' at Stanley Arts, and one training session for carers or staff supporting people with dementia.

Acacia Care Centre workshops used seaside themes to support residents to explore the sights, smells, sounds and feelings of their memories of coastal trips.

Verbal residents fondly reminisced about holidays from years before, while non-verbal residents engaged through objects such as soft fidget blankets (batts), feathers, shells and meshy fabrics. Over the course of three sessions, participants became more trusting of facilitators, actively engaging with activities and demonstrating more energy as sessions progressed.

Two free 'dementia café' sessions provided a more casual environment for people who didn't usually access arts activities or venues to take part in specially designed activities, with 81% of attendees visiting Stanley Arts for the first time.





















CASE STUDY

# Dance to Health

**Standing for 'Arts Enterprise with a Social Purpose', AESOP is a national organisation founded to highlight and develop arts interventions in support of an array of societal problems.**

One of its flagship programmes is Dance to Health, a falls prevention programme for older people, brought to Croydon by the SW London Integrated Care Board between January 2024 and March 2025.

Weekly 2-hour sessions took place at community venues in Thornton Heath, New Addington and West Croydon. Dance artists specially trained in Postural Stability Instruction (PSI) and peer motivators led participants through creative dance sessions designed to improve balance, strength, endurance and mobility.

Sessions are also designed to improve improve bodily awareness and the ability to get up from the floor. Importantly, participants are given space to socialise, encouraging people to have fun and connect.

Outcomes for the initiative are impressive, with 84% of participants improving their 'Timed up and go' (TUG) times - the amount of time it takes someone to stand up from a chair, walk 3 metres, turn back and return to sit down – which can indicate high risk of falls. Nearly 80% of participants complete their allocated sessions, as compared to around 30% for other non-dance falls prevention courses.

OLDER PEOPLE

CASE STUDY

# Family (dys)Function

**Family (dys)Function was an intergenerational performance event designed and delivered by BirdGang Ltd with a cast of 30 local residents from diverse backgrounds.**

BirdGang Ltd, a local award-winning Hip Hop Theatre company, developed the programme in association with Dance Umbrella. It was performed 3 times in October 2023 to 234 audience members at the Stanley Arts venue in South Norwood.

Part of London Borough of Culture, the performance brought together residents ranging in age from 12-18 and 55+ through local organisations such as BME Forum, Beeja South Asian dance group, Savvy Theatre Company for disabled people, schools and care homes.

The performance was based on local stories of participants' collective experiences, and explored how powerful collaboration across generations and amongst those who don't often get to work together can be.

Developed and refined over a series of workshops and rehearsals, the show invited audiences into Aunt Jackies' living room (played by Stacia) to be taken on a family journey devised by participants through movement, spoken word and music.

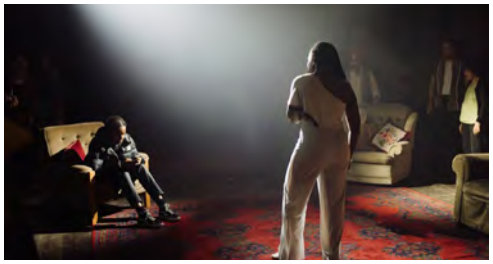
Participants found the experience extremely positive, reporting improved confidence as a result of performing, and feeling more energised and connected through cross-generational working.

DISABILITY

GLOBAL MAJORITY





















CASE STUDY

# Men's Sheds

**"Men like making & growing things, we are not good at talking about our feelings" – Good Food Matters volunteer/Shedder.**

Croydon Men's Shed was set up by Good Food Matters in New Addington & Fieldway, which has a high concentration of isolated older people. Men's Sheds is a community-based initiative that tackles issues related to men's health, engaging those who are less inclined to access health services.

While all are welcome, men aged 45 years and over are the priority group, and the Shed offers a communal space to come together and engage in meaningful social and recreational activities.

From cooking, gardening and building, to informal learning, participants access social support, information and advice, as well as share their skills, experience and knowledge, and relay concerns in a relaxed environment.

A number of men accessing the service report low-level mental health conditions, feel isolated and lonely, have expressed risk factors for suicide, or need respite from caring responsibilities.

Through the initiative, they regularly engage in conversations about health topics such as diet, and create relationships with peers and volunteers.

INEQUALITIES

ADULTS

CASE STUDY

# New Addington Creative Writing Group

**The New Addington Creative Writing Group supports residents to write freely and without judgment, and to experiment with different forms and approaches.**

Set up by local resident Maureen Lishomwa to tackle the lack of mental health or creative activity provision in the area, the group brings the arts to people who are isolated or experiencing deprivation.

As part of the Croydon Loves You summer 2024 grant programme, the group ran a series of 10 sessions at New Addington Family Centre inviting external facilitators to lead workshops on a range of topics including finding beauty in everyday life through poetry, Black identity, family issues, loneliness, domestic violence and more.

A total of 132 attendees took part, with some participating regularly and others attending specific events.

Participants benefitted from attending the group with the organiser citing reduced isolation, increased confidence and the fostering of close bonds between attendees, while also inspiring some members to attend further self-development activities.

One participant went on to perform their poetry at several community meetings and open mic sessions, while another started a business creating and selling original mosaics.







INEQUALITIES

ADULTS







CASE STUDY

# Norbury Stories

**Led by Norbury Village Green Residents Association with support from Norbury Library, Knitting Norbury Together and Love Norbury, Norbury Stories brought together local residents from diverse backgrounds to engage in creative writing.**

The project, funded by Croydon Council's Croydon Loves You grants, began in February 2024 with two months of workshops supporting 10 local participants experiencing different forms of health inequalities to develop play-writing skills. Working with professional tutors, participants devised short scenes inspired by the library's archive images creating a site-specific play performed by professional actors.

A one-day festival in September 2024 engaged 86 further residents, including a reprise performance of original participants' play, as well as Q&A sessions, play- and creative writing taster sessions, children's storytelling workshops and art activities.

Feedback confirmed the events brought together a broad range of residents who found events welcoming and inspiring. Over 95% of respondents who took part in the festival agreed it supported them to feel connected to their community, learn something new and take notice: all key indicators in the World Health Organisation's Five Ways to Wellbeing.

INEQUALITIES

ADULTS

CASE STUDY

# Our Croydon

**Creating a treasure trove of memories for future generations, the Our Croydon project invited residents of African and Caribbean heritage to create their own archival records.**

Encouraging everyone to see themselves as a "unique collection of memories, personal stories, hopes and dreams for the future", the project, led by Talawa Theatre Company, weaved together stories of locals from past and present.

During November and December 2023, histories were exhibited through photography, text, film, performance and audio. Events included a talk and theatre workshop and a screening of Our Croydon's Legacy film.

Throughout the project, community members and commissioned artists celebrated the diversity, resilience and creativity of the borough, while defining what shared heritage and personal legacy meant to them.

Though not a political project, the complex politics of race, space, gentrification and class came up many times.

Overall, 196 people participated, including 126 youths, with the audience totalling 3,793 over the project's duration. Feedback was very positive with 100% saying they felt welcome and included and 90% saying they felt connected to people in the community as a result of taking part.









ADULTS

GLOBAL MAJORITY

CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE













CASE STUDY

# Rhyme Time

**As part of Croydon Libraries' Universal Offer, every branch in Croydon offers at least one Rhyme Time session each week for children aged 0-5 and their parents.**

A national initiative, Rhyme Time sessions involve library staff leading families in fun singing, rhymes, stories and movement activities.

Rhyme Time sessions have been shown to support the development of children's speech and language skills through introducing new words and speech rhythms in age-appropriate ways. Children are also able to socialise with their parents, other children and group leaders, developing skills such as listening, taking turns and communicating.

Gentle activities also develop children's motor skills and coordination such as learning when to clap and matching movements to words and sounds.

Importantly, Croydon attendees report enjoying the social nature of Rhyme Time sessions, allowing them to meet other local parents and socialise, contributing to feelings of belonging and reducing isolation.

Between April and December 2024, more than 12,000 attendances at Rhyme Time sessions across Croydon demonstrate Rhyme Time's important position in the local early years community.

ADULTS

EARLY YEARS

CASE STUDY

# Risking It All

**In March 2025, 2Engage theatre company visited Croydon to deliver Risking It All, an interactive theatre production exploring the risks of vaping, illegal substances and criminal activity with Year 8 and 9 students.**

Part of Trading Standard's work to keep illicit items out of the hands of young people, a four-day tour to 7 secondary schools reached more than 900 students.

The performance featured a script based on lived experiences of real teenagers, tailored to the Croydon context through input from local young people, police officers, the Youth Justice Service and Safeguarding team.

During sessions, actors and facilitators engaged students in discussions about the risks involved in unsafe behaviours, how to spot signs of exploitation, and the real-life consequences of characters' choices.

Feedback from students showed that nearly 90% increased knowledge about criminal exploitation and grooming, while 80% learned more about the health impacts of vaping.

CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE


















CASE STUDY

# SoDaDa

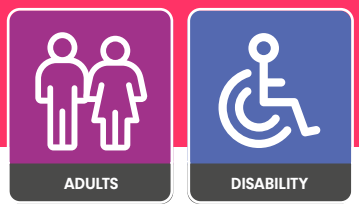
**Hosted by SLiDE in collaboration with fellow learning disabled-led arts partners Turf Projects and Club Soda, SoDaDa #6 was an inclusive cabaret club night held at Fairfield Halls in September 2024. Supported by a Croydon Loves You grant, the 'solar system'-themed event was co-produced with and hosted by adults with learning disabilities.**

The evening's performers included singer-songwriters, performance artists, an electronic music producer and a commissioned cabaret piece, all performing against the backdrop of space-themed visual art wall projections and a hanging solar system installation created by participants.

Other opportunities included themed headdress activities, a 'freestyle frenzy' and a costume catwalk. A quiet 'Space Out' zone proved popular with attendees, with a space photo booth also on site.

Overall, 85 people attended, alongside 13 organisational staff, 10 co-producers and stewards, and 2 further volunteers.

Of 23 participants surveyed, the majority said the event enabled them to hang out with friends, learn something new, feel more active, contribute to their community and enjoy themselves, indicating important positive impacts on wellbeing.



CASE STUDY

# Steel Band

**Knowledge and Practice (KAP) was established in 2017 to support disadvantaged people to achieve brighter futures. KAP aims to enhance the quality of life of local residents, including through supporting elders with a safe space to exercise where they can learn about healthy living and combat loneliness, and activities to support the social wellbeing and confidence of people with learning disabilities and autism.**

In August 2024 KAP partnered with Croydon Mencap to run a five-week Steel Pan Course for People with Learning Disabilities as part of the Croydon Loves You grant programme. Led by Jay from Panashsteel and including Afrobeat music by 2ualay, the musical activities were complimented by West African dishes prepared by Halit Kitchen Purley and Trinidadian food prepared by Chef Elizabeth.

The 5-week course had more than 150 attendances, with participants encouraged to try something new and interact with local artists in a safe space. A graduation ceremony attended by the Deputy Mayor of Croydon instilled pride in participants, who were able to build their confidence, socialise, be active and learn new skills because of taking part.

ADULTS

DISABILITY









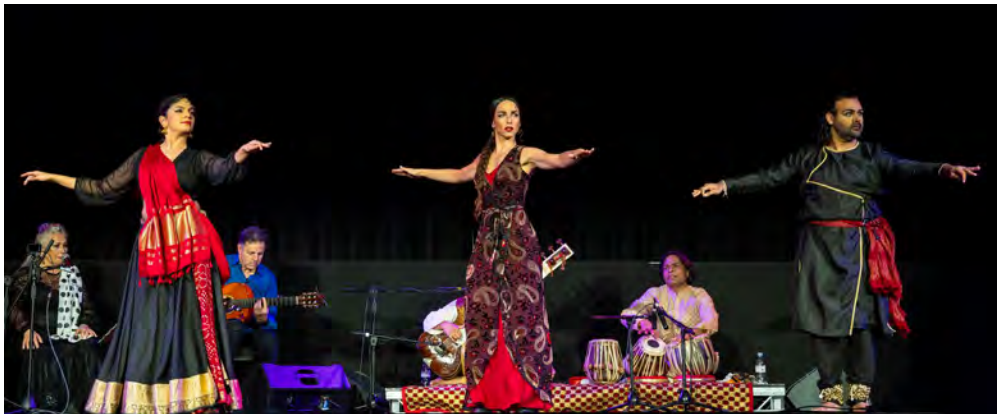












CASE STUDY

# Subrang Arts

**South Asian arts organisation Subrang Arts launched Kalesatu – a project fostering and strengthening cultural connections for South-East Asian communities through the arts – in 2022 in collaboration with creative design company Kinetika and artistic director Ali Pretty.**

Funded by Arts Council England, the project worked with pupils from Norbury High School for Girls to explore the cultural expressions of the Indian diaspora. This included arts, crafts, music, dance, festivals and significant locations in the borough. Their research inspired the creation of 25 silk flags and 25 silk scarves reflecting the Indian diaspora using the UNESCO-recognised heritage technique of Batik silk painting.

Flags were showcased at This is Croydon's events, including Croydon Mela, Croydon Carnival and other venues throughout 2023. Local choreographer Anusha Subramanium and her Beeja Dance Company performers used silk scarves in dance workshops and performances in the area.

Evaluation findings show the project had a positive impact on its aim of combatting South-East Asian communities' risk of social isolation. There was improved socialisation reported especially among the elderly, while also helping to bring families together, and improve overall mood and wellbeing.

GLOBAL MAJORITY

OLDER PEOPLE

CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

# Croydon Snapshot:
## The Local Creative Health Landscape

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## Give us your feedback

Do let me know your comments on the report, either by emailing me at **jack.bedeman@croydon.gov.uk**

or by post to: Croydon Council, Public Health,
Assistant Chief Executive Directorate,
Bernard Weatherill House, Floor 3, Zone E,
8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA.