

Arts Network Archive Workshop & World Mental Health Day Event

In collaboration with the Young Foundation and Arts Network



PROJECT SUMMARY

This project took place in collaboration with KCL, The Young Foundation and Arts Network, a Lewisham-based arts mental health charity. They provide workshops, materials, studio spaces, and other resources to local people experiencing severe mental health conditions. Arts Network is entirely member led and accepts new members through referral from various mental health services. The project was multi-phase and incorporated a prior unfinished project that Arts Network had been looking to advance.

A lot of ground was covered given the budget available and saw the project expand into two workshops; the construction of a bench designed by Arts Network at a community green space called Wildcat Wilderness in Catford; a community event at the site on World Mental Health Day; and the filming of a short documentary about Arts Network which was filmed while the project was running. The major themes explored by the project were the concepts of identity and legacy. These provided the throughline which linked these activities together.

AN Legacy Project: Drawing Workshops

To celebrate Arts Network's rich history join us as we explore our archive and create visual mementos to honor our past.

Have a chance to try out digital drawing and procreate on our new ipad!

We will take inspiration from our history and stories from Arts Network members new and old, to create visual mementos using traditional and digital drawing methods.

These designs will be painted onto plant pots filled with resilient plants which will be displayed in our garden as well as at Wildcat Wilderness next to our completed mosaic bench.

Special guests!

Kings College

We're excited to be joined by Kings College students with a background in archiving who will give us an insight into this world.

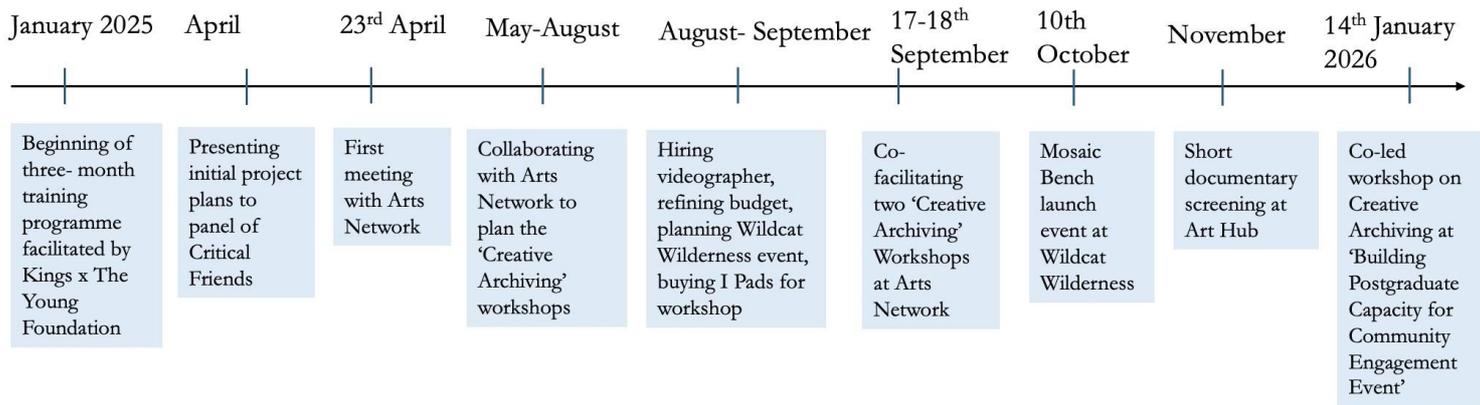
Wednesday 17th
&
Thursday 18th
September

11am - 1pm

Please note: Filming and photography will be taking place during these workshops to document this exciting project.



Undisciplined Spaces x Arts Network Project Timeline 2025



ROAD TO THE PROJECT

Following a training programme led by the Young Foundation, our group explored interests and skills that connected us as researchers. Given our shared background in the humanities, we found interconnecting threads around questions of testimony and life stories, social history, spatial memory, social movements and health. We also identified a number of wider creative skills and interests that were useful for project management and organisation in general such as experience in photography, fine art, poetry, music, creative writing, interviewing and recording oral histories and experience in creating and leading community groups and events.

After conducting research on Arts Network but before formally meeting with them, we initially explored several potential themes to solidify the project, one of which was the concept of 'flow' or 'flow states', as this notion was prominently discussed on their various channels. We then workshopped these ideas across a range of potential artistic approaches and mediums. After having met with Arts Network, the core theme that slowly emerged from discussions were notions of institutional identity and legacy. This came predominantly from two sources. One was the approach of their 30-year anniversary in 2026. The other came from the fact that Arts Network had recently found itself in a period of transition, brought about by the retirement of their founding member coupled with a recent move to a new location in Lewisham. Due to these factors, it was decided to focus in on Arts Network's archival collections, which are in the early stages of rationalization and organization, as a resource to explore the project's themes.

Further elements drawn in included a stalled project between Arts Network and Wildcat Wilderness—a community green space in Catford—to construct a seating area which incorporated mosaic designs by Arts Network members. They also expressed interest in the production of a short promotional film which would document the entire project while also speaking to their legacy. For this purpose, a filmmaker was also brought into the project.

The core of the project was the creation of artworks in response to items from Arts Network's archives. To facilitate this a tablet was purchased along with suitable software so archival items could be digitally traced and utilized in creating artworks. The rest of the Undisciplined Spaces budget was split between the final materials needed to complete the bench at Wildcat Wilderness; several planters to be decorated and gifted alongside the bench; the filmmaker's fee, and other sundry expenses.



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

There is strong scholarly precedent for deploying these methodological approaches to history and working with community groups (Murphy, 2020). Our own expertise informed the collaborative approach we took with the Arts Network to realize their vision for this project. The charity had expressed a desire to reflect on its history and acknowledge the legacy of the work of members and staff. Hence, we approached the project with an onus on the value of subjectivity in creative archiving practices, and history and memory as a scholarly discipline. Historical memories can be tied to locations, people, events, and artwork, which record and transmit both individual and collective memory of cultural heritage (Sleight, 2018 & Green, 2004). They are also bound to shifting perceptions of gender, race, religion, society, politics and class, requiring an inclusive and intersectional approach to source material beyond academic texts (Summerfield, 1998).

As part of this approach to the past, it is vital to draw on a variety of source material, with artwork, oral testimonies, performance, documentaries and written sources. We took this approach seriously, electing to hold a workshop celebrating artwork, photography, posters and leaflets as historical sources, but also providing the space and support for the creation of new artwork which responded directly to the archives. We also collected oral and visual testimonies, or 'life stories', from members and staff, responding to the question: 'What does Arts Network mean to you?' This question, and the activities carried out for legacy-building, were formulated in collaboration with the Arts Network. These approaches brought to the fore the histories of groups and individual social actors committed to social change, as well as acknowledging the fluidity, intentionality and agency-building nature of personal testimonies (Abrams, 2016).

WHAT HAPPENED?

The project took place over two workshops and two community events. The workshops were focused on creating artworks in response to items from Arts Network's archive. These were then transferred, in mosaic form, onto the finished bench as well as utilized as decoration for the gifted planters. To facilitate these workshops, the Undisciplined Spaces group conducted presentations based around creative approaches to the concept of archiving, working creatively with archives and how archives cement wider institutional identity. During these sessions, interviews for the short film were conducted with consenting members, who were guided in their answers by the broad overarching question: 'What does Arts Network mean to you?'. These interviews and all filming were conducted in line with Arts Network's internal policies regarding consent in relation to being filmed or photographed.

The workshops culminated in two events. The first of these was at Wildcat Wilderness and took the form of a community day event which saw the unveiling of the completed bench. Members of Wildcat Wilderness provided a few outdoor activities alongside the unveiling and refreshments were also provided. The event was attended by both members of the public and various stakeholders, trustees and funders of both Arts Network and Wildcat Wilderness. The KCL press team also attended to document the event. The second was a screening of the completed short film, *Shared Ground*. This took place as part of a wider exhibition held at Arts Hub in Lewisham—Arts Network’s current headquarters—titled Shared Ground: Collective projects.



As Arts Network is a member-led organization, we were highly attuned to working with members of the community in our testimony-gathering approaches. Each participant of the creative archiving workshop (whether member, staff or student) was informed on the nature of the project by the Arts Network, and were provided with a consent form in order to be visually and/or orally captured by our photographer and videographer. Arts Network and ourselves took care to ensure that those who did not wish to be captured on camera were provided privacy through their seating locations within the space, facilitated by an in-depth discussion between Arts Network staff and the videographer during the workshop to ensure individual members’ rights to privacy.



The consent form allowed members to choose how they wished to be represented in captured content, including options such as appearing in video or photographs without their face visible, and to withdraw consent prior to publication. This reflected the strong duty of care exercised by the Arts Network. Ahead of the event, the organisation shared its consent form and photography guidelines with the research team to ensure all parties understood expected conduct. These guidelines were also read aloud at the start of the workshop so that all members were informed of their rights within the space.

We asked documentary participants an open-ended question, ‘What does the Arts Network mean to you?’, to allow individuals to frame their own narratives and share only what they felt comfortable disclosing (Knott et al., 2022). This approach aligned with Portelli’s argument against extracting data from participants, instead prioritising authentic knowledge exchange (Portelli, 2017), while also acknowledging our position as non-members of the Arts Network. Following Yow’s emphasis on interview settings as indicators of care and trust (Yow, 2018), filming took place in a room adjacent to the main workshop. This provided greater privacy and improved audio quality, while allowing participants to move freely between the workshop and interview space within a familiar environment.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Throughout this project, we learnt as a team the value of sustained collaboration over an extended period with community partners. Working closely with Arts Network for more than 9 months as part of this programme, we were able to get a glimpse into how smaller charities such as Arts Network collaborate and draw on the resources of other community groups and charities, such as Art Hub and Wild Cat Wilderness. This collaboration is so their work can reach more people, but also a necessary method to remain adaptable and resilient in an increasingly challenging funding landscape. As a group we were deeply moved listening to the testimonies of community members and staff, and recognized what an immense privilege it was to hear the life stories of many people we had just met, and the central role Arts Network has played in their lives.

Arts Network reflected on this further as part of our presentation and workshop on 14th January 2026, reinforcing that the work their charity does keeps people safe, keeps people in recovery and is integral to their community. This project and the reflections of the service users during the workshops also highlights the importance of lived experience as a method of knowledge making about mental health and creativity, and the impact that can be created when researchers and local communities work together. A PhD can be a very isolating experience, and to work with one another and Arts Network community guided us all to reframe our academic work and search for more collaborative opportunities.

GOING FORWARD

The experience of being part of the Undisciplined spaces programme and working with Arts Network has inspired us as a group to continue prioritizing co-production research and impact work in our academic journey. We hope to collaborate as a group in the future on other topics we are all passionate about, building on the skills we have developed throughout this year. We hope to work with community partners in our own networks, and will seek out funding for future projects. We plan to co-author a reflective essay discussing our experience working alongside Arts Network, and will continue to advocate for academia to respond to the views and perspectives of community partners over time.

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