

Appendix 8: Cultural and Creative programme

Manchester Libraries are a vital part of the city's cultural and creative infrastructure, often providing access to residents' first cultural experience. Libraries are the most visited cultural venue in the city. The Central Library cultural programme, Library Live, is complemented by activities across all libraries, including three libraries badged as Creative Spaces – North City, Longsight and Wythenshawe Forum. The cultural and creative programme has been developed through several successful Arts Council England funding grants, establishing strong relationships with the city's creative and cultural organisations and community groups and supporting library staff's skills and confidence in programming creative events.

Alongside the busy events calendar delivered by library staff, such as cultural festival days, Sunday Fundays, school holiday crafting, Holiday Activity Fund sessions, weekly storytimes, author events, age friendly groups etc, the cultural programme provides access to other high quality creative experiences and opportunities on residents' doorsteps, as well as an introduction to the citywide offer. The cultural programme is delivered in partnership with the city's cultural organisations and artists, supported and informed by library staff.

The Creative Space opened on the first floor of Wythenshawe Forum Library, launched last October, is proving to be popular with regular youth music, youth theatre, cinema and podcasting/broadcasting sessions, as well as school-based learning engagements, community workshops, and arts-led wellbeing initiatives.

Work at space has been recognised two awards programmes in 2025. In June, against fierce competition from 100 other library services throughout the UK, Manchester won the Culture and Creativity category at the prestigious Libraries Connected Award. Libraries Connected said that the Creative Space *"is already a thriving, youth focused venue bringing cultural and creative opportunities to people's doorsteps"*.

Then in November Wythenshawe Live Night took home the trophy for Best Event at the Manchester Culture Awards. The event was a sold-out showcase for 30 young performers to an audience of 120 at the Creative Space. It was the culmination of a youth-led music programme by Brighter Sound with local partners, Music Evermore, and others. The event highlighted music's power to build confidence, identity and community, while laying foundations for a lasting local music offer as both brighter Sound and Music Evermore continue delivery in the space and Wythenshawe.



Highlights of the cultural programme: February 2025 – January 2026

Fun Palaces

Fun Palaces is a national initiative – free events made by local people for their own community. At Fun Palaces people come together to share their skills, passions and interests, and to show the world just how brilliant and packed full of genius their community is!



Longsight Library Fun Palace

At Longsight Library's Fun Palace on the first Saturday of October the library's partners and friends were extremely generous with their time and creativity to engage families, young people and others.

People tried out simple and beautiful Tai Chi moves and learnt how to write Chinese calligraphy using brushes with Dragon Voice.

Such a nice lady. My child was really impressed by seeing his name in Chinese. Great work for community.

The Family Volunteer Club helped participants make friendship bracelets as gifts for people experiencing homelessness, while artist Emma Martin of Building Bridges, the Whitworth Art Gallery and Olympias Music Foundation all also contributed with arts, zine and music making activities and Joseph Ayavoro, a sculptor, from Creative Hands Foundation made paper people sculptures wearing tradition Yoruba dress.

My son enjoyed this activity. It is interesting to learn about other cultures through this type of activity.

There was science too – with the National Institute for Health & Care Research bringing their human torso jigsaw model, in which children had to work out where the different organs of the body should go.

North City Library Fun Palace

At North City, alongside 3-D craft activities, the fabulously exciting Love Science ran fizzy, magical experiments and slime making workshops, as well as opportunities to try out mini yoga, podcasting , create Lego sculptures and plant daffodil bulbs to take home ready to see it grow and bloom in the spring!

Afrocats, a charity working to address and dismantle inequality, ran an inspiring collage activity that linked to their exhibition, 'Building Stronger Communities Together', which was on display in the library at the same time (see below for further information.)

Exhibition Presented by Afrocats at North City Library



The Afrocats 'Building Stronger Communities Together' Exhibition was a celebration of communities in North Manchester, using creativity to create conversation and draw attention to the unique attributes that make up different communities in the area.

Over three months, Afrocats worked with organisations, including, Broadoake Court, No 93, Al Hilal Regen, Simpson Memorial Hall, Artree, A Pedra De Siao, ESOL in Abraham Moss and Sick Festival. Participants created artwork under the theme of community and shared similarities using paint, ceramics and mixed media with the help of artist facilitators.

The project showcased the spirit of North Manchester communities and shone a light on the diverse creative talent and voices that live within it. Afrocats held an exhibition launch and film screening on Monday 22 September which was well attended with upwards of 50 attendees overall.

Manchester's Cultural Strategy Pillar – Everything

In Manchester's Cultural Strategy, *Always, Everywhere*, the second pillar – *Everything* – is a commitment to recognise much more of everyday Mancunian cultural life and make sure culture really does connect with the issues that matter to people. Our libraries are central to this ambition, providing space and resources for residents to explore and share their own artistic skills and creative ideas, either in self-guided groups or with support from libraries Delivery Assistants. Here are some examples.

Miles Platting Community Library



Following two of the local children expressing interest a staff member's childhood puppet collection, he brought them in and they all built a paper mache theatre using cardboard, buttons and lots of PVA glue. A great introduction to a theatre stage.

The library houses six donated sewing machines, all in full working order, which are often brought out for our customers to brush up on their sewing skills.

Moss Side Powerhouse

Children attending the library's Thursday craft club make fantastic decorations for display. Working with library staff the focus is on re- and upcycling because you can make art out of basically any everyday object, even if it is "rubbish".

Hulme



At Hulme library 2025's International Women's Day was celebrated with a cakes and refreshments Coffee Morning and a Mindful Craft session with Origami Cranes and Card-making.

Crafters celebrate the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025



Rugby Football Union put out a call for help to engage local crocheting and knitting groups in the host cities of the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025. They were challenged to make rugby balls, red roses and red and white bunting from yarn to be displayed in libraries and galleries for the duration of the tournament.

Supported by Delivery Assistant, Anna Putek, the successful monthly Crochet and Chat Club at Manchester Central Library and libraries all over Manchester, with many knitting and crocheting groups got. It's estimated that Manchester crocheters and knitters volunteered over 1000 hours and used up the equivalent of nearly 2 miles of wool for this yarnbombing project. There were beautiful displays of the work on the lower ground floor of Manchester Central Library and at other libraries, including The Avenue, where the Blackley Craft and Crochet Group had got involved.

Festival of Libraries 2025 Highlights

Returning for its fifth year, and winner of Best Event at the Manchester Culture Awards in 2024, Festival of Libraries, in partnership with Manchester City of Literature, is the biggest festival of its type in the country, bringing programming to all 133 of Greater Manchester's libraries. the festival is filled with exhibitions, performances, installations, workshops, Family Friendly activities and international collaborations. It is made possible thanks to the support of Arts Council England.

Manchester contributed a range of events to the festival at Central and neighbourhood libraries, including:

Central Library hosted Guy Garvey, Mercury Prize-winning frontman of Elbow and Shaun Keaveny, long-time BBC 6 Music broadcaster in thought-provoking conversation event exploring themes of community, creativity, working-class identity, music, memory, radio, and the role that places like libraries play in shaping our cultural lives.

At Gorton library, Reform Radio ran an exciting, interactive DJ workshop providing hands on experience on the decks and insights into the ins and outs of DJ life and at Chorlton library there was an informative event for writers, exploring the process of editing a group anthology.

Forum, Gorton and North City libraries, as well as regular library partner, Z-arts all held Fun Days of creative activities and entertainment for all ages.

The event reinforced my view of Manchester as a community-centred city
-festival participant

More information can be found on Manchester City Of Literature's Youth Tube channel (<https://youtu.be/6l3Lp354DnU>)

Manchester Creativity in Place

Libraries are an essential partner in the Manchester Creativity in Place programme, funded by Arts Council England. The programme is delivering activity to increase access to cultural opportunities locally in north Manchester and Wythenshawe.

We developed a partnership with International Music Making, an established charity keen to develop activity in the north of Manchester.

The programme delivered 11 pop-up events at The Avenue, Newton Heath, and North City and Abraham Moss Libraries. The events offered inclusive activities such as songwriting, group singing, drumming and creative conversations. Participants were encouraged to celebrate culture and heritage through storytelling, oral history, and opportunities for building connections across generations.

"My child didn't want to leave; he loved playing the ukulele so much. We really enjoyed the session!" - parent

"a community is a group of people who share common goals." - lyric from song devised by a group

Library staff also supported some participants of library groups to attend a national culmination event – Access All Ages - at the Bridgewater Hall organised by Intergenerational Music Making and Intergenerational England. The event brought

together people of all ages, backgrounds, and sectors to experience the transformative power of music across generations.

The Creative Space at the Forum library partnered with Creativity in Place and Wythenshawe Community Housing Group to host a Cultural Community Connector event. 15 creative businesses and organisations came together to hear more about the Creative Space and Creativity in Place, as well as spending time networking and making connections

Zoe Williams

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