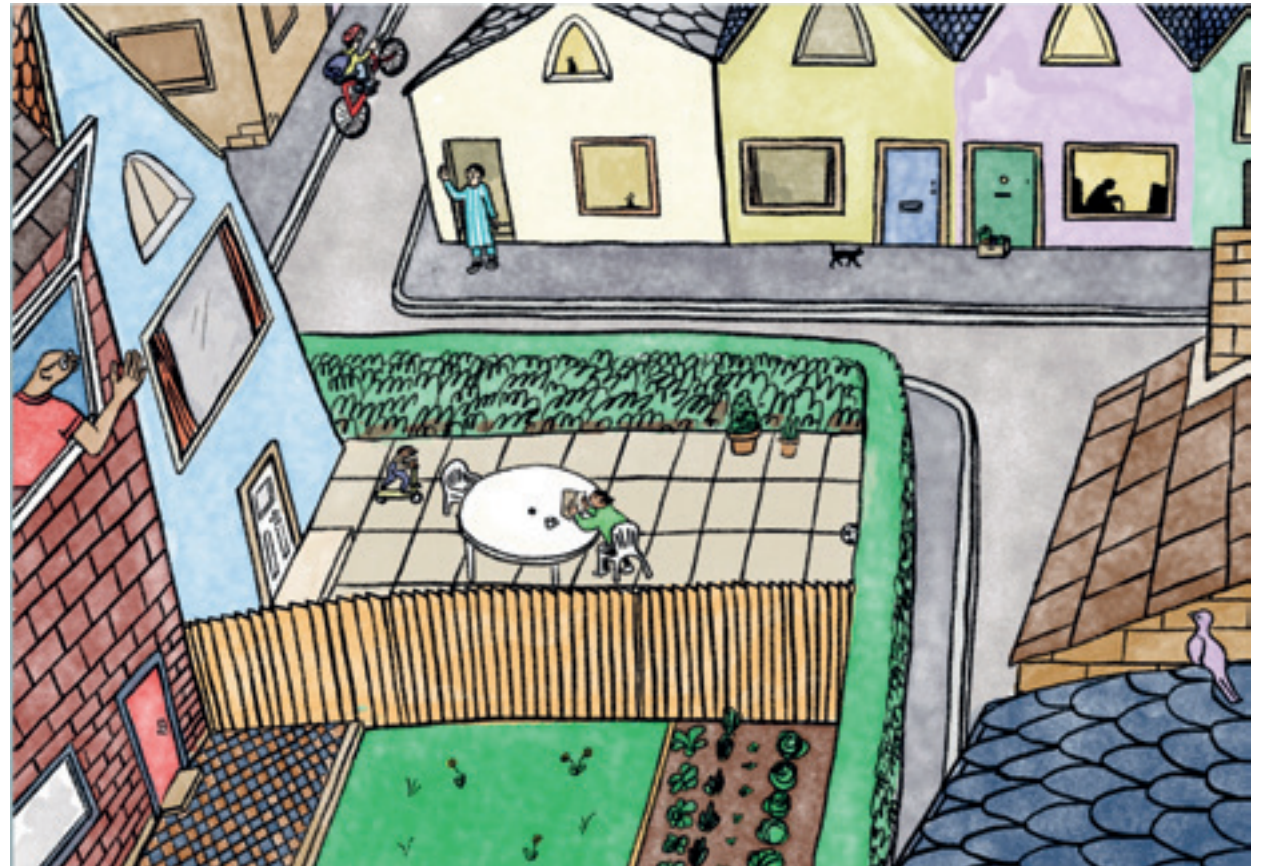


I'm thinking of you...

Case Study

'Being part of the I'm thinking of you was not only an absolute pleasure but provided an opportunity for me to feel in touch with my creativity and work with the most amazing people. It allowed me to address and express emotions I had been exposed to in lockdown and at the same time show people that it's okay to feel different and even better to express that which was a gift in itself.'

Poppy, 15



I'm thinking of you (ITOY) was a twelve week project launched at the start of lockdown in April 2020. Funded by Arts Council Wales, ITOY aimed to:

- Support the mental health and wellbeing of families during Covid-19 lockdown
 - Offer connection and comfort during lockdown
 - Address social isolation and loneliness during the Covid-19 lockdown
-

Summary Outputs

- 61 artists' postcards commissioned
 - Postcards shared daily over 12 weeks via social media platforms.
-

Project Need

Initial feedback from professionals working directly with CYP and families indicated that the repercussions of the lockdown were significant ranging from losing your job to concerns over whether you have enough food, to not being able to see family and friends or being able to go to school, worrying about your loved ones, to increased vulnerability to poverty and poor mental health.

Families and Therapies (ABUHB) teams were having conversations about young people's mental health and well-being, and were concerned about how to create opportunities for children, adolescents and families to 'remember they are human and to be connected to others during these difficult times.'

However, difficulties about how to reach people who might be struggling were arising as normal ways of working with individuals through existing networks including face to face contact stopped.

At the same time, professional artists' work was being postponed and cancelled for all the same reasons, leading to artists being worried for their livelihoods as well as their physical and mental health.

This initial feedback was being supported by the emerging and evolving UCL Covid-19 Survey <https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/> A UK Wide research survey conducted by Dr Daisy Fancourt, UCL aiming to track peoples' mental health and wellbeing throughout the pandemic. Final results are still to be published, but ongoing weekly results available including how lack of connection with others has affected feelings of loneliness and isolation. **The no of participants in the UCL social study from Wales was 60,493 11.4%**

Participants

- Children, young people and families experiencing the effects of COVID-19 and lockdown in ABUHB area via social media:
 - Young people suffering from isolation and the loss of key milestones
 - Parents suffering from stress and anxiety due to home-schooling, working at home, isolation
 - Young people who had previously engaged with Platform 4YP who have benefitted from support in the past and who have expressed an interest in the arts
 - Young people already participating with Newport Youth Council, G-Expressions, PEAK
 - Young people who were experiencing isolation and expressed an interest in expressing their feelings about lockdown
-

ITOY Outcomes

The artworks connected with a large number of people through social media. We don't know the specific impact of these connections – that is the nature of this project, that we had to trust that it was more important to share and offer connection than to demand that people engaged with us. But we do know that, as the project developed, there was a growing audience.

And the artworks generated a conversation about well-being, mental health, struggling, keeping the kids occupied, feeling overwhelmed and isolated, grief, shared neighbourhood spaces (eg streets and windows).

This conversation took place largely online; traces can be seen through people sharing, liking, viewing and commenting.

Through these online connections, people came forward and wanted to actively take part in the project – making their own responses, taking part in opportunities to make work with commissioned artists and to take part in curatorial decision making.

These commissions created avenues for people to connect with their feelings, their wellbeing and not-well-being, both as creators and audiences of artworks.

Artist Kathryn Ashill who created a postcard speaking to the experience of being a mother during lockdown commented 'My eldest has autism and the struggle we have keeping him out of the sea is a good likeness for the struggles of lockdown I think.'

The project drew on research conducted by Nicola Naismith 'Artists Practising Well' (2019) which recognises the positive power of the arts for participants as well as those delivering them.¹

Sarah Hamilton from Plattform 4YP said 'From my perspective I think it was a wonderful opportunity for the young people, that connected them with others. I think it was open and fluid which was easily accessible.'

While Aya a young person who collaborated to make a postcard with artist Deborah Aguirre Jones reflected 'The project is really interesting and it has a good, new way of communicating... It is exciting to know someone over the phone and then exchange ideas and expressing ourselves with art. I loved the valuable talks we had.'



Bringing together different curatorial standpoints, ITOY sparked conversations about how art reaches people. At times you could say there were two audiences: the art audience and the well-being audience, which could almost be split by artwork. And then some artworks bridge that gap or have multiple audiences.

Artist Rosemary Edwards said of her involvement 'Thanks very much for the commission I really enjoyed being part of it. Mental health and well being is always important and this project allows access to talking and thinking about it in different ways.'

As socially engaged artists and commissioners the team have developed a greater understanding of how to work and engage with people without being in the same physical space or through established networks, adapting and experimenting to working with social media and online workshops.

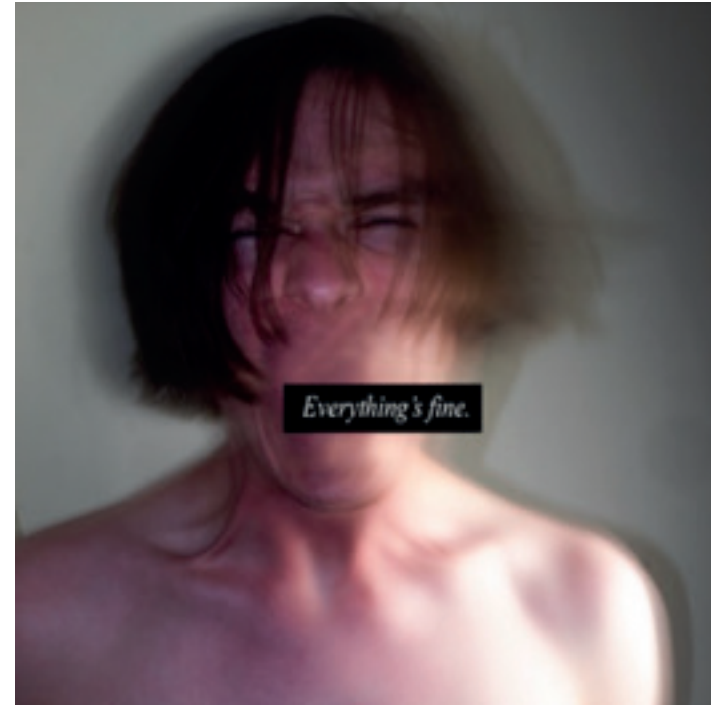
Gareth Clark from Mr & Mrs Clark said 'I've never run workshops online before – but let's give it a go – it's feels important to try.'

Evaluation

Although there has been no formal evaluation of ITOY, feedback has been gathered via social media platforms and the Engage Mid Wales Area Group meeting.

Questions emerging from young people who took part in the project reflecting on their experiences of lockdown include:

- What have you learned about yourself during lockdown?
- What TV shows have you watched over and over again?
- Did you break the rules at all?
- Have you managed to be more productive or did it slow you down?
- Did you change as a person at all?
- How has it altered your experience of looking at the sky?
- Have you been kind to yourself?
- How do you feel when you wake up?
- Are there any voice you've heard too much or too little?



What's made you sad?
Have you discovered anything new in your local area?
How have you managed to stay connected?
Have you fallen out with any friends or family?
Have you noticed the seasons changing?
What happens next?
Have you made any unnecessary purchases?
Who's checking in on you?
How often have you washed your hair?
Where do we go from here?
Do you think this will ever happen again?
Do you feel confident about the future?
Do you think some things will always stay changed?
How many phone calls have you made?
How much baking have you done?
Have you discovered a new hobby?
Do you feel guilty that you haven't done enough?

Sarah Goodey (Arts Development Manager, Garth & ABUHB) found the opportunity to work collaboratively on ITOY essential as it enabled her to contribute to a proactive project after cancelling or postponing all regular activities. An immense amount of active learning was necessary as the team formed and designed the delivery process remotely, not meeting in person until the last week of the project. She describes how 'The project enabled me to make posters featuring the artwork that were distributed to 'wobble rooms' and other front line staffing areas in our hospitals, sharing the 'I'm thinking of you' message.'

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Cost

The project cost £25,000. Artists were paid £250 for each artwork. Artworks made with young people included a number of sessions and cost more.

- Other costs:
- Social media management
- Project management
- Curation & liaising with artists
- In kind contributions from:
 - Garth – contracting, finance and commissioning
 - GG | CC – commissioning and collaborating with young people

Outputs

- 61 commissioned artworks
- 120,000 people have interacted with the project via social media
- A number of the Individual artworks watched over 10,000 times
- Primary Audience via social media were female aged 18 – 34
- 16 films
- 5 spoken word works
- 1 Animation
- 4 made in response to AM Lynne Neagle COVID-19 Superhero stories
- 3 young people participated in a weekly curatorial meeting
- 29 young people took part in co-creating finished artworks with professional artists:
 - 7 artists' workshops with groups of young people
 - 21 1:1 sessions between young people and artists

← Tweet

I really enjoyed finally meeting the @itoy_cymru team today, in person! Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to be involved with such a fantastic project and for the ice cream 😊 The new normal will take some getting used to!



Quality Indicators

- Initiated by and co-produced with Child Psychology Team (ABUHB)
- A diverse curatorial team including young people from Newport Youth Council, Liz Gregory head of Families and Therapies (ABUHB), Sarah Goodey (Garth), Deborah Aguirre Jones (GG | CC) and artists Becca + Clare.
- A rapid response to COVID-19 when many work strands with and for young people were coming to an abrupt end that didn't initially need young people's input – they could just enjoy it at a time when they were feeling overwhelmed and unable to participate or co-produce engagement.
- The project commissioned a diverse range of artists at different stages in their careers, using different artforms, from different backgrounds and paid recommended rates. This diversity of artists were able to reach different audiences.
- After some weeks the project developed, becoming able to incorporate and work with young people as and when they were ready: this included young people cocreating artworks with professional artists and forming part of the curatorial team.
- Artists were supported by the curatorial team where needed, at a time when many were struggling with their own experiences of the unfolding situation.

Supporters/funders

Young people from Newport Youth Council

Garth Gwent Arts in Health

Gofalu Grange | Caring Connections

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Platform 4YP

Peak Arts

Arts Council Wales

Lynne Neagle AM

Jayne Bryant AM

To find out more about the project visit

Instagram @imthinkingofyou_cymru

Facebook.com/imthinkingofyoucymru

Twitter @itoy_cymru

#imthinkingofyoucymru



Gofalu Grange
Caring Connections