**[SHORT CLIPS]**

**Helen Robertson:** *“A big part of the community feels that we've kind of sacrificed we’re land. And then at the same time, we’re electricity prices are going up. Current Westminster government has no, I mean they are kind of turning the screw. So it's really difficult to think about wellbeing in the kind of artsy sense when you're thinking that there’s folk who are freezing and some folk are starving.”*

**Imogen Stirling**: “*If by the end of your session, all you've achieved is a conversation, I think that's, you know, that's the goal. That's what people really require just now. And everything else that comes over and above that is wonderful.”*

**Lewis Hou:** *“You know, I've never met someone who's not cultural in some sense. Do you know, I mean, there's there's… And so I think we do have to be careful, like, are we talking about, you know, poor uncreative people, and therefore we need to do something or actually do we just mean they're not doing the creative things that we are valuing or that are funded by Creative Scotland or whoever it is?”*

**[END OF SHORT CLIPS]**

**Morvern Cunningham**: This is the Future Culture podcast. In 2021, the Culture Collective programme was created and established a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations, funded by Creative Scotland. Since then, they have embarked upon an event series entitled Starting Points, that explored pertinent themes to community-based art projects within the network. This podcast will explore what comes next! What does the future hold for creatives and their importance for communities across Scotland as we go forward?

In each Future Culture episode, we will consider different themes which mirror those of our initial Starting Points events. In this episode, Nourish, we focus on the subject of health and wellbeing.

This week we explore:

* How do we create a sustainable future invested in wellbeing?
* How do we see grassroots culture influencing greater change?
* How can cultural projects help language and communication to improve wellbeing in the future?

**Part 1: How do we create a sustainable future invested in wellbeing?**

**MC:** This week we kick off our journey in the far north of Scotland. The Creative Islands Network provides opportunities for creative practitioners in Lewis, Harris, Orkney, Shetland and North Uist to devise and deliver activities and workshops with people in their local communities.

Their focus is on working with vulnerable groups, including, older people and those living with dementia; those experiencing poor mental health; young people who may have missed out on educational and social experiences - as a result of Covid-19; and people who may be particularly isolated due to living alone or living in their outmost and rural communities and islands.

The project’s aim is to improve quality of life - by providing greater access to, and active engagement with, creative and social experiences. It also aims to connect creative practitioners across the islands to explore ways they can work together in a host of ways. It will serve as a national platform to promote the creative practitioners working, and the creative activity happening, in the Islands.

Two of those creative practitioners involved are Alex Purbrick and Helen Robertson.

Alex is a writer and artist who lives in the Shetland Islands and is working with another creative practitioner Jane Cockayne on the project *Wance apo a time* based in Yell and Whalsay. On the project, they will work intergenerationally between elder care centres and primary school age children - including with Sandness Primary School - to share folklore and stories and create new ones through written and visual arts.

Helen was born, bred and is based in Shetland also. Her creative practice focuses on a wealth of things including jewellery, knitting and design. Helen’s project *Glöril* will see her travelling to every inhabited island in Shetland – except the Mainland – to create work with communities. Together, Helen and workshop participants will explore lace knitting techniques using a variety of materials to create unique lampshades, and to enjoy connecting and making things together again after pandemic restrictions have kept people apart for so long.

As one of the most northerly locations in Scotland, we were keen to ask Alex and Helen how they felt we could create a sustainable future invested in wellbeing:

[CLIP] **Alex Purbrick: “***I've been thinking about this a lot, what is wellbeing and for me, wellbeing is always about being able to be creative, and whatever way that may be. And for some people, they might not think that they are creative. They might say I'm not creative. I've had quite a few responses from the elders saying, I don't write, I don’t draw. And it's trying to kind of break down those barriers and say: well, we're all creative and let's look at how wellbeing our emotions can be enhanced or supported through creative acts. From COVID as well which has isolated quite a lot of us and technology has isolated us I think it's brought us together in some ways but it's also isolated this communal coming together to create with your hands. Technology is great for us all being able to chat and I know that there have been online you know, creative workshops where people have made things and they're all communing online, which is great, I just think there's a such a great power really in people being able to come together in a room and being able to sense, use sensory things. I think the big thing of wellbeing is that we are sensory beings. I mean, I say that about the kids, you know, the whole time, that's it sensory is the way forward, it's incredibly important to have tactile stimulation and create through your hands. So whether it's knitting, whether it's painting, whether it's just putting a handprint on a piece of paper, it's engaging those sides of the brain with the body, which technology has kind of separated us, I think, from our bodies a wee bit. For me, I think it's about encouraging just free flow of creativity, a lot of the sessions that I that I do is more about, well, with the children, it's very much more child-led. So try not to tell them what to do as such. And with the elders as well, having a theme running through, it was kind of like, let's go with that and see what we can make from that. So we were writing haiku poems about giants. Then the next day, you know, I took in some clay, and they were given, I didn't tell them what to make, you know. And that really surprised me how some people made these amazing sculptures. And they said, I've never worked with clay before. And I said, Well, that's fantastic. No one, you know, we're not here to be Picasso, we're here just to create, and I think there needs to be a bit more of a movement towards adult free play. There's a big movement at the minute, I think, in education to get more child led free play. But it needs to be an adult and elders too, and elders, especially, especially in care home settings, they need to be able to express that inner child again, to me, that's what a more sustainable future is about is about encouraging those aspects. And that can filter through into all of our lives, you know, to mean into all aspects of our life. It's not about just going into a workshop and doing free flow, creativity, you could then apply it to your everyday life, I think not thinking that you have to be somebody with a degree or with a qualification in order to be creative. Sometimes you’re having to rewind these tapes in your head, but I think creative practitioners have that way that we can help others to rewind those tapes in our heads. I do think I do think it can happen. I do. I just think it takes time.”*

[CLIP] **Helen Robertson: *“****At the moment, I think, especially here in Shetland and in the north of Scotland, folk are really, their freezing, it’s a horrendous, we’re having a really bad, no a bad winter, we always have a bad one, ken. It's always cold, it was always dark, and it's always windy. And there's this threat hanging o’er them all. Like the fuel prices are rising, and particularly in Shetland, this is kinda hurting, I’ve kinda been on the fence about this, but they’re building massive windmills right on the middle, right in the center of the mainland right in the center a Shetland, and it just seems ironic that we've and a big, big part of the community feels that we've kind of sacrificed we’re land and then at the same time, we’re electricity prices are going up. Current Westminster government has no, I mean they are kind of turning the screw. So it's really difficult to think about wellbeing in the kind of artsy sense when you're thinking that there’s folk are freezing and some folk are starving. Yeah, I didnae have an answer really? Um, I don't know what the answer is to that. Really, I think. I think if you're looking at distribution of resources, then it's, it's good to get that resources as close to the communities as possible. And for me, what this Culture Collective programme did for me, and for my community, I suppose was that it meant that normally, I would not have been able to go into that places because the numbers are so low, and it's expensive to get there, then I have I mean, I have run craft classes in that areas before but I've always done it at a loss and that's not sustainable as a business. The beauty of this for me was that it was funded so I am funded to go and do this and the material, there was a materials budget, so that was included so that the participation. there was no cost, there was no financial cost involved to the participation. That would be important, I think for me, but yeah, I dinnae really ken. I think wellbeing, I wish I had an answer.”*

**MC:** Alex reminds us about how integral art was for many of us as children. There was no structure, but mass freedom and an appetite to explore as many strands of it as possible. Alex also highlights how important freeflow creativity is, especially for adults and elders. Wellbeing can be amplified by expressing our inner child again and creative practitioners can certainly be the timelord link to span this.

Helen’s honesty is completely refreshing. There can often be a lot of sugar coating when it comes to talking about communities and their struggles, but here she explains genuinely that wellbeing is affected dramatically by the lack of essential needs not being met. The irony of multi million pound energy sources being built on their land and the community struggling with costs is a lot to process. How can we talk about wellbeing when that in itself is being stripped away as people are not able to live or even survive comfortably? How can people even think about promoting creative endeavours in their life when they have so many other things to deal with??

And therefore our first provocation is If basic needs are not being met, how can we sustain wellbeing through culture?

**Part 2: How do we see grassroots culture influencing greater change?**

**MC:** We set off to the North East of Scotland and visit North East Culture Collective. NECC will provide an opportunity for organisations to explore and test new models of cultural engagement and participation, by delivering activities and new commissions, connecting and supporting practitioners, organisations and community groups to create a strategic and collaborative network of arts interventions across a variety of artforms.

Their priority is similar to that of the Creative Islands Network, in that they are looking to connect in meaningful ways with communities that remain isolated or disrupted due to the pandemic. They also want to navigate new ways to meet the challenges of participatory work and presenting work to audiences.

One of the words that consistently comes up within communities and, when exploring this journey through the Future Culture podcast is “grassroots”. By definition it’s the most basic level of an activity or organisation *OR* ordinary people regarded as the main body of an organisation’s membership. And this is key when talking about the communities we are searching creatively. The grassroots can be a catalyst for change but it can also be forgotten and not invested in enough based on a hierarchy in society of class, wealth and power. This is especially so when it comes to health and wellbeing and it can be often left to independents to self-start their own projects to help create change or support needs.

Lead Coordinator for North East Culture Collective, Stewart Aitken, is also a freelance actor, director, part of the Ten Feet Tall Theatre team in Aberdeen and Station House Media Unit. Stewart is able to see things on a macro-cosmic level being both coordinator and creative so we were interested to ask him how he sees grassroots culture influencing greater change…

[CLIP] **Stewart Aitken: *“****One of the things we've talked about a lot in the development stage and scoping stages, is what everyday culture is, how broad can the project go? And explore these kinds of everyday cultures, whether that's things like the Doric language, which is still used a lot up in the North East? Or is it the Gypsy Travelling Community, and their storytelling and how they share their cultural experiences between themselves and whether they're willing and wanting to share that and have a amplified voice? So I think it can do because it's the conversation we're having is about what’s a kind of broader culture is not just performance, or visual arts or, or the more traditional kind of ways of thinking about it. And so that is influencing our thinking, and what that relationship might look like, and then what other things we might be able to add to that's already there. Culture Collective is, in many ways, a big investment in grassroots and working with people. And fundamentally, the artists who are excited about working within a kinda more community setting, more naturally, I think, have an empathy with the work and the community that they’re engaging in and building a relationship with. Like many things, it's time, can we invest? I mean, two and a half years of the culture Collective is a long time for a project. And there should be some really interesting findings. But fundamentally, time as you know, more time is needed. And I think that's where the investment needs to go as people just been allowed to move at the rate they need to. So we're often pressurised within culture projects to start, and then deliver, because we've got finite time. And it's often to do with resources and funding, can we invest in in a small way in that ongoing engagement? So it's not just one project. It's an ongoing developmental, and things come off in spurs and little branches as we as we move in, and grow as partners, but it's easy to say, but that takes quite a leap of faith. And we're probably still in that kind of, even though people have been doing theatre and education work and been doing participatory arts work for many, many years. We're still in that kind of convincing people that this is valuable, as valuable as any other tool and any other way of helping communities give voice to feel valued, to play a part in in the local and more regional areas.”*

**MC:** Stewart highlights like many of our other contributors, the importance of investing in grassroots when it comes to time for projects. Perhaps not just short-lived projects but something that has a greater shelf life, much like Culture Collective is doing. He also mentioned looking at things on a broader outline and thinking about things like the Doric language and also our travelling communities. But how can this relate to health and wellbeing? We have to remember that many diverse communities make up Scotland and it’s vital that we look at the beating heart, histories and populations that make them up. By giving people access to remember their heritage, live it and pass it on generationally, then it gives people identity. That is fiercely important when it comes to wellbeing and it can be argued that if you take away someone’s identity, you are also deleting the many wonderful nuances that make this country up. Whilst that has a massive impact on health and wellbeing, it can also influence culture and can dilute ideas and approaches. It’s imperative that we nurture our roots.

We wanted to pose the same question to Heather Evans. Heather is also part of Station House Media Unit also known as SHMU *[pronounced schmoo]* along with Stewart in Aberdeen. She first joined the organisation to work on youth music projects and it’s grown from there. She has a passion for the Culture Aberdeen network to work together more and combine forces in order to make things more effective.

Here’s what she had to say…

[CLIP] **Heather Evans: *“****We're kind of looking to build and hold a space where we can where we can find that out together, where we don't have a strong advance sort of picture of what that will be. Or even what areas of culture might be involved might be most prominent in the programme, by the time we get to the other end of it.*

*It's certainly a challenge and change to the conversation in terms of plans for cultural organisations, plans for a network of cultural organisations. That I think is a really interesting shift. What will come up that I'm not sure, but that's part of what really, really excites me about this program. I think it's a really interesting and, in some ways, tricky area, when you get into wellbeing, which is often coupled with the term health, health and wellbeing. The level of the level of evidence needed for a health intervention is is what it is, and for and for funders in that sphere, evidence of a health improvement needs to be strong before they can take a particular course of action. So, I think there's something around finding the partnerships that allow us to find a common language and a common evidence base that means that partners with responsibility for health and wellbeing outcomes, as a primary driver can come on board more easily. And here's potential there to strengthen what we do in arts and culture as well, by learning from the different measurements that exist.*

*So yeah, there's yeah, there's something around the way we gather evidence, the way we make the case that I think can help in that sphere. But then there is also the challenge of wellbeing is such a subjective measurement. Anyway, I think that's part of the challenge locally, one of our earliest conversations was with the Aberdeen health and social care partnership with strategic managers that are involved in that. So we're hoping we can maybe learn something from how partners in health and wellbeing public sector and third sector are working together already to see if we can become part of that mix. We'll see. We'll see what we learn. We’ll see what successes and challenges we find on the way with that.”*

**MC:** Heather makes some really valuable points here, that have always posed a challenge in conversations not only within the context of our discussion on this podcast, but across sectors. Networks are vital to learning, evolving and development. It can often be the case that funding or policy is changed based on evidence but this can be a ‘Catch 22’ when there is no investment, time or risk when it comes to research. Heather’s excellent mention of common language and finding this to strengthen networks moving forward is something that is happening within Culture Collective projects across the country. Health and wellbeing, culture and business or policy can be all very separate areas so another provocation could be, how do we collaborate across multiple areas more successfully?

Two people who took part in our second Starting Points event based on Health and Wellbeing were Jo Hastie and Sally Thompson. Both are from Grampian Hospitals Art Trust which is an award-winning charity that exists to enhance the wellbeing of all who spend time in NHS Grampian or associated Health and Social Care facilities by providing access to quality arts experiences.

Jo is senior manager at Artroom - a patient-centred project facilitated by professional artists and writers. The ethos of Artroom is that every patient has the potential to be an artist and/or writer in their own right with its aim to contribute to the improvement of quality of life for patients in day unit and in-patient ward care.

Sally Thomson is CEO of Grampian Hospitals Art Trust and both Jo and Sally took part in the second Starting Points event Nourish. They spoke of their reflections following a life-changing period with the pandemic and brought some notable points to the table to take forward…

[CLIP] **Jo Hastie & Sally Thomson**

**Jo Hastie: *“****One of the things I learned from lockdown is you know, like you know, your health and wellbeing and culture they're all kind of intrinsic, you know, kind of one of the things that I used before you know, COVID was going to see live bands and live music and then obviously in lockdown you couldn't do that and I just felt like there was something massive missing from my life. And so you're kind of automatically looking for something else cultural to feed your spirit. So I think you know, all three are kind of vital to who you are as a person but also to how you feel about yourself and your happiness. And, and all of that is interlinked.*

*A lot of the medical staff weren't able to help us in the manner that they used to be. And so that kind of, in a way sort of pushed us outwards. And we were building in contacts with people that we didn't have contact with before, you know, like CPNs who were out in the community, and some of the kind of rural community hospitals. And so we will be distributing in our parks and getting people contact that way. Or we also got a donation of iPads, where the artist could set up Artroom online. And we were delivering in the wards through their visit and iPads as well or that when devices if it was one to one sessions, rather than a group session, then that worked really well. But then we were also acutely aware of the people that we were missing, who don't have that digital connection. And it was brilliant, because there was all this amazing stuff going on online, but not everybody's got access. And so, we ended up partnering with an organisation called Healthy Minds to get face to face sessions. And that was primarily working with people who would have been attending occupational therapists, and day units, which had all closed during the pandemic. So those people are the ones that really, really needed support and help the most, and they just weren't getting it because of places that they would have been to before we're closed to them. I mean, we've always kind of been in a world where we are bound by restrictions and red tape. So our kind of creative heads weren't too fazed. Because we're, you know, when you work in a hospital set, and you work around the most modern boundaries, and then we're, our job is to figure out how do we get around this? How do we do all these amazing things? The lockdown has been an extension of that. But it's also transformed the way the project runs, because we're now starting to develop a referral system, we’re involving not just the SCNs and you know, the auxiliaries and the people on the board, but would involving, you know, psychiatrists and psychologists and, you know, other stuff and pushing out into the wider community as well.”*

**Sally Thomson**: *“As Jo speaking, the thing that really resonated with me when she said there are people out there who are not getting access due to the virtual. And I think that is part of the recovery process of the next steps. It's been shown, through studies that there are people who were already marginalised, and the COVID situation has marginalised and even further, all of us have got will have stories of people we used to work with, who have disappeared into the hinterland somewhere. And it's how do we now develop our services, which makes sure that we can start to address those inequalities, there were inequalities to begin with, and then now are even I think those are more entrenched in certain sectors of our communities. How do we as culture collectives, support those thinking so they are governmental thinking they are institutional thinkings, but as you said, it's the people on the ground who the have that agility to know where those people not so much people where those groups are, where are those young people who used to come to sessions who, for want of a better word, become invisible, what has happened to the invisible become even more invisible, as how do GAT now start looking at those, those those elements of our of our services.”*

**MC:** The pandemic has shown that life, as we know it, can change instantly. From a health and culture perspective, the removal of in-person activities, care and engagement have had a dramatic effect for the worse on so many people in our communities. Jo’s recount of Artroom’s approaches and how they had to learn, adapt and repeat is what perhaps is one of the biggest barriers for any organisation. The resource, finance and people power it takes can sometimes come second when it comes to classically helping people to recover. This can create a sense of treading water or simply placing a plaster over a deep wound when in fact, it must be removed and different tactics attempted. As Sally says, there has to be a reimagination of things. The marginalisation of people, which is something we will speak about more in our next episode, has had a large magnifying glass placed over it as a result of the pandemic. Accessibility, poverty and other pertinent aspects have only been made worse, and now that we are hopefully starting to move to a ‘new normal’, we should consider how to address these things in cohesive and people-focused ways.

Culture for wellbeing is imperative. It improves quality of life, it creates confidence, makes people feel like they have achieved something and can also create the feeling that anything is possible. Communities have acted as microcosms during the pandemic, people have had to work in small bubbles to function, survive and support one another. This adaptation has also been reflected within the arts.

So perhaps our next provocation should be, regarding the recognition of the grassroots rising up to meet the challenges of the pandemic, what next?

**Part 3: How can cultural projects help language and communication to improve wellbeing in the future?**

**MC:** Our last stop of this particular Culture Collective tour is at the north of Glasgow and with WARD 17-based project Here We Are! This centres around the Springburn, Balornock, Barmulloch, Robroyston and Millerston areas and a quarter of the datazones in this area are among the 5% most deprived datazones in Scotland. Here We Are is being steered by Toonspeak which is a Glasgow-based youth theatre and arts organisation on a mission to transform lives through creativity, working with children and young people aged 0 – 25.

The Here We Are! programme will engage a creative team of eleven artists who are passionate about using the arts to empower communities who face the challenges of multiple deprivation, and who want to improve the lives of individuals. Artists are being trained and supported to see themselves as part of the community, and will capitalise on the expertise and knowledge of partners to develop a deep understanding of the social, cultural and historical landscape where the project takes place.

There are free workshops for all participants with a mixed artform programme involving children, young people, adults and older people. The artistic and creative work produced will form a celebratory, multi-faceted performance in Summer 2022 in Springburn park, for the entire community to enjoy.

Three of the artists working with the project are Philipa Tomlin, John Martin Fulton and Imogen Stirling.

Philipa is the lead artist on the project, she is a participatory artist working in theatre and visual arts as well as a mixture of artforms. John is an award-winning Scottish artist who trained at Glasgow School of Art and focuses, and is known, for his painting. He has worked for years bringing the joy of art to people in social care, and with children as well as adults with learning disabilities. And, Imogen is a performance poet, theatre-maker, musician, writer and facilitator who has worked extensively around the UK and Europe with partners including BBC Scotland, Neu! Reekie! and Aye Write!

Language is fundamental when it comes to communication and can take on various roles. Our native languages, the language we use when describing things, the language that is used to relay projects. It’s all intertwined and also helps us express our feelings and can lead to unique ideas.

With this in mind, we wanted to ask these 3 artists: how can cultural projects help language and communication to improve wellbeing in the future?

[CLIP] **Philipa Tomlin: *“****So one thing we've relied a lot on is our brilliant partners, the people who are running the groups have been absolutely fantastic in communicating with us, talking about either individual's needs or kind of talking about the group's in as a as a generalisation. So there's a group who specifically meet because they experienced difficulties with their mental health, I don't know all the background details, we're not privy to that information. But it does just mean that as artists, we're a little bit more aware, and we take care with that group, we also find time within the group to hear their stories, which I think is really important and to enable time and space, for conversation, as we're making our art. In terms of everything that we produce with the groups, we very much hope that everything is accessible, there's an eye on all of the artwork to see is this accessible? Where could it be? Our ambition, this that we will have an event and Springburn Park to celebrate the work already thinking that it will be outside so we know that that's a safer environment with regards COVID And it's also a very central point for Ward 17. And it's a place that everyone loves Springburn Park. So it's, it's an important place to come to and just share time together.”*

[CLIP] **John Martin Fulton: *“****Like for accessibility, that's like really quite integral to the thing. And it was probably in the design, you know, the whole remit a oor project has been accessibility because it's all about Ward 17 So it's, a Springburn, north area of Glasgow and the whole point is, for the arts to be accessible to these people, it basically has to be brought to them because it's so cut off like I live in Glasgow, myself, and the north of Glasgow is just this limb that you know, we've been learning about a bit why that's happened, the history and social reasons that's actually happened that it's really got off, it's difficult to travel to it's difficult to travel round this bit of Glasgow, it's just got really bad transport links and things like that. And then within that, you know, within our own, myself and the other artists we're all really, we all kind of share this ethos. It's like we're bringing out everybody's level, do you know what may in discussed with each other? And we've it all came out, but all like on the side of the participants, there's no way that we're like, oh, you know, “we're artists, and they must, you know, like, jump to our tune”, or whatever, it's absolutely, the participants are the most important. So it's like, how can we serve them? And that’s your main thing, the art has to be accessible. So whether it's like, it's what I always do, so it's probably hard to pinpoint but like I say the language thing, no, you know, also you're bringing all the material. So if there's there'll be money considerations, nobody has to buy anything.*

*Nobody has to have any literacy, because a lot of people you work with, you can’t assume that. You don't need to assume that people are in a good mental space, you just kind of work towards how the participants are. I don't worry too specific about my own practice, but say I would have you know like a painting workshops, so I would have like a painting exercise and mind, even though that I'll design that exercise, maximum accessibility for everybody, you know, it's really broken down into different stages that can be interpreted in different ways. Even though I've done it that way. There could be some people that may find it difficult to engage with that, you would have it really loose, you kind of want to serve everybody. So you'll be aware that some people won't talk, you won't lead through art making. And some people don't want led you know, if you have it in your head that you're there to serve everybody's, you know, what everybody needs out the group then that always kind of works.”*

[CLIP] **Imogen Stirling: *“****Accessibility is always a certain barrier that I come up with, particularly with spoken words, again, just because whichever group or community that you end up working with, there'll be that same variety of experience levels, there'll be adults who have never written since they were at school, and therefore think it's something that is not for them that they can't do. And also, particularly in Glasgow, I often find myself working with communities where English is not the first language. So you have this big barrier of vocabulary before you begin anything else. So I think what I found useful is just offering as many kind of varied tasks as possible towards kind of achieving the same goal. So whether that is some writing tasks, but then some visual tasks, some tasks where you're getting up on your feet, I think what I find most useful is just essentially like distilling everything down to communication, like that's what we're trying to, not even labeling something as overtly as you know, spoken word or writing it is just communication and expression. So asking people, how can they communicate most confidently? Would you rather speak your ideas aloud than then write them down? Would you rather draw those ideas, at the end of the day, everything is about confident expression. So it's just finding the best route to facilitate that for participants. It’s interesting seeing people come in with reservations, and really just having to win over trust. I think because I think just now people are, I mean, I think people are more vulnerable than they've been in a long time, which is a huge barrier when you're already working with groups who are vulnerable, there's actually just a fear of being in groups as well, just now, like it does still feel natural to be meeting face to face sometimes. And so it's just, it's really just taking things as, as slowly and gently as possible. And above all, like before you even get to the creative task or the, you know, the art that you're trying to introduce, just establishing a friendship, some kind of rapport. And you know, if by the end of your session, all you’ve achieved is a conversation, I think that's, you know, that's the goal. That's what people really require just now. And everything else that comes over and above that is wonderful. But if you can just have trust and companionship in these sessions, I think that's really a win.”*

**MC:** We all have our own inner dictionaries. Our personal meanings for things can differ from person to person, so the importance that is placed on language is immeasurable at times. The definition of art for example can be widely different to different people - however, if there was more common ground, could that lead to more people embracing art in all its different forms and leading to greater harmony within our wellbeing?

Philipa, John and Imogen’s conversations all centre around the word ‘trust’. As Philipa says, it’s about taking time to hear stories, there has to be time to develop relationships and let people open up in order to develop this trust. John comments on bringing things to people, this is instrumental in building trust and giving people the option to take part in something that doesn’t provide a disadvantage to them. And, Imogen used the phrase “confident expression” which is new language when delivering spoken-word or writing to people. It is a different way of positioning things. This can also tackle the vulnerabilities that Imogen mentions.

Based on this idea and the words from our three speakers, one of our last provocations is as follows: does our language around the arts need to be changed in order to engage more people who may think the arts and culture is not for them or does not include them?

**MC:** At the end of each episode I like to have a debrief with a guest to discuss the themes raised each week with someone who is connected directly to the episode theme. This week our guest is Lewis Hou - host of the Nourish Starting Points event, which you can view again via the Culture Collective YouTube channel and on our website.

Lewis is an advocate for equitable science, creative and cultural participation. One of Lewis’s many skills is that he was originally trained in neuroscience - his interest in which still informs his passion, around the growing evidence of the benefits of creativity to health and wellbeing, among other things.

Here, I catch up in conversation with Lewis about the provocations in this episode and take a look at the future.

**Part 4: Morvern Cunningham & Lewis Hou Discussing Provocations**

**Morvern Cunningham:** Right, I'll make you big. There you are, and I want to get on with our first question, which is, Lewis, how can creative practitioners flourish, gain trust and be safeguarded within their communities?

**Lewis Hou**: There's so many elements to that question that is easy to kind of start thinking about, but I think the first one that I always encourage practices to think about is who the positionality I guess, of them, you know, who are they and, you know, everyone is a member of community. And, and, and it could be a community of identity, it could be a community of geography, it could be a community of practice. And so there's, I think that is a important role, especially if you are interested in health and wellbeing work around reflecting on who are you and why do you want to connect to a community? And what's the motivations around that, in some ways, being a little bit kind of self-critical about? Are you doing this because you're interested because you're a member of the community or volunteer? Or is this because of a professional pursuit? And if it's a professional pursuit, are you the right person? I think there's almost that element as well.

And on the other end of that spectrum, also then thinking a little bit about this boundaries, which I think with the safeguarding element that you mention, you know, very often is, we know that our connections are so powerful, in terms of, you know, even if it's a cup of tea, versus doing some arts activities, or sharing some cultures together. You know, we know there's a strong evidence around health and well being, but at the same time, not confusing that for clinical intervention or on health and wellbeing, and I think, really being very aware of where those boundaries are, I think.

**MC**: yeah, these are really important points. And I think that whole issue you bring up about, are you the right person is something that we should always be asking us, or I see we I'm not an artist myself, but there is that tension. Sometimes I think, whether you're off the community or not of the community and coming into a community and, and questioning whether that's the right role for you.

Halina has been busy interviewing and talking to some of the culture collective practitioners from kind of all over Scotland, and in particular, was talking to Helen and Shetland, about some of the challenges there, particularly when it comes to, you know, like multi-national companies and energy companies being on the doorstep, while people are not necessarily able to kind of keep their homes or feed themselves. So coming on from that, if basic needs are not being met, how can we even start thinking about sustaining wellbeing through culture?

**LH**:I think that's a really important point. And I think there's something there around one isn't an either or in every situation, I think, you know, I think that sometimes we do, and we do get into a bit of a space of like, you know, cultural activity, and what does that mean, I think, and, for me, you know, I've never met someone who's not cultural in some sense, do you know, I mean, this? And so I think we do have to be careful of like, are we talking about, you know, poor uncreative people, and therefore we need to do something? Or actually do we just mean, they're not doing the creative things that we are valuing, or that are funded by Creative Scotland or whoever it is, you know. So I think there is a balance there, for sure. But also, I do also take that point around, if people are literally the most marginalised communities very often some of these conversations feel very helped with their experience, at the moment when people are looking at fuel poverty, they're looking at bringing food on the table. So I think it is important that these things aren't put into silos and seeing how some of that conversation around things like I think, for me, fundamentally, things like universal basic income, personally, I think has to be part and parcel of some of these wider conversations, certainly on a structural level, because ultimately, inequities, whether that's access to culture, access to wellbeing access to positive jobs and non yeah positive relationships, comes down very often to the basic ability to survive. And I think putting it lightly, our relationship to work and money is a big part of our factor. And I think it's really interesting argument always that we should all, in some ways be fighting for universal basic income, no matter what if we're looking at homelessness, mental health, looking at culture, because actually, if we get that fundamental tenant, right, I think it's going to fundamentally change people's ability to think about these things.

**MC**: These issues intersect across all sectors. So it makes sense. I think there's something you mentioned that about whether people kind of view themselves as being artists, or if people are viewed as as being capable of being creative. I think there's sometimes this perception from a lot of community-based practice that maybe arts and culture aren't for them, or they're not artists, or they're not creative. And I just wonder what your thoughts around whether our language around the arts needs to be changed to engage more people who might who might have those feelings that things are just not for them.

**LH**: Yeah, you know, I come from a neuroscience background. And I think, what do we think about things like if you know, I also challenge a reductionist view of these things, but if you look at the drivers around creativity, creativity isn't just one singular thing and it is by no means owned by the arts themselves. And I think you know, that's, in some ways, the kind of perspective I bring into a lot of the conversations we have, with the work that we do with Science Ceilidh with fun palaces around cultural democracy, as well as which I think is maybe even challenging the way that question is phrased very often is you've got a model of democratising of culture where it's like, Okay, here's all this amazing cultural stuff, research knowledge, whatever it is, how do we make that more accessible? And I think there's a valid arguments for that. But there's also the kind of flipping that on its head and saying, well, why are these the hills that we have built and the hierarchies that we've built? And actually, why do we need to access that when actually, maybe it's the things that we, that we have that are also just not valued, as well. And so I do think there's a balance there, I don't think it's an either or dimension. But I think, again, it's that reflection of this is where, when, in cultural policy people talk about, like, cultural cold spots. So you know, everything's kind of problematised. And there's a hot real deficit, very often a deficit model, kind of applied to these. And I do think that is really problematic. And that's not to say that there isn't a value to bringing in, you know, arts, but it's the it's raising questions about, well, what do we decide as arts versus not arts? And, you know, there's all sorts of ways that intersects with race with with with patriarchy, you know, we have crafts, and we have arts, because crafts are traditionally led by women or women of colour, even and, you know, all this type of stuff. So I do think there's, there's a kind of important sense check to be made there. In terms of that, and I guess there's a delicate balance as the final point that to recognise that, of course, you know, it's, I believe in the work that people do, as professional artists and professional creatives. But yeah, I think it goes back to that first point I made around just making sure that we're not gatekeeping, who gets to, to do that, you know, how do we value professional artists and balanced that in the ecosystem of everyday arts for want of a better term, but then also acknowledge that it's not, you know, we're not building a need. We don't need communities to need us. I think it's really important we don't have that phrase, we're providing space, we're holding space. And I think a lot of really good participatory artist understand that distinction. Community workers understand that distinction. But yeah, it's something to, I think, is a bit of a provocation, I generally always kind of keep in the back of my head.

**MC**: I think the can also, I think you touched on it there as well, the idea that sometimes I think, less so much kind of participatory arts practice, but maybe kind of cultural institutions sometimes have this kind of Crusader approach when it comes to kind of bringing art into communities. And the idea that culture doesn't exist there already without it being brought in, I would hope and argue that Culture Collective is doing something quite different in terms of recognising the importance of culture to communities, and already have it, I wanted to kind of put one of your own questions back to you that was brought up at the nourish event, which is regarding the recognition of the grassroots rising up to meet challenges. I mean, we saw particularly kind of community-based arts organisations like turning into food banks over a lockdown, for example. And, and that's been something that has been really recognised and that kind of adaptation that's been done within those community-based sectors. But what's next? So I put it to you, Lewis, what do you think is next?

**LH**: I think, for me, there's some really interesting research developing about that space around, you know, over lockdown. And I think you see this play out, particularly in some of the work we did in Highlands and rural spaces, it really is, but I think it plays out in cities as well, it was the small organizations that really took probably quite a disproportionate role, because it's the big players, and we still see that play out at the moment and Edinburgh Council I’m looking at you in terms of, you know, shutting down venues, it's the bigger players are so risk averse, because of the size, whereas actually, it was a small organisations that could pivot but had, they may not even be particularly well-funded. But when they were, the funding was a bit more flexible. And they could actually meet to where the communities were, and that I think that plays out for across the third sector, but also, as you say, in arts and culture with the smaller organisations, which could actually do who were more embedded with the grassroots communities could rise up and, and had the structures and relationships in place with the bigger organisations, even if they had that, you know, actually very often have to shut because everyone went on furlough, and they had you know, PAYE and all that kind of stuff to consider in terms of the longer term sustainability. So I do think we're kind of in an interesting space at the moment where I think there does need to be a massive, much bigger shift in the ecosystem of, of small actors. I think it's smaller organisations, really grassroots organisations, and acknowledging such a fundamental role that they play. I think what's going to be interesting moving forward is how we don't we balance that with not necessarily saying, Okay, well, here's loads of money to do it, either. Because I think, you know, some of it was situational. Some of them aren't set up to necessarily take on that next step. And I think we see this play out in some of the funds, like the ideas fund, for example, where sometimes, actually, it's not about the money, of course, it is very often is about money, and there isn't enough money in the sector. And that's I will say that categorically, but I think for a lot of people and again,

It's sometimes in the kind of, you know, projects led by disabled people or people of colour, or people marginalised by with care with caring responsibilities, or whatever would be very often isn't actually about the money, they can't buy out their time. Because there is not a simple like, they're not just some, you know a person where they can just say, Oh, here's my full time equivalent, I'm just gonna bide my time out there just members of the community who wants to do something really good. And so I think there's a balance be played that recognizing that role supporting that role in a structural perspective. And I do think there's a lot to be said, for funding, just in terms of what we've recognise success, you know, even when we talk about companies, and I've got a friend who's doing some really interesting research about this, like social enterprises, it's actually the microorganism, like microorganisms, micro organisations, who are doing a massive, like, who make the impacts, but we, when we talk about it in terms of all financial success of a company organisation, or a third sector, kind of social enterprise, it's always about turnover, you know, things should be allowed to be small. And there's a beauty to that. And there's actually, I think, a fundamental role. I think COVID really demonstrated that, but they just need completely different drivers of recognition and support. And that doesn't mean we just offload lots of responsibility onto them as well.

**MC**: Yeah, I mean, maybe a shift as well, as you say, kind of away from the money is the driver and actually just focusing on people like people-centered purpose and engagement.

**LH**: 100% Yeah, exactly. And not growth for growth's sake, I think that's again, you know, yeah, I think that's the mistake is the people were growing at the, at the piece of relationships.

**MC**: And that the event and earlier actually, in this podcast episode, we heard from Jo and Sally at the Grampian Health Art Trust, and kind of talk a little bit about their work with Artroom, and, and kind of the intersection between really kind of NHS departments and art. So kind of with that in mind, and with maybe any other examples that you have, what are your thoughts around how we collaborate across multiple areas?

**LH**: I think it was a really inspiring kind of case study. And again, you know, that's no mean feat. I mean, NHS, you know, is can be a very slow moving beast with a big, you know, as an organisation, I think, and again, COVID, we've kind of seen that play out in different spaces. I think, I mean, one of the things we're really actively trying to do ourselves, and, you know, our small contribution is trying to bring, develop kind of more grassroots networks that kind of connect the networks, there are so many networks, even within Scotland, around the space around health and wellbeing, culture, you know, different funding schemes, different resources, different sectors. And so one of the things that we've tried to do is support a kind of what we call the Culture and Wellbeing Community Network Scotland, one day, we will have a shorter name, I'm sure. But, you know, to try and just bring practitioners together on that kind of like, it's not about necessarily the best practice, I'd much I ever believe in best practice. But it's about inspiring practices about challenging practice, it's about sharing the resources that we have. Because we all are, as you know, go back to that comment around how all these things intersect, we're ultimately fighting the same challenges in when it comes to equity or access. And so I think there just needs to be a bit more opportunity to join up and have these conversations. And it's obviously really excited to see how culture collective has a role to play in that in terms of the diversity of different stakeholders. And I think it is just providing space, if possible time, that's always the golden thing, reflective practice time and, and learning time. And it's not just about CPD, but I think it's about recognising that everyone has a part to play. It's a massive jigsaw. It's a massive ecology. And so if we can somehow connect, and chat and have space to do that, even more, I think these things naturally happen.

We came across this. It's taken a systems-based approach. And I think for any big issue, and it's thinking about in terms of systems, not necessarily kind of, you know, you can't quantify a quality of a relationship. But we know that we put in these kinds of conversations spaces, really good things happen. We know that. And so how do we cultivate these systems to work better, and maybe take a step back collectively and see, well, what is missing from the system, but where are the conversations not being had? And I think that's a really exciting space that we can maybe think about, even moving forward from the pandemic.

**Outro**

**MC:** It’s the end of another episode, but we do want to leave you with one big provocation to take forward. And that was Lewis’ question: “how do we balance professional artists and everyday creativity, whilst not gatekeeping what culture and creativity is?”

We will explore this further in a special live episode at the end of the series.

In our next episode, Amplify, we focus on minoritised voices within our creative communities. In the meantime, why not head over to our Miro board, an online space that’s been created to invite you to join the conversation. Add your thoughts, insights, experiences and questions here, and we'll include your perspectives in our future conversations. You can find the link in the show notes to accompany this podcast or on the Culture Collective website. You can view videos of the original Starting Points events there too.

**Credits:**

**MC:** The Future Culture podcast is presented by me, Morvern Cunningham, produced and edited by Halina Rifai, with music by Hen Hoose. Culture Collective is funded by Scottish Government emergency COVID-19 funds through Creative Scotland

**END**