

Creative health

Exploring the impact of creative activities in
supporting people health and wellbeing

Report October 2025

Contents

Introduction	3
Our engagement approach	4
The Creative Health Co-production Group	5
The Creative health sector event – How can we reduce health inequalities through creativity	6
Exploring the impact of creative activities in supporting people health and wellbeing - online Survey	7- 30
Listening to local people online forum conversations	31
Listening to local people - community outreach	32 - 37
Listening to local people community outreach Raw Material Music and Media	37 - 38
Creative health in south east London – next steps	39

Introduction

We began looking at the benefits that personalised support including ‘**creative health**’ can have on improving people’s health and wellbeing in South East London in 2024.

Creative health offers a different approach to health and wellbeing - one that draws on community assets and mobilises creative approaches and cultural activities to support people to live well. Creative Health might be taking part in a community gardening project, a singing for wellbeing group, a social arts and crafts session, a cookery class, or any other creative activity which you might be taking part in at home, in a community or health setting, or in a cultural or heritage space.

This work is a partnership between the local councils, the voluntary and creative sector, the Greater London Authority and NHS South East London. We are one of two areas in London testing out this approach, to see how we can use more holistic methods to support people to live well for longer utilising approaches that make sense in their lives.

The South East London Creative Health programme aims to explore how and where creative approaches are supporting the reduction of health inequalities across our six boroughs.

In our work of testing this approach alongside an intensive work of developing new partnerships and mapping the great efforts that are already happening across south east London we aimed to listen to local people's stories, about their views and experiences on how creativity helps them to stay well, and what creative activities are they participating on and where.

Our engagement approach

We invited people living in Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark to tell us about their experiences of how creativity supports their health and wellbeing.

To ensure we reach more local people and hear a varieties of stories and experiences we developed a few different opportunities for people to get involved:

- The Creative Health Co-production Group
- Creative Health event at Southbank Centre - *"How can creative health reduce health inequalities in South East London"*
- Online survey
- Community events and outreach
- Online conversation via a chat forum



The creative health co-production group

As part of our approach we set up a Creative Health Co-Production Working Group. The purpose of which was to:

- Assess the understanding and impact of Creative Health programmes in different communities across south east London and gain an understanding of the value of creative health and how easy people find it to take part in these activities and programmes
- Plan and deliver further work with local people and communities in the programme using a range of ways to find out views about what creative health means to people and communities and how it supports people to stay well including workshops and outreach.
- Share information about [London's Creative Health City](#) in partnership with the Greater London Authority and explore what impact this could have on local people.
- Seek involvement from local people to share stories of the impact of creative health at the upcoming south east London event in February 2025.

As part of the group we recruited 10 local people with lived experience of utilising creativity to support their own wellbeing.

The group met six times from November 2024 – March 2025, facilitated by creative health practitioner Tony Cealy and was made up of community leaders from the voluntary sector, local people with experience supporting improvement of health services and those with lived experience of utilising creativity to support their own mental or physical health.

In February members of the group presented their perspectives to 200 people from across Health and Culture sectors, highlighting the need for sustainable funding and access routes into creative health and the valuable role of the voluntary sector in supporting the link between creative health programmes and health services.

"I felt valued and seen"

"Creativity/Arts has a greater role to play in health improvements and reduction of health inequalities"

How can creative health reduce health - inequalities event

In February 2025 the Creative Health Co-Production Working Group presented at the Integrated Care Board and Greater London Authority's event “**How Can We Reduce Health Inequalities Through Creativity**” and shared their perspectives on how NHS South East London can further facilitate access to creativity to support health of local communities and why this matters.



Watch a short video from the event “How can we reduce health inequalities through creativity”

- Event attendees saw first-hand the impact of creative health initiatives across South East London including: [Breathe Arts Health Research](#), [Thriving Stockwell](#), [Everyone's A Singer](#), [Performing Medicine's REACH programme](#), [Questsoul Theatre CIC](#), [Good Byes with TACO](#), Theatre Peckham's [Unseen Unheard](#), [The Bridge at Waterloo](#) and Downham Men's Group.
- Discussions focused on the power of cross-sector collaboration and need for long-term funding to tackle health inequalities. The Creative Health Co-Production Working Group shared why creativity matters to them and how it supports their wellbeing, particularly focusing on mental health support and engaging those facing language barriers. Attendees also explored how creativity can be embedded into the health system and how communities can use it to stay well.

Creative health

Exploring the impact of creative activities in
supporting people health and wellbeing

Detailed survey report

The creative health online survey

The creative health survey was promoted to members of the public as well as to over 1,300 members of SEL People's Panel. The survey was open for 12 weeks and we received 200 responses. Information on demographic profile of respondents is included in Appendix 1 - demographic profile.

The online survey was promoted with local people via ours and partners organisations channels:

- SEL People's Panel
- Let's talk health and care online community
- #Get Involved newsletter
- South east London Voluntary Sector and Community organisations
- Community champions groups across different boroughs in south east London
- Social media channels
- Integrated Care System newsletter
- ICS partners' organisations' channels



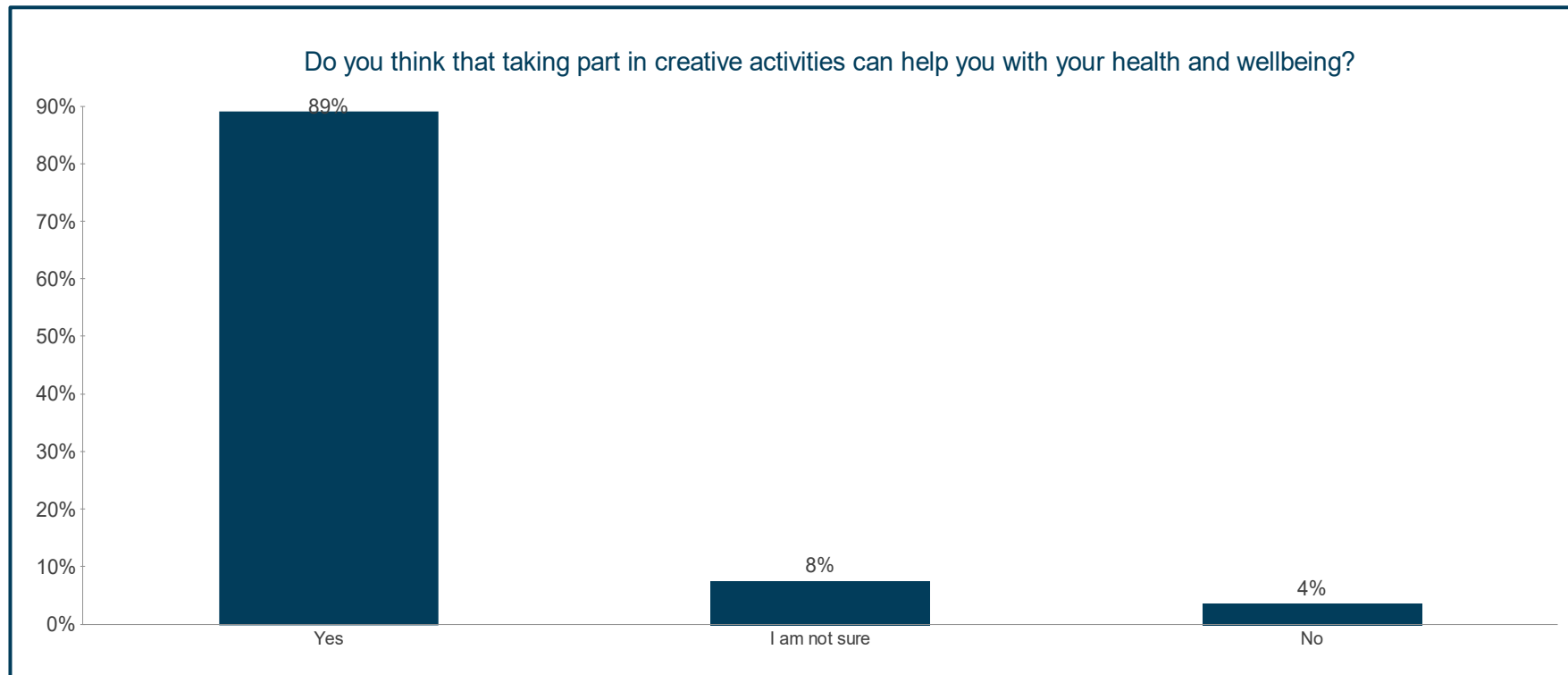
Summary insights

- A high majority of respondents agree that taking part in creative activities supports health and wellbeing – agreed as high majority in all boroughs.
- Gardening, food learning, dancing/physical activity and crafting were noted as the most popular creative activities respondents are participating in.
- Over 60% of respondents felt that taking part in creative health activities made them less stressed, relaxed, positive and happy alongside other benefits.
- A high number of survey respondents are engaging in creative activities at home.
- More women told us they are regularly engaging in creative health activities than men.
- 66% of people not currently involved in any creative activities are interested in participating in creative activities to support their health and wellbeing.
- 58% of people engage with creative health every week. Regular creative health engagement is lower for global majority respondents, perhaps linked to access to information about culturally relevant activity offers.
- Caring responsibilities, affordable access to activities and knowledge of where to find them and managing long term health conditions are barriers to engaging in creative health.
- The need to support free access to creative health activities is highlighted as a priority concern throughout the survey.



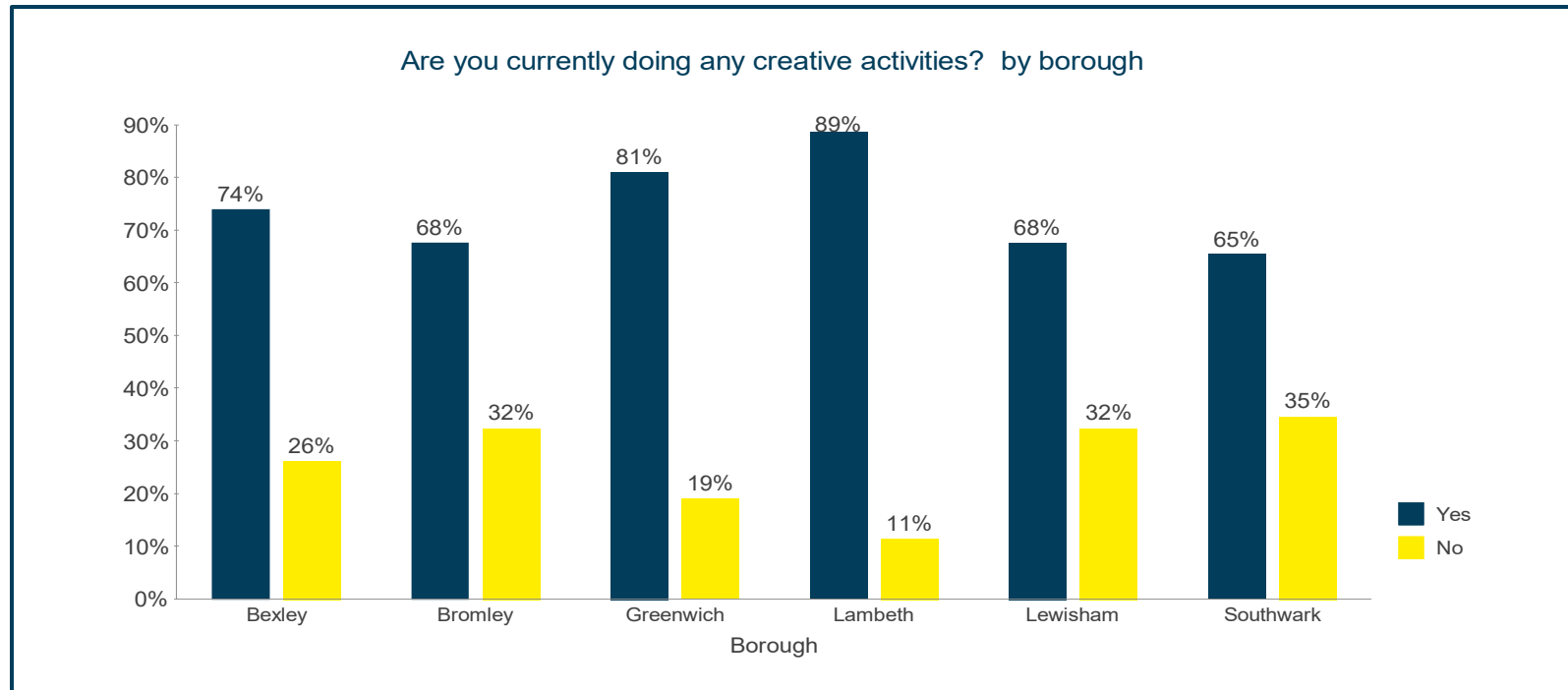
The impact of creative activities in supporting people's health and wellbeing

89% of survey respondents believe that participating in creative activities plays an important role in helping people to keep healthy and well. We had a similar response level from people that we listened to during our outreach sessions. This overwhelmingly positive perception suggests that people in south east London have a good awareness of that creativity and creative health activities benefits health and wellbeing.



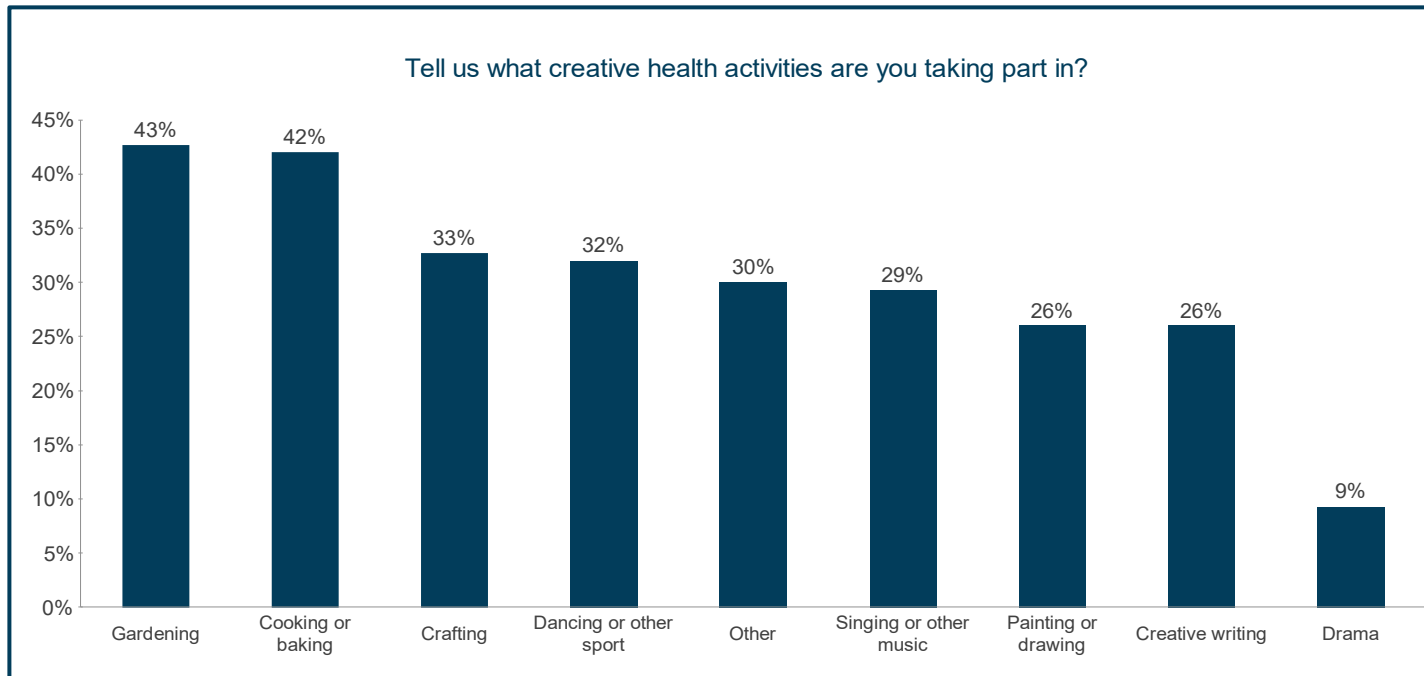
Current participation in creative activities across south east London?

75% of survey respondents overall are involved in creative activities showing strong support for the role of creativity in health and wellbeing. The response was similar across different age, gender and ethnicity demographics. The graph below highlights the distribution across the six boroughs in south east London indicating highest positive responses from survey respondents in Lambeth (89%) and Greenwich (81%).



Creative activities

The survey results highlight that gardening (43%), cooking or baking (42%) are the most preferred creative health activities to participate in. Other activities such as crafting (33%), dancing or other sport (32%), singing or other music (29%), painting (26%) and writing (26%) are also popular, suggesting a diverse range of interests in creative health activities. The results reflect that participants most often choose activities that can be done at home at any time and have relaxing and positive emotional benefits. This is supported by the question – Where are you doing these creative activities? 73.30% of respondents selected at home as the main setting. (slide 18)



Creative activities south east Londoners use to stay well

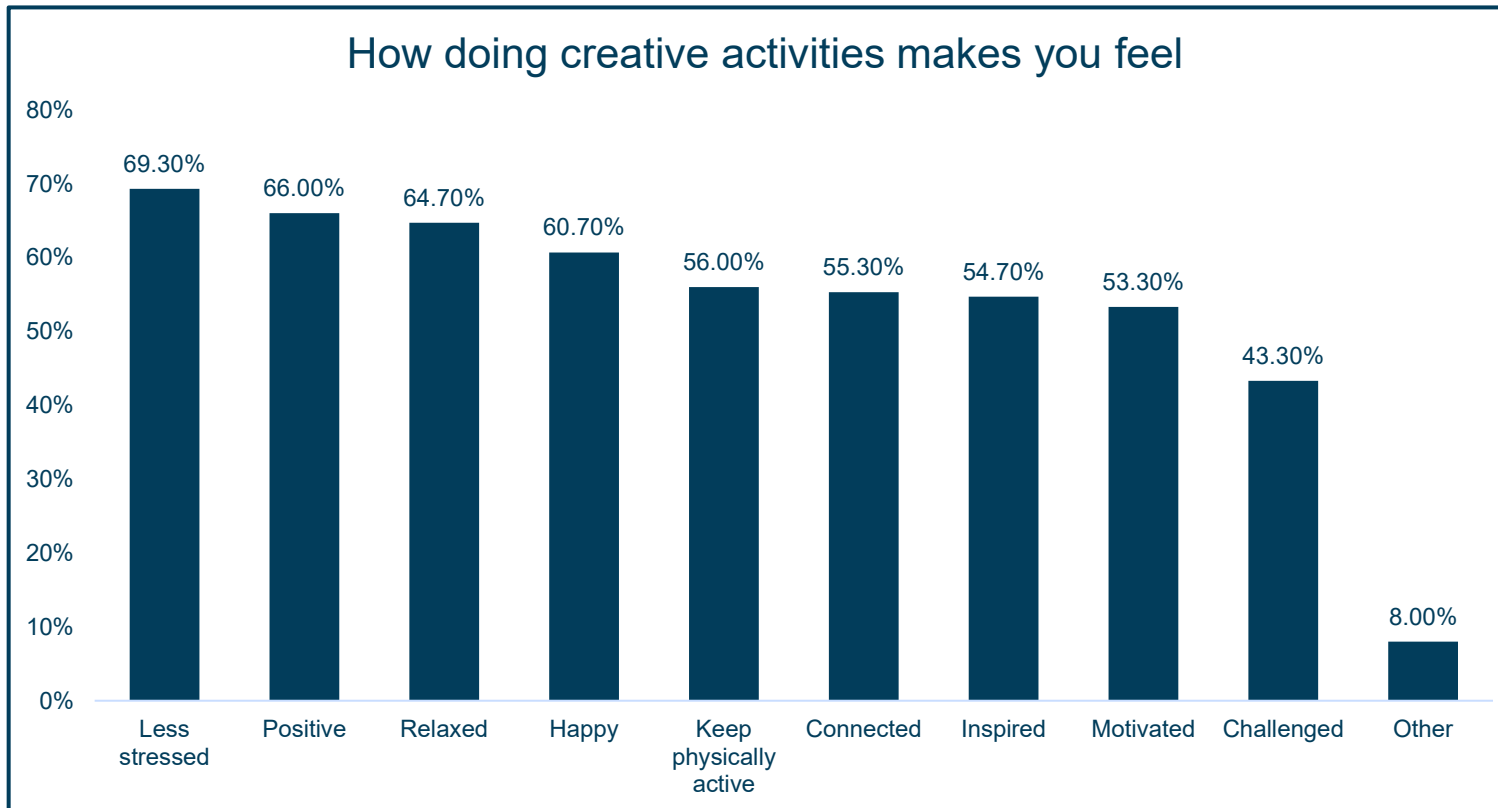
Survey respondents highlighted physical activities like gardening, yoga, dancing and walking groups as ways they use creative health to stay well. Artistic activities such as crafting and making, participating in art groups and engaging with film and photography or creative writing and music making were also mentioned.

Activities were highlighted as valuable for providing social opportunities but also as methods of enabling wellbeing at home. Groups like lunch clubs, U3A and church groups were noted as creative health sites.



Benefits of participation in creative activities (1) South East London

The survey respondents widely agreed that being involved in creative activities have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing with 69% of respondents felt less stressed and 66% felt positive and 65% relaxed.



- Over 50% felt **motivated, inspired and connected**.
- Significant higher percentages of older people reported the benefits of creative health compared to all respondents: 83% of older adults 64 – 74 years old and 71% of 75+ reported that creative health helps them keep physically active.
- **Feeling motivated (86%)** had a strong score across most of the different ethnic and gender groups and young people

Benefits of participation in creative activities (2)

"Improved mental wellbeing, socialising, doing performances to help audience improve their mental wellbeing."

"something to focus on; grounding and something hopeful I can build and create in incremental stages."

"It's transformed my life"



**LONDON CREATIVE
HEALTH CITY**
BUILDING IT TOGETHER

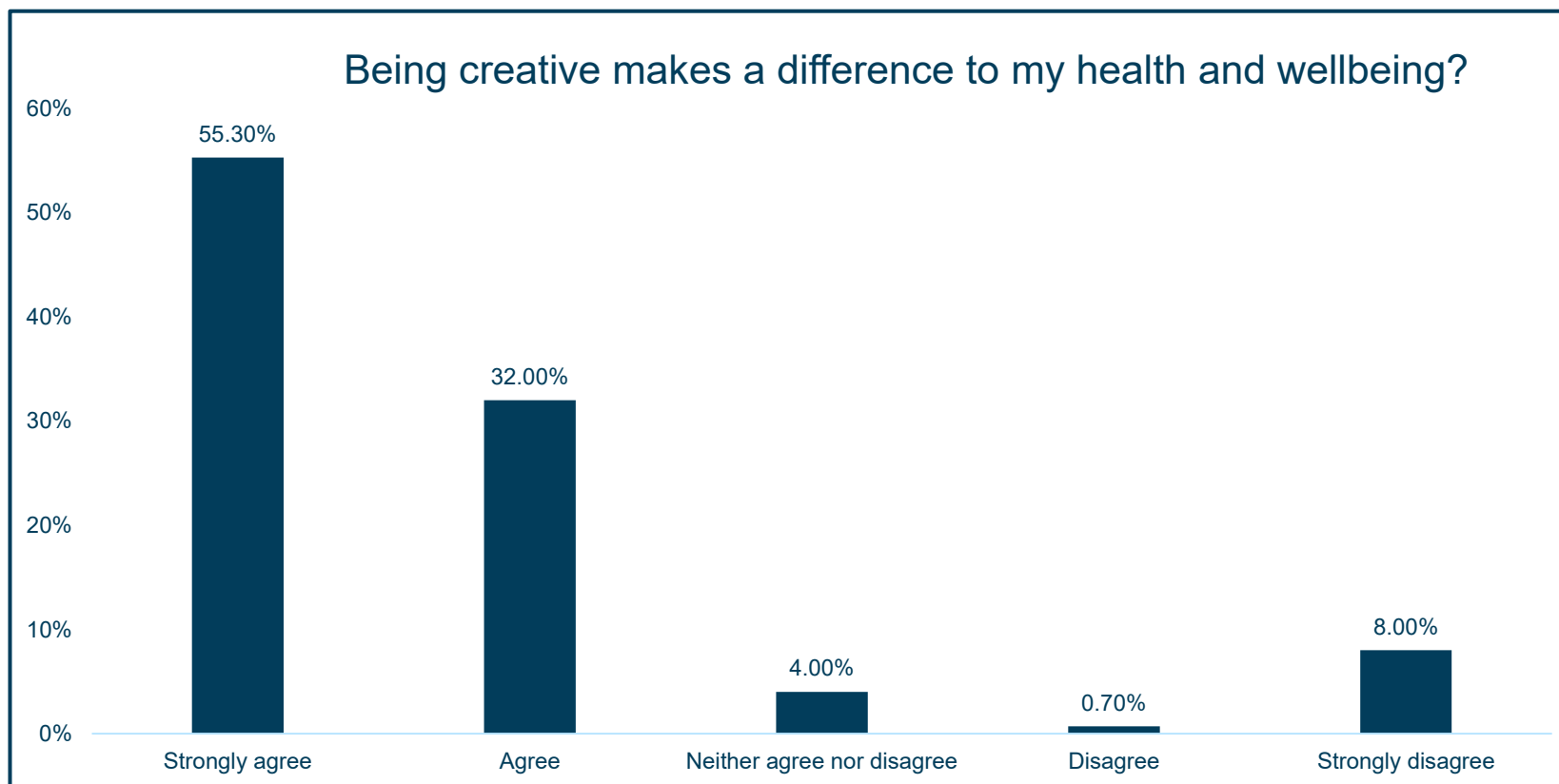
"Being more confident, focused and good communication skills."

"Sharing and learning our culture with others"

"Builds confidence and self esteem"

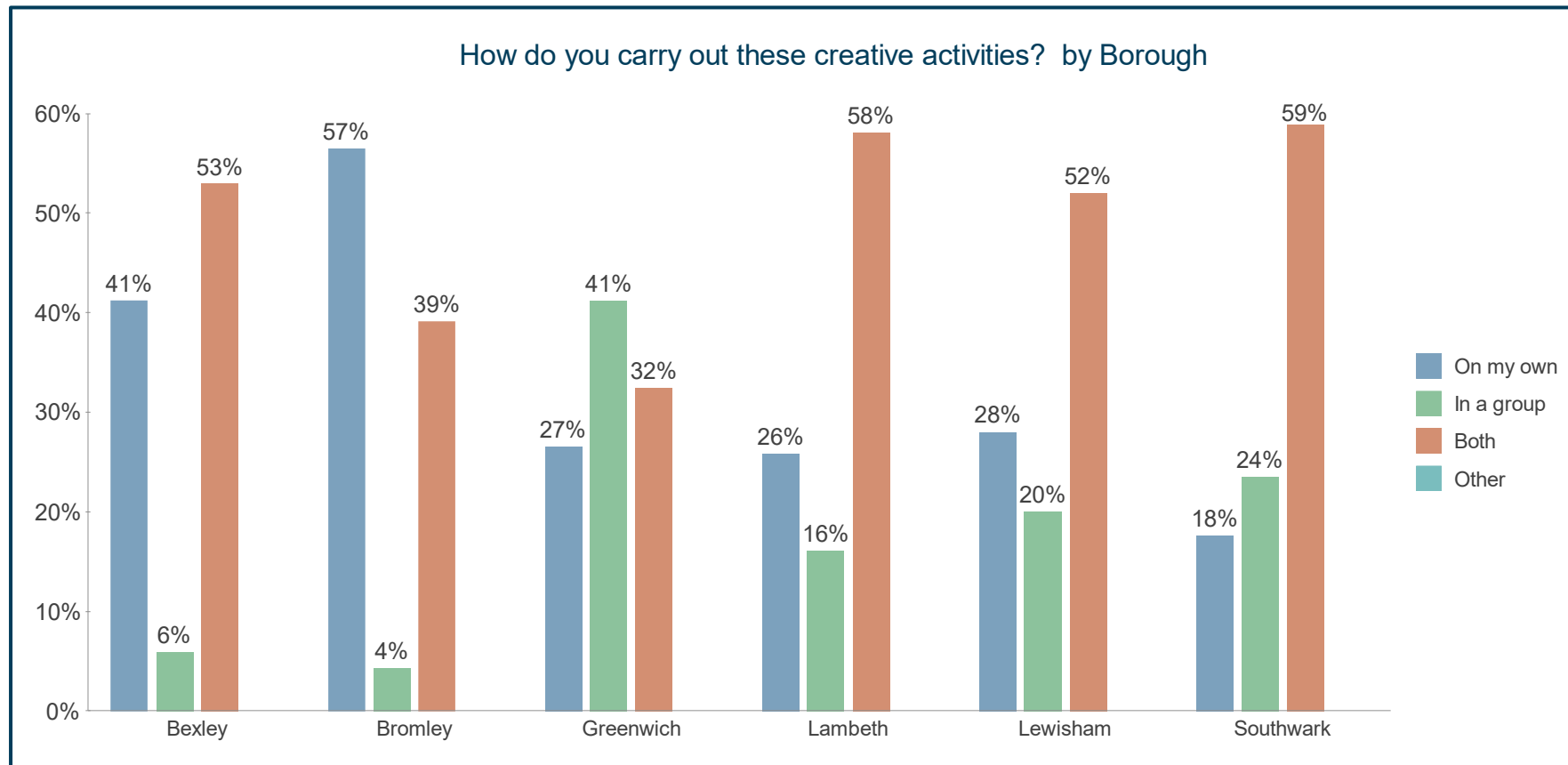
Creativity - health and wellbeing

A high majority of survey respondents agreed that being creative makes a difference in their health and wellbeing 87% (strongly agree – 55%, agree – 32%). Creativity is highlighted as beneficial for improved health and wellbeing across all survey respondents' demographics.



Ways of engaging in creative activities

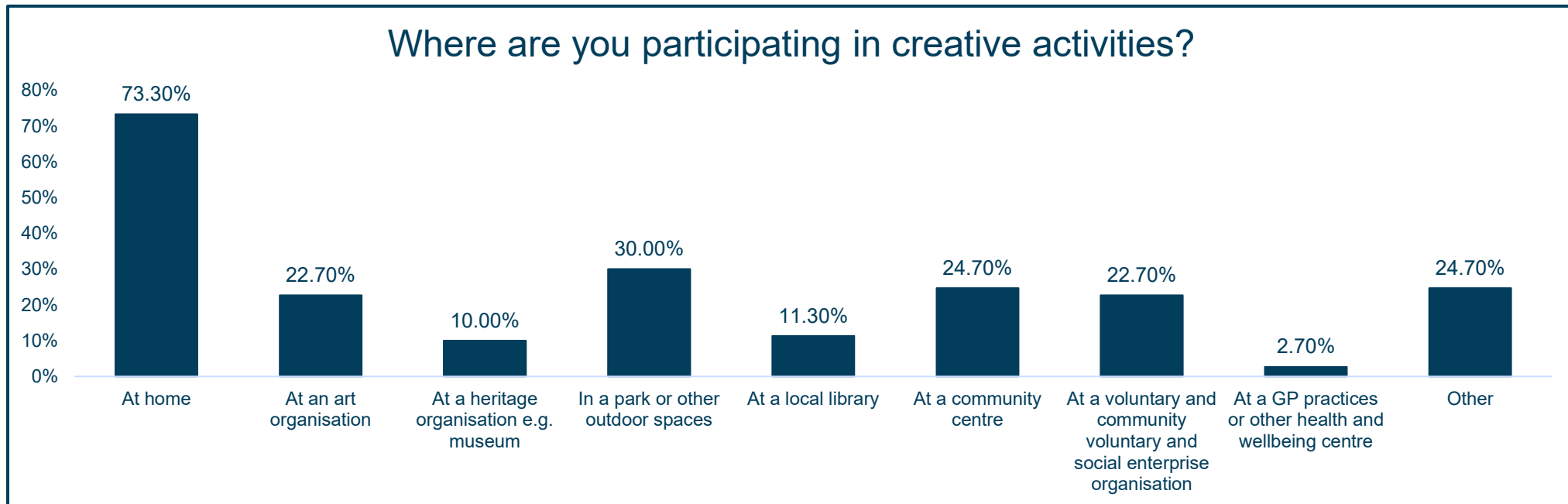
The survey responses show that almost half of respondents (49%) are involved in creative activities both individually and in groups. Overall, there is a balance in how participants across all demographics prefer to be involved in creative activities in both as a groups or an individual.



Settings supporting creative health (1)

A high percentage of survey respondents are engaging in creative activities at home showing that comfort and ease of access are important factors for motivation and creativity. Outdoor spaces are the second most preferred location (30%) highlighting the importance of nature and open spaces for being creative and active.

A very low number of respondents said that they are participating in creative activities within GP practice and health and wellbeing centres which shows there is an opportunity to further integrate creativity within health and wellbeing settings, developing more projects like [Bexley buddies project](#) - [watch a short video to learn more](#).



Settings supporting creative health (2)

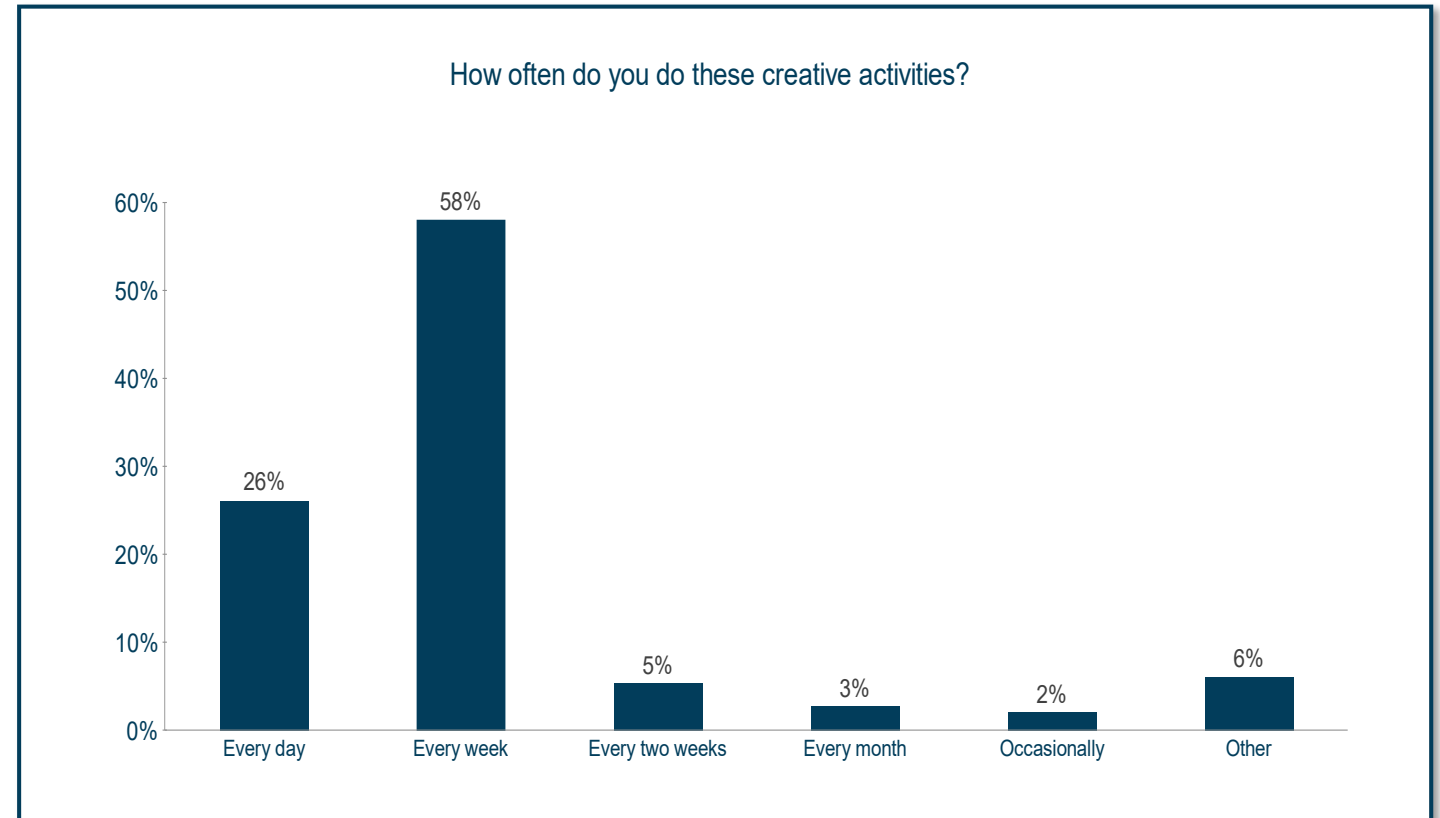
The survey respondents highlighted some other settings where they are involved in creative activities: local community spaces, churches and local voluntary community and social enterprises (VCSEs) (Creating Ground, St Mary's Centre, U3A , etc.) as well as arts spaces like Tate Modern and public settings like pubs and cafes. A low number of health and wellbeing settings were mentioned as spaces where people are currently involved in creative activities.



Frequency of creative health involvement

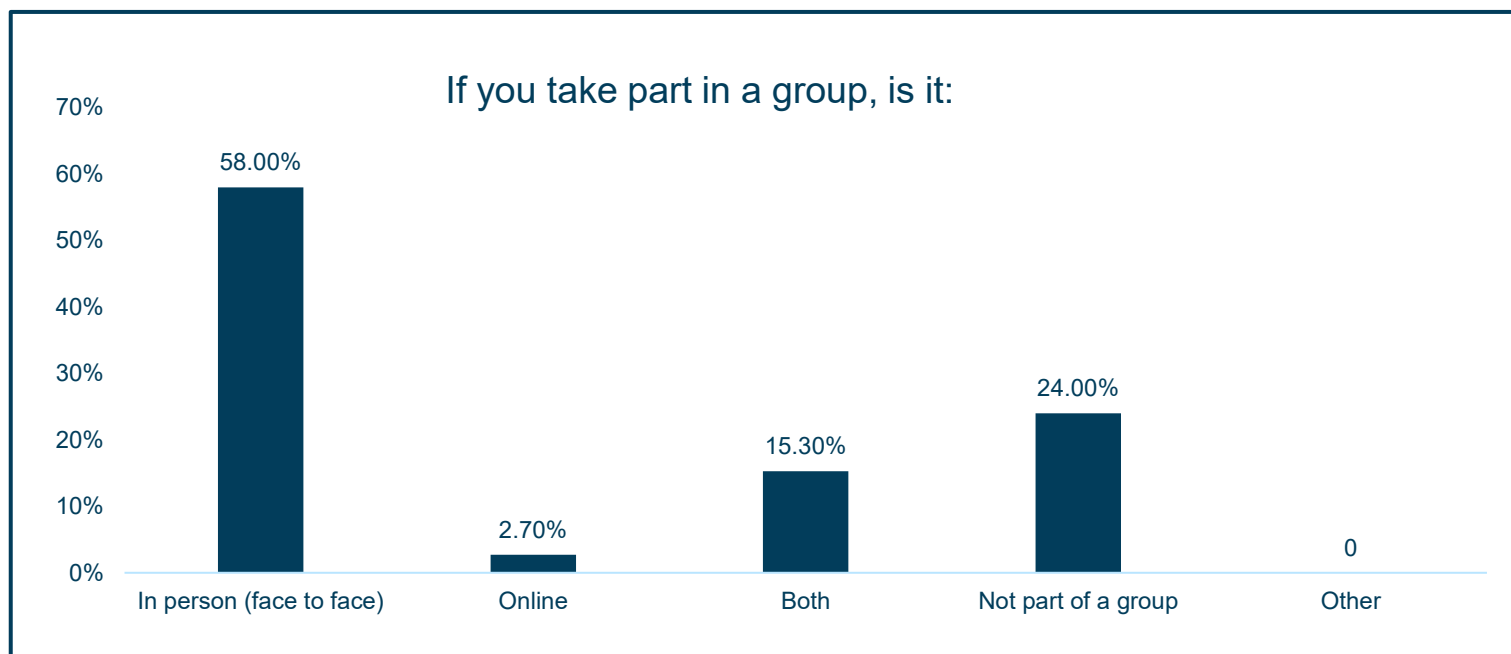
The survey shows that creative activities are an important part of people's routine schedule - weekly or daily (84%). This indicates the value for creativity and participation.

- From the survey responses we identified that women are more regularly involved in creative activities (67%) than men (41%).
- We also identified that for people from global majority backgrounds regular (daily and weekly) participation in creative activities is lower (16%) - this may be influenced by access to culturally relevant offers or where information about opportunities is available.



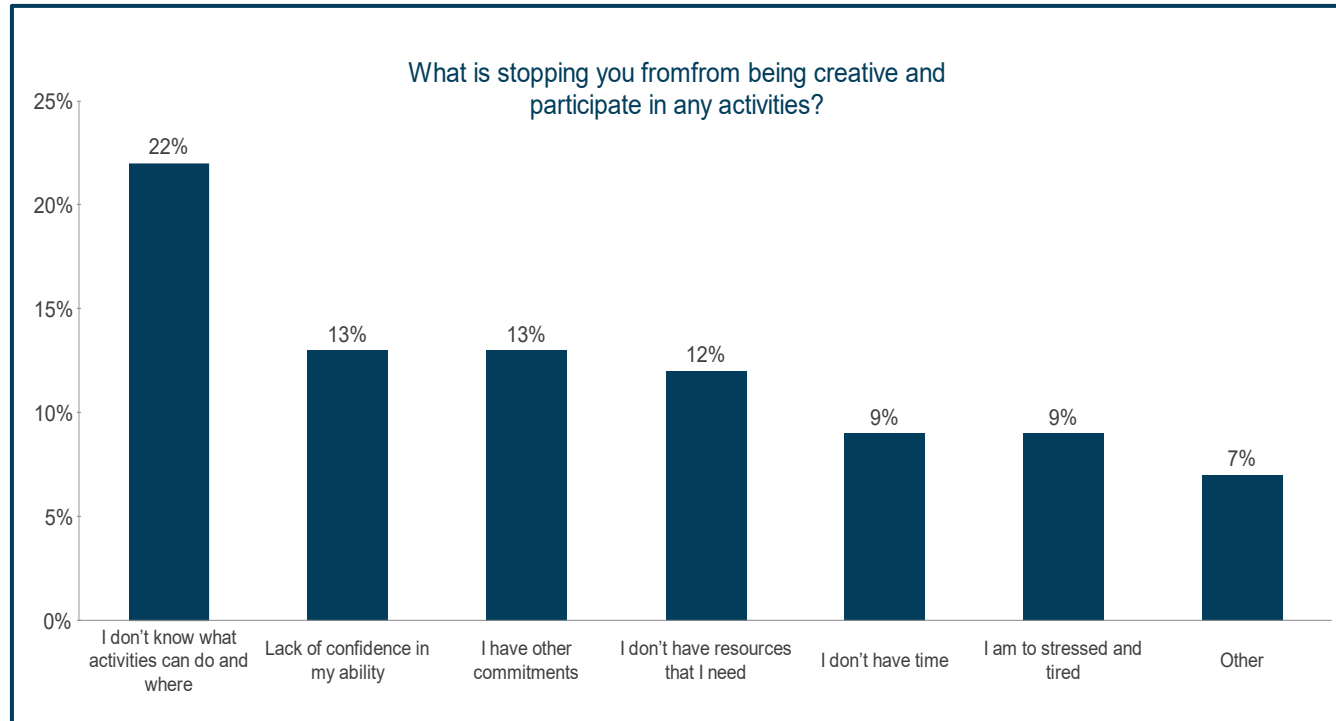
Preferred way to participate in creative activities

People involved in creative group activities prefer in-person formats (58%) and hybrid (15%) which indicate the importance of social connection in creative health activities. This highlights creative health's impact on reducing isolation and emotional support. A very low proportion (3%) opted for exclusively online group activities which may be related to digital access barriers and availability of creative online group opportunities. Almost a quarter of respondents are not involved in group activities which may reflect barriers to access or lack of information.



Barriers in participating in any creative activities

Survey respondents who declared that they are not involved in any creative activities highlighted the following main barriers in participating - lack of awareness (22%), other commitments (13%) and lack of confidence in their ability to take on a creative challenge (13%). Lack of resources, time and stress were also identified as reasons that stop people getting involved in creative activities.

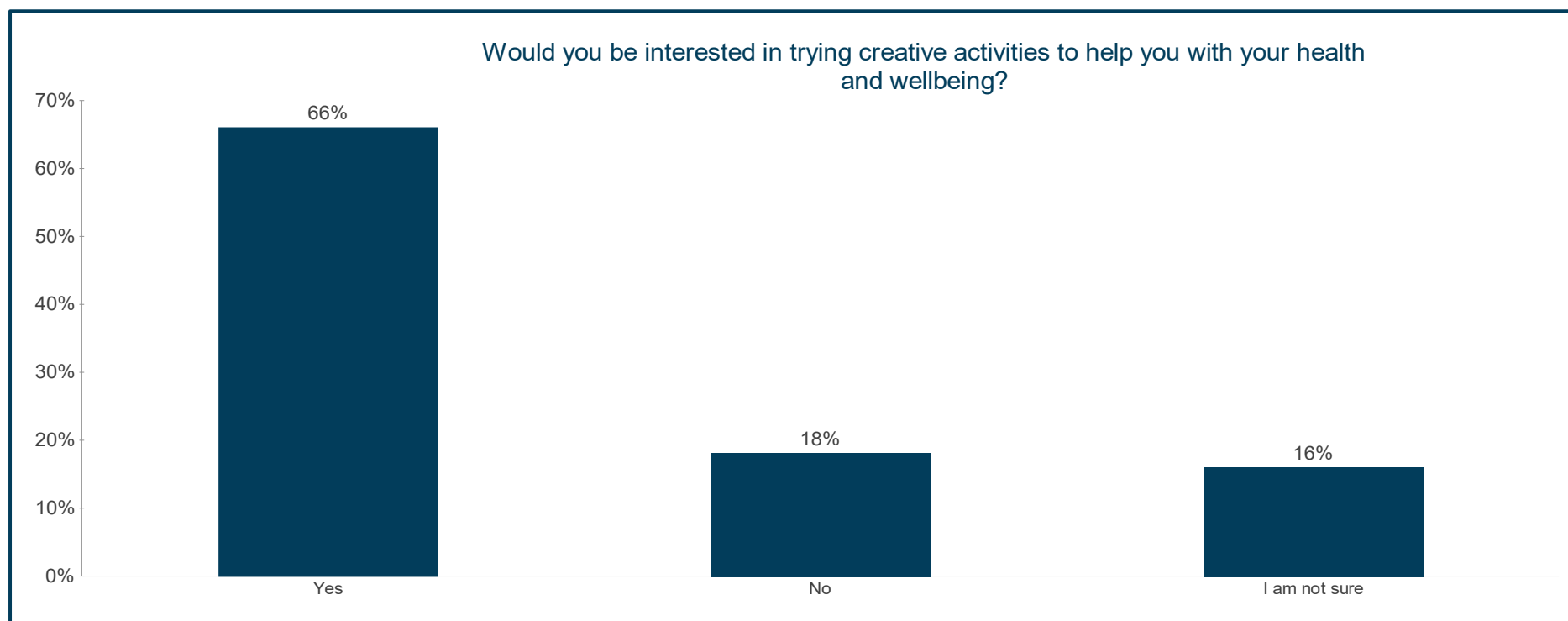


Other – key barriers:

- Although respondents recognise the benefits of creative activities – managing their health issues and/or long term conditions make it difficult for some of them to engage
- Access to local opportunities
- Caring responsibilities

Interest in future participation in creative health activities

66% of those who declared that they are currently not involved in any creative activities showed interest in future participation in opportunities that could support their health and wellbeing. 16% are still to decide about future involvement. This indicates an opportunity to facilitate more of SEL's population to engage with creative health activities to support their health and wellbeing by working to overcome barriers to access.

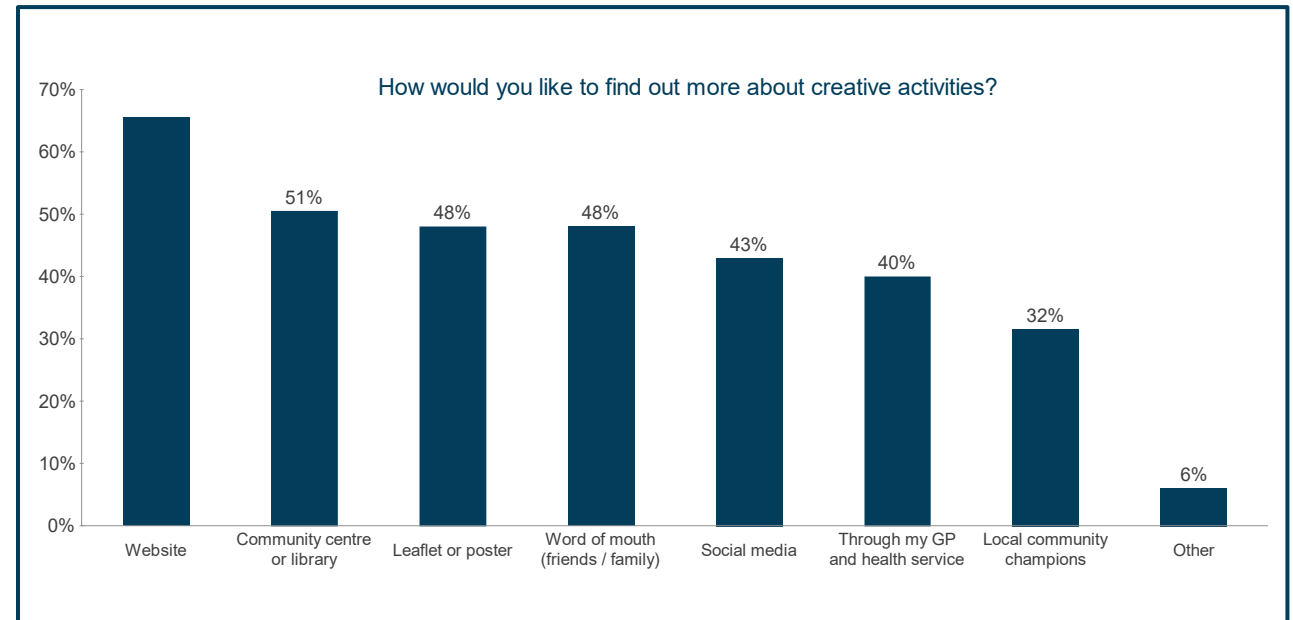


Information preferred channel

As part of the survey, we wanted to understand more about communications channels and how information about creative health activities should be shared with local people. The responses showed that a multi-channel approach would be key to ensuring we reach the full diversity of our community. Digital channels (website – 65%) are the most preferred channel. Community settings (51%) and community outreach via community champions (32%) and health-based services (40%) are also preferred channels again highlighting the need to integrate creative health offers within health settings.

Other – key communications channels

- WhatsApp
- Text messages
- Email updates
- Community settings: e.g. places of worship, voluntary and community sector organisations



Survey conclusions and recommendations (2)



Local opportunities

The survey participants highlighted a few local community groups and organisations offering creative health opportunities in south east London:

- ☐ U3A - [Our Groups - South East London](#)
- ☐ [Creating Ground](#)
- ☐ [Singing for the Brain at St. John's Church Sidcup](#)
- ☐ [The South East London Mind Bromley Recovery College](#)
- ☐ [Unbound Moving Arts](#)
- ☐ [Art4space](#)
- ☐ [Creative lives in progress](#)

Challenges

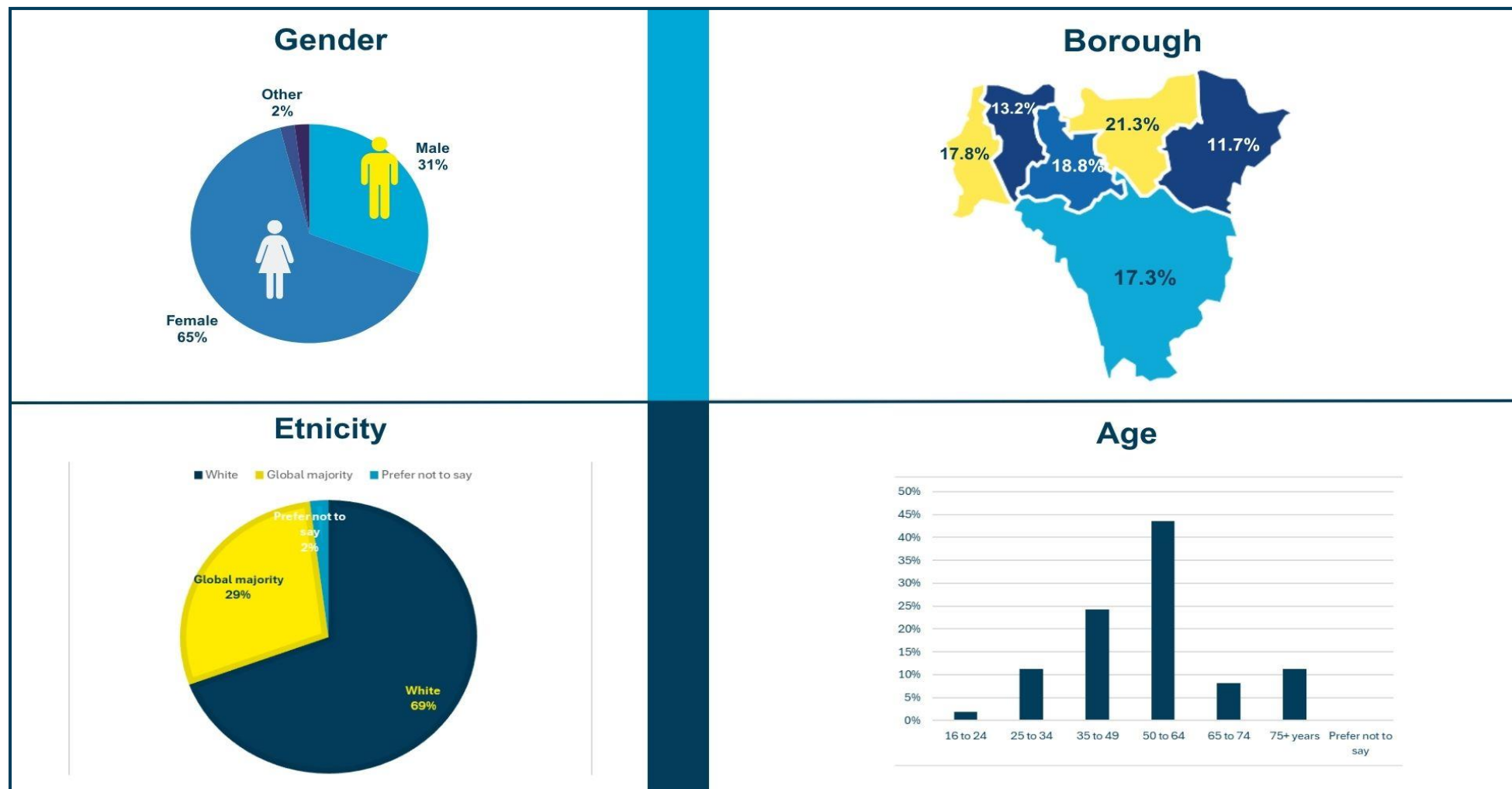
Although insights from the survey highlighted the positive impact and the power of creative health initiatives, participants identified challenges that we will need to address to ensure we can support an inclusive and sustainable approach:

- closure of many facilities where communities can access creative health
- the lack of awareness about opportunities - many people don't know what is available or how to get involved
- the cost of activities remains a significant challenge for many local people
- creative health opportunities can be limited – with gaps for certain age groups, timings, venues, lack of culturally diverse offerings.

Survey participants made comments and recommendations that will inform our next steps and help us build on existing resources aiming to reduce health inequalities through creativity.

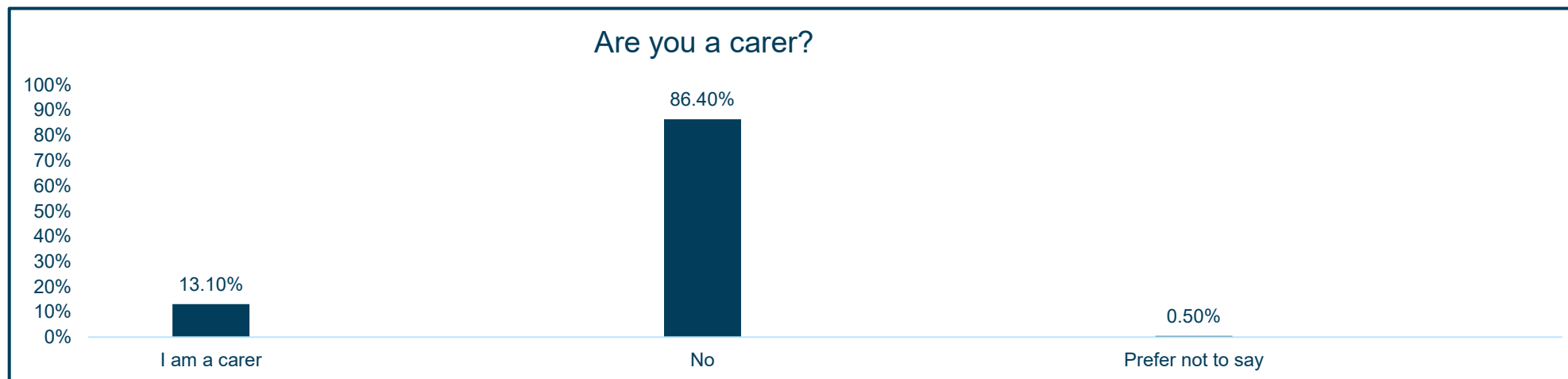
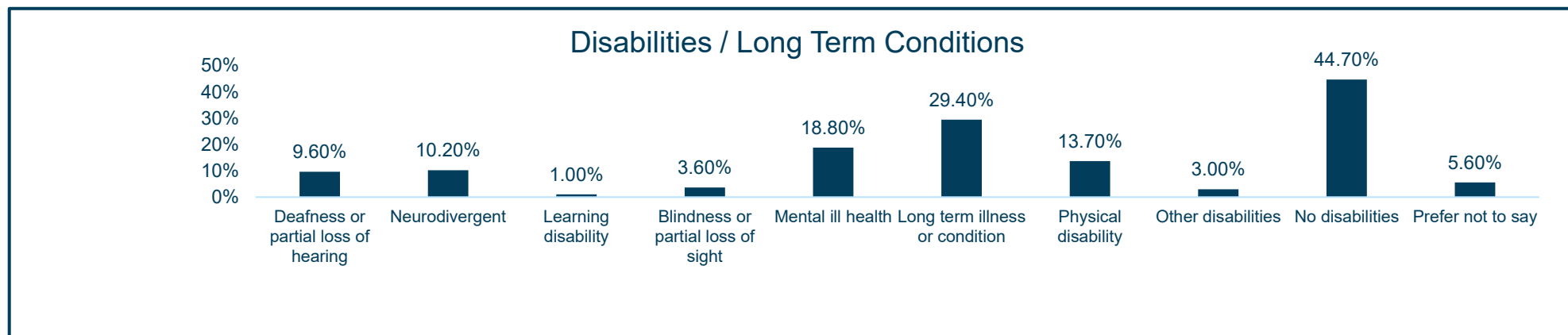
- Raise awareness and improve communication about creative health programmes:
 - enhance promotion and visibility of creative health opportunities across south east London
 - partner with local community champions programmes to share and cascade information, ensuring we reach underserved communities
 - capture and share local stories which evidence the positive impact of creative health has on people's lives and how they're taking part in creative health
- Support to expand and diversify creative health offer:
 - Aim to increase number, consistency and variety of creative health activities available
 - for people of all ages, including working-age adults, parents, young people, beginners and anyone who would like to try, including people with mobility challenges
 - Flexible schedule of creative health programmes including evenings and weekends, to accommodate different lifestyles
 - Put on drop-in taster sessions to help people try new activities without commitment
 - Showcase online groups to support those who are isolated or those with motor challenges as well as mobility challenges
- Value and embed creative health as a component of health and wellbeing approaches in health and wellbeing settings
- Facilitate access to venues and spaces within health and care settings for creative health activities
- Enable free, accessible and sustainable creative health activities for local people through funding support

Creative health survey Appendix 1 demographics (1)



Creative health survey

Appendix 1 demographics (2)



To complement our online survey, we opened an online conversation via the Let's talk platform which offered people the opportunity to share views and recommendations.

Key insights:

- Creativity is a tool for managing mental health and wellbeing
 - many participants highlighted that creative activities such as: drama, singing, poetry, etc. are important for managing stress, anxiety and wellbeing

'I use creativity through craft and sewing as a mindful activity to reduce my stress and anxiety. I take part in and plan activities for Honor Oak Women's Institute, their monthly Craft Club and Craft Days. I find researching and testing new crafts helps me focus and gives me purpose. I've also recently set up a Needle and Natter group once a month in the Honor Oak Pub open to all...It feels very positive and has helped my confidence to bring people together who wouldn't have met if it wasn't for craft and me organising it.'

- Creativity is a tool to support social connections and reduce isolations
 - via community group activity such as: choir group, knitting groups, etc. – e.g. 'Needle and Natters'
- Personal development and build confidence
 - participants underlined the role of creativity for supporting people to get more confident and controlling their lives as well as support healing and overcome trauma

Recommendations

- Support local creative health projects
- Use creative approaches in mental health support
- Funding creative activities within health and care settings
- Promote positive stories of showing impact of creativity for health

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Community outreach summary report

Creative health – listening to local people community outreach (1)

As part of our engagement approach over the summer of 2025 we attended events across south east London which gave us the opportunity to listen to local people and hear their stories.

- Southwark Eid event
- Lambeth Country Show
- Carers week event - Bexley
- Bellingham Festival
- One Bromley Wellbeing Hub
- South Asian Festival - Bexley
- Thamesmead Festival
- Penge Festival

We listened to over 100 south east Londoners.



Created at One Bromley Wellbeing Hub
Creative Health Workshop – July 2025

Listening to local people community outreach (2) summary insights

- Creative health benefits for mental health – relaxing, supports concentration, distracts from difficulties, feeling of fulfilment
- Creative health benefits for physical health – gets you physically active & singing supports lung health
- Activity types – walking, cooking, drawing, crafting and artmaking, dancing, singing, gardening, creative social groups
- Learning new skills gives purpose – cooking and crafting
- Social opportunity – joining groups, singing together
- Creativity provides a chance for "me time" - taking time out for something you enjoy

'I feel calm and tranquil when I write using Arabic calligraphy'

'Dancing makes me feel alive'

'I think creative activities are important to relax and get lost in something that no one is relying on you for... I have a small patch at the front of my property where I grow a few veg. I get enjoyment from neighbours stopping to watch and chat.'

Listening to local people community outreach (3) South East London



Thamesmead Festival
August 2025



South Asian Festival July 2025



Eid Festival June 2025



South Asian Festival July 2025



Eid Festival June 2025

Listening to local people (4)

Below are some of the comments we heard from local people about the ways in which creativity plays a role in their lives.

'I recently had a stroke and am learning to crochet one handed. It is much more challenging than creative'

'My way to be creative is by making creative learning resources and a beautiful learning environment for my students. This makes me feel good'

I love cooking for people because I love to see the smile on their faces. Cooking is a passion of mine. I feel that food brings people together from different walks of life. Good food is essential. Cooking helps me relive stress and makes the world go around.'



'Not feeling isolated and a reason to get out and socialising has made the biggest difference.'

'I enjoy and feel good every time when I am drawing with henna'

'Being creative makes me happy'

'Creativity is the intrigue that helps to bring peoples together and that togetherness then bonds people and creates relationships and creates wellbeing'

Listening to local people community outreach (5) Raw Material Music and Media

On 8 April we visited [Raw Material Music and Media](#) a vibrant community music and creative arts centre based in Brixton, Lambeth, dedicated to supporting creative and personal development for the south london community.

The Raw Material team hosted a community open day showcasing their newly renovated three-storey accessible building which houses recording studios, digital audio production suite and a live performance room.

The event highlighted the wide range of creative activities and resources that people of all ages can access.

We spoke with some of the staff, volunteers and community members who are involved with Raw Material's programmes.

The participants shared how creativity helps them to stay well and feel connected, from poetry and music making to dancing and drumming.



Raw Material Music and Media



Raw Material Music and Media

Listening to local people community outreach (6) Raw Material Music and Media

Watch these short videos with some of the participants explaining how creative activities are important to their health and wellbeing.



Sebastian



Sasha



Yasmine



Beatrice



Jess



Michelangelo

Creative health in south east London - next steps

- Developing borough level creative health objectives, boroughs Public Health and Culture teams committing to support funding to continue Creative Health programme in south east London (SEL) – objectives including in insights from our engagement approach highlighted in this report.
- Organising creative health events and establishing local networks at borough level to raise visibility of work and available programmes and how they support Integrated Neighbourhood Health in SEL – including piloting establishing creative health community champions in Greenwich.
- Mapping tool development (London Arts and Health creative health connections map) to create a central publicly accessible site where creative health activities can be found – linked to Community directories in SEL
- Establishing and building on creative health collaborations in SEL ICS – Southbank Centre/NHS South East London/South London and Maudsley, Bexley Wellbeing Partnership/64 Million Artists, SEL Cancer Alliance/NHS South East London, Lewisham Health Equity Teams & Integrated Neighbourhood Teams/London Arts and Health
- Positioning with Socio-Economic Development and Partnerships in NHS South East London – Collaborating with South London Listens – acknowledging socio-economic determinants of health and creativity as a health behaviour
- Focusing on sustainable funding for creative health – e.g. Creative Health Southwark Steering Group working towards a pooled fund to support creative health organisations, driven by Public Health priorities
- Highlighting where creative health is reducing health inequalities in Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and Health Equity Teams in Lewisham
- Keeping [the creative health conversation on Let's talk health and care](#) platform open for continued dialogue on creative health in SEL

Thank you to everyone who took part in our engagement phase.

Join the conversation on our chat forum:

<https://letstalkhealthandcareselondon.org/creative-health-2>



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