

ReCITE Case Study:

Creative Health Exchange – When Stories Change the Ecosystem

In March 2025, the ReCITE team hosted the Creative Health Exchange, a landmark gathering designed to explore how storytelling and creativity can strengthen the region’s health ecosystem. Held at Liverpool Lighthouse and delivered in collaboration with partners including Writing on the Wall, Capacity Development International, LSTM, and iiCON, the event brought together 138 people from across Merseyside.

Attendees included artists, health professionals, researchers, community leaders, commissioners, volunteers, and residents, each contributing to a shared vision of using creativity to tackle health inequalities. The event’s broader purpose was to showcase the rich array of creative health work already underway in the city region. Members of ReCITE’s Community Innovation Teams (CITs) were invited, as the event was an opportunity to gain inspiration and connect with artists for potential future creative interventions.



Dr Vicki Doyle, co-director of Capacity Development International, and Mike Morris, co-director of Writing on the wall, welcoming guests to the Creative Health Exchange.



Poet Louise Fazackerly performing one of her poems. / Photo Andrew AB photography

The Exchange served as a catalyst for building a healthier future, not through traditional systems alone, but through embedded community-led approaches. It marked a shift from viewing creativity as an “add-on” to recognising it as a foundational approach to community wellbeing. The aim was to explore how lived experience and creative storytelling could be better woven into public health strategies, especially in areas like cancer screening, vaccination uptake, and mental health support.

Context

Across Liverpool, Knowsley, and Sefton, long-standing health inequalities have deepened in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In North Liverpool, fewer than half of eligible women (aged 50-71) attend their routine mammogram appointments revealing a significant screening gap that underscores the urgency for innovative, community-led approaches to creative health. Communities face increasingly complex challenges that can't be solved by services working in isolation. The ReCITE initiative, funded by UKRI/AHRC with £2.5 million, was created to bridge this gap, forming ten Community Innovation Teams (CITs) across the Liverpool City Region. These teams bring together creative practitioners, health professionals, academics, and community members to co-design and deliver place-based, data-informed health *interventions*.

Approach / What happened / Voices

The Creative Health Exchange provided a vibrant space for networking, reflection, and learning. The day featured storytelling performances, interactive workshops, and a creative “marketplace” where artists and organisations showcased their work. This gave attendees, including CIT members, the chance to see innovative examples of how creativity is being used to address public health challenges.



Left: Guests networking at the 'marketplace' segment of the Creative Health Exchange. Right: Aidan Jolly of Collective Encounters delivering a workshop on trauma-informed practice.

The Exchange also drew inspiration from the [#BeBreastSavvyLiverpool campaign](#), run by the Anfield & Everton Community Innovation Team. That initiative reached over 800 women through a community roadshow, supported by nearly 24,000 text message prompts and 872 direct rebooking calls, a powerful demonstration of how creative outreach can engage communities and drive behaviour change

It was the first time that the full network of nine trained community co-researchers came together, supporting the evaluation and advocacy arms of the programme. The ethos throughout was one of collaboration, co-creation, and care.

Participants spoke of the transformational power of creativity. One local woman reflected:

“Creativity brought me back to life.”

A GP attending the Exchange said:

“We used creative methods I’ve never seen before in medicine – and it worked. Screening numbers soared.”

Key take aways

The learning from the Exchange reaffirmed several key insights:

- Creative practice, when rooted in local experience, builds trust in a way traditional messaging often cannot.

- Sustainable change requires breaking down silos between the sectors such as arts, health, housing, education, and other sectors.
- Investing in long-term relationships is far more impactful than short-term interventions.
- There is a strong appetite among local authorities, including the Liverpool City Council (LCC), to embed creative approaches into future health strategies.

What's next

Looking ahead, ReCITE is working with regional authorities to co-develop a Creative Health Strategy for Merseyside. This will lay the groundwork for embedding creative methods across public services. A second Creative Health Exchange is planned for July 2026, further expanding the network of collaborators and community advocates. Liverpool City Council's Sarah Lovell has expressed interest in collaborating on the hosting and organisation of this event - a clear sign of the impact ReCITE is having across the region.

At the same time, ReCITE's co-researchers and evaluation partners are capturing detailed insights into what works, for whom, and under what conditions. This evidence will be shared with national policymakers and commissioners to inform future funding and policy.

With strong early indicators of success, continued funder investment is vital. ReCITE is building more than a series of projects. ReCITE it is nurturing a movement. Through creativity, communities are not only telling their stories but changing the system that shapes them.

Contact:

Rachael Hankin, Project Coordinator, Writing on the Wall, rachael@writingonthewall.org.uk

Link to visuals/media:

- Blog: [Creative Health Exchange Rocks: When Stories Change the Ecosystem](#)
- Visuals: Event photos [Andrew AB Photography](#)
- Website: [ReCITE - Building Research by Communities to Address Inequities Through Expression](#)
- Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)