



RoamCork

- The exploration of place, loss, belonging, and memory, by the communities of the Northside of Cork City

Front cover photo credit: Clare Keogh

ROAMCORK

A unique collection of creative works and expressions by residents living in the Northside of Cork City, as part of a participatory arts and health project, with wellbeing benefits.



The artists of this participatory art project wish to express their sincere gratitude to the following people and organisations for their support and creative contributions to this project:-

Organisations

- ✓ Cork City Arts Office
- ✓ Cork City Partnership Friendly Call Cork
- ✓ Creative Ireland
- ✓ Dance Cork Firkin Crane
- ✓ Hollyhill Library
- ✓ HSE South West
- ✓ Irish Hospice Foundation
- ✓ Knocknaheeny Senior Citizens Group
- ✓ Knocknaheeny Youth Project
- ✓ Mayfield HAZ Team
- ✓ Mayfield Arts Centre
- ✓ Mayfield Library
- ✓ Mayfield Sports Complex
- ✓ Musical Neighbourhoods
- ✓ Music Generation Cork City
- ✓ Saint Mary's on the Hill National School
- ✓ Saint Patrick's Girls National School
- ✓ Sláintecare Healthy Communities
- ✓ The Canteen, Knocknaheeny
- ✓ Tinderbox Orchestra

Individuals

- ✓ Dominic Campbell, Project Lead
- ✓ Ella Daly, Project Coordinator
- ✓ Louise Tangney, Creative Communities Engagement Officer
- ✓ Tanya O'Sullivan, Sláintecare Healthy Communities Local Development Officer

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Cork Journeys

The sand in Youghal was so thick you'd have to plough through it,
Dragging your bags and baggage from the train.

No such thing as playing in the water, most of us were afraid.
Lucky if we'd been shown how to float, how to kick our legs behind us.

Men rolled trousers to their knees, knotting the four corners
of a handkerchief to cool their bothered heads.

I never drank tea, but I did then; even the tea tasted different,
Our cups hanging from our bags, filled by Youghal women.
Straight from the dark of their kitchen, out the back door to us.

We worried the men might be left behind, jumping off the train
for a piddle every stop. The Pints (and the half pints) they'd had with
cousins, too much for their bladders to manage the whole way home.

Everything else, empty – the bags lighter, sandwiches eaten.
The fair ones reddened by sun, and only a few paid for, rushed through
past the ticket man, all of us running from the carriage, up steps to the hill
- Our little hearts filled with summer.

*Poem created from answers by Friendly Call and Senior Citizen Club
participants to RoamCork's 'beautiful questions'*

Forward



The RoamCork Project was born from a shared vision between the Irish Hospice Foundation, Sláintecare Healthy Communities and Cork City Council - to explore how creativity can foster **connection, reflection, and a deeper sense of place.**

Rooted in the communities of the Northside of Cork City, RoamCork invited artists, older adults, schoolchildren, and local organisations into a collaborative space where memory, imagination, and lived experience could meet.

Through storytelling, map-making, music, needlework, poetry, visual art, and simple conversation, *RoamCork* asked vital questions about belonging, legacy, identity, loss, and how we hold space for one another. This book gathers the jewels of that work – not as a definitive record, but as a series of creative impressions by participants of the project which amplify their voices, hands, and hearts working in dialogue across neighbourhoods, generations, and perspectives.

The works contained here are brave, fragile, bold, informative, and deeply personal – they speak to the power of the everyday and the significance of being seen, heard, and remembered. The RoamCork Project has been both a journey and a gesture by all involved in the project - towards a city that honours the richness of its people, their experiences and their stories.

We thank all the participants, artists and partners who made this project possible, and who remind us that creativity, when shared, becomes a lasting form of support and connection.

Lord Mayor Cllr. Dan Boyle

May 2025

Context and Overview of the Project



RoamCork is a creative arts & health / wellbeing project designed to support social connection and emotional health in communities across the Northside of Cork City.

Developed by Cork City Council, in partnership with the Irish Hospice Foundation and Sláintecare Healthy Communities, it was funded through Creative Ireland's Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community Programme and it forms part of the wider Creative Communities Initiative within Sláintecare Healthy Communities.



Rooted in the lived experiences of communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, RoamCork has responded directly to the lasting impacts of isolation, disrupted social connections, and the loss of key life moments / milestones – especially among children and older adults.

RoamCork aimed to address these challenges by using the arts as a gentle, inclusive and non-clinical tool for healing, reflection and reconnection. The project offered a wide range of creative experiences – music, poetry, mapping, mark-making, working with clay and textiles, visual art, and storytelling – delivered through workshops, performances, and exhibitions in schools, libraries and community centres.



A panel of six local artists, specially trained in creative approaches to grief and loss, led these sessions. Their work placed children and older people at the heart of the process, offering opportunities for intergenerational exchange, rediscovery of neighbourhoods, and exploration of personal and shared histories.



Engaging with the communities of the Northside of Cork City in open, creative dialogue about grief and loss was both necessary and transformative. The project did not seek to offer therapy, but rather to create spaces and time for shared expression, understanding, creativity and healing – bridging generational divides and allowing communities to reclaim their stories after years of disconnection.

The Project's Communities of Interest



Friendly Call Programme



Mayfield Library



The Kabin Studio



HSE Community Health Teams



Knocknaheeny Senior Citizens Group



St Mary's on the Hill, Knocknaheeny



Music Generation Cork City



Mayfield Arts Centre



St. Patrick's Girls NS



Musical Neighbourhoods



The Canteen



Hollyhill Library

The Development of the RoamCork Project

The project was developed in four phases - *Discuss, Develop, Deliver, Reflect*, running from June 2024 to Autumn 2025.



Source: R Lartey

1. **Discuss** (June to October 2024) - The lead groups brainstormed, explored approach and responsibilities.
2. **Develop** (October to December 2024) - A call out to artists was made and 7 were selected from 53 applicants.

Irish Hospice Foundation led a bespoke training programme in art and its role in loss and grief. Through this training, artists developed their process for working with groups of young adults and older people. At the same time, Irish Hospice Foundation led training in grief and loss for community groups, Cork City Council staff and Cork NGOs and health care workers.

3. **Deliver** (January to May 2025) - The project was launched with a rousing night of music featuring many Cork community musicians playing with the Tinderbox Orchestra to a full house in Dance Centre Firkin Crane on Valentine's weekend. Artists were paired with schools and older adult groups, and they worked through visual arts, dialogical arts and music to explore and uncover what stories are in the physical landscape, as well as the landscape of the imagination. The sessions / workshops were designed to increase confidence and curiosity, and explore the themes of loss, identity and sense of place.
4. **Reflect** (June onwards 2025) - The RoamCork Project's Steering Group placed strong emphasis on reflection, learning, and the sharing of insights throughout its development. The artists engaged in ongoing dialogue to consider what worked, what evolved, and how creative approaches supported connection and expression within communities of interest. Learnings were gathered through written reflections, group discussions, and participant feedback, helping to shape practice in real time. These insights have been shared through exhibitions, meetings, and this publication, contributing to a wider conversation about the role of arts in community engagement and place-based collaboration.

Delivering the Project through an Arts+Health / Wellbeing lens

As a participatory arts project, RoamCork was grounded in robust, emerging research on the positive impact of creativity on health, wellbeing, and social connection. Part of a growing global movement in health and social care, this project used the arts to address challenges in health and inequality, due to loneliness and isolation, whilst responding to the unique needs of the communities of the Northside of Cork City, by placing creativity at the centre of engagement.

Research has evidenced five core benefits of using creativity when engaging with communities, post Covid:-

- ✓ Emotional expression
- ✓ Nonverbal communication
- ✓ Communal meaning-making
- ✓ Empowerment, and
- ✓ Post-traumatic growth.



The artists used a rich mix of creative and arts-based methodologies to engage communities - storytelling, music, collaborative mapping, poetry, visual arts, cyanotype printing, embroidery, and conversational inquiry. These approaches supported gentle, inclusive participation, enabling participants to express personal narratives and reflect on shared experiences through accessible, hands-on processes. The project embraced experimentation and process over outcome, valuing each contribution as part of a broader collective expression of life, legacy, and local identity.

The following arts and wellbeing frameworks were used by the artists, during the RoamCork project:-



PERMA Model - Developed by Martin Seligman, PERMA is a framework for promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. PERMA stands for:

- **P** – *Positive Emotions* (joy, gratitude, hope)
- **E** – *Engagement* (deep focus, “flow” states)
- **R** – *Relationships* (connection, empathy, support)
- **M** – *Meaning* (purpose, belonging)
- **A** – *Achievement* (goals, pride, mastery)

Source:
<https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/perma-model/>

Creative engagement naturally promotes all five elements, especially *engagement*, *meaning*, and *relationships*.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Five Ways to Wellbeing - Developed by New Economics Foundation (NEF, UK), the Five Ways to Wellbeing are:

1. **Connect** – Build relationships
2. **Be Active** – Move your body
3. **Take Notice** – Be present, observe beauty
4. **Keep Learning** – Try something new
5. **Give** – Acts of kindness or contribution.

Source: <https://www.mindspacemayo.ie/five-ways-to-wellbeing>

The Five Ways to Wellbeing is a simple, evidence-based framework that aligns closely with arts participation. Many community arts projects design sessions to promote all five areas (e.g. sharing skills, ideas, work; mindful observation; learning new skills).



Social Model of Health - Health is shaped by a wide range of social, economic, and environmental factors – not just medical ones. The guiding principles of the Social Model of Health are:

- ✓ Continuous improvement in the quality of services and programs with all efforts channelled to meet the specific needs of the people and communities being served.
- ✓ Health equity and social justice.
- ✓ Community vitality and belonging.

Creative engagement addresses many social determinants of health, such as social connection, cultural identity, and access to supportive spaces, especially in deprived or marginalised communities.

Source: <https://www.crhc.on.ca/model-for-health-and-wellbeing>

The RoamCork project built on participants' existing creativity, cultural heritage, lived experiences, and their capacity for expression.

It focused on the strengths and resources they and their communities already possessed, rather than problems or deficits.

The artists used creative methods throughout the project which promoted agency, dignity, and empowerment, which are especially important in loss and recovery contexts.





In neighbourhoods which are often impacted by health inequalities and social isolation, this project demonstrated how accessible, arts-based approaches can promote emotional wellbeing, intergenerational dialogue, and a stronger sense of community belonging.

What were the intended outcomes?

The RoamCork Project aimed to explore how arts-based engagement could support health, wellbeing, and connection, in communities within the Northside of Cork City, which were particularly impacted by loss and isolation during and after the pandemic. The key outcomes which the project aimed to achieve were:-



- **Use creativity to support wellbeing** - RoamCork aimed to demonstrate how music, visual arts, storytelling, and participatory practices can positively impact mental health, build emotional resilience, and community connection.
- **Address the experience of loss and grief** - The project acknowledged the unspoken or unprocessed losses many people, particularly older adults and adolescents, experienced during Covid-19. Through creative means, RoamCork offered space to reflect, remember, share and reconnect.
- **Strengthen intergenerational and community bonds** - By working across age groups, RoamCork sought to bridge generations, encourage storytelling, and reignite relationships within communities.
- **Map and reimagine place** - Through artistic mapping activities, participants were encouraged to rediscover and creatively reinterpret their neighbourhoods, bringing forward stories, memories, and shared hopes for the future.
- **Promote inclusion in the arts** - RoamCork prioritised access for people who may not typically engage with cultural activities, especially in areas of social or economic disadvantage in Cork City's Northside.
- **Contribute to the evidence base** - The project intended to build on research linking arts and health / wellbeing, demonstrating how participatory arts can be integrated into community wellbeing strategies and public health frameworks.

Ethical Considerations

The RoamCork Project, grounded in participatory arts and health practice, involved working closely with vulnerable individuals and communities, particularly older adults, adolescents and people who were experiencing loss. This required careful attention to ethical considerations to ensure the project was respectful, inclusive, and safe for all participants. Outlined below are the key ethical considerations which informed the project:

- ✓ **Confidentiality and Anonymity** - Artists and facilitators were sensitive to the personal nature of the stories and memories shared, particularly around bereavement or trauma. In many cases, names were changed or omitted, and identifying details were anonymised when used in public-facing outputs such as poems, maps, or interviews.
- ✓ **Emotional Safety** - Given that the project addressed themes of loss, grief, and community memory, artists worked with care. Sessions / workshops were structured to include moments of reflection, grounding, and informal support.
- ✓ **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups** - All artists were Garda vetted and trained in Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children First.
- ✓ **Co-creation and Agency** - The project was participatory by design, which was essential to ensure that participants had real agency in the creative process – not just subjects of artistic interpretation. Artists listened closely, honoured lived experiences, and made space for shared decision-making.
- ✓ **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion** - Cork's communities are diverse, with varying life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and ways of expressing grief or memory. Artists ensured the work was inclusive, accessible, and respectful of local values.
- ✓ **Dissemination of Work** - The exhibitions and published materials are the outputs of the project and have been shared in ways that preserve the dignity and voice of participants.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh.

The Artists



Julie Forrester is a visual artist and creative producer, whose practice prioritises process-based approaches, often working collaboratively and 'in context'. Julie's work is characterised by an enquiry into narrative forms from connection with place and shared experience.

Her recent work focuses on urban ecologies and climate awareness. Her collaborative work explores the sense of belonging which arises out of a relationship with place, subtly embracing themes of advocacy and inclusion.

With a long career as an artist in education contexts, Julie is a panellist with numerous arts organisations, including The Crawford Art Gallery, where she delivers programmes in response to artworks and exhibitions. She is currently curating the multidisciplinary arts participation and site-specific Art Project, Gleann a'Phúca in The Glen, Cork.



Clara Scullion is a multi-media artist based in Cork, and originally from County Antrim. Her work explores representation and memory through photography, textiles and text. She enjoys collaborating with charities and organisations to help lesser-heard voices create work and exhibit publicly.

Clara has presented her artistic research on ethical representation in art at conferences across Ireland since 2021 and exhibited throughout Ireland, the UK and Sweden since 2015. She completed her Masters in Fine Art at Ulster University in 2022; her undergraduate degree in Fine Art and Education at the National College of Art and Design in 2017, and won the IPIP Graduate Award that same year.



Jenny Horgan is a teacher, poet and Irish Examiner columnist. Her creative work appears in various journals such as Southword, Howl and Abridged.

She was awarded a poetry mentorship with Thomas McCarthy in 2023 and was chosen as one of four poets to attend a masterclass with Theo Dorgan in 2024 as part of One City One Book.

Her work was most recently shortlisted in RTE's Prompt Series. Her debut collection was released in April 2024 with Doire Press.



Amy McNamara is a traditional Irish musician and visual artist based in Cork City. Originally from Tulla, Co. Clare, an area renowned for its rich musical heritage, Amy was immersed in the East Clare style from an early age, growing up in a highly musical family. She has achieved national recognition through her success at the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, most notably winning the Senior Céilí Band competition in 2019 with the Cnoc na Gaoithe Céilí Band, following a remarkable run of three consecutive Munster titles (2017–2019).

Amy has toured internationally with Cnoc na Gaoithe, representing Irish culture and music in Shanghai and South Africa, as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge celebrations, and has also performed widely across Europe alongside her siblings, Kate and Gearóid McNamara.

In addition to her performing career, Amy is a qualified primary school teacher with a strong passion for music education. She is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of musicians, blending her creative talents as both an educator and artist.



Grace Haynes is a visual artist and educator from the Cavan / Monaghan region and relocated to Cork City in 2023. She graduated with a BA (Honours) in Illustration and Graphic Design. She is currently a socially engaged artist working in the community and works as a Creative Associate with the Creative Schools Initiative and is an associate artist with Helium Arts in Cork.

Her work to date is concerned with the natural world, taking inspiration from flora and fauna found natively in Ireland. She has recently begun to explore alternative process in eco arts, including in making and natural dyes which she then combines in her visual work. She is currently doing a certificate in Eco Arts Practice at the Crawford, Cork.



Tommy Lysaght is a Stone Carver, Facilitator and Educator. Working with various organisations, he brings his skills to collaborative projects by focussing on engagement and connection with people, heritage and culture. He works on commissions for public sculpture and installations, working closely with Cork City Council, local businesses and local organisations such as Cork Simon Community.

Tommy creates solo sculptures and smaller stone pieces, accepting private commissions where clients bring exciting ideas worth setting in stone. Heritage, place, people, nature and stories are of particular interest to Tommy when starting a private commission or personal piece.

The Aran Islands have been a place of particular significance for Tommy in terms of experiences and inspiration in his journey as a Stone Carver.



Rachel Lartey is a Social Practice Arts Facilitator and Researcher based in Cork. She is dedicated to creating and supporting meaningful artistic experiences within communities, with a particular emphasis on inclusivity, dialogue, and co-creation.

Her work explores a wide range of social issues, including ageing, identity, isolation, stigma, loss of community, and our need for human connection. Through collaborative, arts-based approaches, she facilitates spaces where people can come together to share, reflect, and imagine new possibilities and ways of thinking.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh.

Specialist training for the artists

Cork City Council and Irish Hospice Foundation arranged for the artists chosen to deliver the arts and wellbeing / arts and health project to have specialist training to ensure the project was delivered ethically, safely, and with the necessary depth of understanding.

Grief is a complex and sensitive topic, especially in communities facing social and economic challenges, where multiple forms of loss may be present. The artists needed to be prepared to respond with empathy, care, and appropriate boundaries, creating a safe space which supported creative and emotional expression.

The specialist training on Arts and Grief, Grief Theory, and Public Models of Bereavement not only protected participants but also supported the wellbeing of the artists, enabling them to work with confidence, clarity, and resilience. It helped build trust within the communities of interest and ensured that the work aligned with the values and professional standards of all commissioning bodies.

The training also enhanced the quality and depth of the artistic outcomes, ensuring the project was impactful, meaningful, and capable of contributing to healing and connection.

In review, the key reasons specialist training in grief and loss was delivered to the artists were:

- **Psychological safety:** To handle emotional disclosures with care.
- **Community trust:** To engage with sensitivity, especially in communities facing multiple layers of loss.
- **Ethical standards:** To align with best practice in arts and health delivery.
- **Artist wellbeing:** To support emotional resilience.
- **Project impact:** To create meaningful, relevant, and transformative work around grief and loss.

The Launch of RoamCork

The RoamCork project was officially launched at Dance Cork Firkin Crane on 15 February 2025, with a vibrant, family-friendly fanfare.

The launch marked the start of RoamCork's collective arts and wellbeing initiative and featured a powerful fusion of local and international talent - Music Generation Cork City, Musical Neighbourhoods, The Kabin Studio, and senior community choirs – who performed alongside Scotland's Tinderbox Collective, a 21-piece community orchestra of rappers, singers, brass, strings, and woodwind musicians.



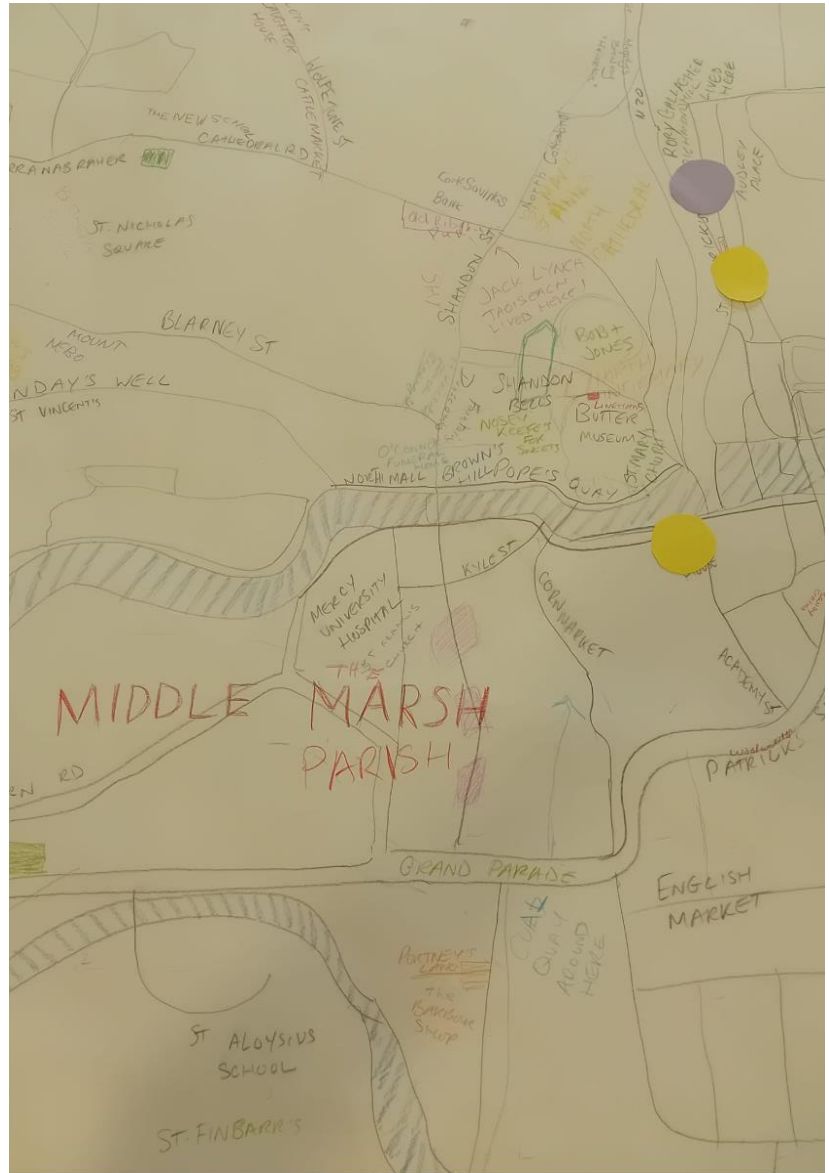
Photo credit: Clare Keogh.

Speaking at the Launch, Cork City Council's Creative Communities Engagement Officer, Louise Tangney, shared with the audience why RoamCork was being delivered and how it would address some of the enduring impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Cork City's Northside. She shared how the project was aimed to encourage people to enjoy their post-pandemic freedom - to wander, explore, experiment, and be curious.

Both groups demonstrated a rich and detailed knowledge of Cork City, recalling intricate elements of its urban history – from road layouts to long-forgotten shops and businesses – spanning several decades.

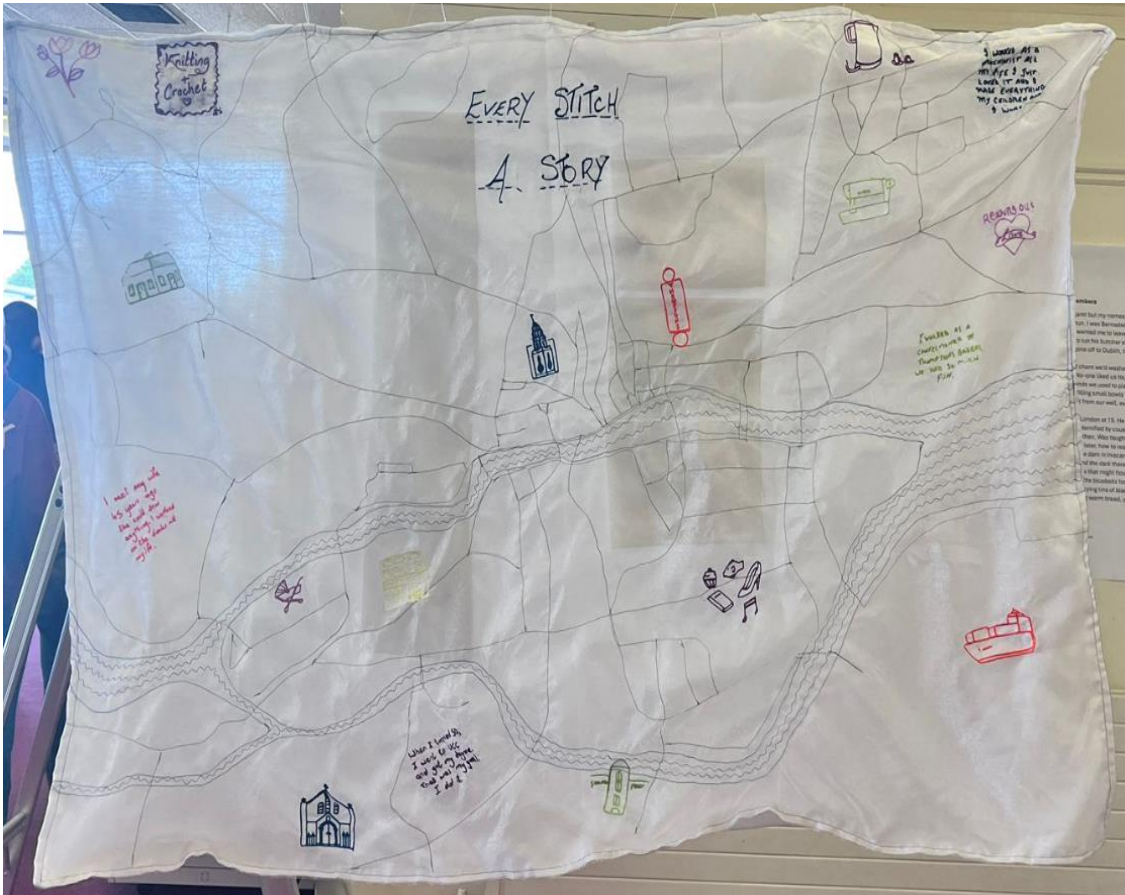
The sessions drew inspiration from the work of fellow RoamCork project artist Julie Forrester, particularly her mapping activity, which featured a large roll of A0 paper with a hand-drawn outline of the city. This visual and spatial framework served as a powerful catalyst for storytelling and collective memory-sharing. Participants marked the map with personal landmarks representing moments of joy, work, and achievement. Though the two groups engaged with the same map separately, their contributions intertwined to create a layered and communal memory map.

Through the creative activities, participants shared deeply personal recollections, demonstrating how dialogical art – where the process of conversation and collaboration is as important as the final work – can gently unlock stories of grief, memory, resilience, and pride.





In addition to mapping, the sessions incorporated creative techniques such as basic embroidery and botanical cyanotype printing – symbolic expressions of time and memory. While not all experiments were successful (for instance, photographic cyanotypes using acetate did not develop as expected), the project embraced its experimental nature, prioritising the process and interpersonal connections over final outcomes.



Every stitch told a story as members of the senior citizens' groups carefully embroidered their personal landmarks and treasured memories. With each thread, they marked places tied to joy, work, family, and friendship – bringing to life decades of lived experience across Cork City. These delicate stitches became more than decorative details; they were acts of remembering, honouring, and sharing, weaving individual narratives into a rich, collective tapestry of place and belonging.



Friendly Call Cork - Artist **Jenny Horgan** collaborated with *Friendly Call Cork*, a service supporting older people through regular check-in phone calls from trained volunteers. Rather than engaging directly with service users, it was agreed that Jenny would work with and through the volunteers, integrating a creative layer into their existing interactions.

Her approach centred on the development of “*beautiful questions*” – carefully crafted prompts designed to spark reflection, conversation, and storytelling. These questions were shared with the Friendly Call team, who, in turn, circulated them among volunteers. Responses were returned, both in written and audio formats, providing a glimpse into the lives and memories of participants.

Jenny then sought more direct engagement with older individuals, which led to several meaningful one-to-one conversations – some conducted over the phone and others in person. Notably, her visit with one participant offered a particularly rich exchange; through a simple, conversational approach, he shared his life story, memories of Cork, and personal reflections. His later visit to the exhibition marked a significant milestone in the project’s ambition to build connections and visibility for participants.

RoamCork’s Beautiful Questions

1

Where is a place with special meaning for you in Cork City’s Northside?

2

Do you remember coming to Cork City’s Northside for the first time? Maybe you weren’t born there or you moved into the area.

3

Can you share anything about school life or your working life? Where did you go to school or work - what are your strongest memories?

4

Young people nowadays like to meet up outside or play online. What did you do for fun as a child and later on as an adult to have fun? What activities and events went on in the Northside that you can recall?

Outlined below are some of the creative exchanges by participants:-

“

My father was off working, and my mother would take us up the baths, where The Kingsley is now. It was an outdoor swimming pool. We loved it, and after we'd go to Fitzgerald's Park, then we'd walk all the way up the hills home. It was a fair trek. I wouldn't be doing it now I can tell you. I remember the 'brown bombers.' They were the lifeguards who got really tanned from being in the sun.

”

Response to one of the 'Beautiful Questions'

“

There'd be my mother and father, three kids and two aunts. I remember my father putting a cushion over the handbrake so one of us could sit there, we'd head to Red Strand beyond Clonakilty. My father had a one ring gas primus, and he'd cook us sausages and beans. I can nearly taste them now. I carried on the tradition and brought my own kids to the beach too. They were special times.

”

Response to one of the 'Beautiful Questions'

Recognising the value of working within established community settings, Jenny also connected with fellow artist Clara's group of older adults. Over two in-person sessions, she engaged participants informally as they worked on their art, collecting responses and reflections through casual, one-to-one conversations. This method proved especially effective in capturing authentic voices and their lived experiences - gathering small but meaningful narrative fragments. Repeated references to games, music, dance, travels and work revealed underlying patterns and shared cultural touchstones. Drawing on this material, Jenny crafted a series of poems, carefully maintaining the original tone and voice of her contributors while preserving their anonymity.

A Cork Nun Remembers

I was born Margaret but my names have changed –
part of being a nun. I was Veronica too, and Louise.
My father never wanted me to leave – I was the only one
who knew how to run his butcher shop.
But I was soon gone off to Dublin, then Nigeria.

I remember we'd chant when we washed our hands.
Well-Well-Well. No-one liked us touching lepers
with the same hands we used to plant vegetables.
To sew and pray, filling small bowls with stew.
Carrying water out from our well, even to men with guns.

My brother left for London at 15. He cried.
We put a sticker on him so he'd be identified by cousins at Paddington.
He joined the army then. Was taught how to mend
socks, cook and drive, and later, how to read.
He shot a donkey once in a ditch by the dam in Inniscarra.
He was made pay for the lost round.
Found the dark there comforting, keeping watch against bombs that
might flood the city.

My mother liked bright colours - the bluebells for Our Lady's altar, and us
little ones carrying tins of blackberries inside a white pram, imagining
warm bread, yellow butter, the thick spread of jam.

Jenny felt the sessions with Friendly Call and the Senior Citizen's groups became a highlight of her work on the RoamCork Project because it exemplified the potential of informal, embedded engagement within familiar and trusted community spaces, including the power of listening, the art of conversation, and the value of narrative in honouring the everyday experiences of Cork's older generations.

“

I started at St. Vincent's before coming to Mayfield. In Mayfield I started in Guardian Angel school. It is still there. It was hard going. It was hard going because at that time there was corporal punishment. I'm sure my teacher got high blood pressure from hitting me, but he certainly fattened on it.

Back then if you weren't up to it, you were forgotten and put to the side. I remember being frightened of learning and being put down. It was a terrible thing - being told you will never be anything. It took me a long time to realise I can be somebody, because of always being told I couldn't. The children today are so blessed. I didn't get the chance to learn properly.

”

Response to one of the 'Beautiful Questions'

St Mary's on the Hill, Knocknaheeny & St Patrick's National School, Mayfield - Artists Julie Forrester, Grace Hayes, Amy McNamara and Rachel Larney collaborated to deliver a series of imaginative and reflective workshops with students from St Mary's on the Hill in Knocknaheeny and St Patrick's Girls National School in Mayfield.



In her work with the young women in St Patrick's National school, **Julie Forrester** developed the theme of belonging and very quickly, in the creative exchanges, they shared their own personal sense of belonging and how it has changed over the last few years, as they have got older, and since the pandemic.

They shared how they came to appreciate where they live because the pandemic highlighted to them how valuable their communities are to them and how where they live is a place to honour, appreciate, own and be owned by.



Together they mapped places in their locality that were dear to their hearts - the places they go for food, to play, to be alone and to be with friends. They remembered how they were when they were 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 and the milestones that happened during that time.

For Julie, as an older adult working with young people, she enjoyed the experience of personally reaching into the past - both back to the pandemic years but also to when she was 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. The intergenerational aspect of RoamCork held a deep fascination for her.

The mapping work brought up feelings for the students that they experienced during a time of separation and how, during the pandemic, they sought out spaces for solace and joy, where they could safely share moments with people and places in the open city in a time of upheaval.



The students also shared how they have come to understand and appreciate that one of the outcomes of the pandemic's "lock downs" was how they were gifted with more time to build a special relationship with 'their place' / 'their community' on their doorstep.



The mapping activity laid the groundwork for deeper, more expressive exploration, as Julie introduced "spiral" work to the students - spirals into this time, beginning on 13 March 2020 and leading till now.

For them, 2025 marks the end of a cycle and transition from primary to secondary education. As they leave things behind, they find other things – finding ways to acknowledge grief and loss in the passage of time and recognise the resilience that has brought them through.

The spiral activity was a playful, intuitive method that helped unlock storytelling and self-expression. Through this work, the students began to articulate their experiences of the past five years, including sharing key life milestones they had missed during lockdowns – birthday parties, First Communion, visits to and from relatives – and they spoke openly about the sense of absence and disruption they felt. At the same time, the creative process also encouraged them to recognise moments of joy and resilience. Many of the students spoke of how they had come to value their families more deeply, describing the intense longing they felt during periods of separation.

To inhabit the space Julie also brought some botanical inks foraged from materials in the locality during the pandemic, and they used blackberry, oak, alder and pine inks – making messy, splashy, and controlled maps about time, using modifiers to alter the colour and watch changes take place.



They also made tie dye samples binding cloth with bands and spraying these bundles with colour, and used gloves to protect their skin in a reiteration of the hand care of pandemic times. Some of their patterns even mirrored the familiar shape of the corona virus and they found that patterns repeat - spirals from our ancestors and circles in nature come through in many things that we do. They encountered the feeling that when we create we connect, and we make beautiful, messy, precise and surprising things.

The students sometimes shared stories and sometimes had time just for themselves - to be in the process, the creativity of gesture and material unfolding before each other and the responses without and within.



They each gathered their weekly pages into a book. The splashy time maps were still changing colour as the inks fade or oxidise in contact with the air.



The students also created small clay charms – personal tokens made both for themselves and as offerings to their community. Some of these very meaningful pieces are now displayed on the wall of the local shop on Gardiner's Hill, just a short walk from the school.







In her work with both St Mary's on the Hill and St Patrick's Girls National School, artist **Grace Haynes** worked closely with schoolchildren to explore their local environment and personal connections to it through visual art techniques such as inks, embroidery, and watercolour. Over a series of workshops, students mapped out their neighbourhoods, highlighting the places that held meaning for them and reflecting on how both they, and their communities, had changed as they grew older.

Using layered and expressive artistic methods, the students were encouraged to visually represent their personal experiences, memories, and emotional links to key locations in their communities. These included everyday, yet deeply valued places such as the park, the local chipper, the Chinese takeaway, SuperValu, the library, the GAA pitch – spaces which played a major role in their sense of belonging.

Students also reflected on a renewed appreciation for the outdoors and their local environment - nature walks, time spent in their gardens or parks, and even the simple joy of fresh air became treasured experiences. The students spoke with enthusiasm about the places that gave them comfort and routine: the library, the tank, the green, the water tower, The Kabin Studio, the homework club, and even their favourite local takeaways – all reminders of the community structures that supported them before, during, and after the pandemic.



Again, the workshops created space for critical reflection and discussion. As the students mapped and shared stories, conversations emerged about some of the challenges in their area. They expressed concern about littering and noted that bins were removed because of fears they would be set on fire. They also observed that there were few places to sit or gather, because of worries these might lead to anti-social behaviour. These comments reflected not only their connection to place, but also a developing awareness of the social and environmental dynamics affecting their communities.

Artist **Amy McNamara** also worked with students from St Mary's on the Hill and St Patrick's Girls National School, using sound, music, and collaborative storytelling to deepen their engagement with the project's themes. Drawing from the students' earlier mapping activities, Amy invited them to

reflect on their personal and group contributions through "voice-notes" – short audio recordings capturing their thoughts, memories, and the meaning behind their creative expressions.



These recordings became a powerful starting point for further exploration. The children enthusiastically shared what they had mapped – places that mattered to them, symbols of community, and memories tied to their neighbourhood. Amy then invited them to translate these expressions into music and sound, sparking an immediate and joyful response.



Several students spontaneously fetched their musical instruments, eager to contribute their own rhythms and melodies. This process resulted in rich, collaborative musical sessions, where children expressed themselves not just through words, but through song, beat, and improvisation. For some, this was the first time they had used music to articulate emotions and experiences; for others, it was a moment to shine in front of their peers.









The openness of Amy’s workshops created space for every child to participate – whether through playing an instrument, adding lyrics to a group rap, or simply responding to the sounds around them.



This integration of music and voice within RoamCork was more than a creative output – it became a tool for empowerment, emotional expression, and connection.

Three musical arrangements with lyrics were produced by the students at both schools.

The three songs are called:-

 [A Generation Back .m4a](#) 

 [Knocknaheeney is the place to be Render1.wav](#) 

 [We used to play cowboys and Indians .aac](#) 

In the context of grief, loss and reconnection, these musical moments and the production of three songs offered joy, agency, pride and collective energy, helping the students make sense of their world in a way that was both playful and profound.

The best thing about Knocknaheeny is going to
shop. ♡ During covid I loved staying in bed.. ♡

The smell of the chipper. Small's like home.. ♡

When I step outside I see grass and chairs.. ♡

If Knocknaheeny was a person it would be me because
I'm kind.. ♡ I feel strong when I dance with music...

I want to tell Knocknaheeny to stop littering.. ♡

When I come my area I feel scared because
houses come to my terrace.. ♡

I wish people could see how bad littering is... ♡

☆
af - Jessie...! May.. ♡



In her first workshop with students at both schools, **Rachel Larney** explored belonging and community through a beautifully simple and mindful group painting activity.



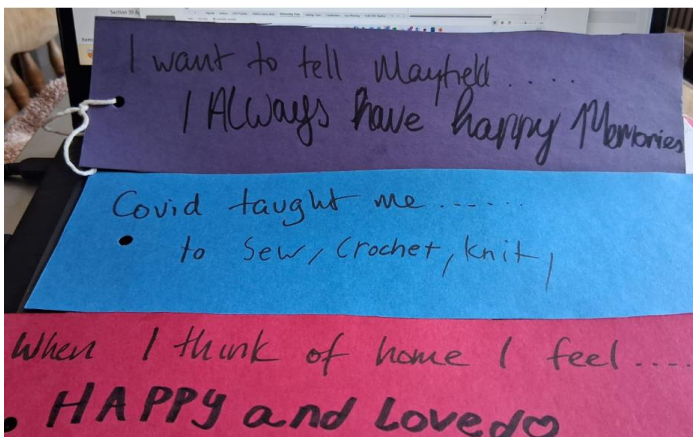
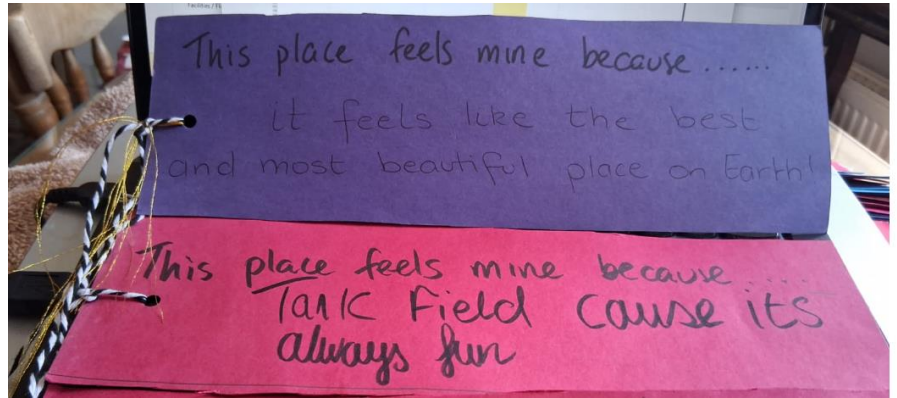
Each child received a small paintbrush and a palette to select a colour of their choice. Using a large roll of lining paper spread across the space, they were invited to paint circles – varying in size, colour, and placement – moving freely around the paper as they worked. As the exercise developed, students were prompted to create circles within circles, using different colours each time, and then to swap paints with classmates, encouraging collaboration and shared creativity. The small brushes were intentionally chosen to slow the pace and allow children to engage more mindfully in the process.

The atmosphere naturally shifted throughout the session – at times quiet and reflective and other times were lively and full of excitement as students began to see a larger collective artwork emerging from simple shapes. As they painted, Rachel posed gentle questions: *Who might be in your circles? Who matters to you – family, friends, neighbours? What places are important – your home, a park, an imagined space? Why do those places matter?*

This process sparked a flow of honest, expressive sharing. It became clear how deeply the children felt connected to their community, their surroundings, and the people who support them. To complete the piece, students filled in the spaces around the circles with contrasting colours to protect and highlight the vibrant relationships represented within each one. In the end, the entire roll of paper was covered in a rich tapestry of colour and meaning.

When reflecting on the experience, the students shared insightful comments – “I learned patience because I had to slow down,” and “We can do so much if we do it together.” Many simply said how much they loved making art and creating something beautiful together. The session became a powerful metaphor for connection, belonging, collaboration, and the beauty of shared creative expression.

On the last day of the series of workshops at St Patrick’s Girls National School, parents and grandparents were invited to see their creative pieces, as well as engage in the creative process themselves. As a group, the core themes of belonging, pride, and community were revisited through a simple yet meaningful creative activity.



Each student, parent, grandparent, teacher, artist selected a few prompt cards and were invited to complete the sentences in their own words.

The resulting reflections were rich and heartfelt, offering glimpses into cherished memories, important local places, and the enduring warmth of family and friendship. These individual lines beautifully captured the lived experiences of those connected to the school and the wider Mayfield community.

To celebrate and honour these voices, the prompt cards were gathered together to create a collective poem, which was then featured as a poetic installation at the final exhibition.

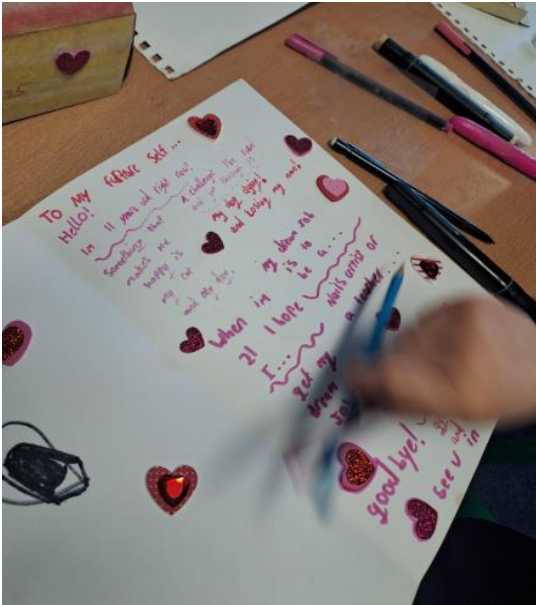
Each contribution was hung on string, allowing the words to gently move in space – symbolising the threads that weave together identity, memory, and place.



The students of St Mary's on the Hill also enjoyed making their own personal time capsule and writing a letter to their future selves. The creative activity was a powerful way to nurture self-awareness, imagination, and emotional wellbeing.

At an age where they are beginning to explore their identities, hopes, and dreams, they valued having time to pause and reflect on where they are now, what is important to them and what they have so far lived through, as well as what they aspire to become.





They included in their letters songs, singers, actors, TV shows they loved right now. They also did drawings of what was important to them, and included charms in the time capsule to represent important people in their lives. They shared what they had learnt from living through a pandemic and their hopes for the future.

Their personal time capsules are playful yet profound archives of their current world – a record of the challenges they've faced, the values they hold dear, and the people who shape their everyday lives. All agreed they would keep their time capsules safe until 2035, when they planned to open them as young adults. This exercise supported wellbeing by encouraging self-expression, future-thinking, and emotional connection – all while honouring their voices and their place in time.

At this pivotal age, just before the transition to secondary school, the students of St Mary's on the Hill and St Patrick's Girls National School are beginning to see themselves not just as individuals, but as part of a wider community and world.

So, they were invited to create their own personal "Square Mile" using clay. They were asked to reflect on the spaces they move through every day – home, school, parks, shops, streets - and to see these familiar places with fresh eyes. Through creating their 'square mile' using the clay, the students got to document what makes their square mile *theirs* – the places they love, the people they notice, the sounds, smells, memories, and hopes attached to their surroundings.



The creative work delivered by the school children of St Mary's on the Hill and St Patrick's Girls National School offered a powerful way for students to connect memory, place, identity, and change. Through multiple creative lenses, the students were able to see and experience themselves as active participants in the life of their neighbourhoods, with voices that matter.

“

Great memories of learning songs - a lot of rebel songs - and we were encouraged to sing them with fire in our bellies which mostly happened on Friday's in Churchfield. I look at it with pride each time I pass it and the memories keep flooding back... I remember primary school so well. Teachers would do a sing song on a Friday and we'd be banging our feet and fists - rebel songs. Usually we'd go home for lunch across the way. The school was across from home. On rainy Fridays Mr Coughlan would keep us in until two, and then send us home early for the weekend. Everyone was from Churchfield so you'd all be delighted going home together.

”

Response to one of the 'Beautiful Questions'

The Exhibitions

RoamCork's exhibitions were officially launched in Cork on Thursday, 29 May 2025. The events showcased a wide range of creative works by participants and featured a temporary trail linking the communities of Mayfield and Knocknaheeny, which they worked on from mid-February to May.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

The two temporary exhibitions – hosted at Mayfield Library and The Canteen in Knocknaheeny – featured delicate, thoughtfully crafted works in poetry, music, textile, painting, clay, and cardboard.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

The intergenerational nature of the project brought together a rich tapestry of voices – where recollections of old songs existed alongside imaginative visions of the future, all grounded in a shared and thoughtful engagement with the present.



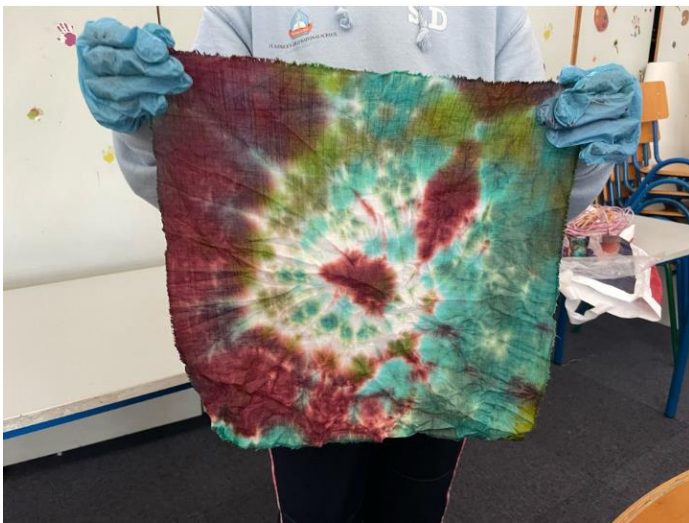
Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



The artistic expressions of participants were transposed onto posters and bunting and were used as connective threads between the two neighbourhoods.

Some reflections from participants, key stakeholders and artists

“RoamCork demonstrates how creativity can enhance connection, healing, and overall health in our communities. By uniting children, older adults, and local artists, the project helps individuals reflect on the pandemic’s impact and reimagine the spaces they inhabit. This initiative aligns with the Creative Ireland Programme’s goal to unlock creative potential, benefiting both individuals and the community. It also supports the Sláintecare vision of providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time, by fostering community health and wellbeing. I am proud that Cork City Council, in partnership with Irish Hospice Foundation and community groups, is leading such thoughtful and inspiring work.”

- First Citizen Lord Mayor Cllr. Dan Boyle

“While we created lots of art, including cyanotypes and textile pieces, I believe the biggest thing that came out of the work was laughter. To reminisce alone is often melancholy, to reminisce together is heartwarming”

- Clara Scullion, Artist

“This project has provided my daughter with access to musical opportunities which she would not normally have access to. She has loved being part of the project and I am grateful she was part of it”

- Parent of St. Mary’s on the Hill student

“Because of my time with Amy, the musician, I was inspired to learn the guitar. She told me how Cork libraries have lots of musical instruments which can be borrowed, but I asked my Mum if I could have my own and she has bought me one! I can’t wait to be able to play the guitar like Amy”.

- St Patrick’s National School student

“I think the groups I worked with were so infinitely interesting and kind that we could have continued developing work forever. I would have loved to have more time to support the participants in the development of more technical skills so that they could create some more individual work in our sessions, representing themselves through craft. I think everyone enjoyed the work, but I think we would all be more interested in continuing the time spent together chatting as we worked”

- Clara Scullion, Artist

“Art allows us to speak where words might fail. When working with grief and loss, creative methods like poetry, needlework, mapping and music gently opens space for dialogue. People, especially children and older adults, want express themselves safely, without pressure. It’s incredibly powerful to witness that kind of connection and level of sharing from all participants, during this project.”

- Rachel Lartey, Artist



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

Outcomes of the Project

Outlined below are the key outcomes of the RoamCork Project:-

- ✓ **Participation and Engagement** - Over 100 participants were involved in the project, including older adults, schoolchildren, teachers, community members. Six professional artists worked collaboratively across the Northside of Cork City, engaging groups in Knocknaheeny, Mayfield, Hollyhill and beyond.
- ✓ **Two Public Exhibitions** - Exhibitions were held at Mayfield Library and The Canteen, Knocknaheeny, showcasing artwork created by participants. Creative work included poetry, paintings, textile work, cyanotypes, and clay sculptures, reflecting personal and shared memories. A creative trail linked the two sites, including performances, interactive elements, and visual storytelling.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

- ✓ **Creative Mapping and Memory Work** - Participants contributed to the creation of a large-scale, collaborative memory map of Cork, linking past and present through lived experiences. Storytelling, mapping, and “beautiful questions” prompted reflection on place, belonging, and identity.
- ✓ **Creative Outputs and Legacy Materials** - Audio recordings, written poems, and documented conversations preserved for future use in community archives and arts-health research. Participants created original works (including poetry and visual art) inspired by participant stories and voices.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

- ✓ **Publication showcasing the creative works of all participants** - This book was produced, capturing the process, methodologies, and creative works of RoamCork. It includes reflections from participants, key stakeholders and artists. The publication provides visual documentation of the inspirational contributions of participants.
- ✓ **Contribution to Arts & Health Knowledge** - RoamCork offered a model for how arts-based interventions can be used to address loss, tackle isolation, promote wellbeing and post-pandemic community rebuilding.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

Legacy of the Project

The legacy of the project lies in the warm and meaningful relationships that emerged and stories shared. All participants expressed how they discovered how supportive creative expression and spending time together, engaging in the arts was engaging, and deeply affirming.



Rooted in collaboration between artists, Sláintecare Healthy Communities, schools, community support organisations and local residents, the RoamCork project empowered participants to explore their personal and collective experiences of loss and grief, due to the pandemic and it stands out as a strong testament to the power of art to promote dialogue and showcase the resilience of the communities on the Northside of Cork City.

An essential strength of the RoamCork project lay in its use of dialogical art – a form of socially engaged practice that places conversation and relationship at the heart of the creative process. Also, rather than focusing solely on the production of finished artworks, the artists used art methods to prioritise the interactions, exchanges, and shared meaning-making that occur within the groups who participated in the project. In the context of grief, memory, and loss, this approach was particularly powerful.

RoamCork created a safe, open-ended space where participants could reflect aloud, listen deeply, and engage in mutual storytelling. Within RoamCork, these dialogues, whether sparked by a stitch in embroidery, a mark on a map or the plucking of a stringed instrument, allowed participants to gently unpack personal and collective experiences. The art-making during the RoamCork project became not just a product, but a process of emotional connection, validation, and healing, showing how the sharing of our lived experiences is a creative act in itself.



Photo credit: Clare Keogh



Resources

What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553>

Compassionate Communities are programmes which develop self-help to support people through difficult times in their lives - <https://hospicefoundation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Compassionate-Communities-Position-Paper-2025.pdf>

Time to Reflect explored the impact of COVID-19 and public health measures on the experiences and perceptions of the Irish population in relation to dying, death, and bereavement during this time - <https://hospicefoundation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Time-to-Reflect-Report-2023-Irish-Hospice-Foundation.pdf>

New Economic Foundation – 5 ways to Wellbeing - <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/five-ways-to-wellbeing-1.pdf>

How teaching children traditional arts and crafts has a role in supporting children’s mental health and emotional wellbeing - [Creativity, crafts and post Covid-19 anxiety | Findel International](#)

Toolkit for evaluating arts & creativity programs for older people - <https://www.publichealth.ie/events/toolkit-and-free-online-learning-courses-evaluating-arts-and-creativity-programmes-older>

Does Arts & Creativity have an impact on wellbeing for older adults – Institute of Public Health - <https://www.publichealth.ie/sites/default/files/resources/Arts-and-creativity-two-pager-final.pdf>

Arts & Creativity in Later Life - <https://publichealth.ie/sites/default/files/2023-02/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Arts-and-creativity-full-report-final.pdf>



Photo credit: Clare Keogh

