

**575 Ways to Create and Connect:  
How a small, terraced house is inspiring creativity at every age  
by Laura Hussey, August 2023**

This summer, the team at [575 Wandsworth Road](#) delivered a programme of free creative workshops at [Battersea Arts Centre](#), for local residents aged 60 years and over, aimed at fostering social connections and inspiring creativity at any age.

*575 Ways to Create and Connect* was a pilot community outreach project, inspired by the home of Kenyan born poet, novelist and British Civil Servant, Khadambi Asalache (1935-2006), who, from the age of 51, spent the last twenty years of his life transforming his modest terraced house into a work of art.



*“It was magical, when I saw it. I thought, I can do something with this.”* Khadambi Asalache on the house (1989).



Prompted to disguise a damp patch in his basement with reclaimed wood he found in skips, Mr Asalache went on to embellish almost every surface with hand-carved wooden decorative motifs inspired by architectural styles, art and objects from around the world. Even the floors are hand-painted, making it one of the most fragile properties in the [National Trust](#). It can only accommodate small groups (just six people at a time), totalling up to 2,000 visitors each year.

However, embracing Mr Asalache’s creative approach to practical problems, the team sought new ways to open up access to this incredible home and artwork and, having recently become a [Community Partner](#) at Battersea Arts Centre, decided to take the creative spirit of the house out into the community and provide outreach engagement opportunities there.

Designed and delivered in collaboration with 575 Wandsworth Road’s first Community Champion Volunteer, Holistic Creative Therapist Salvatore Circelli ([Create to Flourish](#)), the outreach programme’s over-arching theme was “everyday creativity”, and each week explored a different prompt (e.g. discovery, journeys, play) that linked to the story of the house.

*“[I enjoyed] ...the warm welcome, small group, learning about the house, the collective storytelling, personal stories of those present. In a safe space.”*

From collage to kintsugi, workshops made use of materials easily found in our homes (e.g. magazines, egg cartons, jam jars), and gave them a new lease of life. Focussing on the collective joy of



making in a welcoming and supportive environment, each session centred on human connection, with conversation starters (e.g. what song makes you smile?) and a group playlist of songs, which became the soundtrack of the summer.

Each week, we captured participants' feedback, asking for three words to describe how they felt after the session, which included: *warm, creative, fizzy, energised, accepted* and *inspired*.



The workshops have also provided us with an insight into the wider wellbeing benefits of the programme to individuals and communities, in building relationships ("*happy, got friendship*") and reducing anxiety ("*not as apprehensive*").

Thanks to BAC providing us with free space to deliver the workshops, we'll be continuing to run *575 Ways to Create and Connect* until June 2024.

Next up, as part of Wandsworth's [Brighter Living Fair](#), and to mark [International Older People's Day](#), we are collaborating with vintage paper collage artist, Laura Goossens ([gooseglitters](#)) for a morning of connection and creativity. Collage has proven to be very effective for calming your mind, stimulating creativity and productivity, and the workshop will be an opportunity to learn something new, showing that creativity has no age limit.

*Laura Hussey is the House and Gardens Manager at 575 Wandsworth Road. Currently in her twelfth year working for the National Trust in London, she leads a small and dedicated team in caring for and opening up access to this incredible property in creative ways. Laura is passionate about connecting, inspiring and empowering individuals and communities to unlock their own creative potential.*