



Credit: Members of Ukeo's Magnificent 9

Starting a group: how the end of a class could spell the start of something new...

Written by Creative Lives

If you've ever taken part in a fun class and mourned its loss at the end of term or when the project folds, then Ukeo's Magnificent 9 might just provide you with the inspiration you need. At Creative Lives, we support and encourage people to be creative - and in particular, to take part in creative activity with other people or be part of a self-led group. So we were delighted to hear that when a local ukulele class in Dover came to a close, participants decided to take matters into their own hands.

Ukeo's Magnificent 9 is a group of amateur ukulele players, all over the age of 55, who meet weekly at St Radigunds Community Centre. The group started in October 2021 after attending a tutored beginner's course. "We enjoyed it so much we decided to carry on," says Wendy, one of the group members. "We remained in the same venue as it was central to everyone, and St Radigunds was happy to host us at a cost we could afford."

The group plays a large selection of musical genres, and members suggest music that brings new challenges so all the players can improve. They also have a non-hierarchical model where everyone has an equal say and everyone contributes to the group's development through their individual talents. "Some research future music and some lead group sessions using their greater music knowledge," explains Wendy. "We set up a WhatsApp group that allows ideas and materials to be shared easily, and any key group decisions are discussed by everyone."

Members have found a range of benefits come from being part of the group, including learning a new skill, companionship, and an escape from current issues. New friendships have blossomed, with people also meeting up outside the group. For anyone else looking to start their own creative group, here are Ukeo's Magnificent 9 top tips:

- Set up a WhatsApp group for members
- Find a venue that everyone can get to easily
- Have the confidence to know you can run it yourselves - everyone has skills and you can do a lot with free information found online
- Make sure you have a summer break, it helps to refresh and refocus

We would add to that 'be welcoming to newcomers', as joining a new group can be a little daunting! But having fun being creative is infectious so word of mouth usually helps to populate a group. For more information about Creative Lives, our projects, free resources and to read other inspirational case studies, visit www.creative-lives.org

We champion community and volunteer-led creative activity, and work to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative. In particular, we celebrate and promote people expressing themselves creatively with others, recognising the benefits this can bring.

