

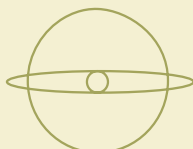
# HIGHLAND MEMORY SPACE

*Remembering Together project in the Highland Region:  
A co-created consultation into community Covid memorials*

**JULY 2023**



Sinéad Hargan, Hector MacInnes and Cat Meighan





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Bottom left: participants at Dunnet Forest

Bottom right: example of participant response to sensory activity, Cromarty Youth Cafe

## Challenges

## Sensory memories



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## Three Highland based artists: Introduction and approach

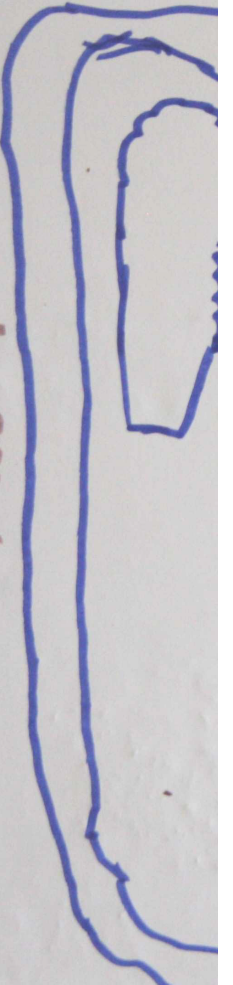


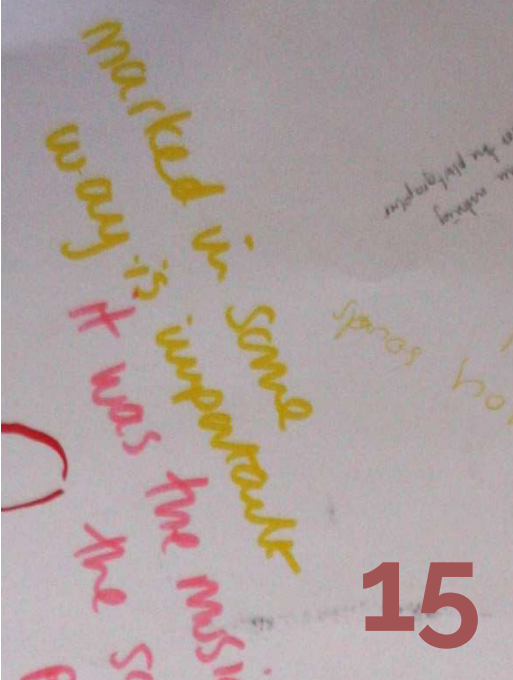
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## Participant statistics and engagement

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I felt happy because I did it  
Mhtho Gofaokool





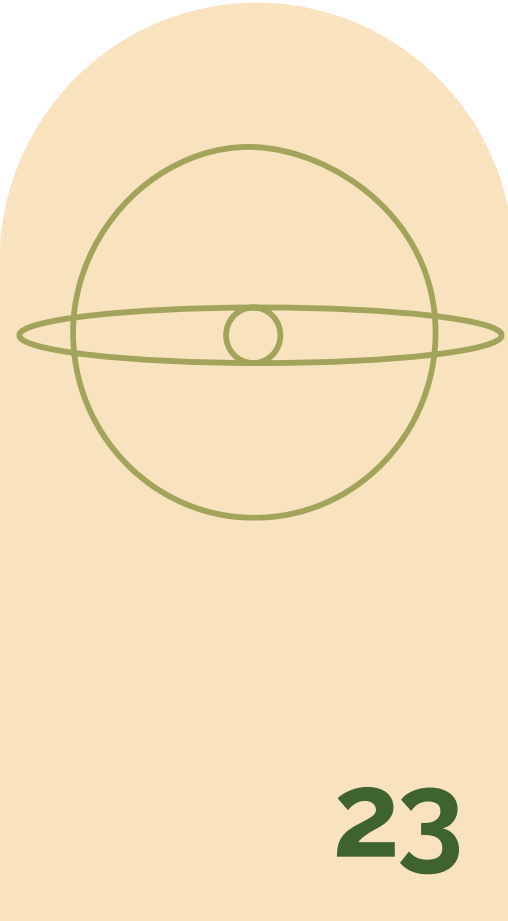
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Phrases from  
engagement

Top left: example of  
participant response  
to sensory activity,  
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session

Bottom left:  
example of participant  
response to sensory  
activity, Caol Roman  
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Cover page: Cat Meighan  
with participants at the  
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Phase two  
suggestions:  
vessels and  
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# Sections

The smell of sanitiser  
The smell of other people's barbecues  
The sound of CPAP machines - the air is forced and creates a pushing sound.  
The feeling of being asked to do something abnormal  
The smell of someone as they hug you  
My cousin's perfume

The smell of cut grass  
The smell of sanitiser  
The smell of soup and remembering misguided generosity  
The intolerance of others, through fear

The sensation of time passing slowly

The smell of fabric softener  
The smell of coffee breath

The deafening noise of a restaurant  
The look of an empty car park  
Muffled voices through glass  
Voices over the phone  
Voices through masks

TV light through  
curtains  
Car headlights pulling  
into driveways

The smell of sanitiser  
The feel of raw hands

### Hypervigilance

Mice in the walls  
Lapwings  
Horses  
Minecraft  
Music  
Pog Champ  
Quack  
TommyInnit  
Taylor Swift  
Birdsong  
Wii Loading

Traffic  
Aeroplanes  
Cars  
Birds  
Singing  
Insects  
Cruise ships  
Postman  
Doorbell  
Footsteps  
People conversing  
Children playing in the  
street and at school  
The smell of sanitiser

Aloe vera  
 Wild garlic  
 Time outdoors  
 Barbecues  
 The school run  
 Breathing machines  
 Wall of hearts  
 Holding a patient's hand  
 Holding someone to comfort them

### Gardens

#### Grass

Hedges with berries or lights

A friend  
 Music  
 Swings  
 Houses  
 Yellow fields  
 Wind  
 Orange and purple road  
 Green leaves  
 A junction  
 The Garden Hour  
 Tiles or bricks  
 Water  
 A river  
 A bridge  
 A Bower  
 A red door  
 A single figure  
 An outhouse  
 Dried soil

Paneer Butter Masala

The smell of having left your washing in  
 the machine overnight

The smell of a candle jar in the rain with  
 cigarette butts in it

A mask filled with wotsit dust smells like  
 the sea

The smell of a new mask  
 Of a medical centre  
 Being outside waiting for treatment

The sounds of the bin lorries  
 People going by  
 Dogs  
 Neighbours mowing grass  
 Barbecues

The cats bring the smell of the outside  
 into my bedroom

No tourists and no traffic sounds

No boats

Scraping bark with fingernails  
 Birds  
 Feet on Gravel  
 Snapping branches  
 Cars on the faraway road mimicking  
 wind through trees  
 Dry leaves crunching  
 Wood against metal  
 Children using their voices in forests

The smell of disinfectant  
 A nice clean smell  
 An inner vibration that's different  
 An echo in the garden

The ships blowing their horns in the  
 harbour  
 And Dougie playing his pipes  
 The smell of bleach  
 The feel of raw hands  
 Touching a loved one with gloves on

The smell of sanitiser  
 All over the steps of the bus  
 Fog on the inside of glasses  
 Beauty beyond imagination

# Three Highland based artists

## Introduction and approach

The national Remembering Together project in the local authority area of the Highland region was managed by Lyth Arts Centre, Caithness.

Three Highlands-based artists, Sinéad Hargan, Hector MacInnes and Cat Meighan were commissioned to work with local groups and communities, generating ideas to inform the development of Covid Community Memorials in the region.

Sinéad Hargan is an artist working with live performance, participatory performance, sound, and film. Sinéad's work is often centred around acts of collective grieving, she creates new rituals and radically reshapes old traditions in order to access a deeper understanding and care for the world around us. Her work often involves socially engagement and she is interested in collaboration as practice so that the work is participatory, inclusive of many voices and is rooted in the Far North of Scotland communities in which she lives and works.

Hector MacInnes is a sound artist and researcher who works across various disciplines including field recording, music, voice, storytelling, installation and practices of listening. He is based on the Isle of Skye, where he has a community embedded practice and body of work around themes of place, belonging and identity. He is also researching a PhD in new approaches to the concept of "the field" in rural arts practice, particularly through sound, at CRISAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice).

Cat Meighan is a visual artist who often works with groups of people and in communities. Research of the issues that impact the communities she works with, their own lived experience and the dialogical approach used, all inform the artistic response. This response can take a variety of forms: two-dimensional, sculptural, conceptual, performative, and activist.

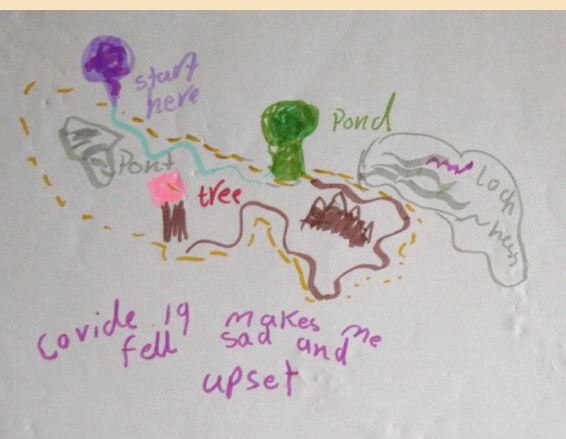
## Approach to engagement

The approach to engagement has had an embodied focus, using the five senses to explore memories, stories and experiences, and then to tease out common themes, and a plurality of emotional responses.

The engagement drew on our existing network of connections and working partners, developed during multiple previous socially engaged projects. Having three practitioners located at the geographical extremes of the Highlands gave us a headstart in addressing the implicit challenges of working across such a large area, on a project to which trust and locality are both so important. New connections were also formed, as well as some open public engagement and engagement with individuals on specific themes and experiences, giving us a wide reach across many different demographics represented in the region.

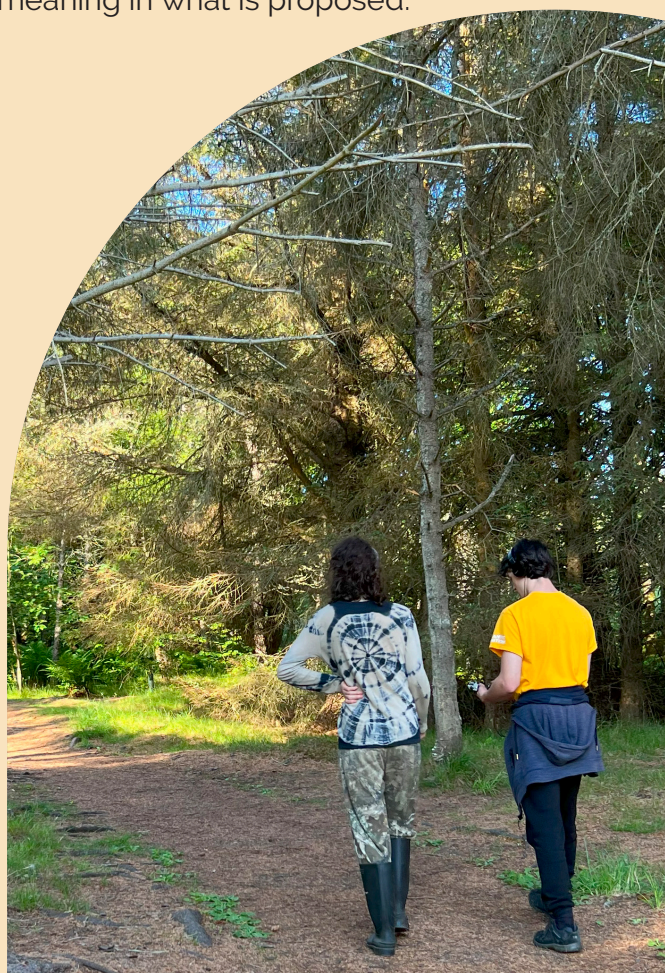
Nonetheless, it has been important to recognise from the outset that this project is not necessarily for every individual who resides in the Highland region. It has engaged with a cross section of society that both were able to, and wanted to, engage. For a variety of reasons - such as not wanting to talk about the past, bringing back painful memories, anger, ambivalence, disbelief - others stated openly that they did not want to be involved, or that they did not feel it was for them. While we respected these decisions in the course of this phase of the project, we have also attempted to learn about how the project's aims are communicated and miscommunicated, and to integrate that into how we have moved forward and our proposals for phase two.

As it stands, this report focuses on the fact that a deeper engagement, rather than a wide one, can be richer and give an abundance of the material required to complete the next steps. It is hoped that through the common and recurring themes discussed by participants that the next phase of this project produces something that will resonate with significantly more people than we were able to engage with in the first phase. Due to the generosity offered to us, and the trust placed in us by the participants we have been able to work with in phase one, we are confident that this will be the case, and that through careful, mindful, and sensitive handling of the myriad of experiences recorded, there will be deep and genuine meaning in what is proposed.



Left: example of participant response to sensory activity, Cromarty Youth Cafe

Right: participants at Dunnet Forest



**"Through careful, mindful, and sensitive handling of the myriad of experiences recorded, there will be deep and genuine meaning in what is proposed."**

## Resources created and used

We set up a dedicated website which has information about the project, information about us as practitioners and links to Greenspace Scotland, Remembering Together, and Lyth Arts Centre.

The website was also intended as a place to explore our sensory approach. There are a variety of activities anyone could follow, and then share their responses with us. This has been less successful than session engagement, with only a handful of people engaging this way.

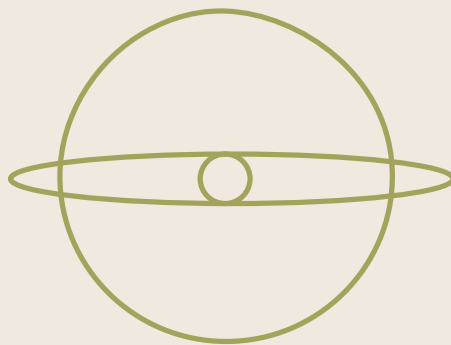
Those few engagements we have had, however, have been very full, and have helped inform how we have taken the project forward.

Prior to engagement we set up a system for recording feedback and sensory responses. This consisted of questions we aimed to ask each group or individual which were then recorded in a shared online form, allowing us to analyse and have an overview of responses, seeing trends, commonalities and the diversity of material gathered.

## | HIGHLAND | MEMORY | SPACE |



events



look



listen



touch



smell



taste

Above: example of website landing page

**"a place to explore our sensory approach"**



Broadford  
 Cromarty  
 Dornie  
 Dunnet  
 Fortrose  
 Fort-William  
 Inverness  
 Lyth  
 Mallaig  
 Portree

& online across  
 the Highlands



Above: working with participants at Dunnet Forest, Caithness.

Left: response from Caol Roman Catholic Primary School, Fort-William

186

*people*

# Participation

## The public

Two teenagers, two older adults, a family of four

A young person's carers

A person with long covid

The mother of a participant

Young adults with a requirement for additional learning support

Women with experience of domestic abuse

A women's worker

## Twenty four juniors

Six seniors

Two leaders

A community lunch group

## Primary one to seven

The whole school

And two

Assistant teachers

## Adult learners

Older adults

Boardgame group

## Community group

Mainly older folk

A mental health group for men

## Elderly day care service users and staff

Young creatives, fourteen to nineteen years old

## People who have suffered grief

Creative people

Highland senior citizens network

Community leaders

Mental health service users

Befrienders

People with Long Covid

The public

Young people

Primary Five

"Targeteted engagement, distinct communities & individuals"



Above: participants at Dunnet Forest

Below: example of participant response to sensory activities, Caithness Young Creatives



# Challenges

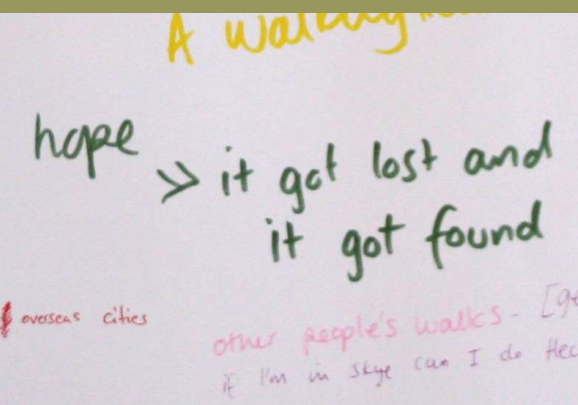
We have faced a number of practical, social and creative challenges. Some of these we have had the resources and the time to tackle directly, and for some it has been more appropriate to see them as creative provocations. For others still, we have had to accept what might be beyond the scope or capacity of the project.

The first, and maybe most obvious, is the sheer scale of the Highland council area, and the diversity of its population, both culturally and socio-economically. Our geographical reach, being based in Inverness, Caithness and Skye, has been extremely helpful in covering what we can within budget and timetable, and a strong existing network of relationships with community-facing organisations has given us access to a wide range of different groups, and the majority of responses to the project were gathered this way. Beyond these areas and relationships, the long distances involved have meant that we were not able to slowly build new relationships or let them develop over time through informal contact. In areas such as Ullapool, Ardnamurchan or Speyside we have had to try and organise sessions through local groups or venues and in doing so have faced a range of further challenges - gatekeeping, hostility to public art projects, raw emotion around the pandemic - that we discuss further below.

One key step we had taken beforehand was to try and make the project as accessible as its scale allowed by creating a wide variety of avenues for engagement, even if not all of those avenues ended up actually being accessed: the creation of the website with remote participation activities, online sessions, activity emails sent out to schools, and open events advertised through local radio and newspapers. Each of these brought in some level of engagement, but in all cases numbers were very low in comparison to organised, closed sessions with specific community groups.

In carrying out the project we have been given a range of reasons for this, some being that particular people simply want to move on from the pandemic, some being that particular communities are very busy at specific times of year, or a sense from some people that the project wasn't "for them" - although it is notable that we received this last response both from people who thought the project was only for people who lost a loved one, and also from people who thought it wasn't for them because they lost a loved one.

Over the course of the project we adjusted our language at various points, around the project's purpose, structure and methodology. Across the period of delivery, there has however been the presence of at least some confusion and some misgivings about the project; the perceptions around who the project is for is perhaps one example of something paradoxical about trying to approach "the public" about an experience that was, by definition, extremely individualised and specific.



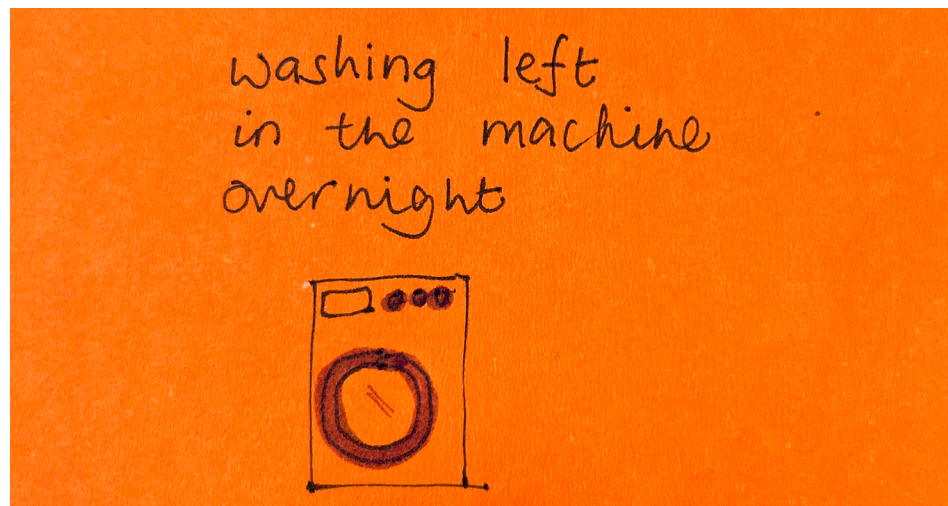
**"Part of our hopes for the briefs we will offer in this report are that they provide ways of sensitively reframing the project, rather than simply delivering it".**

Left: example of participant response to sensory activity, Inverness Creative session

In the end, our approach was that the onus was on us to make the project as accessible as we could, and to tell as many people about it as we could in clear language. However, it was also our responsibility to accept and respect that people might not want to engage with, or even want to hear about the project, and it would be inappropriate therefore to overly promote participation or to speculate about their reasons for not wanting to engage.

Inevitably, this created further tensions which we have had to accept, one clear example being around gatekeeping. In a few areas we were unable to hold sessions because we were reaching out to potential host organisations, and we felt that representatives of those organisations were themselves hostile either to the project, or to how we were conducting it. In both instances we decided to focus our attention on sessions with people who were actively wanting to engage. This engagement challenge is likely to persist throughout phase two of the project.

Right: example of participant response to sensory activity, Inverness creative session



Secondly, even within some of the most successful sessions, the sheer breadth and depth of experiences that the pandemic brought about for participants has raised significant challenges, although these were challenges that have more constructively shaped both how we carried out the project and our proposals for phase two. A wide range of emotional responses is evident throughout this report, but there are perhaps two that are particularly challenging and worth mentioning in more detail here.

One is public anger about the way the pandemic was handled at local, national and UK levels. In some cases, the source of this anger was government corruption or scandal, and in some cases it was anger about particular rules. However, in other cases there was much more specific anger about, for example, experiences with tourists from other areas where restrictions were different, or even unpleasant experiences with specific individuals within participants' own communities. Crucially, in many cases this project was the first real opportunity some participants had had to openly discuss what had happened to them since spring of 2020, or to vent their emotions. Phase two will need to proceed with care around this, and in particular not assume that the cosy language of "togetherness" is in itself appealing. With regard to many people's memories and ongoing experiences, as one participant put it, "forgiveness is not high on the agenda".

Another arises from the experiences at the other end of the spectrum. While the Highlands, like all areas, was marked by significant tragedy and isolation, there were other people who were reticent about sharing their experiences precisely because their pandemic experience is/was one of freedom, reconnecting with family and the outdoors, or suddenly having time and space to do what busy normal lives had got in the way of. One participant described their lockdown as a "glorious wonderful secret", and another noted that their children refer to it as "a special time". Some of these participants, while they enjoy their own individual memories, felt that some of the language around "remembering together" was inappropriate and likely to stir up bad feelings unnecessarily. The challenge this posed in carrying out phase one was perhaps simply that it added to reasons for low engagement, but a more important challenge for phase two will be to recognise the incredible disparities between individual experiences, and that any attempt to summarise a narrative or to generalise about the Highland experience in any way risks causing offence - the next phase must acknowledge and accommodate irreconcilable experiences.

A consequence of these things described, which is perhaps worth noting as a challenge for us and a likely challenge for phase two are the difficulties around communicating the project and its hopes. A lot of this is about the language of the project itself - we found it difficult to settle on a description of the project that worked in all settings, and constantly adjusted how we deployed language about the project, who was funding it and why, and what we thought our own roles were. Part of our hopes for the briefs we will offer in this report are that they provide ways of sensitively reframing the project, rather than simply delivering it.

There were additional complications, though, in how our attempts to reach out to the public were mediated. An example of this might be a newspaper article which, while constructive and a chance for one of us to describe the project in detail, was also made problematic by the paper inserting highly inappropriate graphics, and by using a photo we had asked them not to. There is often risk in interaction with the media, but our experience was that the pandemic is such a contentious topic that, for example, imagery that a participant described as "in your face" can be a real trigger for many and therefore alienating and extremely discouraging. Although it's unlikely that phase two can be carried out without media coverage, our proposals also try to factor in the importance of subtlety, quietness and consent around engaging with the topics of the pandemic, covid and long covid.



Left: example of participant response to sensory activity, Cromarty Youth Cafe

# Verbatim responses

just give the money to the NHS

I went through gallons of Bleach and Zoflora

I stopped smelling flowers because of all the bleach I was using

Now it's into your head that you don't take people into your home

Locking people in their house for weeks as if it was nothing

You felt like a prisoner in your own home - and you hadn't done anything

don't give up - don't let it rule your life

nothing's been done to repair that divide

you don't want to hear what I've got to say about that

I felt part of the human race again

Everyone's forgotten what the NHS did

that first pint

they've made their billions, and now they've sent you here to placate us with a memorial

I do not wish to be stuck in a negative perspective

It's not everybody that wants therapy talk

a special time

I want people to be released from whatever life-inhibiting thing they've been suffering

the big picture is overwhelming

I can't live my life like this any more

a glorious wonderful secret

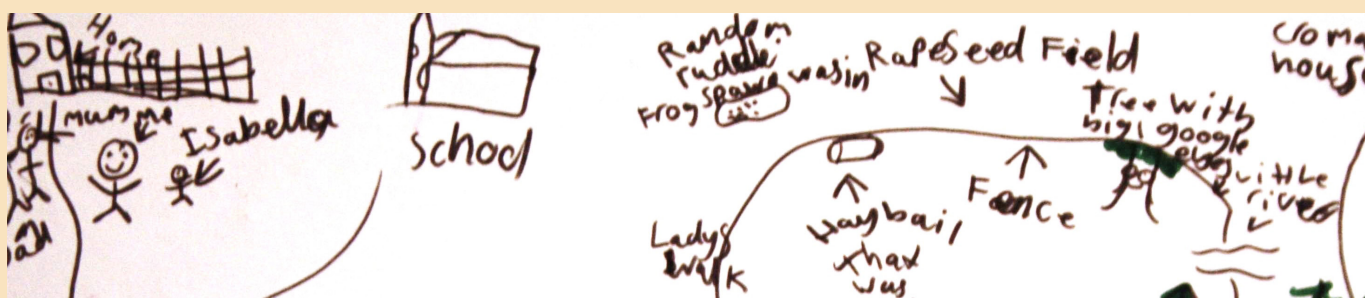
I don't know how much honest remembering I'd do - I'd still be editing

It's never going to go away

Prophets of doom

Maybe we actually handled it quite well

One reason we respond so slowly is that we forget what happened



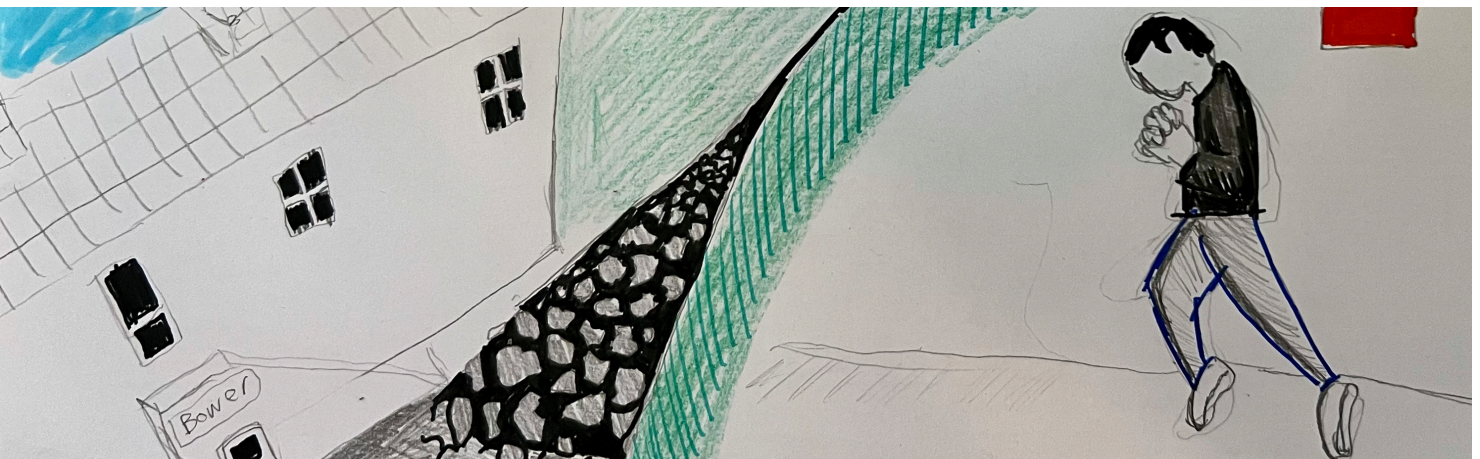
Above: example of participant response to sensory activity, Cromarty Youth Cafe

Grow your own veg!  
Once the campervans arrived, the trouble started  
We were very lucky  
Cough Cough Skoosh Skoosh  
Forgiveness is not high on the agenda  
We just got up and got on with it

Death after death after death and what did we do? \*clap, clap, clap\*  
There was an echo in the garden  
Sometimes I think "did that actually happen?"  
Next time, shut the bridge  
Put the vodka on  
I need diazepam to get on the bus now  
crooks

I spoke to two nurses yesterday, they said it could be years  
I can't believe - no one can say that Covid didn't impact me  
Something has to come of it  
I don't think a memorial is the right thing  
I feel I'm in prison, my free will doesn't influence things  
The Covid has got me  
So I'm lying in my bed... you can see I'm lying in my bed here  
It affects the rhythm of your life  
I'm not going to have any meetings for that lying down, I don't think it sets the right tone  
It was the loneliness that killed her

Basically all I do is watch cartoons, have breakfast, watch more TV, lunch then more TV  
then have my dinnertime, I have my dinner while watching TV, then watch more TV, and  
then go to bed. So there you have it, my life during lockdown, a typical day in a typical  
year of 2020



Above: example of participant response to sensory activity, Caithness Young Creatives



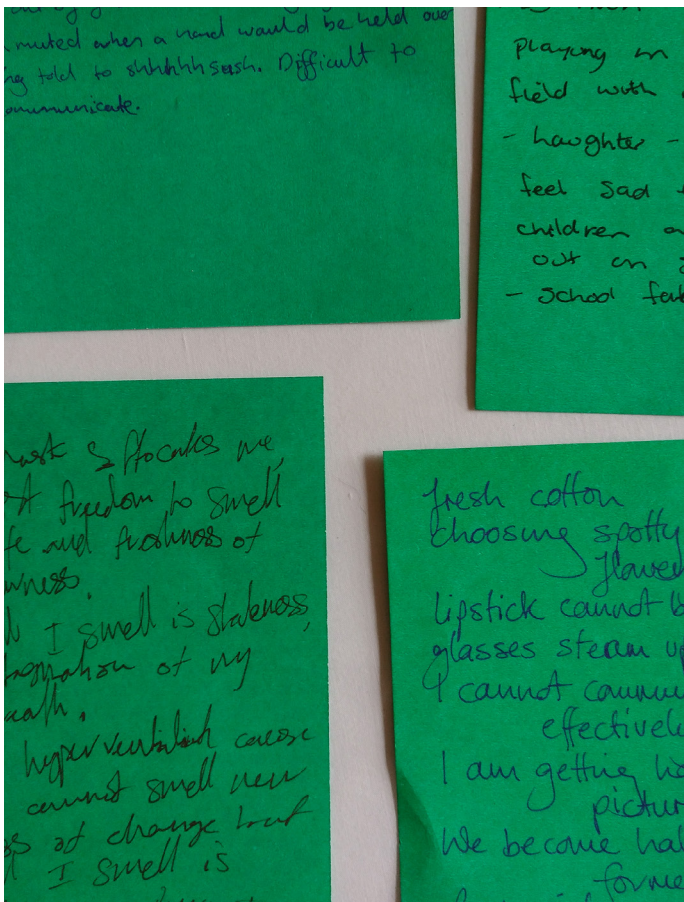
# Feedback and observations

## Community Response: Finding Joy And A Sense Of Purpose

Many of the groups we engaged with were set up to combat isolation during, and due to, the pandemic. The HSCN (Highland Senior Citizen Network) online sessions, for example, were set up as a result of the pandemic and lockdown and this still happens each week which is seen as really positive.

A few people spoke of the opportunity to get to know their neighbours better and how this makes them feel safer when they are alone in their house. They said they might not have had the chance or courage to do this without the lockdowns; there was the sense that everything stopped, but we accepted and we adapted as communities.

Many parts of the Highlands felt 'lucky' to be in small communities with lots of open space and access to the outdoors. Finding joy in small things was a prevalent theme in many of the sessions, going on walks, having short conversations, zoom calls and many shared thoughts about our life now: 'how beautiful life is, seeing life after in a different way, we didn't perhaps realise what we had'. One person spoke of family dinners together during lockdowns and how they miss that now that they are back at work.



There was also a sense of guilt in the joy, many spoke of how privileged they felt to have had that time together, and how they felt guilt in enjoying lockdowns while others suffered. Distributing things like learning packs to families, wet up helplines, run events such as easter egg hunts for children, and give people who lived in flats growing kits was very important to many communities, many mentioned this gave them a sense of purpose and an opportunity to see others smile. There was a general feeling of connecting with the community better during this time.

Right: example of participant responses to sensory activity

## Time: Technology, Living Outdoors And Lockdown Walking

The feeling of unreal time. Lonely time. More time with family, gardening, helping others, and the use of outdoor spaces. 'The time lived felt like a movie, a genuine feeling of astonishment'. Another person brought up the ways we spent our time during lockdowns, the zoom quizzes, themed film nights, Netflix documentaries, cooking meals, the importance of breakfast, lunch and dinner as markers of time in a different way. Many people spoke of time spent working online and the different kind of exhaustion that comes with it, but also the advantages to more flexible working patterns now. One person spoke of how much they appreciate the technology that we have to communicate, that at least they were able to connect with family online 'Imagine if the pandemic had been 30 years ago – how would we connect? How would we have coped then?'

Many mentioned the time they missed out on and that we should value the time we have now. Time spent outdoors came up a lot. 'It felt like the community came out, particularly walking.' During lockdown it was noticeable to see the community coming out to walk. Walking was a routine. A group of community workers detailed their adaptation to lockdown - outside community meetings, open air conversations which when organised, more people than usual came along. They noted that more elderly people seemed to be experiencing depression, and they were able to sit outside their houses on benches and visit them. A change in how our relationship to the outside was a huge theme throughout all our sessions, how we navigated indoor restriction by adapting our lifestyles to outdoor working, exercising and socialising.

Outdoor lifestyle provided many the ability and space to notice things that we usually do not, 'to stop to breath and think', to notice nature, seasonal changes, local foraging and growing space, things on the beach, everyday things that caught people's interest and were brought to the forefront of our collective living in a way they have not been for a long time. On this theme, there was also discussion around how on one level it feels ridiculous to suggest that in the Highlands we need more green space, but in reality a lot of Highland green space is inaccessible or alienating or of rough terrain and there is a real need for public and accessible green spaces.

## Fear and Anxiety: The Loss And The Grief

It was clear throughout the sessions that people were grieving many things. There was grief for the loss of loved ones and the loss of moments and opportunities to grieve together and celebrate lives. People were grieving friendships, community and a freedom to socialise that, some groups felt, has caused long term societal damage that little is being done to repair: "you get out of the way of speaking to people". There were many conversations around losing the ability to spend time together, losing the habit, and developing fear and anxiety that sticks around. We spoke at length about fear; about the fear that still exists, 'fear is contagious' 'people are still ruled by fear, fear of covid then and still, and now fear of a living cost crisis'. Someone

spoke of turning on neighbours and how they had to 'check themselves' before getting annoyed at neighbours' garden parties. They spoke of how they felt the government and media encouraged reporting on neighbours and criticised how quickly we were all on board with policing one another. One person asked: 'how do we reach people to help them be less afraid?' and another said 'I still can't leave Caithness, even though I know it's safer, there is a mental block, and I can't do it.'



Left: example of participant response to sensory activity, Cromarty Youth Cafe

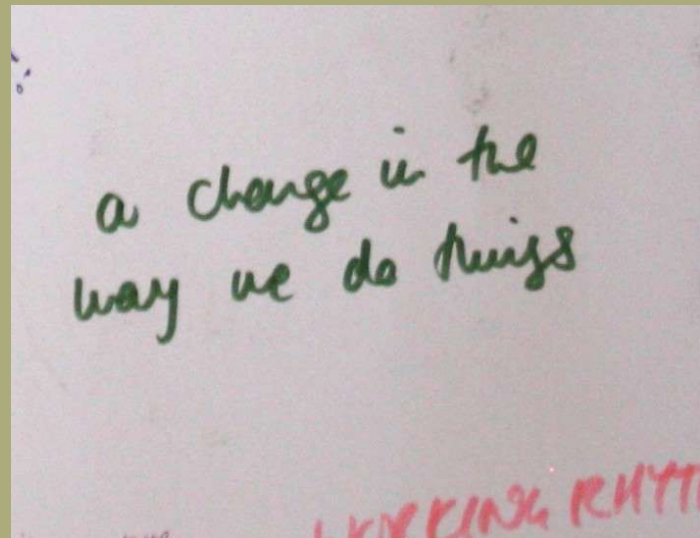
Many people spoke of the anxiety around things 'opening back up'. One response from a student in 4th year during lockdown was that the time spent in lockdown was fine but after this ended, they felt they did not want to leave their house. Many people spoke of worrying about others, younger generations spoke of worrying for grandparents and those isolated and shielding, that struggled to leave the house.

Older generations spoke of how they can manage but the young people would be the ones to suffer the most, that younger generations have missed out on formative years and life moments. 'Lockdown we felt we were grieving for things we were not able to do, and this brought about losing part of ourselves'. Many people mentioned missing specific but common things like the sound of other voices or the feeling of other bodies in a room at a crowded gig. A Nurse spoke on how we cared without touch during lockdowns and how this was really hard and felt unnatural: 'the first thing many people do to console someone is to hold them, we couldn't hold anyone, I couldn't comfort or be comforted'.

### Feeling Helpless: Isolation And Social Breakdown

There were varying perspectives on mental health and a mix of inspiring and brutal stories. Many highlighted that the mental health impact is long term and a 'looming catastrophe' and they feel this is being ignored or avoided by our Government and healthcare system. One of the participants had given birth during lockdown and found the experience traumatic and isolating because they were not allowed to have their partner there. Participants spoke of the loneliness and isolation they are still experiencing from the lasting impact of the pandemic: 'sorry, I'm talking your ear off, I'm away home to speak to my walls'. In one session with a group of older adults, some mentioned how much they appreciated just being asked and included: 'thank you for taking the time to come see us' 'it means a lot just to be asked' 'What about the people who aren't here? I have friends that still won't leave the house'.

Another theme that came up often was that 'people's mentality about other people has changed'. For some, the pandemic has been the death of 'Highland Hospitality' and the Highlands have changed from a culture of hospitality to being 'scared to be in each others' presence'. Someone noted that they felt this has been the biggest social damage, and remains the big anxiety, the big thing that needs to be undone. Another was that there were no tourists and no traffic felt like we were granted freedom. There was some frustration and anger directed at tourists, one group talked about when the lockdown ended and campers came into the area but did not contribute to the local economy.



Above: example of participant response and feedback to sensory activity, Inverness Creative session

**"thank you for taking the  
time to come see us"**

## Resources, Care & Anger

The negative impact of government advice and the media through fear mongering was a common topic. Some expressed that not knowing was frightening. There was and still is a lot of anger towards government decisions and mistakes. Anger that rules were imposed both chaotically and very rigidly from afar, with no room for local common sense or compassion at a local scale. We discussed how carers are valued in society (i.e. lack of value) and that there was no respite care offered to families and they found it very difficult to cope. 'As a carer you are a professional, but it is hard to turn off emotions - it is not possible to be impersonal when you are caring for someone'. Prevalent among the care staff we spoke to, feelings of anger and frustration at the ways they were prevented from doing their work, and guilt about some ways they were forced into work, were voiced. The nurses felt there was a very unfair divide through society during the pandemic (they were on the rough end) and 'nothing has been done to repair the divide'. Care was mentioned a lot in our session, as a subject it felt very important. 'Who cares? Where is the care?'. There was a sense of lack of appreciation for all types of care labour - the paid and the unpaid. And a real anger about council services and cuts to service 'there will be a decade long hangover for support, care access and resources'. Many people spoke of the loss of services, damage to the NHS, lack of appreciation for what NHS staff had done, and what service users had tolerated.



Above: example of participant response to sensory activity, Duncan Forbes Primary School

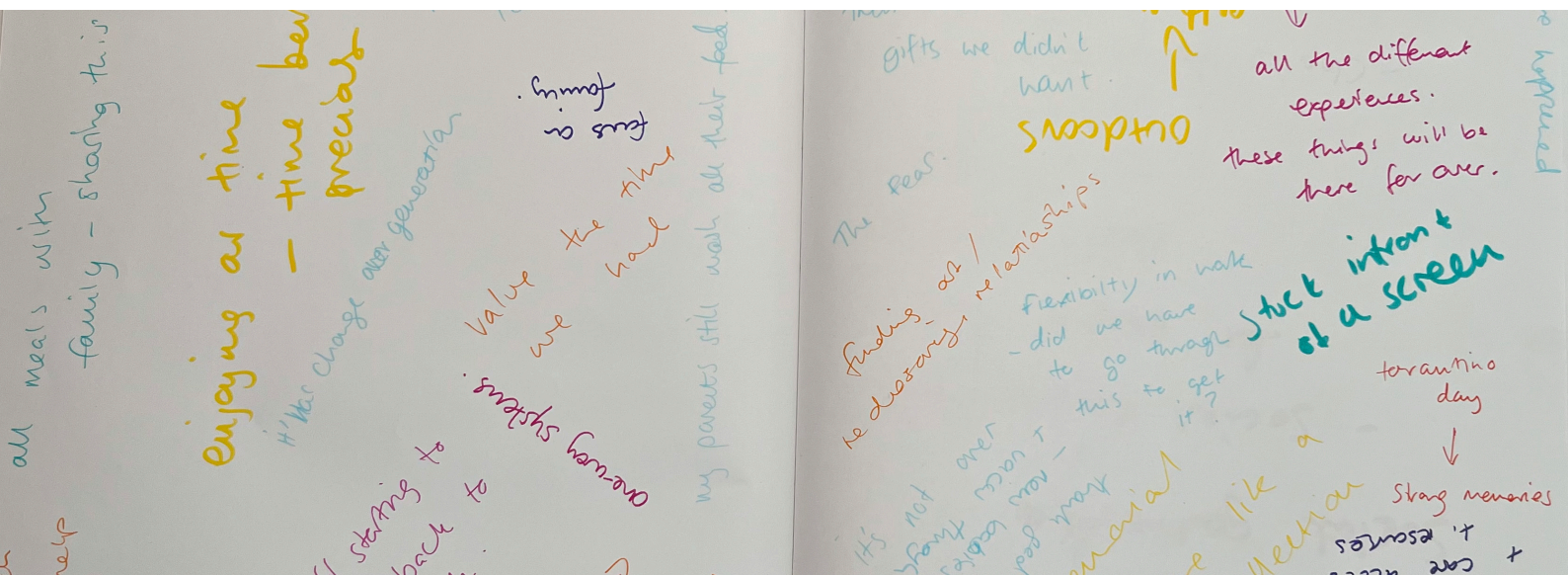
**"Who cares? Where is the care?"**

## Summary: A Dichotomy Of Responses

We found that there were two main responses from everyone we engaged with: those who were interested in the conversation and happy to discuss memories, senses, and experiences, and those who did not want to talk about the pandemic because of the anger, loss and frustration outlined in the feedback section. The aspects highlighted in the context of memories that participants felt should not be forgotten, or points that should be acknowledged are; the lasting impact of lack of services, lack of trust in some institutions and authority/government, people still experiencing the pandemic or feeling that it is not yet over due to long covid, associated anxiety and poor mental health. The fondly remembered things, the community effort, agency over our own time, a pause for reflection, the act of taking care of others, people being brought closer, valuing creativity and the contribution of others such as those with caring responsibilities like parents and NHS workers.

A notable theme was a focus on personal stories - there was not really much engagement with the idea of a traditional public memorial, but great engagement with sharing details of little idiosyncratic stories or aspects of individual life. Acknowledging there are many people's perspectives to consider in the context of the whole of the Highland region, participants mentioned that as a society it is important to reflect, mark, accept, acknowledge and provide space for recording, recovering and remembering. This holds for both positive and negative impacts of the pandemic. The balance between the collective and individual experiences were strong themes that came across when discussing what and who this project is for. There is already so much that we have collectively forgotten while concurrently there are still people living with conditions, such as long covid, who have not been able to forget or move on, or those who lost loved ones still grieving. There is a continuing impact of the pandemic in areas of everyday life and learning from this time, as well as remembering in an act of acknowledging, or not forgetting, with the aim of informing future generations was a desired outcome for many of the communities we spent time with.

Below: example of participant responses and feedback to sensory activity, Dunnet Forest



**"as a society it is important to reflect, mark, accept, acknowledge and provide space for recording, recovering and remembering".**

## A place for both

A place to rest  
A place to be together

A giant party  
Lots of picnics  
Lights

Something that is marked  
That shows the human side  
Something written

Spoken word  
Emojis  
Footsteps  
Multi-dimensional sculpture  
A walk with sculptures  
Maybe a film documentary  
Something collected

A walking trail  
A waymarked trail  
All walking one day  
Together  
Walking to a central point  
Something tangible  
And real

History books  
Archive  
Spoken word  
Something that acknowledges  
Difficulties  
Something to show resilience

A multi-sided plinth  
A plaque that says "we're still here"  
An instruction manual  
Something for people who say  
"Today, I don't want to be home alone"

A play  
A radical inquiry  
A community garden  
Something symbolic  
Something that acknowledges losses  
and death  
Something that reflects community  
A thing  
Something positive

A time capsule  
Hands  
Flags  
Storytelling  
An archive of experiences  
A soundscape  
A book of poems  
A horror movie

Objects  
For  
Everyone

A touring exhibition  
A short film  
A moment in time  
A little Vacuum  
A little Bubble  
A little glass bubble that people can put  
their own memories in  
Something that provokes discussion

A leaflet  
Like a drill leaflet  
A cairn  
A memorial garden  
Paths  
A statue of the virus  
A folly  
A maze  
Footprints  
Sounds  
History  
Archive  
Give everyone  
A Toilet Roll

Somewhere beautiful  
Somewhere warm and sheltered  
Somewhere peaceful  
The woodlands  
On a small accessible hill  
The future  
You decide

# Phase two suggestions: Vessels and Portals and Radical Archives

This report provides an overview of a consultation and co-creation process around an emotionally raw topic, with a diverse set of people and experiences, across the largest geographical local authority area in Scotland. While initiated as an inquiry into community covid memorials under the banner of "Remembering Together", one of the most consistent themes of the report is that, in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, language around 'remembering' and 'togetherness' is contentious, sometimes abrasive, and even triggering, for a wide variety of reasons.

Part of the delivery of phase one of this project has been to constructively redirect the energy inherent in the strength of feeling we have encountered. As the project has gone on we have progressively broadened the discussion from 'what would be an appropriate community memorial?' to questions like 'what is the role of public art in your life?' and 'how can a creative approach, or a creative lens, address and respond to what is going on in your life, here and now?'. The two artists' briefs offered below deliberately back away from any specific narrative around the pandemic, and offer an opportunity to reframe this project as speaking to a plurality of changed lives since the pandemic began in the winter of 2019-2020, up until the present, with an openness to the multiplicity of factors in those changes.

While much of the report might focus on what has been difficult, challenging or even impossible during phase one, we are also keen that our proposals for phase two refocus on possibility and opportunity. On one hand, the visceral emotional response we have encountered at times demonstrates that the pandemic which this project purports to address is ongoing, live, political and indeterminate - and this is, or ought to be in our opinion, an exciting, serious and powerful context for any creative practice. On the other hand, the report demonstrates an appetite for change, and an appetite for creative and radical approaches to that, and phase two of this project represents an opportunity to participate, in however small or large a way, in that positivity which underlies much of the anger, resentment and mistrust.

Through discussion and reflection on Phase 1, we propose two briefs for Phase 2:



# Vessels and portals:

**a creative work which will create and hold space  
for an experience, a communication, a connection**

We have identified that one of the desired outcomes of this project is to provide a space that can be visited alone for quiet reflection, as well as be used by the community for gatherings. Can this space provide portals of connection between Highland communities that might not usually connect? Can we use this space to experience radical togetherness? As well as provide quiet spaces that can be visited for thought and pause to process?

This project brief seeks to create a series of moving vessels or portals, built structures, that connect people across the Highlands - these might be commissioned structures designed by an artist or existing structures like polycrubs that can stay in locations after the project. Inside the travelling portals will exist a space to be used by whoever needs it. It might appear in forests, beaches, fields, as well as visiting specific groups like a befrienders group, a high school or a community cafe across spring - summer 2024.

The artist will, in response to this report, design a sheltered structure(s) and installation to travel across the Highlands. The artist/producer(s) will work with place-specific project partners/organisations so that the curation of events inside the portal is decided democratically and co-produced. There will be a local programme of events in each installation - this could be a grief counselling session, a potluck meal, a film screening, an activist group meeting, a printmaking workshop.



# Radical Archives:

**a creative work which will record  
and document lesser heard voices**

Three years after the pandemic began, how would you answer the question "what just happened"? How would the people around you answer the same question? How would your community answer it? With such a wide range of individual experiences, positive and negative, peaceful and chaotic, often developing in isolation from those nearby, how could a story or a history of these years ever be recorded?

This project strand seeks to create a radical archive of individual stories and experiences from 2019-2024 - one that will gather, tell and re-tell a different history to the one currently being written in political memoirs and pandemic inquiries; one that will challenge the way grand public narratives develop, and one that is fit for purpose when there is no main narrative that includes what happened to you, and the people you love.

The artist(s) will work with communities and individuals to supplement the research conducted in phase one, finding the individual, the idiosyncratic, the unrepresentative and the turbulence. They will then develop a critical and radical format - for example, a textiles/flag project, a film, an interactive installation or a distributed sculpture - to hold and retell those stories that can be co-created and then either toured or installed in multiple physical and non-physical locations in the Highlands in the spring - summer of 2024.

**"how could a story or a history of these years  
ever be recorded?"**

With thanks to all the individuals and groups who took the time to generously share their experiences, thoughts, hopes and fears to contribute to the research and information in this document.

All images are reproduced courtesy of the artists, except the top cover image, courtesy of Cromarty Youth Cafe.

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[www.rememberingtogether.scot](http://www.rememberingtogether.scot)

[www.highlandmemory.space](http://www.highlandmemory.space)

