



**THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND
HEALING PROGRAMME YR1 (2022-23)**

FOREST OF DEAN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION



OVERVIEW

Wyldwood Arts is a community arts organisation that cultivates and celebrates the unique creative landscape of the Forest of Dean. Through our transformative programmes, we unite generations, explore personal stories, and promote wellbeing. Our work emerges organically from our relationships with local communities and in response to the needs of the people we engage with.

The Healing Programme is a three-year project designed to help communities in the Forest of Dean to connect through creativity. Supported by The National Lottery Community Fund, it involves a programme of planned and community co-created events and projects to enhance and promote creativity and wellbeing.

With this programme being designed and owned by the community and involving a diverse range of partners, artists and experts, we decided to begin with a period of consultation. This involved three distinct phases: 1) direct, face-to-face conversations at various public events and celebrations in the Forest during Summer 2022; 2) an online survey distributed and promoted through Wyldwood's digital channels; and 3) a deeper stakeholder conversation at a community discussion evening in Autumn 2022.

From these three strands, we were able to draw the following conclusions:

- **People want to know what's on.** Although there may be many events, workshops, performances and other creative opportunities in our communities, lots of people say they often only find out about them after they've happened. Event organisers want a quick, low-cost way to promote their events, and people want a simple place to look to find out what's on in their neighbourhoods.
- **People in the Forest want creative activities they can get involved in.** From street art to storytelling, barbershop to brass bands, the Forest of Dean is full of creative people who are interested in a broad and diverse range of artistic endeavours. Lots of people want to take part in creative activities, and not just as audience members. People see the benefit in participating actively in the arts, which supports the idea that co-creation is a positive influence on wellbeing.
- **Access is more difficult in the Forest.** Being able to access creativity is more difficult for people living in the Forest of Dean than in other areas of Gloucestershire. In order to best serve our communities, we need to work with existing groups to reinforce and strengthen our collective networks, and to ensure that we focus on maximising our reach and impact in local areas.

This report outlines the regional context within which the Healing Programme is being delivered, details the process behind the development and implementation of our community consultation, and presents all our findings and conclusions to date.

We hope that this report is a useful resource for all individuals and organisations who share our mission to cultivate and celebrate creativity across the Forest of Dean.

BACKGROUND

Notwithstanding the toll that the coronavirus pandemic has had on all our communities, there is a significant and growing body of evidence that indicates a need for healing and a desire to restore a sense of collective sense wellbeing, as well as the vital role that creativity and participatory arts has to play in this process.

Wellbeing in the Forest of Dean

Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures show that during the course of the pandemic, wellbeing dropped markedly in Gloucestershire as a whole, with the Forest of Dean being more significantly negatively affected than the rest of the county.

The table below shows the reported scores for four measures of wellbeing: anxiety, happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile. Note that the scores are a mark out of 10, with a higher score indicative of generally better levels of wellbeing, except in the case of the anxiety score, where lower sources indicate lower levels of anxiety.

The difference between the Forest of Dean score and the Gloucestershire score has been calculated, with higher levels of wellbeing for the Forest indicated in green, and lower levels indicated in red.

Reported wellbeing measures for Forest of Dean compared to Gloucestershire

	Gloucestershire 2019-20	Forest of Dean 2019-20	Difference	Gloucestershire 2020-21	Forest of Dean 2020-21	Difference
Level of reported anxiety	2.97	2.88	0.09	3.21	3.54	-0.33
Level of reported happiness	7.56	7.51	0.05	7.38	7.03	0.35
Level of reported life satisfaction	7.83	7.75	0.08	7.5	7.35	0.15
Level agree life is worthwhile	7.9	8.04	-0.14	7.74	7.72	0.02

Source: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2023

While figures for the four measures of wellbeing were roughly the same as, or higher than, figures for the rest of Gloucestershire in 2019-20, these rates dropped significantly over the course of the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, given the impact of the pandemic, all four measures of wellbeing worsened across all of Gloucestershire in 2020-21, but the Forest of Dean was even more significantly impacted than the county as a whole, with all measures falling below the county averages.

Deprivation in the Forest of Dean

The Forest of Dean District was identified in 2011 Indices of Multiple Deprivation data as one of the more deprived areas of the county. According to the Forest of Dean District Council : July 2011 (Core Document 11):

“Although the urban areas of Gloucester and Cheltenham suffer from a greater concentration of deprivation, the Forest of Dean District suffers from deprivation in various domains across a larger area than many other districts in Gloucestershire.”

- Forest of Dean District Council

By 2019 the picture had not markedly changed, with the Forest being the lowest ranked district in the county alongside Gloucester city. Nationwide, the Forest of Dean’s most deprived neighbourhood, Cinderford West 1, was still in the bottom 10% of most deprived neighbourhoods, while 9 other Forest neighbourhoods were in the 10-20% band.

The Forest population also has a distinct pattern of deprivation, with very few residents in the lowest deprivation quintile, but nearly none in the highest quintile.

The case for creativity

The 2017 Creative Health Inquiry Report extensively demonstrates the positive impact of the arts on health and wellbeing. Particularly relevant to our Healing Programme is the reported statistic that after engaging in participatory arts activities in health and social care settings, 82% of people enjoyed greater wellbeing. The report also shows that participatory arts activities help to alleviate anxiety, depression and stress.

Be Creative, Be Well (2012) recommends what we would now recognise as a co-creative approach to community arts projects as a way of developing successful participatory arts activities:

“Begin by exploring participants’ thoughts and feelings about their community and environment and focus on building on these.”

- Be Creative, Be Well

A co-creative approach, as defined by *Considering Co-creation* (2021), means making things together and owning things together. It is a methodology that influences all stages of the design process, from devising to evaluation, and shifts the agency and the decision-making power into non-establishment communities and puts all collaborators on an equal footing.

As such, it is an approach that naturally aligns with Wyldwood’s ethos of cultivating, empowering and celebrating creativity. Co-creation begins with listening, so our starting point for the Healing Programme was, naturally, consultation.

What did we need to discover through consultation?

It is important to stress that many organisations in the voluntary and community sector in the Forest of Dean and beyond have sought to consult and listen to the many people and communities they work with across the district. It is not Wyldwood’s intention to replicate the work of other valued community organisations, nor is it within the scope of our project to conduct a rigorous academic survey of the Forest.

Instead, we set out looking to build non-transactional relationships through a series of public outreach events, online interactions, and in-depth discussion with individuals and organisations. These three strands formed the basis of our consultation activity.

PROJECT DELIVERY

Direct consultation

We developed a flag-making activity that could be delivered at a wide range of public events during Summer 2022, including several events related to the nationwide Platinum Jubilee celebrations. This activity provided a creative point of engagement, through which consultative conversations were able to develop organically.

We attended the following events and kept a record of the number of participants and notes from conversations:

Event	Date	Participants
Steam Mills Family Fun Day	9th April 2022	36
Cinderford Community Celebration	2nd June 2022	100
Coleford Busking Festival	4th June 2022	33
St Stephens Jubilee Celebrations, Cinderford	5th June 2022	53
The Orchard Trust Summer Fair, Lydbrook	12th June 2022	40
Proms in the Park, Speech House	2nd July 2022	75
Coleford Music Festival	9th & 10th July 2022	134
Lydney Arts Festival	6th August 2022	50
Forest Showcase Food Festival	2nd October 2022	72
	Total	593

Online consultation

Between June and November 2022, we circulated an online survey asking people in the Forest of Dean to join our creative conversation. The survey was promoted through various channels including our newsletter, social media platforms, and via physical business cards that were distributed in shops and cafes around the Forest as well as being given out at some of the events we attended as part of the direct consultation.

Given the relatively detailed nature of the survey, which involved a combination of multiple choice and long-form questions and answers, we had set a modest target of 100 responses. We ultimately received 95 full responses.

Questions aimed to give a picture of the geographical location and age of respondents, as well as more specific details like caring responsibilities, barriers to access, areas of creative interest and the role that creativity has in the respondent's life. Full details of the questions can be seen in **Appendix 1**.

Discussion forum

The idea for a discussion forum event developed from ongoing conversations within the Wyldwood team, building upon our original intention to form a steering committee or advisory group to help to guide the process of choosing which projects to support.

With a steering group involving a relatively small group of individuals each giving up a large amount of time, we decided instead that a larger event for stakeholders, including voluntary and community sector peers and other interested parties, would be a more effective way of ensuring that more of the people from the communities we aimed to reach were able to guide and influence the Healing Programme project.

On 1 December 2023, Wyldwood hosted an 'open space' format community discussion forum event in the Wesley Arts Centre, Cinderford, to answer the question "*Creativity, community, connection. How can we make it happen in the Forest of Dean?*"

The open space format allows for the attendees to set the agenda, and to chair and engage in discussions on subjects that are determined collectively. It was therefore not Wyldwood setting the agenda for the forum, but rather the community as a whole coming together and talking about the things that mattered most to each of us.

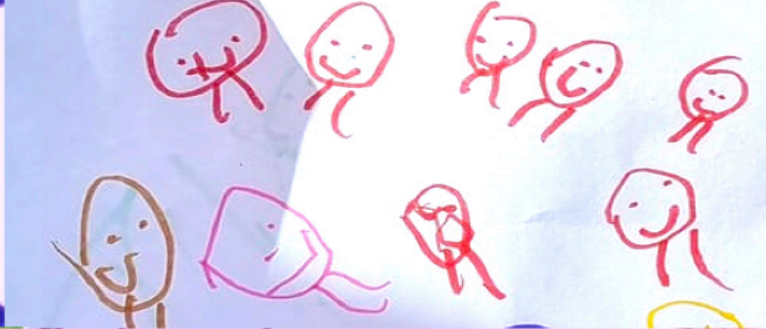
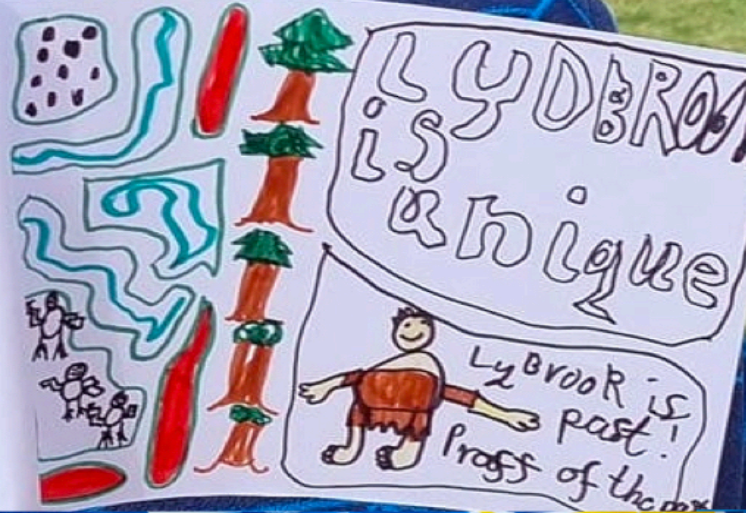
It was an open invitation event, with a total of 65 individuals and organisations from Wyldwood's local network being directly invited, alongside an open invitation that was publicised among the wider community. Around 40 people attended for the evening.

FINDINGS

Direct consultation

Facilitators took notes from the conversations they engaged in at each event, or, when it wasn't possible to do so (for example at some of the busier public events) wrote a summary of the event. Over the course of many hundreds of conversations, certain common themes arose, with the frequency of specific themes presented below.

Conversation: "How do we make creativity happen in the forest?"	Count
Finding out what's on - promoting and finding events	8
Life has changed for the worse since coronavirus and lockdowns (including increased mental health challenges)	5
The Forest has changed recently (including Severn bridge tolls, gentrification, and immigration and refugees)	5
Theatre (participation in and attending)	4
Arts and craft	4
Creativity lacking in school provision	3
Music events	3
Happy to be out and about at events again (since covid)	3
Poetry and open mic events	3
Low cost activities	2
Activities for young people	2
Activities for families	2
Gardening	2
Traditional Forest activities	1
Groups for disabled adults	1
Groups for new mums	1
Pottery	1
Outdoor activities	1
Activities for visitors and tourists	1



It is important to emphasise that these findings represent a snapshot, rather than a representative sample, of people. Whilst the events we attended were geographically spread across Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney, as well as some smaller villages such as Lydbrook and Steam Mills, these kinds of events are more likely to be attended by families than, for example, older people or those with complex support needs.

The prompt sheet for the activity is presented in **Appendix 2**. Our aim was to give participants a starting point to begin to think about the place they live and what it means to them, and allowing the conversation to flow from there. The flags that were created provided some insight into the things that were important to people that attended the events, especially children, as the craft activity was particularly popular with them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, many of the flags were quite patriotic, with children keen to make England, Wales or Union flags. Other important themes that occurred included nature, trees, wild boar, sunshine, and favourite characters from media.

Page 9 gives a small selection of the hundreds of flags that were made over the course of the consultation, including two of the many Ukrainian flags that were made. Special invitations had been issued by the organisers of the Proms in the Park event at Speech House to a group supporting Ukrainian refugees in the Forest of Dean. Despite the language barrier, our flag-making activity proved to be popular with the Ukrainian children, who explained to us how the colours of the Ukrainian flag represent the blue sky and vast wheat fields of home.



Flag making at a summer event in Lydney

Online consultation

Whilst our online respondents were not as numerous as our face-to-face conversations, the survey gave people an alternative way of accessing our consultation. We were able to ask detailed questions and gain specific information about each respondent's location, age and caring responsibilities. Detailed information from the 95 responses can be found in **Appendix 3 - Online Survey Respondents**.

In addition to the word cloud, the following comments provide a flavour of the responses that were shared with us, and give a broader picture of the kinds of talent and ability that we have in the Forest:

We would LOVE to know more about you - selected quotes

"Interested in graffiti and street art, would love somewhere to practice on a regular basis."

"I have written songs for years, and also enjoy painting. I would very much like to be involved in activities where like minded people get together and either create together or discuss and help one another."

"Love walking and going to theatre events both outdoor and indoor. "

"I used to love sketching when I was a lot younger and I'd like to re-explore that and I'd love to try painting."

"I have a passion for bringing the community together. I help to arrange various events within my community."

"I run a studio up-cycling furniture. I like to be part of bigger arts and craft events such as FarOpen [art trail]."

"There used to be a local open mic night running before Covid. It would be nice to get it up and running again!"

"I write stories and the odd poem... had a few published."

"I would love to be part of a barber shop singing group but lack confidence to approach people I don't know."

This data offers a snapshot of current community provision, but doesn't necessarily allow us to develop projects that are of interest to as broad a range of people as possible. Responses to questions 6, 7 and 8 allow us to build a better picture of this.

Representations of this data can be found in **Appendix 4 - Areas of Creative Interest**, where questions 6 and 7 have been combined into one chart and question 8 is presented separately.

Overall, we see a broad spread of interests from questions 6 and 7, with 'Arts and crafts' being the largest individual option (selected by 21.6% of respondents), and 'something else entirely' (4.5%) and 'dance and/or movement' (7.6%) as the least commonly selected options. All of the categories that contain performing arts combined together (Poetry and/or writing, Theatre and/or performance, Music, singing, and/or song-writing, and Dance and/or movement) form 38.7% of the total number of selected responses, suggesting a particular interest in performing arts.

The way in which people want to engage in creative activities, as seen from the responses to question 8, are striking. Roughly a third of people want to participate in long-term projects, a third want to participate in workshops or short-term projects, and a third want to be part of an audience. Very few (3.7%) of respondents said they didn't want to be involved in creative activity at all.

Perhaps surprisingly, although people do talk about wanting to attend performances and events as an audience member, the majority of respondents (64.4%) were interested in participatory arts rather than enjoying art more passively as an observer or audience member. It is clear from this that the majority of our creative offer should be projects that people can be active participants in, rather than passive consumers.

Barriers to access

We asked survey respondents to tell us why they (or the people they cared for) might be unable to access events or activities, as well as asking for suggestions for accommodations that could be provided to facilitate access to future events.

The answers they gave were wide-ranging, as we decided to allow free-form answers rather than having options on a pre-defined checklist. The following word cloud, created from responses about why people weren't currently able to access creative activities in the Forest of Dean, gives a good overview of the themes that arose.

Finding out what's on

"I'd like to take part in events happening in my area but I never know where to look to see what is going on."

"Often not hearing about activities in the forest is a barrier, Newent is isolated."

"There needs to be one place where all events in the Forest are listed."

Crossing the threshold

"Lack of confidence. I do have some spare time and would love to try. "

"Lacking confidence in coming along and taking part"

"My mental health means that I tend to become insular and not seek out other creatives. So anything that can bring people together would be great."

Discussion forum

The 'open space' format of this event allowed attendees to ask questions that were of interest to themselves, or that they needed to find an answer to, and all of the people present were allowed to participate in these discussions as much as they wanted to. Questions that related to similar areas were combined into one session to allow for people interested in the same ideas to be part of the same discussions. The list of questions gives us an insight into the topics that are important to our communities:

SESSION ONE

- What sort of creative activity would carers like?
- How can we prevent transport from being a barrier to people taking part?
- How can we get more primary school children to learn about their Forest heritage?

- How can we ensure that those using NHS adult mental health services link in to the Forest community?
- What challenges do new groups face?
- How do we bring new participants within the community into creative spaces?
- How can we create an affordable, community creative group in Cinderford and Coleford?

SESSION TWO

- How do we make creative opportunities for young people in the Forest of Dean to prevent outward migration?
- How do we find out/broadcast what is going on?
- What went missing during Covid (groups/orgs) and how can they come back better?
- How important are creative activities in overcoming trauma? / How can we make FoD a force for creative health and a happy creative community?

These questions indicate huge scope for community, connection and creativity within the Forest of Dean. The most notable question that was convened across the whole event was *How do we find out / broadcast what is going on?*, because it was asked in various forms by multiple convenors, and was by far the most attended session - to the extent that there were significantly fewer questions convened in session two because a majority of the attendees wanted to talk about this topic. It is also significant because of the frequency with which this question came up from the other parts of the consultation, so is clearly an important area upon which we need to act.

Another similar theme of physical access and transport was also a significant discussion question in session one, and other common themes about finding new or difficult to reach audiences, what we lost over Covid lockdowns, and how to create suitable creative activities all formed part of the discussions at the event. It is not part of the scope of our consultation to publish the details of all of these discussion topics - they were convened on the day of the event for the benefit of the people that attended, and details of the discussions were shared with all attendees after the event.

NEXT STEPS

There are three main threads that emerged through all these strands of consultation:

- **People want to know what's on**
- **People in the Forest want creative activities they can get involved in**
- **Access is more difficult in the Forest**

These three threads are already being woven into the Healing Programme through our Year 1 activities, and will continue to guide our activities in Years 2 and 3.

We have developed and launched a **What's On Forest of Dean [website](#)** that will allow event organisers to freely promote events in the forest, and for our communities to find out what's on in one place. The website has proved popular with event organisers and we are working on how to extend its operation beyond the Healing Programme project. The website also includes free guides to [event promotion](#) and [accessibility](#).

We have successfully bid for a co-creation Community Ensemble project through Arts Council England, to develop and perform a creative piece in the Forest in 2023-24. We are working in partnership with community organisations such as the Lydbrook Band to develop a performance that people can participate in and audiences will enjoy.

We have created an Access Officer role at Wyldwood, with support from Barnwood Trust, to improve accessibility to creativity across the Forest and improve best practise within our organisation.

We have responded to specific requests for projects and activities that emerged through the consultation, including by starting work with a volunteer gardening group in Cinderford, creating an intergenerational Forest School between a school and residential care home in Blakeney, and launching a new Pudding Club in Newent.

In Year 2 of the Healing Programme, we hope to increase the number of co-created events by curating a cultural festival of events across the Forest of Dean for delivery in 2024. We will also be developing and deepening our work with some of the communities involved in the projects that we are already planning and delivering.

REFERENCES

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Wyldwood Arts is a registered charity in England & Wales.

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APPENDIX 1 - ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Whereabouts in the Forest of Dean do you live?

2. What age range are you in?

0 - 5 years, 5 - 12 years, 12 - 18 years, 18 - 28 years, 28 - 48 years, 48 - 68 years, 68 - 88 years, 88 + years

3. Which of the following statements best describes you at the moment?

I consider myself to be a creative person and I already do lots of creative things

I consider myself to be a creative person and I would like to do more creative things but I'm a bit unsure about it (feeling nervous / lack of confidence / unsure where to start)

I consider myself to be a creative person and but there is currently nothing near where I live that I would like to take part in

I'm not very interested in creative stuff

Other...

4. Do you currently care for anyone, for example - a child or young person, an older person, someone with a health condition or disability? If so, what is their age range(s)?

0 - 5, 5 - 12, 12 - 18, 18 - 28, 28 - 48, 48 - 68, 68 - 88, 88+

5. Please select the areas of creativity which are of most interest to YOU (select as many as you like):

Poetry and / or writing, Theatre and / or performance, Music, singing, and / or song writing, Dance and / or movement, Arts and Crafts, Visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, film etc), Creative community activities such as community gardening, cooking, taking part in community gathering, Something else entirely (please tell us what is it at the end!!)

6. Please select the areas of creativity which are of most interest to the person or people you care for (select as many as you like):

Poetry and / or writing, Theatre and / or performance, Music, singing, and / or song writing, Dance and / or movement, Arts and Crafts, Visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, film etc), Creative community activities such as community gardening, cooking, taking part in community gathering, Something else entirely (please tell us what is it at the end!!)

7. Which of the following statements feel most true for YOU? (you can choose more than one)

I'd like to take part in one-off or short-term creative activities in the Forest

I'd like to get involved in a longer-term creative group or club in the Forest

I'd like to go and see more creative things in the Forest (live music, theatre, comedy, art exhibitions, performances)

I don't want to get involved in anything creative or go and see anything creative

8. Which of the following statements feel most true for the person or people you care for? (you can choose more than one)

I'd like to take part in one-off or short-term creative activities in the Forest

I'd like to get involved in a longer-term creative group or club in the Forest

I'd like to go and see more creative things in the Forest (live music, theatre, comedy, art exhibitions, performances)

I don't want to get involved in anything creative or go and see anything creative

9. Please tell us about barriers that you experience to taking part, and how future events/activities might be more accessible to you (examples might be things like 'not having enough spare time' or 'things being too expensive' or 'I have a disability that most activities don't make allowances for' or 'its difficult to find childcare')

10. If you care for someone, please tell us about barriers that they experience to taking part in things, and how future events, activities and offerings might be more accessible to them (examples might be things like 'not having enough spare time' or 'things being too expensive' or 'I have a disability that most activities don't make allowances for' or 'its difficult to find childcare')

11. We would LOVE to know more about you – if you have the time to share a few lines with us! Things you are interested in or that you would like to take part in, your hidden talents, things you are already involved in (such as writers groups, walking clubs, gaming, social clubs, creative activities on your own or with friends) or things you already organise in your community (events, festivals, clubs, games etc).

12. Why is creativity important to you? (You can choose as many options as you like)

It is a way of expressing myself

It is a way to meet people and be part of a community

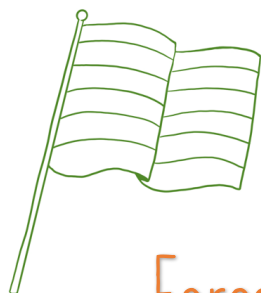
It is beneficial for my mental health

It is a way of making a political statement

Creativity isn't important to me

Other...

APPENDIX 2 - FLAG MAKING ACTIVITY



WYLDWOOD
ARTS

What would a
Forest of Dean flag look like?

We want you to design it! Here are some tips to get you started.

Start by remembering that flag-design (also called vexillography) is all about simplicity.

- ✓ Your flag should be simple enough to be drawn from memory.
- ✓ Using just a few elements will help make your design stand out.
- ✓ It needs to be seen from far away, so avoid words or detailed images.

Next, think about the things that are important to you about the Forest of Dean.



How could you represent these using...

...symbols?

A symbol can be used on a flag to represent an idea or an object in a simple way.

...colours?

Colours can be used to represent other types of features and feelings.

...patterns?

Some flags use a pattern, like a cross, a circle or a series of stripes, to mean something.

Finally, look at some existing flag designs - could you adapt them to show a connection?



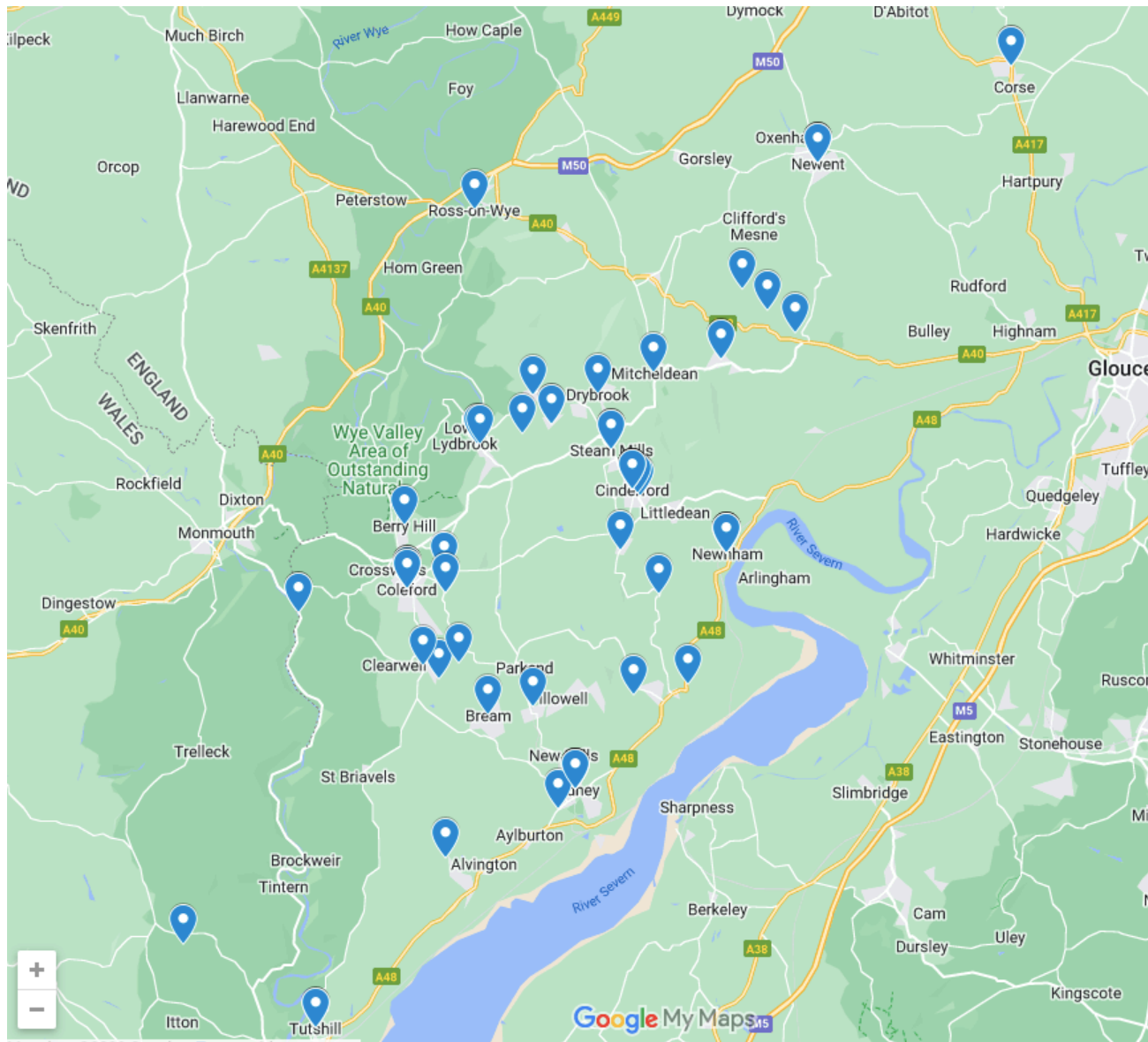
The Union Jack, or Union Flag, has been the national flag of the UK since 1801.



The Severn Cross was adopted in 2008 as the official flag of Gloucestershire.

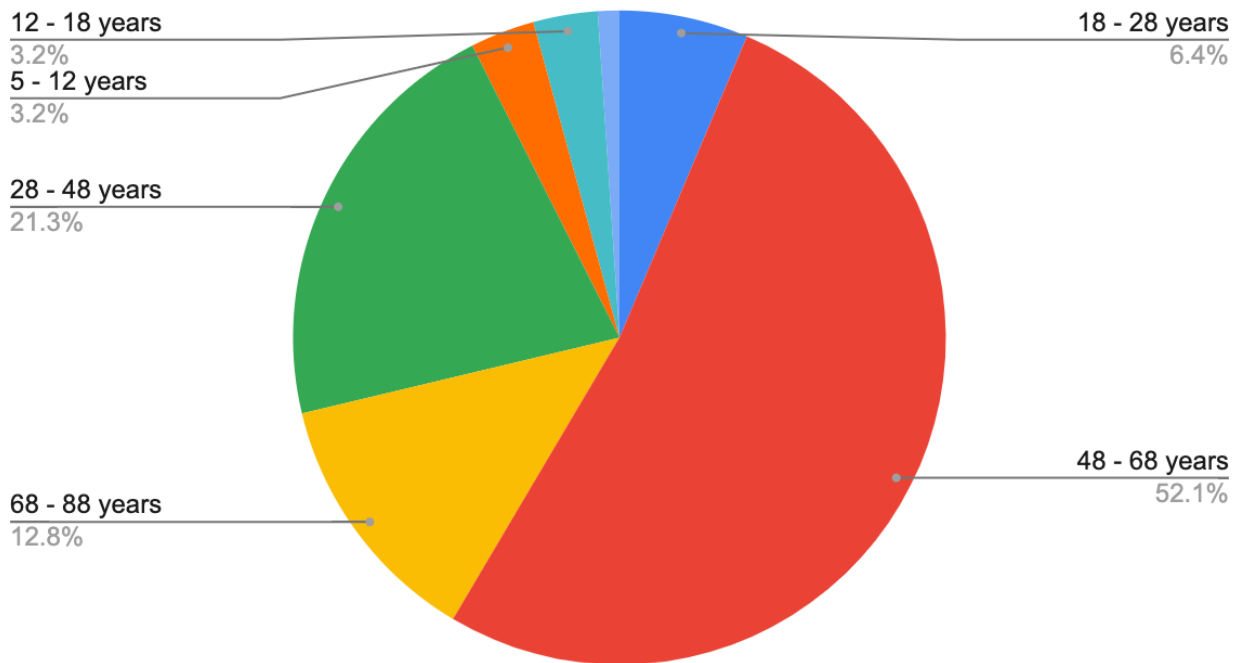
APPENDIX 3 - ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Whereabouts in the forest do you live?



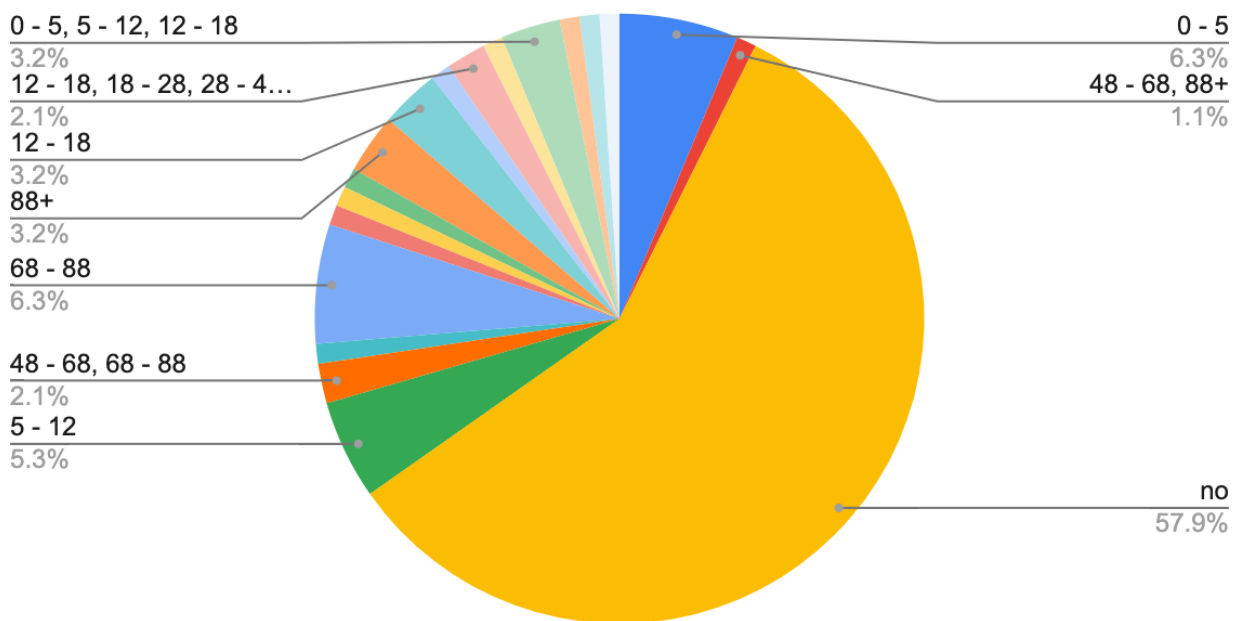
What age range are you in?

Count of What age range are you in?



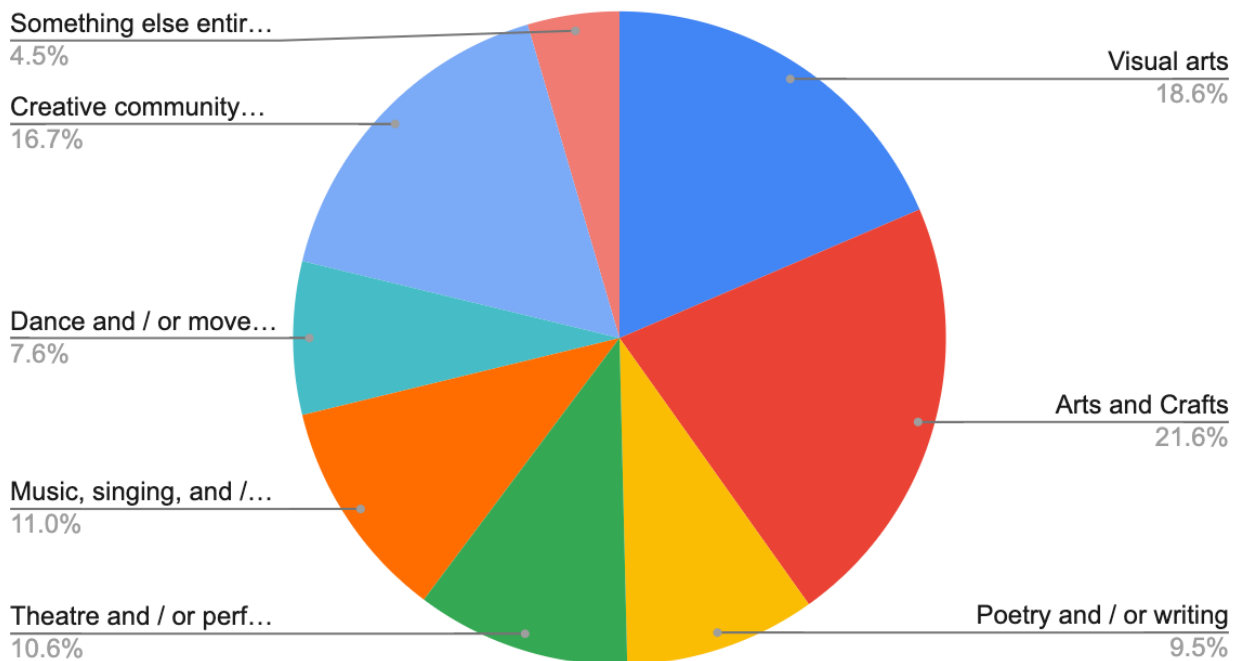
Do you currently care for anyone?

Count of Do you currently care for anyone, for example - a child or young person, an older person, someone with a health co...



APPENDIX 4 - AREAS OF CREATIVE INTEREST

Which areas of creativity are most interesting to you?



What kind of creative activity would you like to be involved in?

