



**Project commissioned by British Ceramics Biennial in partnership with AirSpace gallery and funded by Paul Hamlyn. FRANCIS, Anna (2017) Community Maker.**

Display at the British Ceramics Biennial, Spode Factory, 2017.

The 'Community Maker' project focused on the Portland Street area of Hanley, where 33 houses have been refurbished and sold for £1 each as part of a long-term process of social renewal and urban regeneration led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. This housing intervention aimed to 'change the rhythm' of the area and support the development of a happier and healthier community.

'Community Maker' formed part of the cultural sector's response to place-making for the area, bringing long-term residents together with new arrivals to build an active and engaged community. It began when local artist (and £1 home owner), Anna Francis, approached British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) with the idea. BCB's community engagement programme acts as a catalyst for positive social change through cultural activity in Stoke-on-Trent, a city with some of the lowest cultural participation rates in England (34 per cent). The idea was to work with local people to explore personal stories, cultural identities, ceramic heritage and relationship to place through the making and sharing of food and through designing and making ceramic objects together.



Using community meals and 'make' sessions to bring people together was a way of creating space for productive, if at times difficult, conversations.

Using an action research approach to involve local people in decision-making tells you if and how something will work and empowers people to take action and engage further in their community.

Building on the findings from year one, and two of the project where repeated again and again by members of the community was the need for a community space to get together, The Community Maker Project evolved from having the initial aims of creating a community ceramic ware to celebrate community resilience, to a shift in focus in striving to develop a community building.

The local pub, shop, community centre were all still boarded up, and people felt strongly that in order to thrive, a space was sorely needed. This has led to Community Maker artist Anna Francis partnering with Rebecca Davies to set up The Portland Inn project, to first secure the asset transfer of a disused pub building, then to set up a community led community interest company, and then to develop the pub building based on the needs of the community, into a thriving creative arts and community centre.

The Community Maker project workshops continued in 2017 from the green space near to the pub building, where a series of 8 creative workshops were held to test skills development with the community. Anna Francis hosted a celebratory feast event at the Spode Site at the end of the project as part of the British Ceramics Biennial, where the wares developed with the community across the 3 year project were displayed, and the community were invited to share their experience of being part of the project with the local MP, and key workers from the British Ceramics Biennial.

