

Fun A Day challenge triumphs with weekend-long exhibition at Positive Lights Projects in Exeter with 45 contributors

By Ivan Macquisten

Forty-five people from all over Greater Exeter have exhibited their creative skills in the **Fun A Day** project, a community show at the Positive Lights Projects in the city centre.

The Fun A Day concept is simple: pick a project, do it every day throughout February and record it. Adults and children drew, painted, sewed, baked, photographed and wrote to complete the challenge, lifting spirits, celebrating life and bringing a little colour to the dog days of winter.

The results went on display at Positive Lights Projects in Sidwell Street in a weekend-long show on March 18 and 19.

"It's been a fantastic way of bringing people together, and we are thrilled by such a wide response to the challenge," said Stephen Fisher, who co-organised the event with Ali Lucas.

Both live in St James Ward and co-chair the Bury Meadow Residents Association, which is very active in the community. But this was a personal initiative that they developed for the whole city.

"It was especially pleasing to see students from the university join in, as well as enthusiastic participants from further afield in the city, who had heard about the Fun A Day project through social media and more than rose to the challenge," said Ali.

One of the latter was Megan Dowsett, a Heavitree resident who pledged to make a Nature Doodle each day, inviting others to join her in the task. The result was an amazing nature book of art, a whorl of photographs of everyone joining in and even an interactive sculpture for visitors to adapt at the exhibition.

"I realised it was about collaboration – what happens if I bring other people into my Nature Doodles?" said Megan. "I thought it was about helping people connect with nature, which it was, but even more than that it was about connecting with people."

University of Exeter student Tuong Nguyen, who is studying for an MA in Creative Arts & Education, devised a project called *We are what we eat*. She used pictures of food, recycled newspapers and discarded and ready-to-eat meal boxes to create highly imaginative and colourful collage portraits.

Third-year Liberal Arts student Hannah Wix cooked a new vegetarian meal every day to explore more inspirational recipes while pursuing a healthy diet. "I wanted to show what could be done by mixing different ingredients to create really tasty meals," she said. Her display was a collage of photos of all the meals she cooked during the month.

Youngsters also got in on the act. Izzy, aged 6, rose to the challenge with her friends Maya (7) and Elana (6). While Izzy put her artistic skills to good use in creating a North and South Pole landscape, complete with igloo, polar bears and penguins, Maya and Elana each built a portfolio of photographs, snapping their pet cats and rats each day.

Sheila Thorne, an accomplished artist, created abstract pictures each day using acrylic paint on pastel paper, displaying the results on a print rack. As with so many other of the exhibits, they attracted a lot of attention.

Mick Braddick photographed the same patch of garden each day to record the early spring sequence, showing buds and flowers emerging after winter.

Project inspired by King Charles III's Coronation in May

Inspired by the forthcoming Coronation, Peter Davies produced a folder titled *A Jewel A Day*, researching Royal regalia and revealing each of the important pieces to be used on May 6, along with their often-astounding provenance. These included gemstones that have been in the Royal collection for centuries, such as St Edward's Sapphire, now set in the diamond cross atop the Imperial State Crown, but once gracing Edward the Confessor's coronation ring, and even visible in the celebrated historical artwork, *The Wilton Diptych*.

Ali Lucas created two bird-inspired workbooks called *The February Flock*, containing paintings, graphic illustrations, collage and even elaborate needlepoint portraits of garden birds.

One participant dropped off a large abstract design quilt, which took pride of place at the entrance to the Positive Lights Projects gallery space. An amazing work!

Fun A Day is an American invention that started by a group of friends, who wanted to stay lively and creative throughout winter, in Philadelphia in 2004. It has since been adopted across the USA and has ventured as far as Dundee, Scotland.

"It's been a highly rewarding experience," said Ali. "There are no fees, no prizes, no age limit and no exclusions, which means that everyone can just concentrate on the joy of taking part."

Stephen agrees. "One of the best parts has been watching the community evolve and engage, with children, university students, people with no formal art training, and accomplished artists all sharing the same space and co-creating something wonderful. It's just great to see so many people contributing to a wholly positive project, and to have reached such a wide range of artists, cooks, photographers, writers and others."

All the participants appear to have finished the weekend with the same question: "What am I going to do for Fun A Day next year?"

For further information, contact Stephen Fisher at fun.a.day.exeter@gmail.com



Figure: Top row left to right: **Megan Dowsett** with the artbook that arose from her Nature Doodles project – it attracted a great deal of attention at the show. **Mick Braddick** with his photo project focusing on the emerging spring. University of Exeter MA student **Tuong Nguyen** with her *You are what you eat* display. Middle row left to right: **Sheila Thorne** with some of her acrylic works. **Izzy, Maya** and **Elana** in front of their projects. **Peter Davies** shows off his thoroughly researched project on the Crown Jewels in anticipation of the Coronation in May. Bottom row left to right: University of Exeter student **Hannah Wix** with a portfolio of photographs of her exploratory vegetarian meals. **Ali Lucas** and **Stephen Fisher**, who organised the Fun-A-Day project, at the Positive Light Projects Exhibition. **Ali Lucas** with her two bird-inspired art books, “The February Flock”.