



Manchester
Metropolitan
University

The **COMMUNITY** *Issue*

aAh!



Featured Artist **Aleesha Khan**
@ph4tfunk

Aleesha Khan is a mixed media artist with a broad range of experience across different mediums such as painting, photography and graphic design. Khan's international upbringing instilled a keen sentimentality towards nostalgia and surrealism within her. She enjoys finding ways to blend, obscure and subvert techniques and is often influenced by the natural world. Her eclectic style that champions texture and vibrancy has found its way through exploring and absorbing the weird and wonderful, which continues to fuel her passion for making art that is a feast for the senses.

Our Team

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Natalie Carragher

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Megan Levick
Olivia Gilbert

EDITORIAL TEAM

Ava Barker
Cheri Dermott
Curtis Wilson
Edward Firman
Eve Woolley
Imogen Burgess
Kate Dening
Lowri Simmons
Megan Hall
Mia Gadsby
Michael Davies

SOCIAL MEDIA

Ani Orujyan

CONTRIBUTORS

Alice Haston
Beisan Najib
Ciara Reynolds
Evie-Iris Atkins
Grace Xu
Hannah Branch
Ian Burke
Iris Skipworth
Joel Turner
Kaitlyn Brockley

DESIGN COLLECTIVE

Adomas Lukas Petrauskas
Aigerim Zhumabay
Aleesha Khan
Alice-Skye McEwen
Anna Comerford
Charlie Mooney
Monica McManaman
Nicola Henry
Quang Dat Nguyen

ILLUSTRATION

Dylan John Meek
Natalie Bhart
Nicola Henry
Olivia Taberner
Ruby Sharp

PHOTOGRAPHY

Adrianos Falkonakis
Ciara Reynolds
Jack Oliver
Kaitlyn Brockley
Molly Goble
Yas Lucia Mascarenhas

SPECIAL THANKS

Elle Simms
Helen McCormick
James Draper
Jess Edwards
John Lean
Kaye Tew
Nathalie Griffith
Richard Silburn
Simon Webb
Vince Hunt

CONTACT

Follow @aAh_mag
Email aAh.editor@gmail.com
Telephone 0161 247 1951
Address **aAh! Magazine, Manchester Metropolitan University, Grosvenor East Building, M15 6BG**

aAh! distributes copies on the Manchester Metropolitan University campus and across Manchester. A wide range of advertising packages and affordable ways are available to promote your business. Get in touch to find out more.

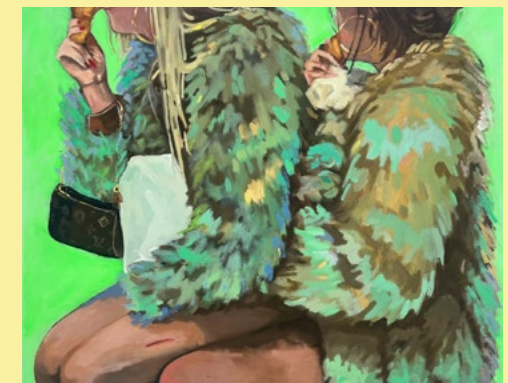
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part without the explicit permission of the publisher. The views and opinions expressed within this publication do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Manchester Metropolitan University.

Get involved!

We're always on the lookout for student journalists, editors, social media marketers, graphic designers, illustrators, photographers and filmmakers on an ongoing basis to help make aAh! an informed, inspiring, witty, and opinionated collection of student voices and talent that makes our city brilliant. Get involved and be a part of your student magazine.

Cover Artist **Marnie González Warren**
@marniesgallery

Marnie González Warren is an MA Fine Art student at the Manchester School of Art, specialising in figurative oil painting to explore culture and image. Influenced by theories of spectacle and meaning, she recontextualizes imagery in order to examine ideas of femininity and social structures within contemporary culture. The anachronism of oil painting offers a counterpoint to the immediacy of digital media, creating a space that consolidates memory whilst encouraging its reflection. Through layered narratives and bold colour – echoing the saturation of digital culture, her paintings offer a commentary on the complexities of contemporary Western consumption.



editor's letter

Welcome to The COMMUNITY Issue

The word COMMUNITY is synonymous with Manchester. From trailblazing activists to groundbreaking music legends, artists and poets, our city has always been home to powerful, passionate people. Manchester's symbol – the bee – embodies the collectivity and resilience of its people. It represents hard work, cooperation and a deep sense of belonging that ties us to the city.

This issue explores the spirit of togetherness and unity, celebrating the individuals, groups and initiatives that make up the mosaic of our community. Through the voices of Manchester's people, we paint a picture of a city rich in diversity and resilience, and shine a spotlight on the communities that lie at its heart and soul.

In the face of today's social and political challenges, our communities – the people we turn to for support, comfort, guidance and inspiration – are more important than ever as we come together to challenge adversity.

This issue is packed with guides to help you find your own community. There are spaces to connect and grow, and insights on the best places to live after graduating.

When violence against women and girls has been declared a national emergency, we speak to experts on the importance of female communities and finding strength in sisterhood.

We also highlight two Manchester Met students – filmmaker Baka Bah and photographer Yas Lucia Mascarenhas – who are breaking barriers and amplifying under-represented voices through their creative projects.

As a city with a rich and significant musical history, which has played a role in creating and supporting many communities and subcultures, we explore the artists shaking up the Northern music scene and spotlight the Northern Quarter's radio station providing a platform for underground talent.

We take a closer look at Manchester's literary world through the independent LGBTQ+ bookshop Queer Lit and the vital role libraries play in shaping 21st Century communities.

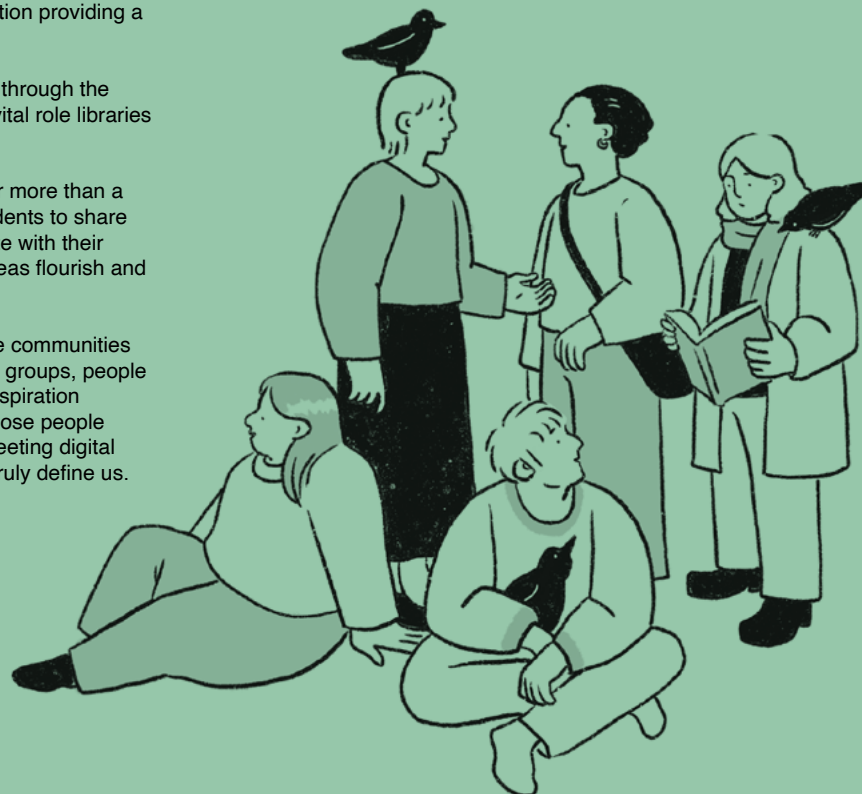
This magazine itself is a reflection of community. For more than a decade, aAh! Magazine has been a platform for students to share their voices, showcase their creativity and collaborate with their peers. It is a space where connections are made, ideas flourish and creative expression thrives.

As you read this issue, we invite you to reflect on the communities that you are part of. Perhaps it's your family, student groups, people you work with, or a space where you find support, inspiration and empowerment. Consider what this space and those people mean to you. Because while technology may offer fleeting digital connections, it's the real-world bonds we build that truly define us.

Megan Levick and Olivia Gilbert
aAh! Magazine Editorial Assistants



Illustration Nicola Henry



CONTENTS

SPACES TO CONNECT
AND GROW

FINDING STRENGTH
IN SISTERHOOD

THE SUCCESS OF MOSS SIDE

GIRLS TO THE FRONT

ELLEN BETH ABDI

CROP RADIO

GORP CORE:
FROM FEED TO FEET

FASHION SOCIETY

MANCUNIAN
FASHION FUSION

Q&A:
BREAKING BARRIERS

LIGHTS UP

BEST PLACES TO LIVE AFTER
GRADUATING

Q&A: FEED MY CITY

THE FAMILY RESTAURANTS
GIVING BACK

OPINION

INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT EXPERIENCE

ASK aAh!

MANCHESTER'S LIBRARIES

QUEER LIT

STORYTELLING
AROUND THE WORLD

PRINT CULTURE
IN MANCHESTER

CREATIVE WRITING

WHAT'S ON

SPACES to Connect and Grow

By Megan Levick
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas

Manchester thrives on its diverse communities – cultures, clubs and networks that bring people together. Whether you're new to the city, looking to find your place at university or simply hoping to make some new friends, there's a group for you. From walking clubs to creative workshops, we've rounded up the best ways to connect and grow.

2 GIRL GANG MANCHESTER @girlgangmcr

A socially and politically engaged collective, Girl Gang Manchester inspires women to take up space and embrace their creativity. They host collaborative and inclusive experiences, such as immersive screenings, experimental exhibitions, creative club nights, workshops, book clubs, support groups and more. If you're looking to meet new people and explore activism through art and discussion, this place of friendship, solidarity and support is for you.

4 HOME @homemcr

HOME is Manchester's independent cinema, theatre and art gallery for 'the curious from all communities,' screening a huge variety of thought-provoking classic and contemporary cinema. Founded in 2015, the space strives to push the boundaries of form and technology, engage communities, support new artists and offer a platform for art and culture. It's an ideal place to find inspiration and connect with others with a shared passion for the arts.

1 FEEL GOOD CLUB @wearefeelgoodclub

Run by two queer women on a mission to "make you feel good," Feel Good Club creates a safe, inclusive environment where you can be your best self. Serving up feel-good vibes at their flagship location in the Northern Quarter, they offer brunch and coffee by day and host events and a bar by night. With a calendar jam-packed with events designed to spread positivity and queer joy, including cabaret, book swaps and crochet workshops, there is something for everyone.

3 MANDEM MEET UP @mandemmeetup_mcr

Breaking stigma and building brotherhoods, Mandem Meetup is a grassroots charity dedicated to promoting and improving the conversation around men's mental health. The group offers regular community-driven events, including football, a talking circle, a chess club, mindful walks and a variety of workshops in a judgement-free, inclusive space. All events are free to attend, rooted in their ethos: "Come as you are, you're welcome here."

5 DYKES WHO HIKE @dykeswhohikemcr

Promising lots of laughs, fresh air and good vibes, Dykes Who Hike is an LGBT+ walking group creating a wholesome, inclusive space for Manchester's queer community. Originally founded to fill a gap in queer-friendly spaces for women to connect in London, the group has expanded to the North, completing scenic walks around Greater Manchester and its surrounding areas. Join for a great way to stay active and meet new people.

6 QUEER ROOTS COLLECTIVE @queerrootscollective

For those who feel most at home in quiet, outdoor spaces, Queer Roots Collective offers a refreshing alternative to city life. The Manchester-based regenerative grassroots group is designed to facilitate queer spaces and celebrate the queer community, while offering versatile ways to get involved. Their events range from a queer gardening club to open mic nights, with a range of creative workshops, as well as staging their annual Alt Pride Festival.

7 ALTOGETHER OTHERWISE @altogetherotherwise

Dubbed NOMA's local "Hobby House," Altogether Otherwise is a creative community space where you can relax, recharge and pursue creativity, escaping the fast-paced culture and pressures of everyday life. It's the perfect spot to unwind after a busy day, with free-to-attend workshops and events ranging from an evening gardening club and a yarn club to wheel-thrown pottery workshops, a fantasy/sci-fi book club and cookbook club.

8 BEE PEDAL READY @beepedalready

Cycling is one of the best ways to get around as a student and Bee Pedal Ready is on a mission to make cycling fun, safe and accessible for all. Founded by Manchester's first bicycle mayor, the initiative empowers and educates women and girls to ride and repair bikes, breaking down barriers to cycling. Keep an eye out for their Dr Bike Sessions on campus, where you can bring your bike in for checks and minor adjustments for free.

9 YOGA SOCIAL CLUB @_yogasocialclub

Balancing university life with staying active can be tough, but Yoga Social Club makes it easier by re-imagining the traditional yoga experience. Immersive, interactive classes designed to provide you with all of the physical and holistic benefits of yoga have created a relaxing space to stretch, breathe and smile. With a range of regular classes, from mellow morning yoga and upbeat weeknight sessions (followed by a post-yoga hangout) to baby yoga, Yoga Social Club is an inclusive judgment-free zone for people of all abilities.

10 THE COOL GIRLS BOOK CLUB @thecoolgirlsbookclub_

A recent addition to Manchester's literary scene, The Cool Girls Book Club is a female-led community where booklovers can connect with like-minded women, engage in discussions about their favourite reads and discover new literature. Meetings take place on the last Sunday of each month and are a great way to expand your perspectives and connect with fellow book-lovers.

FINDING STRENGTH IN SISTER-HOOD



By Lowri Simmons
Illustration Olivia Taberner
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas

In an era when digital communities reign supreme, it's easy to lose sight of, and appreciation for, the simple joys of existence. The smell of freshly mown grass, the feeling of sunlight warming your face, the comforting sound of birds chirping – these small grounding moments have been overshadowed by the blue light from our screens. Social media promised to bring us together, but many of us are feeling more alone than ever. Through endless, mindless scrolling, digital communities are taking over our real life connections, filtering out the world beyond our screens.

For Gen Z, the so-called "loneliest generation," this sense of isolation is stark. Youth organisation ShoutOut UK reports that nine million people in the UK are "chronically lonely" – and the figures are rising.

Women in their 20s in particular face unique challenges when it comes to forming and maintaining friendships in the modern world. Societal pressures, life transitions, post-university relocations, early career demands and the stigma surrounding loneliness often make it difficult to build authentic connections.

Jessica Bennett, a 23-year-old Animal Behaviour and Conservation student at Manchester Met knows this feeling all too well. The endless scrolling of perfectly-curated lives on Instagram left her feeling more disconnected than ever. "Society has unfortunately made having few or no friends something to be ashamed of, as if there's something wrong with you. Either you must be 'weird' or 'annoying.'"

"Organised groups such as Girlhood provide safety in numbers."

Her experience is far from unique. With Gen Z averaging more than six hours of screen time per day, according to Ofcom's *Online Nation* report, it's clear that much of our socialising is happening online rather than through face-to-face interactions. Screen time has become part of the fabric of everyday life for most, making real-world connection increasingly rare. Yet Bennett found an antidote in CLIQ – a social networking app designed specifically to build safe, real-world connections.

Co-founded by Nicola Gunby, CLIQ was created in response to the lack of safe and authentic spaces for women to meet. What began as a digital platform quickly evolved into something more meaningful.

"As a female myself, I knew how important it is to create safe spaces for women," Gunby explains. "A lot of the platforms out there that we are using aren't safe for us to meet people on; they haven't been designed with us in mind."

The app allows users to create female-only spaces, with privacy settings that restrict access to keep men out. "If I want to create a female running club on CLIQ, I can set my privacy settings to just 'female-only', and the same with events and personal profiles. The need for female communities and events is growing really organically on CLIQ, and I'm so proud of this. Now, it's about expanding the demographic while still keeping women safe."

Bennett credits CLIQ with helping her find her people. Through the app, she connected with Girlhood, a Manchester-based community group for women, and began attending their Sunday morning 'Girls Who Walk' meet-ups.



"Discovering the Girlhood community [through CLIQ] was like finding something I didn't even know I was looking for," she says. "When you find an activity that matches your interests, you naturally connect with other women who are motivated by the same things. 'I've been on several walks now, and I love it.'"

For Bennett, this was more than just a social outing – it was a shift in how she experienced the city as a woman. "For one event, we started with an ice-breaker by ordering a drink in a cute café. We walked through Peel Park and back to the café – all while feeling confident in the city because we were walking as a big group."

This sense of safety in numbers is no small thing. In the past year, violence against women has been declared "a national emergency". According to a study conducted in 2024 by Mitie and WalkSafe, 44% of women say they feel unsafe when walking in the dark. Many also feel vulnerable even during daylight hours while commuting to work. This highlights the growing need for safe spaces where women can feel secure and supported.

Gunby, who regularly attends CLIQ events herself, says the demand for female-only spaces is clear: "The surge in violence against women has made female communities more important than ever. Community is needed for everyone – it's essential to our human biology – but for women in particular, it's also about safety."

"We want to know that when we are in a community we are safe and that our voices can be heard by people who are similar to us. We want to be in spaces that we know men can't access, which is why safety on CLIQ is such a big thing."

The platform's community-building ethos extends beyond just socialising; it also creates opportunities for shared experiences. Earlier this year, Bennett attended a Girlhood event with Manchester City Football Club. "We had a pizza party with friendship bracelet-making in one of the Etihad Stadium hospitality restaurants," she says. The group then sat together to watch the Women's Super League derby – Manchester City versus Manchester United.

"It was an evening that the childhood me would have dreamt of: football, making friends and supporting women in sport. I came away with a phone full of new friend's numbers, lots of pictures and the feeling of female empowerment," says Bennett.

"As women we should feel comfortable to walk when and where we choose without looking over our shoulder, without always staying in the open or in monitored areas and always having an escape plan. Organised groups, such as Girlhood, provide safety in numbers – showing the power of women supporting women."

A study by the National Library of Medicine found that friendships and connections between women are related to individual resources, meaning friendships may provide individuals with a perspective on themselves. What this means is that, the stronger a woman's friendships, the higher their self-esteem, hope and social support becomes.

Bennett adds: "It can feel intimidating to attend any social event at first, but with Girlhood you can go with a friend or be welcomed on your own. If I'm being honest, I actually followed 'Girlhood' online for quite a few months before I had the confidence to attend my first event."

"Social media has become a big social competition. People feel the pressure to prove their life is packed with activities, achievements and relationships. This is why I have found using CLIQ so amazing – it breaks those barriers."

Follow @findyourcliq on Instagram.

BAKA BAH



THE SUCCESS OF MOSS SIDE

By Megan Hall
Photography Yas Lucia Mascarenhas
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas



Manchester's inner-city neighbourhood of Moss Side is often portrayed in the media as a dangerous area, plagued by knife crime and shootings. However, one resident and Manchester Met student – Baka Bah – believes this one-sided story doesn't reflect the true spirit of his community.

While studying for his undergraduate degree in Film at Manchester Met, Bah began working on his documentary, *The Success of Moss Side*. His goal was to showcase a more nuanced perspective of the area, highlighting the stories and livelihoods of local residents.

Bah's personal journey reflects the impact of media narratives on self-perception. He began to notice how the negative portrayal of Moss Side had started to affect him: "I found it weird that I always had an awkward feeling when mentioning where I come from, and I didn't like that feeling. It didn't sit well with me. After a while, I started questioning it: 'Why do I feel like this about saying where I'm from?'"

He adds: "Whenever I do say where I'm from, I automatically see labels ping over my head. I see it in people's reactions – the 'oohs' and 'aahs,' like, 'Oh, you're from Moss Side?!'"

This sentiment led Bah to explore how pervasive media narratives shape perceptions: "If people have this narrative that there's only death, there's only stabbings, there's only crime, there's only drugs,

there's only bad ethnic groups within an area, that it's somewhere you should stay far away from because there's so many bad things happening, the people [who live there will] begin to feel like that's what they are."

Bah recognises some simple areas for improvement when it comes to accurate and truthful representation. When typing 'Moss Side' into Google, Bah says he only sees back-to-back negative articles. "There's a massive gap between the information that they're getting and the information that they're putting out."

Perceptions of Moss Side are not just spread through word of mouth. Following the tragic death of his cousin Cheriff Tall at a street party in 2020, Bah experienced first-hand what being so close to recent news events in Moss Side was like.

He explains that his strong connection to Moss Side led him to create the documentary, despite the tragedy: "I have a shared experience with my auntie through losing her son, like that was my cousin. Even through all that, I still felt the need to make this documentary to highlight that there's more to Moss Side than that."

In light of this, Bah's documentary will feature the "unsung heroes" of his area, such as his auntie Suwaidu Sanyang, who felt the full strength of her community after the passing of her son. Football



coach Ahmed Yassin will also be a focus of the documentary as it tells the story of how he started a football programme to help combat anti-social behaviour.

Bah challenges the tendency to focus solely on issues, advocating for well-rounded narratives with a critical purpose. He explains: "People like to pick up an issue and concentrate on the issue, but I don't want to do that. I want to recognise there's an issue because it's very important to recognise something, but I want to concentrate on the solutions and how we can move forward in understanding what the scope of this issue actually is."

Bah was inspired to use his passion for filmmaking to make something that would help bring truth to the rhetoric surrounding the place he calls home. Projects like this could change the futures of generations to come who deserve to see that their community is capable of goodness.

"I've seen a lot of documentaries in the past and sometimes I get a feeling of 'Is the story being told the way the people themselves would tell it?' And that's not the feeling I wanted people to have from this documentary."

As an enthusiastic film student, Bah's love for documentaries helped him realise the importance of who is on the production team, who is in the writing room and who makes the final edits. He explains that those contributing to his documentary were involved throughout the whole editing process. "Even down to the B-roll and stock material

that we used, it all came directly from them, so everything originated from the source," he says. "I feel like it's a much truer representation of the story when you have that kind of approach towards a project."

Bah says that his audience might be most surprised by Moss Side's "level of warmth" He explains: "That's the type of community that Moss Side is. It's an 'everybody knows everybody' tight-knit community. People will stop to speak to each other. From leaving your house to going to the shops, you will get stopped by ten people and speak to ten people because it's just that sort of community."

"Moss Side is a slice of happiness. It's a slice of joy, a slice of sadness, a slice of endurance, a slice of culture and a slice of difference. I feel like Moss side is an example to the rest of the UK of how people from so many different backgrounds and cultures can co-exist and thrive despite all the adversity society places on them."

In pursuing this project, Bah has been pleasantly surprised by how his community put their faith in him, just as he has done for them. "In all honesty, I was shocked at the level of interaction that I had with the story and the reasons why we're doing what we're doing. I didn't think there would be enough people that cared, I don't know why. Even though I have faith in it, I didn't have faith in the people, which I'm now realising was wrong."

The experience of highlighting the positivity in Moss Side has moved this filmmaker in more ways than he could have imagined, as he aims to become the "opposite of ignorance". Bah says: "Working on

this film showed me the importance of actually finding out the full story rather than just having an idea, a one track mind; tunnel vision, riding that idea. I've learnt to really strip things back and delve deep into the different sides and different layers of a subject."

To anyone wanting to be a bigger part of their community and inspire others, Bah says: "Go and do the little things. Figure out where you stand within the community, who you are within that community first, and try to actually understand the community."

Bah has set up a GoFundMe page for *The Success of Moss Side* to raise funds for the project, with the hope that it will be showcased in cinemas. Follow @baka_bah

Bah's documentary project was initially funded through the Rise programme at Manchester Met through our 200 year celebrations. If you're interested in running community-facing projects, check out Rise at rise.mmu.ac.uk

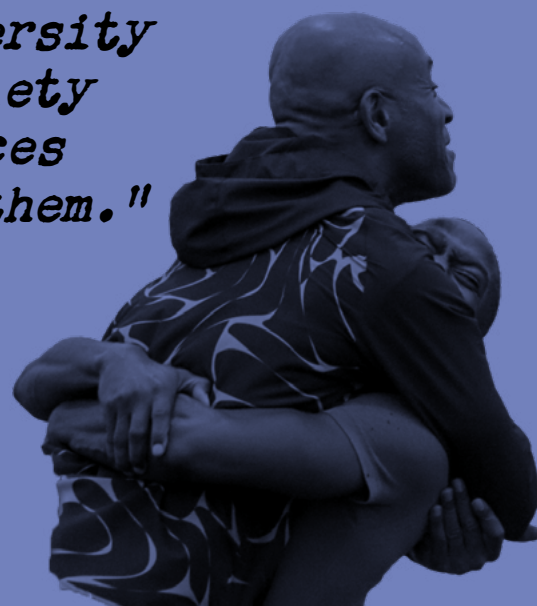


☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

"I feel like Moss Side is an example to the rest of the UK of how people from so many different backgrounds and cultures can co-exist and thrive, despite all the adversity society places on them."

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆
 ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

"Moss Side is a slice of happiness. It's a slice of joy, a slice of sadness, a slice of endurance, a slice of culture and a slice of difference."



GIRLS TO

HUMUNGOUS FUNGUS



OPEN FLY

THE FRONT

By Kaitlyn Brockley
Photography Kaitlyn Brockley
Design Monica McManaman

OPEN FLY

Channelling the ultimate Riot Grrrl energy is Open Fly, famed for their chaotic live presence across the Manchester punk scene. Combining spoken word with baring barks, Open Fly fuses the creative songwriting of Sonic Youth with the sauntering swagger of L7 to create a sound that is dynamic, noisy, bold and fun. After grafting away at live shows, the band is ready to open the doors to the wider world of Open Fly, inviting others to join their sprawling technicolour world.

THE GIRLS, GAYS AND
THEYS, SHAKING UP
THE NORTH-WEST'S
ALTERNATIVE SCENE.

ROZEMARY

Spawned in the emerging Liverpool alternative scene, Roze-mary combine spiky riffs with frontwoman Izabel Lavin's guttural growls and soaring vocals. Citing Spiritbox and Heriot as influ-ences, and notably named after the hit Deftones' track, Roze-mary combine the chaos with the calm and are steadily building a reputation amongst the metal community for their raucous live shows. With a slew of shows across the country and their upcoming slot at Liverpool's No Play Festival 2025, the sky is surely the limit for the Merseyside metalcore quartet.

HUMUNGOUS FUNGUS

Now more than ever, the world needs punk music. Manchester trio Humongous Fungus firmly place their politics at the forefront of their music, frequently playing at fundraisers for LGBTQ+ youth and using their voice on social media platforms. Their technical prowess is unmistakable: lead guitarist and singer Willow Grieves crafts sludgy, meandering riffs over crooning vocals, backed by Selina Per, then tied together neatly in a bow by drummer Venus Lee. Now a fixture in Manchester's blossoming punk scene, you'll also catch singer Willow in goth-punk outfit Dierotica.

LABRYNTHINE OCEANS

Labyrinthine Oceans craft sultry-sweet shoegaze that floats between tender and abrasive, creating a wall of noise reminiscent of My Bloody Valentine and Deftones. Spanning a multitude of genres from dream pop to grunge, their work is cinematic and sprawling, cultivating a world that is shrouded in nostalgia, but uniquely their own. However, it can also take a gritty path: the track 'untitled' harks back to early PJ Harvey – gravelly, ferocious and defiant.

LOVE RARELY

One of the most exciting offerings from Leeds' thriving hardcore scene, Love Rarely combine math-rock with screamo vocals to create work that is beautiful and ferocious at the same time. Standout track 'Mould' demonstrates this with vocals that melt into intricate guitars, before seemingly imploding into distorted growls and throbbing bass. After touring with UK metal royalty Loathe and Static Dress, and announcing their first headline show in their hometown, they look set to hit the big league and become a household name themselves.

ELLEN BETH ABDI



Manchester's musical history is nothing short of legendary. Between Joy Division's post-punk innovations, Britpop royalty Oasis and the booming indie rave scene that sparked 'Madchester', the city has been a stomping ground for some of the most influential artists in British music history. Now, festivals like Parklife and OUTBREAK continue to cement its reputation as a hub for sonic discovery, luring global audiences eager to experience Manchester's creative energy. But beyond these internationally recognised names lies a network of independent artists and grassroots venues working to amplify the homegrown talent coming up through Manchester's music scene.

Musician Ellen Beth Abdi knows this world well. A mainstay of Manchester's scene, she's worked with city legends such as New Order and A Certain Ratio whilst building a genre-spanning career. For Abdi, collaboration is at the core of what makes the city's music culture so special. "People will hold your hand and then watch you fly," she says. "People have your back, which I think has made everything a lot easier. There's not this competition – it's quite egalitarian."

Community support is palpable in Manchester, she says: "As much as the artists collaborating is important, having that crowd and having the weight of people behind you is something that is really strong in Manchester. Everyone is very congratulatory and supportive, even if they're not a musician or artist."

Abdi's roots in Manchester run deep. Having grown up here, she went to study at The Royal Northern College of Music, a decision that felt natural and inevitable. "I don't think you'd have me down as a homebody, but everything is here so I've had no reason to move – I love it here," she says.

Crediting the amazing people and opportunities she encountered while part of Manchester's huge student body for shaping her, Abdi jokes about the air of mystery surrounding Manchester's suburbs as she recalls a memory from her student days: "I felt like an expert on Manchester. I'd say 'Let's go to Hulme!', and people would go 'Oh my God, where's that?' and I'd think 'It's ten minutes down the road, just hop on a bus and see where it goes!'"

The lack of recognition of the culture coming out of Manchester's suburbs (read: anywhere but Oxford Road or the Northern Quarter), is a topic close to Abdi's heart, such as Matt & Phreds as essential springboards for small artists.

"You need venues that people go to on a regular basis where they don't know who they're going to see," she says. "Venues like The Carlton Club [in Whalley Range], Fuel and Withington Public Hall [in Withington] are doing great work in the suburbs of Manchester and putting on really amazing shows. I've done so many gigs in those venues, and most musicians in Manchester will have passed through them at some point because it's a rite of passage. Just don't take those places for granted."

The ongoing cost of living crisis continues to throw up challenges for young creatives navigating the industry: "There's basically no money and there's very little infrastructure, especially for people who are starting out," Abdi explains. She says that as venues close amid a lack of investment in the grassroots "it's basically impossible for working-class artists to get a foothold."

"That's something that drastically needs to change because we're not going to see a single working-class artist on stage in the next ten years if it continues this way," she says.

Though funding cuts for arts ventures threaten independent hopefuls, Abdi credits community efforts for helping to keep the local music community alive. Manchester has a tightly interwoven community of musicians, promoters, record store owners and radio DJs – all of which, Abdi says, play a crucial role in pushing artists into the spotlight.

"Community radio in Manchester is so good. Legacy 90.1 is one of my favourite radio stations – it's what Manchester DJs listen to in their cars. They don't just play music, they advertise community events. They're true community spaces," says Abdi. Other Mancunian institutions she champions include Piccadilly Records in town and Chorlton's King Bee record shop.

Abdi is keen to shift the focus from the usual suspects to the lesser-known pioneers who have shaped the city's sound in more understated ways. "Everyone can reel off the big bands," she says, "but Manchester has a massive Black music history. Manchester street soul changed the face of electronic music in the UK, and that's often not part of the conversation."

She adds: "It's the unsung heroes and the vocalists and producers that I want to celebrate."

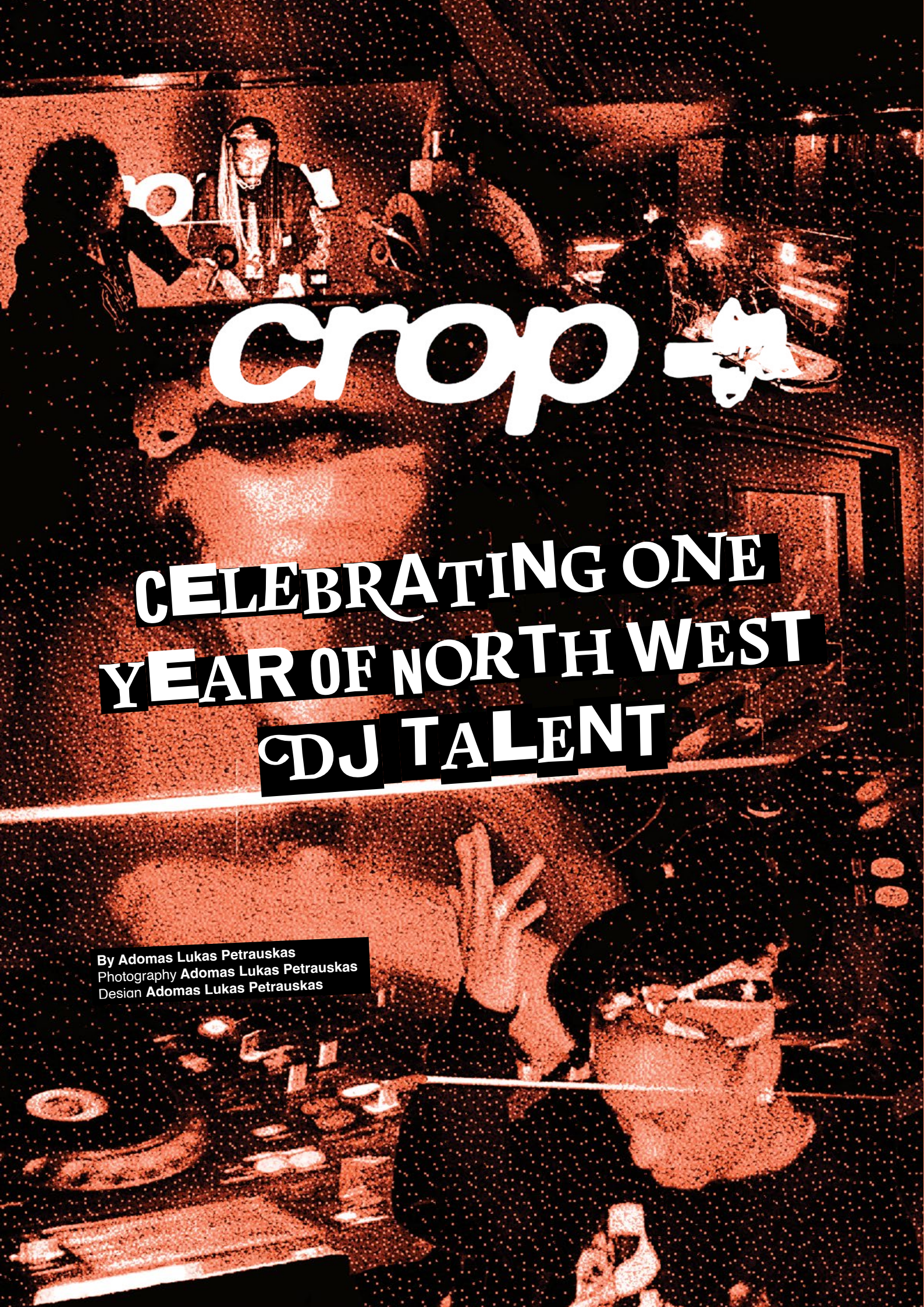
"People will hold your hand and then watch you fly"

For emerging musicians, Abdi's advice is simple: immerse yourself in the scene and engage with what's around you. "Go to a different gig every week, even if you don't know who's playing. Go and talk to people and get involved as much as you can because there are loads of opportunities. Just look for it and you will find your people."

In Manchester, where music thrives on mutual support, that community spirit remains the foundation for everything.

By **Olivia Gilbert**
Photography **Jody Hartley**
Design **Adomas Lukas Petrauskas**





crop

CELEBRATING ONE YEAR OF NORTH WEST DJ TALENT

By Adomas Lukas Petrauskas
Photography Adomas Lukas Petrauskas
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas

As the independent radio community CROP marks its first year, we catch up with its founders to reflect on the vision that sparked it, the highlights along the way and what the future holds for Manchester's new music platform.

CROP is an independent radio and community platform in Manchester's Northern Quarter, located on the second floor of Port Street music venue Stage & Radio. The station operates in the remnants of an old pizza kitchen with DJ decks and turntables set up beside a ceramic oven, making it a perfectly unconventional home for a platform built on experimentation. The studio itself is a warm, low-lit space scented with incense, strung with fairy lights and dotted with potted flowers, creating an inviting atmosphere that feels more like a friend's living room than a broadcast station.

Since launching in March 2024, CROP has championed hundreds of underground artists across the North West, offering a platform to DJs and producers often overlooked by the mainstream media. "The name highlights the importance of nurturing emerging talent, much like crops, which need the right space and resources to grow and thrive together," says CROP founder Connor Cooper, as he adjusts the broadcast setup for an incoming resident DJ.

In just a year, CROP has quickly gained attention thanks to the eclectic mix of talent they spotlight, including artists like Princess Elf Bar, Kop-Z, Esme, and Kusasa, each bringing a unique approach to their sets and music production. The space acts as a playground for the DJs to push boundaries, experiment and develop their craft. This diversity of genres keeps CROP's audience wide-ranging, welcoming fans of every corner of the electronic music spectrum.

For Cooper, creating CROP was a response to Manchester's rich but often underexposed creative scene. "There was such a wealth of creativity and talent that didn't get the spotlight it deserved in comparison to other cities," he says, nodding to radio platforms like The LOT in New York and NTS in East London. With NTS attracting three million monthly listeners, the power of this modern radio format is clear. Cooper saw an opportunity to build something similar in Manchester – a space where artists could share their music with new audiences and experiment freely.

Outside of broadcasting, these welcoming music spaces invite conversation and connection for artists in certain niches, who would usually only find each other online. "These spaces create a much-needed social hub for creatives outside of the intensity of a nightclub," says Cooper.

"They allow people in this community to share their passion for music during a challenging time for the industry, with nightclubs closing down left and right and a cost of living crisis looming over the heads of ravers. These environments connect and humanise the people who play music and the people who run parties, in a space that doesn't demand alcohol or staying out late."

His words ring true in the current climate. According to a study by the Nighttime Industries Association, the UK lost 37% of its clubs over the past four years, with approximately ten clubs closing each month. In the North West alone, 74 nightclubs have closed since 2020. CROP's existence offers a glimmer of hope – a welcoming space formed of a tight-knit community of artists and selectors who might not otherwise cross paths.

Despite the industry's challenges, CROP has cultivated a genuine sense of family. Resident DJs and regulars describe the platform as being more than just a radio station – it's a creative sanctuary. "I'm proud of this place and I'm proud to be a part of it," says Cooper.

This welcoming energy extends beyond broadcasting. CROP regularly gives back to the community who support by backing meaningful causes. The recent BLEND talk panel is one example – an evening of conversation about diversity and inclusion in Manchester's music scene, with proceeds donated to Mermaids, a charity supporting transgender and gender-diverse youth.

Co-founder and DJ Tommy Cross, who has been instrumental in CROP's growth, is excited about the platform's evolution. "Things are getting very exciting and I am proud to work somewhere that does so much for the community," he says.

CROP's reach continues to expand with new creative projects. This includes CROP Magazine, a platform spotlighting emerging artists, venues and collectives, as well as offering deep dives into dance music history.

CROP has also made its mark on the city's larger events. During the 2024 Warehouse Project season, CROP took over at the Star and Garter pub for the Repercussion day festival. The pub was transformed for the night, with CROP's signature aesthetic – incense, flowers scattered throughout, and unmistakable earth-shaking sounds from an eclectic range of high-energy performances from DJs and MCs. For Cross, being part of this event and connecting with the crowd was a highlight: "My favourite part was handing out flowers to ravers at the end of the night." The diverse lineup introduced many new fans to the radio station and the positive energy of the CROP platform.

Reflecting on CROP's first year, Cooper is excited about what lies ahead: "I think it's a moment to be proud of what we've done over the past year and also to look forward to the next 12 months – the plans we have for expansion and the continued work we can do to platform our residents and the people that come through the space."

With plans for more events, expanding broadcast schedules and the launch of CROP Magazine, the platform shows no signs of slowing down. Cooper adds: "Hopefully we're creating something that allows that potential to grow and be fulfilled."

*"There was
such a wealth of
creativity and
talent that didn't
get the spotlight
it deserved"*



FROM FEED TO FEET:

HOW GORPCORE FASHION HAS BOOSTED YOUNG COMMUNITIES OF MEN TO WALK AND TALK

By Hannah Branch
Illustration Olivia Taberner
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas

From Arc'teryx raincoats to mud-clogged Salomons, we explore how outdoor garments have evolved from fashion trends to functional wear – bringing together communities of young men in the process.

What began as a Patagonia jacket and a sunrise ambition soon turned into getting “battered at 3am by the wind” – something Manchester Met student Edan Morton didn’t have in mind.

“I was hiking Snowdon with my best mate Oscar. We hiked up in the evening, camped out near the top and watched an amazing sunset. We got up at 3am and walked to the summit just in time for the sunrise. It was one of the most beautiful and memorable experiences of my life!” Which perhaps wouldn’t have been the case if it weren’t for the right fashion staple.

It all started with a techwear rabbit hole, leading Edan to discover a style associated with hiking and outdoor gear – Gorpcore. Standing for “Good ol’ Raisins and Peanuts,” this style inspired a generational trend of environmentally-friendly fashion pieces, pushing young people into their local high grounds.

“I got really into trainers at first; my Salomons were my favourite,” says Morton, reflecting on how the fashion brand re-discovered its intended purpose. “Fashion made hiking more accessible for me. I started going on walks with friends during lockdown, and I was very lucky to live in Sheffield, so I was close to the Peak District.”

Amassing 125 million posts under #Gorpcore on TikTok, a fashion army addicted to waterproofs and duck-down puffers was not predicted for square-eyed Gen Zers, more accustomed to life in a virtual world built from pixelated blocks, as opposed to walking in the hills.

It seems young people actually want to go on walks nowadays, and the forced camping trips with family or being dragged around Mountain Warehouse to get your Duke of Edinburgh kit seem to be a thing of the past. Now this equipment is being put to actual use!

Ed Linton, a fellow fashion fanatic passionate about hiking, pushed himself to the extreme to experience the outdoors, from cold plunges on Snowdonia to skiing black runs at the French ski resort at Morzine.

“I have mates who got into the outdoors because of fashion,” he says. “I like the sustainability aspect. Patagonia is known for using recycled materials. The most important rule when exploring the outdoors is to leave no trace. Without the rise in popularity of outdoor fashion, brands wouldn’t be able to experiment with sustainable materials at their current rate.”

For many like Ed, going outdoors and ‘touching grass’ was not on their teenage agenda, but it was the fashion that enticed him. Being ‘steazy’ in the pub with Nike ACG fleeces, Maharishi parachute pants and Montbell puffers wasn’t as satisfying as putting the clothes to use.

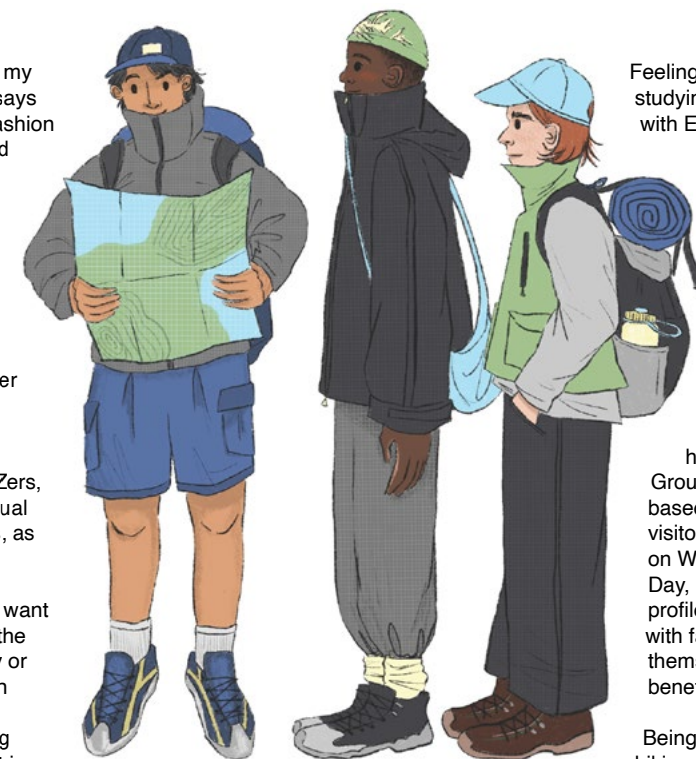
Edan says the versatility in these fashion trends is what he finds attractive: “The jackets and trousers are extremely practical for outdoor activity but they also look good and can be worn day to day. I think it also needs to be remembered that you don’t need a £500 jacket to enjoy the outdoors.

“You can throw on an old pair of trainers, buy a £5 waterproof from the charity shop, get a meal deal and enjoy the outdoors for the day, as well as the physical and mental benefits it offers.”

The mental health element of spending time outdoors and getting physical exercise is unquestionably important. Ed says: “We would go on a weekly family walk. My dad was adamant about it as it gave us an opportunity to clear our heads and catch up. He would often say it was to ‘clear the cobwebs.’”

Walking communities have become a haven for young, fashion-conscious men like Edan and Ed, helping to open up a conversation about men’s mental health – a stigma that affects many. According to the Priory Group, 77% of men polled have experienced symptoms of anxiety, stress or depression, with 29% of those saying they are “too embarrassed” to speak about it, according to campaign group Let’s Talk About Suicide.

“It’s enabled my group of friends to keep seeing each other regardless of where we are in our lives,” says Edan. “Sometimes one of us may not be drinking or wanting to stay out late, so it gives the opportunity to still see each other in a healthy and enjoyable way.”



Feeling isolated is common for many studying at uni, something that resonates with Edan. “My mental health is always something that I have struggled with, for most of my teenage and adult life. I think it’s so important that it’s talked about so all men know that there is someone who will listen and be there for them if they are struggling. So they know they are not alone.”

In recent years, walking collectives and wellness walks have surged on social media. Groups such as Common Ground, based in the north, have become regular visitors to the Peak District. Every year on World Mental Health Awareness Day, Common Ground hosts a high-profile wellness walk in collaboration with fashion brands like ASICS, priding themselves on raising awareness of the benefits of keeping active.

Being a student in Manchester puts hiking on your doorstep, says Edan. “I’ve done a lot of walking in the Peaks since

moving to Manchester. I’ve tried getting out as much as possible, doing walks around Edale, Glossop and Bakewell.”

But how did hikes in the Peak District become a movement for increasing mental wellbeing for young men?

Former Manchester Met academic Yuhei Inoue, now a University of Illinois Professor of Sport Management explored this in research published in *Social Science and Medicine*. People going to the gym together developed a sense of improved wellbeing, he found.

“This wasn’t necessarily just about exercise but about the social relationship people develop. People feel they’re part of the community and they feel connected.” Yuhei says this could be translated into how fashion is creating a community of people who started out wearing outdoor clothes and are now putting them to their intended use:

“There will be a benefit for their health and well-being, particularly if they feel connected. Fashion is an important source of identity, a common identity that can promote a sense of belonging to the community and group.”

Edan agrees: “The outdoors feels like a very safe space, so those conversations usually come naturally without any judgment. I think any community that allows men to be open and honest is a place to break down the stigma surrounding men’s mental health and it’s great that the walking community is becoming one of these places.”

Ed adds: “People are so engrossed with being online, it’s unhealthy. Every opportunity to be outside with your mates is a chance to be honest and open.”

With social media screen time averaging 28% of our day, our already lonely generation may be more digitally connected but is definitely more socially disconnected.

Wearing your Arcteryx raincoat in the shower to make the purchase worthwhile is a sham of the past. Instead of clubbing or living online, young men are foregoing nights out in favour of catching sunrises at the Peak District.

Students in Manchester are reconnecting with nature and each other, and we have Gorpcore to thank for it, and a community based on walking in the physical world will do wonders for male mental health.

FASHION



By Imogen Burgess
Photography Molly Goble
Design Anna Comerford

SOCIETY

Fashion Editor Imogen Burgess meets the Manchester fashion creatives rewriting the rules of the industry.

Fashion has long been defined by its connection to exclusivity and elitism – an industry where “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know” rings true. This phrase, also a favorite of my dad’s, encapsulates the idea that industry success isn’t determined by skill or merit, but rather by familial ties and well-placed networks. Growing up, I always thought this was unfair – surely people should be assessed on their knowledge, not their parent’s contact lists? However, after joining the community at the Manchester Fashion Institute (MFI) without any previous industry connections in my family, I quickly learned the truth lies somewhere in the middle: it’s important to put yourself in a position to network and build a creative community of your own which will inspire and challenge you.

This is where a new generation of Manchester’s fashion creatives is rewriting the rules of the industry. The new wave of creatives is building their own community from the ground up. They are harnessing their collective power to break through the barriers that once made the industry so exclusive, and to ensure that the future of fashion is more accessible, equitable and authentic.

One example is Manchester Met’s Fashion Society, which serves a microcosm of this movement, providing a space for talented people coming together, revolutionising the preferential processes creatives have been forced to negotiate when starting out in the industry, instead pushing for an equitable entrance into fashion.

“Community is a really integral part of fashion, and it’s probably one of my favourite things about it,” says Laura Johnson, chair of the MMU Fashion Society. Working alongside five other committee members from a range of disciplines but united by their passion for fashion, the collective has built a society of 129 members.

“We cultivate community by putting a lot of thought into our events and ensuring they are relevant to young people today – not even just fashion, but within creativity,” says Johnson. Through carefully curated socials, the society creates a space for members to meet, connect and learn from inspirational local figures who are pushing boundaries in their own careers. The goal is to leave members feeling inspired, and possibly with new contacts that might help propel their own careers.

A £10 membership grants access to fashion events, guest speakers and club nights, all coordinated through a group chat on WhatsApp, but the friendships and connections made through the society are invaluable.

“It makes me feel really good that people feel brave enough to come to our events alone, that they feel like it’s a space where they can find their community,” says Laura. “That really is amazing.”

By openly rejecting the gatekeeping culture that has surrounded fashion for decades, creatives are able to find a sense of belonging,

not only at the university, but also within the wider creative networks of the city, becoming part of something bigger than themselves.

“We all come together and pitch our ideas,” says Laura, describing the collaborative nature of the society. “The team works together to delegate responsibilities fairly, playing to each other’s strengths. That in itself creates trust. I’d say we cultivate community through friendship, honestly.” The committee’s connection runs deeper than just being colleagues, and nurturing these emotional bonds strengthens their ability to work as a team and create the best possible events for their members.

The Fashion Society’s ability to build a creative community extends beyond its own circle, inspiring other initiatives. One example is *Wear Abouts*, an MFI student-led podcast that Johnson co-hosts alongside Miriam Myers, a fellow Fashion Promotion student and friend.

The podcast is orchestrated by Alec Dudson, a senior lecturer in Fashion Communication. Exploring a range of fashion topics, the show has quickly gained traction, reaching listeners across five continents. Though still in its early stages, *Wear Abouts* has already made waves, connecting a global network of fashion enthusiasts and opening up new conversations around the future of the industry.

“Creating a mini community to work on it was always going to be a really key element to *Wear Abouts*,” says Dudson. “It’s really nice to know that something made by our students is out there in the real world.” Laura adds: “We definitely relied on each other as a community to help each other out and to get feedback.”

The podcast has become a platform where emerging talent can interact with top industry professionals and gain invaluable insight into the inner workings of the fashion world. It is proof that even in its infancy, the power of community and collaboration can generate real change.

Both the Fashion Society and *Wear Abouts* have exciting events and outputs on the horizon. The podcast releases episodes every other Monday, including a recent conversation with Jalaj Hora, former vice president of product innovation and consumer creation at Nike. The Fashion Society is preparing for the annual Manchester Met Gala, its biggest event of the year. The event, covered by *Dazed* last year, offers students the opportunity to showcase their work on a platform that once felt out of reach. “We’re even talking about having a runway!” reveals Johnson.

She is determined to give back to the community that has supported her and other creatives. “I feel like so many people at uni have amazing pieces of clothes and artwork but they often don’t have a platform to show it,” she says.

She believes the importance of community extends beyond the fashion world and into broader societal issues. “We can use things like the Fashion Society to support local grassroots venues, which right now are really struggling,” she says.

Laura wants to help these small fashion communities to mobilise: “It’s about that loss of community that’s happening because of big corporations. The community is all the more important now, and we must come together and support independent places and collectives.”

Follow @mmufashionsoc and @mcrfashioninstitute

“It’s about showcasing local young people’s talents and having a good time”



Not long ago, wearing traditional clothes was something young people would shy away from in modern society, fearing they would stand out too much or for the wrong reasons. These days though, standing out is embraced amid Manchester's melting pot of styles, and fashion fusion – the blending of different cultural clothing – is definitely taking the spotlight.

From elaborate accessories to intricate patterns, locals are drawing from their heritage to vamp up contemporary streetwear, creating new markers of style that transcend traditional dress codes and inspire new ventures in fashion.

While streetwear remains a Manchester staple – think printed tees, oversized jeans and endless layers of jewellery – it's now being complemented by rich cultural details.

South Asian garments like embroidered kameez are being layered over vintage jeans and trainers, while more subtle touches like one-of-a-kind bangles, fur-cuffed Afghan coats and whatever teams represented on second-hand football tops are sported in the name of style and pride.

"Loads more people are bringing their culture into their clothing now," says artist Kav Prabakaran, who takes inspiration from his Malaysian heritage to elevate his everyday looks. "A lot of the time, I wear different jewellery and traditional clothes like sarees with a crop top underneath – it's a fusion of both western and traditional."

Fashion is more than just style for Prabakaran – it's a personal and political statement. "I feel comfortable and more seen when I dress like this because it's my identity. I'm bringing my parents' culture into what I wear, and it's important to me to preserve their culture so it's not forgotten," he says.

"Now, because of social media, people are becoming more culturally aware. They are becoming more comfortable wearing traditional clothing, especially in major cities like Manchester. It makes me feel empowered, especially because queer South Asians have been oppressed. I feel like doing it as a form of protest as well in a way: 'This is me.'"

The city's creative community is driving the trend to new heights, with designers re-imagining these styles into fashion fusion pieces.

"My designs combine different cultures as well as different styles, fusing a lot of things together to make something new," says fashion

designer Ingrid Nyarumwe. She drew inspiration from Ghanaian tribal wear when creating her Tropiese Fantasia collection, aiming to "bring this aspect of Africa to the Western world".

The collection features a high-neck tie-dye mini-dress with a drape cascading over one shoulder, an ombré butterfly-shaped top paired with low-rise flowy capris, and a sheer royal blue gown adorned with an array of hand-sculpted flowers in just the right places, its long sleeves trailing gracefully to meet the hem.

"Growing up in Africa, I was exposed to the culture, bright colours and vibrant patterns," says Nyarumwe. "I merged this with different western fashion styles that I wasn't familiar with before immigrating."

The attention to detail in her designs goes beyond blending the colours of the Ghanaian flag in her two-piece, but cleverly replicates elements of tribal wear through thoughtful fabric choice and construction techniques.

Her purple and gold dress is "effortless and looks as if it's a fabric that has just been pinned together which, in tribes, is usually what they do". She explains how "they don't sew the clothes, they'll just get a fabric, drape it on the body and maybe tie it at one side."

Though emerging designers like Nyarumwe are leaving their mark, she says there is still a lot of work to be done: "There's definitely a fashion presence here, and people will fuse the different clothes together – wearing them, layering and whatnot – but in terms of brands, I wouldn't say I see a lot of that. I feel like there's more that could be done."

Manchester's own like Prabakaran and Nyarumwe aren't just paying homage to heritage but are reshaping streetwear as we know it. The city itself – defined by its street culture and wide multicultural community – mirrors the essence of fashion fusion and a style that's distinctly Mancunian.

By Beesan Nagib
Photography Beesan Nagib and Erin Giles (@eringilesart)
Design Quang Dat Nguyen

"Fashion in Manchester is quite diverse - people wear what they want here"



BREAKING BARRIERS



aAh! catches up with Manchester Met alumnus and sports photographer Yas Lucia Mascarenhas who challenges stereotypes and explores diversity in sport through her lens.

By Olivia Gilbert
Photography Yas Lucia Mascarenhas
Design Nicola Henry

"I want my work to give a sense of belonging and hope to those who feel underrepresented in their sport"



Can you tell us about yourself and how you got into photography?

I'm a 21-year-old photographer specialising in sports and events. I've always been into photography but I fell into the sports scene by chance when I started covering a friend's matches at university. After that, I was asked to cover more and more and I just really fell in love with capturing people's sporting achievements.

Could you tell us about your *Breaking Barriers* project?

Breaking Barriers explores the barriers ethnic minorities face within the equestrian community. It shines a light on these communities whilst also allowing individuals to share their stories, struggles and their place in sport through my photography. I'm also working with the British Horse Society to further my equestrian projects and I'm creating a book on communities which overcome barriers in their sport – for example para ice hockey and free community football sessions.

What was your goal with this series?

As a dual-heritage woman who has been in the sport since a young age, I had first-hand experience of how difficult it can be for individuals from minority backgrounds to get into horse-riding, but also to progress within the sport and feel they have a place in the equestrian community. My goal with this series was to give underrepresented individuals in the sport a moment in the spotlight. Additionally, I hoped to challenge the typical equestrian stereotypes and really capture the powerful community that they exist within. I hope to reach individuals from similar backgrounds, inspire them and acknowledge that they have a place in this sport.

What do you think the biggest barriers to inclusivity in equine sports today are?

One of the biggest barriers to inclusivity in the equestrian world today is simply a lack of representation. People can't be what they don't see, and with simple things like equestrian adverts so often featuring Caucasian women, people end up feeling out of place.

How have the people you photographed responded to the series? Have they shared any reflections with you?

The subjects I photographed really connected with my work and were so pleased that others are connecting with it too. They shared a sense of pride to be involved and are really excited about where it may lead. The very first shoot I did for this project was definitely the most meaningful for me. I got the chance to talk to parents and see what major issues are still lingering within the equestrian community. It really gave me the motivation to push forward with the *Breaking Barriers* project.

How do you hope your work contributes to a broader conversation about diversity and inclusion in sports?

I hope that my work sparks conversations not only within equestrianism but the whole sporting community in general. I want my work to give a sense of belonging and hope to those who feel underrepresented in their sport, or unable to even start a sport.

Follow @yasluciaphotos

LIGHTS UP



By Kate Denning and Megan Levick
Illustration Dylan John Meek
Design Anna Comerford
Photography Adrianos Falkonakis

Women of all ages were milling around, draped in neon, waiting for the Lights Up ride to begin. There were fairy lights wrapped around handlebars and reflective strips catching the late afternoon November sun. There was a collective buzz of excitement in the air, accompanied by a sense of defiance.

Manchester became the European Capital of Cycling in 2024, a recognition of a commitment to its two-wheeled community. But for many women, cycling in the city still has a long way to go.

I ride my bike almost every day – to uni, meet friends, simply to move my body. But it isn't always easy. Drivers cut too close. Pedestrians step out unexpectedly. And I avoid the dimly-lit shortcuts and isolated park paths that aren't worth the risk.

As a woman, cycling in the city comes with a mental map etched with fear. I take note of locations where I've felt vulnerable and other female riders warn me to avoid. I brace myself for the worst every time I ride my bike.

I am always on high alert. With each ride, my list of places to avoid grows steadily, relentlessly. Cycling through fear is relentless.

At other times cycling makes me feel unstoppable and strong. I can forget my own vulnerability in a brief illusion of freedom, where fear fades. I know there is a community of women who feel the same, but I rarely see them.

Tonight, I can. Lights Up is an annual event led by Manchester's bicycle mayor Belinda Everett, part night-time bike ride, part celebration of female visibility. It unites a community of women to ride together to be seen and heard.

There are 180 women riders: colourful, cheerful; full of light and energy. My usual cycling solitude is replaced by an overwhelming sense of community. Laughter reclaims the streets as we take over

with bright colours, flashing lights and chanting. We move in unified motion, an unstoppable force of purpose and power.

"Whose streets?" someone calls out. "OUR STREETS!" we roar back.

Whitworth Park and Platt Fields Park are places I would never cycle through alone at night. But the spaces which once felt too dangerous are suddenly ours. Lights Up is about reclaiming what has always been out of reach. And I am part of that.

Every pedal stroke is an act of defiance, a statement that we have an absolute right to occupy these spaces and feel safe. We are dismantling the boundaries that have kept us fearful for so long. Streets once off-limits have become ours, nothing can hold us back.

We arrive at Victoria Baths for the aAh! Magazine X Lights Up Exhibition. Once a place of gender-segregated swimming, these public baths are now a celebratory space. Artworks line the walls – vibrant posters, bold portraits and film.

For Manchester Met Illustration and Animation student Sarah Beck, whose portraits celebrate the grit of female athletes and who has lived with chronic illness since her teens, the work is deeply personal.

"I would love to see more representation of women with chronic illness achieving success," she says. "It would've given the younger me more hope and inspiration to keep fighting on."

Belinda Everett speaks to the riders. "We don't want Lights Up to be an annual event. We want to get to the point where it's not needed." I think about this as I ride home. I'm alone again, and so I am vulnerable again; but somehow I feel less so.

The map of out-of-bounds places is still engraved in my mind. It needs to remain there for my safety and wellbeing, but now it feels smaller, less intimidating.

I'm part of a community now.



5 Best Places To Live

By Ian Burke
Design Aigerim Zhumabay

Life comes at you fast once you leave uni. One of the biggest decisions you'll make post-degree is where to set up home. If you plan on staying in Manchester, there's so much more to the city's suburbs than Chorlton or the familiar sights around the Oxford Road/Wilmslow Road corridor.

Greater Manchester is awash with lively suburbs, and if you're willing to venture further, some rural outposts with easy access to the city.

Levenshulme (Manchester) Low-key foodie heaven

Four miles south-east of the city centre, Levenshulme has undergone a transformation over the past decade. Although the creeping tide of gentrification makes for a stark split between its streets – the middle-class fantasy land around Central Avenue is just over Stockport Road from dicey Matthews Lane – one thing everyone in 'Levy' can get behind is its food scene.

As well as being home to Cibus, the *Good Food Guide's* Best Local Restaurant in the North West, Levenshulme also has legitimate claims on having the city's tastiest shawarma (Levenshulme Bakery), takeaway curry (Khan's), Lebanese food (Sips & Dips), rice and three (Nehari House), bakery (Long Bois), biryani (Lahori Chai Shai), and for a touch of the unexpected, a paratha shop in a car wash (Paratha Hut).

If that wasn't enough, it also boasts the legendary 192 bus, which runs from Piccadilly to the far reaches of Stockport. It's a route so renowned that it inspired a concept album, produced by local singer Dave Hulston back in 2013.

Ramsbottom (Bury) Cosy countryside vibes

With steam trains from the heritage East Lancashire Railway chugging behind one goal, the River Irwell babbling behind the main stand, a cherry tree by the tea hut, and wooded hillsides enclosing the rest of the ground, it's not often you can say a non-league football club is the best place to immerse yourself in a neighbourhood.

That's exactly what Ramsbottom United's bucolic stadium offers, though: a microcosm of this former mill town on the outer tendrils of Greater Manchester.

'Rammy' is in prime walking territory, with Holcombe Hill and the Peel Monument – named after local lad and founder of the modern police, Robert Peel – dominating the horizon, and hikes along the Irwell Valley stretching south towards Bury and north into Lancashire. It's 12 miles away as the crow flies, but the X41 bus brings you to Manchester in 45 minutes.

Denton (Tameside) Booming on the quiet

Of all the places on this list, Denton is the one experiencing the greatest levels of flux. Five miles east of the city centre, a sudden post-Covid proliferation of bars and restaurants has helped to blunt the rougher edges around its main Crown Point crossroads.

Those restaurants are at the forefront of Denton's renaissance. What began with the long-lost Salus, a trailblazer selling a peculiar combination of dirty burgers and fruit juices, has blossomed into a scene where tapas and pad Thai rub shoulders with lobster ravioli, a special at Ornella's Kitchen, and afternoon tea at Vault Two.

Monton (Salford) West Didsbury on tour

Between its gang turf wars and Ewan MacColl's 'Dirty Old Town', with its bittersweet references to gas works, canals and factory walls, Salford has always had a rough press. Sure, the inner-city quadrant jutting from the west bank of the Irwell has had its issues, but the up-and-coming village, fondly nicknamed 'Monton Carlo' by locals, promises vibrancy and soul to new explorers.

Salford is perhaps Greater Manchester's most underrated borough. Chat Moss, a vital habitat for rare peatland species, takes up almost a third of the city's land, and snuggles up close to Monton.

With its mesh of swanky bars, vintage shops and brunchable eateries, Monton is Salford's equivalent of West Didsbury. This opulence doesn't come cheap, of course, with more affordable options south of the East Lancashire Road in neighbouring Eccles.

Heaton Chapel (Stockport) Grown-up suburb on the edge of 'the new Berlin'

One stop along the train line from Levenshulme, the lifeblood of Heaton Chapel coalesces around the junction of School Lane and Manchester Road. Predominantly a family area, but with plenty of Victorian villas converted into flats, you're away from much of the city's hustle and bustle.

Here, you'll find an array of award winners, including the venerable Littlewoods Butchers and craft beer den Heaton Hops – a semi-regular haunt of Paul Heaton and Stone Roses bassist Mani – as well backing onto the sprawling Highfield Country Park.

However, Heaton Chapel is well placed for nightlife. It is next to Heaton Moor and its stunning art deco Savoy Cinema, the bars and food of Levenshulme, and within walking distance of 'the new Berlin', aka, Stockport town centre.

FEED MY CITY

By Olivia Gilbert
Illustration Ruby Sharp
Design Alice-Skye McEwen

"NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS WOULD COME KNOCK ON OUR DOOR WHEN WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY FOOD AND VICE VERSA. THEY KNEW WHEN WE NEEDED FOOD AND WE KNEW WHEN THEY DID SO WE WOULD HELP EACH OTHER."

Perched on the outskirts of New Islington is Feed My City. Tucked between a chippy and an off-licence, their modest unit is one you'd probably miss if you weren't looking for it, but this small charity is making waves in the local community, the ripples of which are felt across all of Greater Manchester.

The charity's founder Sukhbir Singh was born into poverty in India where his survival depended upon his community. Recalling a childhood without electricity, running water or a guaranteed meal, Singh says: "Next door neighbours would come knock on our door when we didn't have any food and vice versa. They knew when we needed food and we knew when they did so we would help each other." That same spirit of community support is at the heart of what Feed My City does today – making sure nobody in Manchester goes hungry, no questions asked.

What began as a small-scale food support effort has grown into a lifeline for thousands of people across Manchester, running entirely on donations and people power. Despite a huge client base with referrals coming from places like Citizens' Advice and The Trussell Trust, Feed My City is led by just three core team members of staff backed by volunteer chefs who cook up to 400 hot meals every day. Then there is a 67-strong team of active volunteers who do everything from "cooking, cleaning, call-handling, food bag packing, stock buying, delivery driving and admin," Sukhbir says.

This army of volunteers make it possible for the charity to operate seven days a week, from 9am to 9pm, making it one of the few services in the area with that kind of accessibility.

In the face of the cost of living crisis, Feed My City has seen a sharp upturn in people needing support, but unlike traditional food banks, Sukhbir has a no strings attached approach to providing help.

"Most food banks require registration or proof that you're in receipt of benefits," he says. "But it's a frightening and painful exercise for people to prove that they need it. I know how hard it is to ask somebody for food because I've been in that position. We have the food, and we want to give it to people without hassle."

Tackling food insecurity might be Feed My City's primary goal, but their impact stretches far further than getting food into bellies. "This place helps people in so many indirect ways," Sukhbir explains. "When people phone up, they tell you a story. Just being able to offload helps with their mental health." The team operates on a judgement-free, no questions asked basis, meaning they need no justification from clients before organising a food delivery.

Importantly, Sukhbir says: "Listening to people and making them feel welcome changes lives".

Official support for Feed My City is still lacking despite its huge impact, and the charity relies heavily upon donations from the community. While financial contributions are important, Sukhbir emphasises the power of the student community in particular.

"Most of our funding comes from people who've been to the base and see what we do," he says. "Students are a very powerful network. I think they need to think about the charity sector as an opportunity."

Feed My City has had a number of students come to them over the years, some to conduct research for dissertations and others to volunteer their time. Sukhbir says all of them leave feeling empowered that they've had a positive impact on their local community.

He has a piece of advice for those wanting to get involved in local initiatives like Feed My City, or even start their own. "Before you start, talk to people. Look around you. Look for signs that people are struggling. Understand that your neighbours and friends can be in trouble and that you can help them. It's as simple as that."

Follow @feedmycity_mcr

SCAN FOR RECIPE:



Good food has the power to bring people together, and in Manchester, this couldn't be more true. We explore how family-run restaurants are going above and beyond for their community.

Since opening in 2019, Fress, located in the Northern Quarter, has made a name for itself not just for its food, but for its dedication to the community. Managed by Rubel Sardar, the restaurant has been committed to helping the local area from the very beginning.

"During Covid, we fed the NHS and donated lots of food to homeless people," says Sardar. "By following guidelines, we were able to help local people." This gesture led the family's broader mission to support those in need, especially during the challenging times of the pandemic.

The family came to the UK in the early 1970s and began with five brothers who came together to open their own business. Prior to Fress, the family ran Khau Galli, a restaurant in Oldham, but it was their experience during lockdown that defined their approach to community service.

As the pandemic caused financial strain across the country, Sardar recognised that Fress had extra food they could donate to those in need. Throughout the pandemic, the business donated over 10,000 meals to key workers, working closely with the Royal Oldham Hospital to support the Manchester community.

Now the family-run business is on a mission to donate a million meals by 2029. In response to the global hunger crisis, they have already donated 50,000 meals since 2021.

Inside Fress, guests find a warm atmosphere and friendly staff serving up hearty breakfasts and brunch. This welcoming environment reflects the restaurant's deeper commitment to

nourishing the community, with both food and a sense of belonging.

Meanwhile, the nearby Yadgar Cafe has its own unique charm. It's a small shopfront on Thomas Street with a stiff door and an old-fashioned interior. However, you'll soon be greeted with a hot meal and friendly chat. Yadgar's serves up plates of 'Rice and Three,' a specific type of South Asian cuisine found across the city with its roots in cheap canteen-style catering for rag trade workers, with servings of lentil dal, vegetable curry and meat on a bed of rice.

Yadgar regular Arthur Lee Hatton-Jones, 19, describes how this spot supports the Manchester community: "Yadgar offers reasonably priced, great food that is accessible to everyone. It's always a nice place to come and chat, providing a break from the working environment."

He adds: "It's a home away from home; they always look after me."

A few miles across town, on the Stretford Road in Hulme, is Buzzrocks, a family-run Caribbean restaurant which has been serving the Manchester community for 35 years. It all began with a small trailer at events like Glastonbury and Womad. Today, they've settled in their new restaurant home.

Buzzrock himself came to Manchester from Jamaica in the 1970s as a 27-year-old, two decades after his parents arrived here with the Windrush generation. Showcasing his cooking talents at Caribbean club nights in Moss Side, his nickname Buzzrock came about as friends would say his dumplings were kneaded "tight like a rock."

It's also where he met his wife, Farida Anderson. Over the years, they've built a base of regular customers, all queuing for their opening meal each day. Farida is proud of serving up Caribbean food for all communities: "We are open with everyone in mind," she says.

Buzzrocks partnered with Deliveroo during Black History Month to actively support Black-owned businesses and give back to the community. For every order placed from a Black business, Deliveroo made a donation, with the funds going to the Zahid Mubarek Trust, Buzzrocks' charity of choice, to help Black businesses threatened by the cost-of-living crisis.

Buzzrocks is committed to giving back to the community in countless ways and firmly believes in second chances. One aspect of this belief is that they employ ex-offenders to help support the business. Farida – now an MBE – is a motivational speaker who works with prisons to help people turn their lives around. She says: "We are always open to work with people when they reach out."

By Alice Haston
Illustration Ruby Sharp
Design Alice-Skye McEwen



OPINION: "THERE'S NO REPLACEMENT FOR THIRD SPACES"



By Ciara Reynolds
Photography Ciara Reynolds
Design Charlie Mooney

For Gen Z, the loss of third spaces is leaving us isolated but there's a lot we can learn from the generations before us.

Every Tuesday, 91-year-old Joan walks from her flat to Turncroft Lane in Stockport to set up for the weekly ballroom dancing. Joan, a dedicated member of Woodbank Community Centre, has been attending ballroom classes for more than 20 years – and she has no plans to slow down anytime soon.

The dancers arrive promptly at 1pm, paying £2.50 entry which covers a cup of tea during the break. They begin by sitting in rows along each side of the room, with regular dancers in the same chair every week – an etiquette I learned the hard way. For Stockport's elderly community, this has become their weekly tradition. People come from far and wide over to dance with their friends and partners every week, a routine in some cases stretching back decades.

However, this kind of local community is rare among younger generations, and today, Woodbank Community Centre acts as a sort of time capsule which may, unfortunately, disappear with this generation.

Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined this type of socialising as the 'third space': a public space on 'neutral ground' that

is separate from home and work, where people can meet and connect. Oldenburg identified these spaces as essential for wellbeing, offering a place for people to put aside their day-to-day worries and engage with others.

Our generation has seen a huge decline in third spaces. Research conducted by Unison in 2024 revealed that funding cuts have led to the closure of more than two-thirds of council-run youth centres in England and Wales since 2010. The spaces that are left for young people are often inadequate.

One play area in Stockport has been labelled 'a dog toilet' by locals in an article by the Manchester Evening News, exposing the so-called 'playground' as nothing more than a circle of tarmac. Hardly a welcoming space for young people.

There's no doubt that Gen Z has generated its own version of community through online connections made possible by social media. However, this is no replacement for third spaces. It comes as no surprise that the continual loss of these spaces has had a negative impact on our generation, which is now one of the loneliest yet.

A 2023 study by Cigna found that 73% of workers aged 18-22 report sometimes or always feeling alone, with this number even greater in those who use social media frequently.

Woodbank has stood the test of time due to the goodwill of its members. People like Joan, Betty, Joyce and Dennis turn up every week and enjoy each other's company.



But there is a legitimate concern that younger generations will live lives that exist exclusively between home and work, with any social outing beyond that being accompanied by the expense of a £6 pint or a £4 flat white.

No matter how connected we are virtually, through TikTok, Instagram and other social platforms, these often parasocial relationships are no replacement for real, face-to-face communication and connection. If the social networks of previous generations dwindle or die as government money dries up, who knows what 'community' will look like for us in our old age?

Fingers crossed it ends up being more than just a group chat.



ASK aAh!

By Lowri Simmons & Imogen Burgess
Illustration Natalie Bhart
Design Monica McManaman

Have a dilemma that's bugging you? A problem that just won't budge? Student life can throw all kinds of curveballs. But don't worry, we're here to help.

Q: "I feel so much FOMO because I commute and can't always stay out late or afford to go to raves or events that I would love to go to. What should I do?!"

A: This is a valid concern and one a lot of people will relate to. Commuting students are overall less considered and catered to within the social aspect of uni.

There is a common misconception that everyone at uni has the means to attend lots of expensive music events and to spend a fortune on going out. But in reality, student budgets can't always stretch to regular nights out, which can impact on your social life.

However, the university offers plenty of cool, budget-friendly events where you can meet new people or go out with friends you've already made. Check if there are clubs or societies for the niche music groups you are interested in – there are plenty on The Union website. From underground music to harmony gospel choir, there really is something for everyone. For example, the Indie Society (which costs about £2 to join) recently held an all-day showcase of local bands, which would be something you could attend in the daytime and still be able to get the train back home with plenty of time. Similarly, the D&B Society often advertises daytime raves which you could attend and then comfortably get the train home afterwards.

If you want to go out in the evening, build a good relationship with a friend who lives closer to the social spots, and stay at their place to save on travel costs and ease FOMO. Depending on your circumstances, you can always return the favour and offer them a break from campus life by inviting them to stay at yours.

Q: "I'm feeling anxious about finding new friends and maintaining my student community once I graduate, move away and begin working. How can I pursue my own life whilst staying connected with my student circles?"

A: This is a totally normal way to feel as you approach the end of your studies. You've been in this environment for three years (or more), so it's natural to feel anxious about this change in your life.

Manchester Met postgraduate student Evie Horton shares this advice: "Embrace this new season of your life. You can't hold on to your student identity forever, but as you go into this new era of life, you learn to grow and adapt with the connections you made at uni."

Although it's understandable to feel this way, try and embrace this change in your life and see it as an exciting opportunity to make new memories and meet new people. Consider joining groups in your area that are made for people to meet and make new friendships and connections too.

You might not be able to see your uni friends as often anymore, but this makes the time you spend together even more special – plan thoughtful activities to make the most of those moments.

Evie adds: "You also learn to make new connections in your new workplace or wherever you may find yourself post graduating. It really is an exciting opportunity to make new friends in your 20s."



EXPERIENCE: "LEAVING HOME TAUGHT ME HOW TO FIND A COMMUNITY"

Homesickness hits different when you're 10,000 miles away.

By Ava Barker
Design Monica McManaman

I've always hated the cold, so it's a good thing that summers back home in Brisbane, Australia are practically year-round. Now, three weeks into my student exchange at Manchester Metropolitan University, I'm still trying to adjust to the seemingly persistent rain and freezing wind. But there's nowhere I'd rather be.

I've lived in Brisbane my entire life. All those balmy, cloudless days were beginning to blend together, and I was itching for a break from the sunny monotony. After several months of non-stop form-filling and obsessively checking my email, the long-awaited acceptance letter to Manchester Met arrived. Despite my excitement, there was a gnawing uncertainty – a feeling that was strongest the moment my parents and I tearfully hugged goodbye.

My first few days here blurred into a jet-lagged haze crouched next to the heater in my dorm, shivering, while on the other side of the world my friends danced at music festivals and sunned themselves at the beach. I felt the bitter sting of #FOMO whenever I'd check my phone and see photos of them together – tanned, bikini-clad and beaming – and wondered if I'd made a huge mistake leaving them behind, even if only temporarily. After all, six months feels like an eternity when you're 20, and so much can change so quickly. Would my friends back home forget about me?

I felt truly homesick for the first time when a stranger wearing my best friend's perfume passed me on the street. The familiar scent stopped me in my tracks, and a sharp pang shot through my chest as I remembered I wouldn't be home for her birthday this year.

At first I was terrified to speak to anyone. I cursed myself for being incapable of adjusting overnight to my new environment. Just one week into my exchange, I already felt like a failure – a feeling exacerbated by the fact that two of my friends from back home, also on student exchange in Bristol and Milan, were faring much better than I was. Friend #1 had made firm friends on her first day; Friend #2 was already going on Hinge dates. Meanwhile, I wandered around campus alone trying to keep my UGGs dry.

I walked around the city a lot in those early days, bundled in multiple coats and wearing at least three layers of pants. At first, not being able to recognise a single place or face was overwhelming and disorienting, but soon enough, I saw it for what it was – an opportunity for change.

Slowly, Manchester stopped feeling so foreign. It started to welcome me in small, unexpected ways. Maybe that started with the stranger on the street who, on my first day, seemed to telepathically sense my confusion and stopped to give me directions unprompted.

Then a girl who works at the vintage store invited me out for drinks, and my fellow students in my poetry class didn't laugh when the tutor called on me to read my work aloud. Gradually these experiences chipped away at my uncertainty, helping me realise there might be a place for me here.

Just like I'm learning to withstand the cold, I'm also developing the skills and resilience to put myself out there. By leaving behind my friends and family – albeit temporarily – I've given myself the freedom to embrace a new community. Starting somewhere new is a process that can make you deeply

vulnerable, and the initial loneliness can be overwhelming.

But the experience of uprooting my entire life and ending up OK has given me a newfound confidence to try new things and seek out new communities, like volunteering for aAh! Magazine.

As a Journalism major, I'm grateful for the opportunity to get involved in Manchester Met's student community through an outlet that gives me a sense of familiarity in this new place. More than that, volunteering here makes me feel like I'm not just passing through – I'm becoming part of something.

"I'm not just passing through – I'm becoming part of something"

Libraries are a

KIND OF
ACTIVISM

By Edward Firman
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas
Photography Jack Oliver

Libraries are the backbone of many communities, playing a vital role in connecting people with services and groups – often in surprising ways. aAh! dives into what makes libraries so valuable and why we must protect them at all costs.

Amid mass closures, libraries have never had it harder. BBC research in 2024 revealed that over the past eight years, more than 180 council-run libraries in the UK have either shut down or been taken over by volunteers. Lower-income communities were four times more likely to have lost a publicly-funded library, while 2,000 jobs were also lost. In Manchester alone, seven libraries reduced their opening hours and 39 staff were cut.

Despite this, libraries remain a vital part of our community's ecosystem, offering safe spaces to access the internet, improve literacy, attend events, connect with others and escape from difficult home lives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government recognised libraries as an 'essential service' due to their public computers, order-and-collect loan services, and school and home library services. Many also made regular welfare calls to vulnerable people, with library staff redeployed to assist with shielding efforts and Test and Trace work, leveraging their deep community ties.

However, the support libraries offer goes far beyond these emergency services. Today, they continue to provide crucial resources such as job training, Citizens' Advice sessions, IT courses and benefit support. Some libraries even provide free SIM cards loaded with free data for residents over 18.

Alan Lynch, Neighbourhood Delivery Assistant at Manchester Central Library and host of the library-themed podcast *Full Volume* highlights the important role libraries play in the lives of our society's most vulnerable members.

"We have regulars who come in and there's a real camaraderie because people need libraries, especially if you're struggling with

temporary homelessness or in sheltered accommodation. For them, it's a lifeline – somewhere to go where they can sit and be warm, read the paper, maybe even listen to the podcast."

He adds: "There's a high likelihood more branches will shut, but for people in economically deprived areas, libraries are lifelines – not just for books, but for everything. For a focal point, for finding out about your benefits, how to get work, or even just to use a computer. If you take that away from people, then you'll really feel the effects."

In addition to the myriad of physical and practical support, libraries also offer emotional support services. Gorton Library hosts 'Death Club', a regular event helping bereaved families deal with death, loss and grief.

Libraries serve as creative hubs too. Susie Wilson, a poet and winner of the Disabled Poets' Prize, runs the monthly Sub Club at Manchester Poetry Library. She says neurodivergent workshops led by author Louise Wallwein at the library helped her connect with others.

"It was just really fabulous to be in a room with late-diagnosed autistic people," she says. "We all just sat and wrote together. Those people probably wouldn't have come together in that way anywhere else."

"They could have met in a community hall, but having this curated library hub encourages people to think about community activities. It draws people in to mix with other people that they might not have linked up with otherwise."

The cultural impact of libraries cannot be underestimated either, as a venue for events celebrating Chinese New Year and Diwali

"Libraries are free,
welcoming and open in a world
that is increasingly expensive,
hostile and closed"

The strength of feeling towards libraries can be seen in the fight to save Burnage Library, which was reborn in 2013 as a 'community-powered' library' after locals rallied to prevent its closure.

Manchester's dedication to literature earned it the status of UNESCO City of Literature in 2017, joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. The title recognised the city's 'rich literary heritage, vibrant contemporary scene and commitment to accessibility and inclusion.'

Martin Kratz supported Manchester's successful bid: "In Manchester, there is a very strong sense that libraries are civic spaces that people have a right to access. I think that shows how important they are. They are not optional or a luxury – they're a necessity."

He adds: "Libraries shouldn't be radical spaces, but they are. They are radical because of the world around them. Libraries are free, welcoming and open to a community in a world that is increasingly expensive, hostile and closed. Libraries are a kind of activism."

With three Greater Manchester libraries – Bolton, Oldham and Manchester – shortlisted in the North England category for the British Book Awards' Library of the Year 2025, now is the perfect time to visit your local library and become part of its community.

"What happens is you're able to say: 'Yes, you're right, that's missing,' and put it into the library," he says. "That community stake in the library becomes cemented – it becomes physically present on the shelves and you know you're part of it."

Martin adds: "I often say the Poetry Library is a listening space, a space that listens – that's really at the core of it."

The forms of library-supported communities extend beyond people. Initiatives like Culture Nature England helped Didsbury Library create seed libraries, community garden beds and nature walks, promoting biodiversity and reconnecting people with the beauty of the natural world.

Violaine Reinbold, the neighbourhood engagement officer at Didsbury Library, says the potential loss of these facilities inspired a reaction from the community. "They're that important that local people, when they were threatened, mobilised to keep them open."

queer Lit

Building a Community Legacy

In the last five years, hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people have risen by 112%, underscoring the critical need for safe, inclusive spaces where queer individuals can find a sense of belonging. Amid this crisis, Queer Lit has emerged as a sanctuary in the form of a literary refuge – offering acceptance, visibility and a space for friendship to flourish.

Matt Cornford, founder of Queer Lit, knows firsthand the struggles queer people face in finding spaces where they truly feel seen. “I loved reading, but was struggling to find queer literature,” says Cornford. “I went to Waterstones on Deansgate seeking to find just any piece of queer literature – I actually went in very sheepishly, despite my extroverted queer nature – and they told me they don’t have a section specifically for queer literature. They said they have queer literature within sections, like fantasy or crime, but that it didn’t have its own section.”

“I was expected to just waltz into a romance section of a mainstream bookshop and work out which from 30,000 books was queer literature. It would have been nearly impossible, and I thought: “This has to get better.”

This encounter sparked a realisation in Matt: the world of literature was failing to serve the LGBTQ+ community. He took it upon himself to set up an online bookshop dedicated to queer literature. He was soon selling more than 700 queer literature titles. The shop developed beyond its online presence to a small physical location on Tib Street, where stock grew to 1,400 titles.

But as the demand for queer literature continued his range of stock mushroomed to more than 4,000 titles. That’s when in 2023, the Queer Lit we know and love today on Great Ancoats Street was born.

“I knew there was more out there, because there’s a bookshop called ‘Gay’s The Word’ in London. It’s been there since the 1970s and has stood the test of time. It is still strong and serving our community.”

Inside Queer Lit, the gentle hum of conversation and laughter can be heard above the rhythmic clunking of cocktail shakers and milk frothers. Queer Lit’s warm and welcoming buzz gives Manchester’s queer community something that other LGBTQI+ areas of the city lack – a contrast to the lively but often overwhelming atmosphere of queer spaces.

“Manchester is filled with queer community and we look at it and think: ‘Oh my God, we have Canal Street!’ Don’t get me wrong – I love Canal Street. I love going out there and watching a drag queen in a busy, loud bar. But that’s pretty much all Canal Street

By Lowri Simmons
Photography Molly Goble
Design Nicola Henry

“This has all been done, and would only be ABLE TO have been done WITH THE SUPPORT of my community”

offers; drag shows, a loud environment and heavy drinking.”

Emphasising the need for queer community spaces that aren’t centred around nightlife, Matt’s aim was clear: “To create what is missing in our community. Something that can give queer communities a space to thrive, converse and meet in different scenarios – space that isn’t created around booze and loudness.

“A place where you can have a quiet chat and a coffee, or a drink. Currently there is lots of vibrancy in Manchester, but it is being underserved in those calmer areas of life.”

Matt’s vision extends to all corners of the LGBTQI+ community: “We do trans days, lesbian nights, trans life drawing, comedy nights, book launches – all things that the [Gay] Village couldn’t and wouldn’t touch.

“We host the Neurodiverse Girl Club and love providing them with a space to be as loud or as quiet as they need to be. On Monday evenings they have a dedicated space just for them – a place to come together and build their community.”

These offerings provide a space for people who might otherwise feel overlooked by the more nightlife-focused areas of the city. For Queer Lit’s events manager Alix Ashton, this is especially important. As a queer disabled person, Ashton has often found mainstream queer spaces inaccessible.

“There are not a lot of spaces that cater for me,” Alix says. “The access in the Village

is terrible, with very few places being accessible. This can be really isolating. Queer Lit gives me a hub within my own community that welcomes me with disabilities and all, and gives me a place I can go to and feel safe with friends and family.

“It’s a space that’s been missing from the community for a long time. A space that’s about the day-to-day, an escape from the everyday, a safe space and most importantly, a welcoming and inclusive place that does not discriminate and prides itself on its accessibility.”

Being part of the Queer Lit community has made a big difference. Alix says his contribution makes him feel “Pride, pure pride.”

A visit to the Queer Lit bookshop has become a staple part of the week for Thomas Yates, now a regular. “I feel at ease, relaxed and welcome when I’m here. Queer Lit feels like part of my identity now.”

Sipping an iced caramel latte while flicking through William Hussey’s *The Outrage*, the graduate and full-time gymnastics coach explains they spend time here on most days off.

Thomas says: “It’s a space to read, work, see friends and chill out. If I miss a week, I really feel it.”

There is meaning to be found in the shop’s location, next door to the historic Social Refuge, a sanctuary founded in 1899 for women fleeing danger. There is a resonance here and a legacy of pride and protection for the Queer Lit community.

“Queer Lit gives me a hub within my own community that welcomes me, with disabilities and all, and gives me a place I can go to and feel safe with friends and family.”



“Having a safe space to go is so important for people in minority groups as it shows them they’re not alone,” says Thomas.

“Queer Lit is attached to Social Refuge – a name which came about due to the premises being a ‘refuge’ for females decades ago; an inclusive space for all people to have a ‘social’ and come together. This makes Queer Lit even more important to me.”

The impact that having a space like Queer Lit would have had on his teenage years is not lost on Thomas.

“It would have provided my queer friends and I a space to feel less self-conscious about how we were acting, what we were doing and saying and reassurance that there were and are other people out there like us.”

Being a founder of this community has also had a profound effect on Matt Cornford.

“If I were to speak to my younger self, I would be inspired by the community I have created with the support of my community around me. I grew up in the middle of nowhere, in Torbay, a tiny town where there wasn’t a queer community, where you felt isolated and lonely.

“You can disappear in Manchester if you want to. You can still be vibrant, but you can disappear. I can walk down the road hand in hand with my partner, and I know that no-one is even going to look back, let alone comment. That is the wonder of such a metropolitan city.”

“I understand what this is supporting. It has all been done with the backing of my community, and nothing would have been done or would work without it.

“Queer Lit is absolutely my baby. My proud moment now is having platforms to enhance and connect queer literature. We have a place that people can call home.”

This deep sense of pride and purpose has driven Matt to push Queer Lit to new heights, recently submitting an application as Bookshop of the Year.

Traditional bookshops consider what their customers want, he says: variety, but also the main titles that will attract as many people as possible.

“For us, it’s a bit different,” he says. “We’re not just serving a market; we’re serving an identity and a sexuality. Within that, people want romance, sci-fi and the chance to see themselves in memoirs. So we ask ourselves: ‘Is it LGBT literature? Is it in a true light?’ If the answer is yes, let’s get it on the shelf.

“I don’t care whether only three people will buy it in a year. Let’s get it on the shelf, because it might move the world for somebody.”

Connections through Clip

By Evie-Iris Atkins and
Megan Levick
Photography: UNITOM
Design: Aleesha Khan

“Independent
magazines have the
most interesting
things to say.”

“Celebrating the worlds of visual culture” is what Northern Quarter magazine and bookshop UNITOM does best, says head publishing buyer Tim Bell. With an eclectic collection spanning over 400 variations of media, the independent store delivers endless inspiration to the city’s creatives, part of a growing community that values print culture in an increasingly digital world.

“It’s a niche community; everybody knows each other,” says Bell, highlighting how independent publications help create real connections, even in big cities where it’s easy to feel disconnected. UNITOM isn’t just a bookshop – it’s a creative space for independent publishing and collaboration. By not stocking commercial heavyweights like *Vogue* and *Elle*, UNITOM gives independent publications the room to make a real impact and cater to niche interests.

“Independent magazines have the most interesting things to say,” says Tim. “There are people doing very niche publications who have a genuine passion for that subject. More and more, we see magazines becoming more specialised. They’re produced and written by people for people who are also very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about that subject.”

UNITOM’s store layout is also reflective of this ethos. Expertly crafted to spark curiosity, its rough thematic structure encourages organic discovery. “UNITOM is roughly grouped because we see demographics of people shopping for a particular type of magazine,” Tim explains.

“You might be buying a fashion magazine because you like a musician that’s being featured. All these creative practices fuse into one another – you’re not necessarily buying a fashion magazine just for the fashion content.”

As digital consumption overwhelms our generation, the desire for physical encounters is stronger than ever as people realise that social media is consuming our lives. According to media regulator OFCOM young people aged 18 to 24 in the UK spend an average of four hours and 36 minutes online each day. It’s a habit that’s increasingly shaping day-to-day life and behaviour.

However, the overconsumption of algorithm-driven content, blinkered to narrow interests, is now being met with a growing craving for deeper, more meaningful experiences outside the digital realm. This shift is also seen in the resurgence of broader physical media – ‘zines, vinyl records, and even CDs – as people yearn for real-world connections that digital platforms can’t offer.

Tim is selective with what he exhibits. Whether it’s well-known names or smaller publications, physical media thrives in physical environments where people can feel inspired. “To present somebody who’s maybe publishing their first ‘zine alongside huge publications on equal footing... it benefits both,” he says.

Acting as a portal for consumers, Tim’s observation of trending topics and visits to independent book fairs help him to accumulate a collection of diverse, compelling titles. UNITOM also offers a platform for local creators.

At launch nights, people leave inspired to create their own publications: “We get people coming to the events, going on to do their own thing, and then we end up hosting them for an event,” Tim says. “We even see it amongst the staff too.”

One example is *Dial In*, a specialty coffee magazine created by UNITOM staff member and Manchester Met alumni Elliot Howard and co-founder and MA Multimedia Journalism graduate Ania Klekot. The magazine highlights independent coffee roasters and explores the craft, culture and community behind their work.

Explaining the drive behind their magazine, Ania says: “We wanted to create a magazine that is niche. There was a gap in the market for something like this, and we both like coffee, so we wanted to collaborate on this together.”

In an era dominated by digital content, the duo are also dedicated to keeping print alive. “For us, it’s about trying to keep things in print; I’ve always wanted to do print. I’ve been a big fan of exhibitions all throughout my degree,” says Elliot.

Before the magazine had even hit the shelves, *Dial In* had already caught the attention of a distributor – something Howard sees as “a testament to the enduring appeal of print”. Ania adds: “We want to prove that print is not dead. Every time I say that I’m writing a creative print magazine, everyone always says: ‘No-one buys print magazines anymore’, but it’s still very much alive, especially here in Manchester – there’s such a big scene for it.”

Tim echoes this: “I think there is a definite desire for people to push back against so much of their lives being digital. So much stuff that we do day-to-day has to be done by phone, or on a screen of some sort, and now there’s a backlash against that. People want to experience things more in the real [world].

“There’s a desire for people to be out there doing stuff in real-time,” he adds. “I think that ties into a print publication, especially the kind of stuff we do – more niche, more focused. There’s a general appetite in Manchester for people to feed off and be inspired by each other.”

Creative Writing

Homecoming

All this is infused with the end,
or the longing for it—

the crimson memory that weaves
itself through the brown blur.

I’ll reach out the window
feeling the air pass through,

and hold onto the image
that passes between

my fingers— the blue-chip house,
turned inside-out with its pink

flesh hidden— the cup of tea melting
on the windowsill— the red-hot

firecracker exploding on the
street— and a woman

knits an elegy at the end, smiling
with her sprawling rows

of rotting teeth. And here,
between stitches, I’ve returned.

Last Ride to the East

After Tokyo Story

the train came in too late

but i boarded anyways, pink

tongue clipped, silver

teeth punched through— last

ride to the east— & the conductor

hands the slip back. i

wait, still, in the before silence watching

as the man in front fishes

for buttons, his back

bent into hollow creases—

& the words painted beneath

his ticket in thin brushstroke

bruise

his fingers. the empty space

behind him gazes, growing &

i think he waits for something too—

but the whistle wails,

dirgelike, until

it drowns out

its own tune, until

i lose sight of him, & the wheels of the carriage

turn, ticking

in time to the peeling clock— so i

look away, down

to the red flames licking

the sand-drenched coast

where the sunlight twists in a rippling dance,

for a brief moment, beneath the tracks.

Grace Xu is an MA Creative Writing student at Manchester Metropolitan University, incorporating immigrant stories and Chinese mythology into her work. She explores the Chinese diaspora in her poetry and fiction and the communities we gain and lose by immigrating. Her work has been published in *Euonia Review*.

Storytelling around the World

Manchester Met student helps set a Guinness World Record for storytelling – and is now building a community around the art form in Manchester.

By Megan Levick
Illustration Nicola Henry
Design Adomas Lukas Petrauskas

Manchester Met student Iris Skipworth helped set a Guinness World Record for storytelling – and is now building a community around the art form in Manchester.

For many, the word “storytelling” might bring to mind films, books, or polished marketing pitches presenting a company’s journey. But for Iris Skipworth, an undergraduate at Manchester Met, it is an ancient, living art that means so much more.

“Storytelling is a traditional art as old as language,” she says. “It’s how we have always made sense of the world and conveyed lessons to each other.”

Iris, a two-time National Young Storyteller of the Year, highlights the timelessness of stories like *Cinderella*, *Red Riding Hood* and *King Arthur*. “These tales, and many others, do not belong solely to the domain of childhood, but have been told by adults to adults for many years.”

Iris is part of a small but dedicated community of oral storytellers, preserving the traditional artform. She grew up learning the craft at festivals and storytelling clubs across the country, listening to stories that spanned cultures, continents and centuries. This year, she took her passion to a global stage and made history.

In January, Iris travelled to Marrakech, Morocco, to take part in the International Storytelling Festival, held at Jemaa-El-Fnaa Square. It was here, alongside

storytellers from 33 countries, that she helped set a Guinness World Record for the longest continuous storytelling session.

“For over 94 hours, we performed in 21 different mother tongues to an ever-present audience,” she says. The record, which required witnesses, rigorous documentation and multiple recordings, was officially confirmed at 80 hours, 32 minutes and 58 seconds.

Storytelling requires an engaged listener, Iris explains: “It’s a collaborative act, created between the teller and audience. Each tale is different every time it is spoken; there is no memorising or reading aloud, and so there is an active magic to be felt in the air.”

During the festival, Iris heard a Moroccan version of *Hansel and Gretel* which featured a blind, cave-dwelling ogress rather than a witch living in a gingerbread house. It was a reminder of the fluidity of oral storytelling: “Many stories across the globe can be traced back to each other, to a common root story that changed in its retellings as it travelled from person to person across the continents and centuries,” she says.

“I have always been amazed at what storytelling can show us about our history. It is a true living legacy.”

Iris’ passion for storytelling is personal, but she is part of a wider cultural movement. Until recently, oral storytelling in the UK was on the brink of being forgotten.

“In some countries there has been an unbroken tradition of storytelling, but in the UK we nearly lost this important art form,” she explains.

The revitalisation of the adult storytelling scene in the UK was pushed by the hard work of three contemporary storytellers in the 1980s – Hugh Lupton, Sally Pomme Clayton and Ben Haggarty.

Their efforts inspired Iris: “Due to their work, and my parents’ influence, I never considered stories were something one might grow out of. I’m proud now to call myself a professional storyteller.”

In addition to her contributions to the record-breaking session, Iris took part in school workshops across Marrakech – the festival ran 230, reaching over 2000 children.

Back in Manchester, she is building her own legacy. In 2019 she established her own storytelling club for adults, A Sting In The Tale, a monthly storytelling club at Lock 91 on Deansgate.

“The audience gets to listen to talented tellers who have travelled from across the UK with their storytelling expertise,” she says. Her club

has become a place for people to embrace the magic of storytelling.

“We’ve heard stories of shapeshifting Japanese badgers, Anansi tales from Sierra Leone and iterations of Red Riding Hood from over a thousand years ago,” she says. “In April, Amelia Ace Armande, a non-binary performer, will join us, bringing a new breath of life to Dionysus from Greek Mythology.”

Iris believes that as well as entertainment, storytelling remains a tool for preserving history and teaching valuable lessons. For her, creation myths explain the world around us and folktales warn of the dangers in the woods.

“Storytelling is always relevant, keeping alive a history of the people we were and evolving with us to carry lessons in a language we understand, no matter how the context we live in changes,” she says.

“It would be a great loss to our species if we ever decided we were ‘too old for stories.’”

Follow @stingintheclub



What's On

By aAh!
Design Quang Dat Nguyen

Want to make the most of your summer this year? Leave it to aAh! Consult our list of balmy summer events from April to September (sunshine not guaranteed!)

April

MARY POPPINS THE MUSICAL
09-17/04/25
@ Palace Theatre

The classic multi award-winning musical is coming to the Palace Theatre for a limited time this April, and it's a must-see for musical fans. The story of Mary Poppins is so ingrained in our collective consciousness that it will still be worth the night out for those who aren't. Everyone knows these songs, whoever they are.

AFROBEATS & AMAPIANO CLUB NIGHT
04/04/2025
@ The Union

Get ready for a night of pure vibes at The Union's Afrobeats & Amapiano club night. With a stellar DJ spinning the best in infectious Afrobeats and soulful Amapiano, expect non-stop dancing and an electric atmosphere. This is the perfect night to bring your mates – or make some new ones on the dancefloor.

KEIKEN – WORLD BUILDING AND THE NATURE OF REALITY
22/04/25-7/05/25
@ Modal Gallery

Keiken will delve into powerful themes of interconnectedness, perception and immersion, exploring how relationships, energy and sensory experiences shape our reality in both digital and physical spaces. Join digital artist Jazmin Morris and the Keiken Collective as they present a thought-provoking selection of their groundbreaking work.

THE MUSIC OF STAR WARS
05/04/25
@ Bridgewater Hall

John Williams' *Star Wars* score is unparalleled, and experiencing it live will be nothing short of a transcendental experience. Performed by the Hallé Orchestra and conducted by Steven Bell at the beautiful Bridgewater Hall, it's a guaranteed wholesome and timeless night out.

MACFEST 2025: LIVING BETTER TOGETHER
23/04/25
@ Manchester Central Library

Two MBEs – Qaisra Shahraz and Erinma Bell – bring MACfest back to St Peter's Square. Hosted by Darryl Morris, they will discuss solutions to the problems faced by immigrants and strive for a more progressive society where all are safe and accepted.

May

NICE ONE BITTERSWEET EXHIBITION
10/05/25
@ The Carlton Club

Support local artists at the Carlton Club in Whalley Range this May. This multi-medium exhibition features more than 100 creatives exploring post-uni uncertainty, accompanied by sets from 12 DJs. A celebration of student resilience, it's the perfect event for art lovers seeking inspiration and community.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WEEKENDER
24-25/05/25
@ Victoria Park

If you're big into music festivals, what better place to be than the Neighbourhood Weekender in Warrington? See big names like Stereophonics, The Wombats and Wunderhorse, plus discover rising stars whose legacy may one day be just as legendary.

TYLER, THE CREATOR - CHROMAKOPIA: THE WORLD TOUR
27-28/05/25 8PM
@ Coop Live

The ubiquitous Tyler, the Creator is performing in May at our beloved Co-op Live for his eighth studio album, *Chromakopia*. Featuring appearances from Lil Yachty and Paris Texas, there is no doubt this will be an insane evening of expertly crafted music and unforgettable performance art.

June

BUNKER TALK #151: MANCHESTER ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS
03/06/25
@ The Salutation

MAFA presents a discussion on "Looking Back, Moving Forward - Creating, Collecting and Conserving Art in Manchester". Contributors include Hannah Williamson, Curator of Fine Art at Manchester Art Gallery, MAFA Archivist Peter Davis and Wendy Levy, a gallerist in Manchester for 40 years. Chairing this latest Bunker Talks installment is Fionna Barber, a Reader in Art History at the Manchester School of Art.

FESTIVAL OF LIBRARIES
4-8/06/25
@ Manchester

It's a sure thing that we do music right over here, but there's also a notable community of future (and current) scholars, authors and poets, all of whom are looking for somewhere to showcase their passion. Last year, this fest included 115 events across five days, so expect great things from our committed libraries.

PARKLIFE FESTIVAL
14-15/06/25
@ Heaton Park

If you're planning on joining everyone and their mum at Parklife for its 15th anniversary, you're likely to catch huge names like Charli XCX, Jorja Smith and 50 Cent. What more do you need?

July

BALL TOGETHER NOW
27/06/25 - 29/06/25
@ Manchester

Ahead of what is set to be a record breaking summer for women's football, Ball Together Now Football Festival is a trans-inclusive annual football event for women and non-binary people. Founded by Manchester Laces and Pride Sports in 2022, the event will host live music and independent food and drink stalls.

SOUNDS OF THE CITY
2, 4, 5, 9, 11-12/07/25
@ Castlefield Bowl

A smorgasbord of artists from indie to rock to hip-hop, Sounds of the City really does sound just like the city. There is something for everyone and the vibe is electric. Expect The Black Keys, Rizzle Kicks and Elbow among many others.

OASIS
11, 12, 16, 19, 20/07/25
@ Heaton Park

Did you hear that Oasis have reunited? Apparently, it was huge news! Every single ticket is long sold out, often at 'dynamic' prices.

LILY PARR EXHIBITION
04/08/25
@ National Football Museum

Amidst the Women's Euros this summer, the National Football Museum is opening a new exhibit honouring one of football's first prolific female players, Lily Parr, a champion for women's rights. The exhibit consists of never before seen pictures from the 1920s.

BALLOONS & BEATS FESTIVAL
27-28/06/25
@ Platt Fields Park

Balloons & Beats is coming to Manchester for two days in June with electrifying music performances accompanied by a hot air balloon display. The festival features stunt shows, monster trucks and fairground rides – all the elements needed to keep nine to 90-year-olds happy!

ELIZABETH GASKELL'S HOUSE 10 YEAR EXHIBIT
06/07/25
@ Elizabeth Gaskell's House

Back in October, Elizabeth Gaskell's house opened an exhibition to celebrate its 10th anniversary following its refurbishment. The last chance to attend is this July, and it would be a shame for any lovers of history and literature not to celebrate the struggle for this Mancunian landmark to breathe again.

FONTAINES D.C.
15/08/25
@ Wythenshawe Park

Fontaines D.C. are coming to Manchester in August and it's certain to be a big event. Special guests are Kneecap and English Teacher.

August

SAM FENDER
16/08/25
@ Wythenshawe Park

It's a guaranteed great night in Wythenshawe Park with Sam Fender and a special performance from Olivia Dean. You can expect an eclectic mix of passion-fuelled performances under the summer evening sky (clear sky not guaranteed).

FESTA ITALIANA
23-25/08/25
@ Cathedral Gardens

Pizza, wine, and cannoli lovers – this one's for you. Head to Cathedral Gardens this August for a celebration of all things Italian! Featuring live music, street food, cookery demonstrations and much, much more, this weekend-long festival is inspired by Manchester's Italian heritage. Free entry and something delicious for everyone.

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: BALKAN EROTIC EPIC Autumn 2025
@ Factory International

Marina Abramović returns with *Balkan Erotic Epic*, a bold large-scale performance premiering at Aviva Studios. Blending dance, ritual and traditional Balkan throat singing, the piece explores the eroticism woven into Balkan mythology. Expect a raw, visceral experience from the legendary performance artist, pushing boundaries in her signature style.

September

SURPRISE CHEF
10/09/25
@ YES (The Pink Room)

If moody, cinematic jazz-funk is your thing, Surprise Chef's gig at YES should be firmly on your radar. Hailing from Melbourne, Australia, the quintet's groove-heavy instrumentals draw from '70s film scores, soul and the kind of funk that hip-hop producers love to sample.

JAPAN WEEK
Early September 2025
@ Manchester

Manchester will be transformed into a hub of Japanese culture as it hosts Japan Week 2025. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the festival will showcase hundreds of performers, with arts, music, fashion and sports taking over the city. The free events coincide with EXPO 2025 in Osaka, making this a rare and unmissable cultural exchange.

Scan for more events throughout the year so you never miss out 📱





Read the full issue



*Issue #12
Spring/Summer
@aAh_mag*