



Sewing kits have been sent to women taking part in the Sewing Through the Pandemic project

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Sewing through the pandemic – supporting women through craft

Women across the North of England who are facing significant challenges are documenting their experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic one stitch at a time thanks to a unique craft project.

Northumbria University lecturer [Dr Angelika Strohmayer](#) has teamed up with the charity [Changing Lives](#) to launch the Sewing Through the Pandemic initiative.

The project was originally designed to explore the importance of crafts in the recovery of women who have experienced trauma, but its future looked uncertain when the COVID-19 lockdown came into force just one week after it launched.

Recognising that the women taking part might need support now more than ever, the project team decided to adapt – posting out craft packs containing all the materials needed, allowing the women to take part in their own homes.

The packs contain a square of white material and seven different coloured threads, each representing a different feeling or emotion.

Each day the women are asked to sew a few stitches onto their square using the colour which best represents how they are feeling that day. For example, red signifies angry and upset, yellow happy and excited, and green calm and collected.

As well as providing the women with an outlet to explore their emotions and connect with others during this difficult time, it is hoped once restrictions are eased the squares can be joined together to form a snapshot of life during the pandemic.

As Dr Strohmayer, a lecturer within Northumbria's [School of Design](#), explains: "Throughout history sewing, and craft in general, has been used by women during crisis situations to document their experiences and speak out in a way they often can't do through other means.

"This project is building on a strong heritage of storytelling through textiles – from women in Vietnam documenting their experiences of war through patchwork quilts, to Chilean women sewing scenes from their everyday lives onto hessian sacks – craft has always been an outlet for women to express their emotions.

"Sewing is very accessible, it connects people and can help people through very challenging times, such as the global Coronavirus pandemic we are all experiencing at the moment."

Having originally prepared 10 sewing packs to post, word about the project

spread and within days more than 80 women, from across the North East, Yorkshire, Midlands and the North West, had signed up to take part.

As Laura McIntyre, Head of Women's Services at Changing Lives explains, the project is providing a vital connection for women at a time when access to support services has been greatly reduced due to Coronavirus.

She said: "The women taking part in the Sewing Through the Pandemic project include women on community orders, women in recovery from addiction, women living in Changing Lives' women and children's unit and accommodation projects, and women who are unable to access our usual community programmes who are at risk of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

"The feedback has already been amazing. We have always known that craft is an engaging activity and people really enjoy doing it, but what we are hearing, loud and clear, is crafts are helping to contain, heal and overcome trauma.

"Craft shouldn't be underestimated and seen as the beginning stages of support: they are a part of recovery which lets women express themselves and be heard in different ways. They build on strength, skills, talents and help women to recognise these things in themselves and build a different future."

Find out more about the Sewing Through the Pandemic project by reading these blog posts from [Dr Angelika Strohmayer](#) and [Laura McIntyre](#).

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