



SKIPPKO

Skippko is an arts organisation based in Holbeck, South Leeds, formed in October 1988 by two female artists. For more than 30 years we have committed ourselves to developing creative projects with communities across the North of England.

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Under
the Canopy

A group of people are sitting around a table under a rustic canopy structure made of wood and brown fabric. The canopy is supported by wooden poles. In the background, there are trees and a blue tarp. The scene is outdoors and appears to be a community gathering or workshop.

*"I have made new friends,
my mental health has improved,
I have learnt to slow down and
spend time on me, so relaxing."*



Introduction

The 'Under the Canopy' project ran from Autumn 2022 until Spring 2026, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and Wade's Charity. Eighty-eight sessions have taken place over the past four years in the beautiful setting of Hollybush Conservation Centre. We've had wonderful feedback from all those involved and the following words from one participant beautifully describe what the project has been all about.

"It's the best thing that I have to help me through. You're surrounded by people that don't judge you and help you to see things that you have never appreciated before. It's a surprise every week – nature, trees, crafts, drawing, writing. I feel like my inner child comes through."

Sharing Matthew's hot herbal teas; listening to Matthew read poems and stories; Anne showing us different types of natural crafts; growing seeds, painting, picking up leaves, choosing a tree and sharing lunch with people that show you compassion and have empathy.

I feel so lucky. I feel like I belong. Life is better for me whilst I am part of 'Under the Canopy'. It gives you hope and purpose and a reason for living."

The Arrival of Spring (Inspired by David Hockney)

Dots and dashes,
Scribbles, smudges,
Squiggles, patterns,
Blotches, lines and marks.
Spring is here,
Recorded with the confidence of
graffiti scrawl –
Each canvas an invitation
To take a walk
Into a world awash with colour,
Warm tones,
And vibrant spring textures.
The composition draws me in.
I can smell the garlic,
Hear the robins and the tractors!
I love the gnarly trees which have
seen so much life,
The purple shadows, the frothy
cow parsley,
The sky full of blossom,
The greenness that welcomes
life anew.
It is peaceful here,
Calming and inspiring.
I feel like I am walking through
the countryside into the light.



Spring



Rain Song (by Marlene)

Hear the rain pitter patter
Watch the raindrops sliding
Seek the view the mist is hiding
Getting wet it doesn't matter.
Stair-rods making puddles deeper
Splashing wellies faster faster
Hear the joy in children's laughter.





(by Shelley)

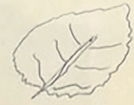
The winds from the mountains
A forest lies asleep
Dazzling sunshine
It's really spring
The sweet forget-me-nots
Forlorn as ashes





9/5/24

Hollybush



Sun dappling through the
trees

Cacophony of birds singing
their glorious songs of
celebration

Mother duck, well camouflaged
among the branches by the
pond, proudly protecting her
future generations beneath
her.

Pondskaters become lunch
for the hungry newts
All life is here - peace reigns

(by Yvonne)





Spectral Trees (by Pat)

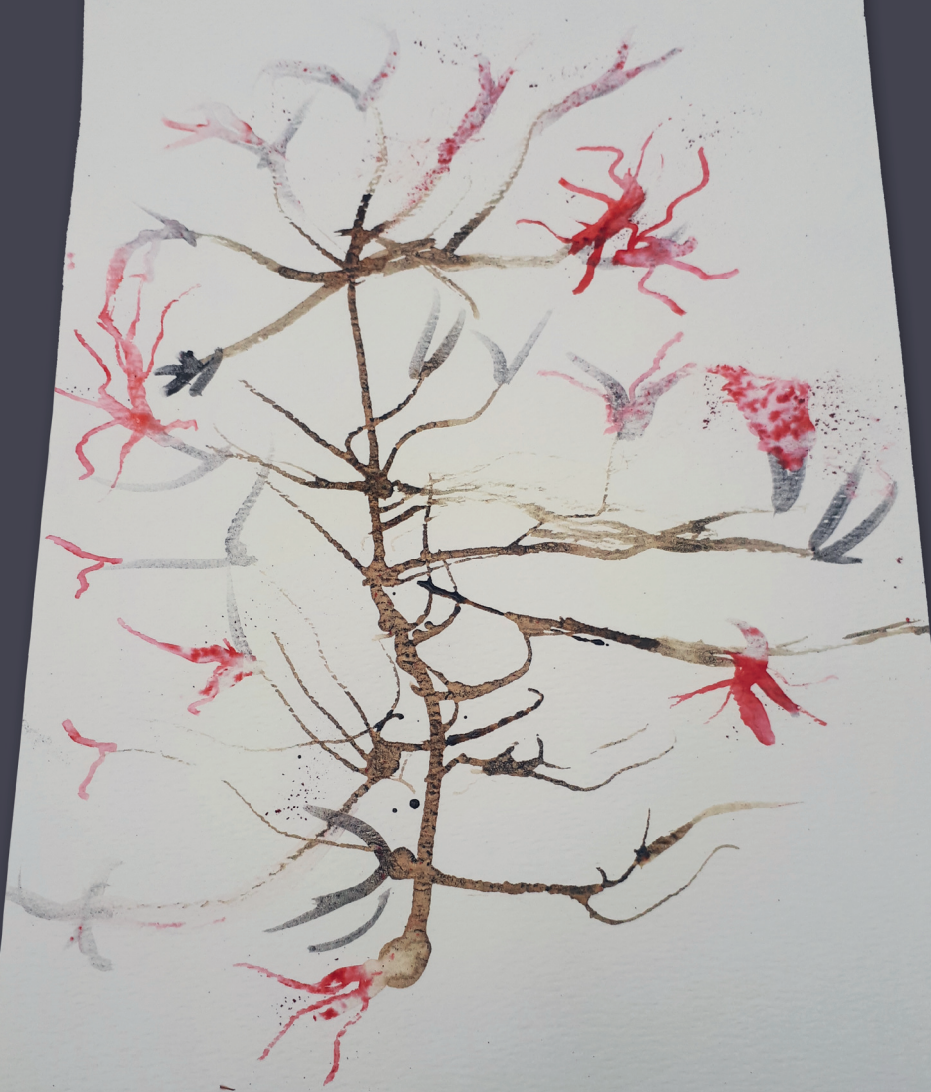
The platform is empty
Spiders' silken webs crusted with frosty haw
hang in outline,
Misty shelter windows, no doors
I write creating a furry edge and see
Spectral trees where my finger has been.

A clicking, hissing line
Waiting, frost breaths
No train
The air is calm, heavy, opaque
Crunching the gritty salt along
the platform length.

Spectral trees are gazing at me
Their blackness ominous
Lit by a moon like pale sun
Shrouded light
Buds are forming under the caress
of longer days

A blackbird sings
from the skeleton tree,
and there it is,
high on the jointed branch
a shadowy calling note
to the first day of March.





Haiku (by Yvonne)

Cherry blossom falls
Carpeting the path beneath
In soft, fragrant pink



Summer



Canal Connections (by Matthew)

Gliding gently on the water
Slipping slowly through the land
Listening to the towpath chatter
Moving softly, time in hand





*"I love being outdoors in nature,
it revives me and being in a doing
group is new to me outdoors,
like lovely playing out time."*





What Are Weeds? (group poem)

What are weeds and why do we hate them?

Weeds are creeping, clinging, strangling, parasitic, annoying at times.

What are weeds and why do we love them?

Weeds are resilient, pioneering, headstrong, persistent and misunderstood.

What are weeds and why do we need them?

Weeds are sometimes edible, sometimes healing, sometimes bearers of gorgeous flowers, pollinators, propagators, nitrogen-fixers, a sign of great fertility in the soil.

What are weeds and what do we call them?

Weeds are “the-working-classes-of-the-garden”, “dinner-for-tortoises”, “plants-in-the-wrong-place”, “Nature’s-medicines”, “deep-rooted-crevice-weavers”, “Welcome-in-my-garden”.

What are weeds?

Weeds are welcome in my garden.





Strawberries (group poem)

First a delicate scent of sweetness,
Then the skin – red and dimply and
studded with yellow-green seeds.
Let the teeth sink in to reveal a soft
pink heart, nestled in bright red flesh.
Some strawberries are tasteless, but
these are wonderful –
Fresh and juicy, crunchy and sparkling,
Sherbety and full of wonder,
Exploding in your mouth like a nebula
in the darkness of space.
They're addictive, these strawberries...

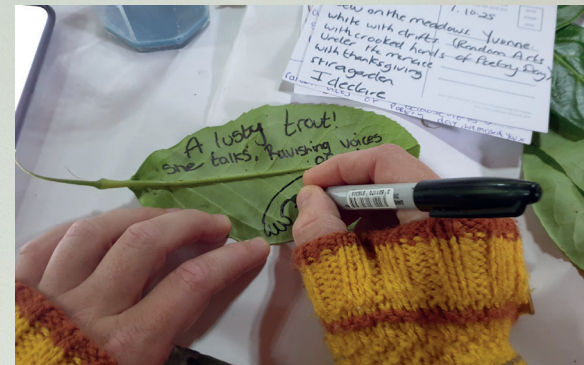
*"Lifts my spirits,
makes me smile,
reminds me life is fun!"*



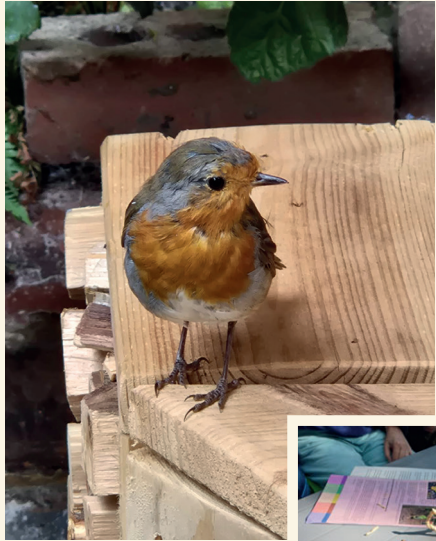


"Being out in nature improves everyone's mental health and makes us appreciate natural beauty."





Autumn



*"Time for me.
Peace and quiet,
making new friends
and learning
new skills."*

Framed Nature Under the Canopy Weaving (by Peter)

Marram Grass basket sketched
nature walks
canal side Burdock

Barley
Oats
Hawthorne

wefted right to left
and left to right
into a strong string warp.





Under the Canopy

(by Peter)

Rose Hip Tea
Breathe, settle in
Laugh

Black Rose Hip grow
In Seacroft
(I never knew that!)

Inside out itchiness
Need to blet
after frost make it into Rhoda Mel
sweet Scandinavian mead.

Anti carcinogenic
tons and tons of Vitamin C
A, B, D...

Such a cure-all
And RUN
To the loo!


Protection Hip
A fairy formed
Invisibility cloak.

Venus – Aphrodite
Bi-um-virate
A loving Adonis.





I was lucky to find some happy ink caps so I took them home to make some ink and used it to make this drawing of the mushroom and write about it.




A proper autumn day
Full of showers and sun

Birdsong fills the air with joy

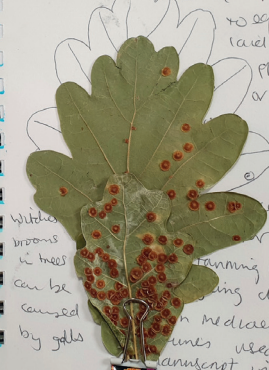
Leaf shadows danced on the sun dappled canopy

We drew the shadows of sticks whose uses I told the story of my stick, chosen as a mix of a birthday treat seems right to

we learned about different oak galls, homes to tiny wasps and other tiny insects. A corky response to eggs laid in flower or acorn

Wither brooms in trees can be caused by galls

Woolenning coats, washing cloth. In medieval times wool was used as manuscript ink.



"Makes me more aware of the world around us and how we all need to care for each other and life around us."

A gentle breeze rustle the leaves which blaze and fall to the ground

Trees shiver as winter sleep is coming!



In Pakistan,
My dad's foundations for his house
Were left to grow with trees, veg and flowers.
I remember lying on a rattan bed,
Under the shade of lots of trees,
Smelling the fragrance of the blossom,
Feeling the cool breeze,
Feeling at peace and safe.
Birds chirruping,
Crows crowing,
Noisy motorbikes speeding by on the road,
Hearing the hooves of the horses tripping by.

When we came to Britain,
The weather was so cold.
I was only four and our garden was overgrown.
It was wild with long grass,
Very green and wet and damp.
The grass and weeds were higher than my head.
I remember the sound of the grass,
Swishing around me as I made my way,
Very scared,
To the outdoor toilet,
Wondering about this strange, dark place,
That we had come to.

(by Kausar)









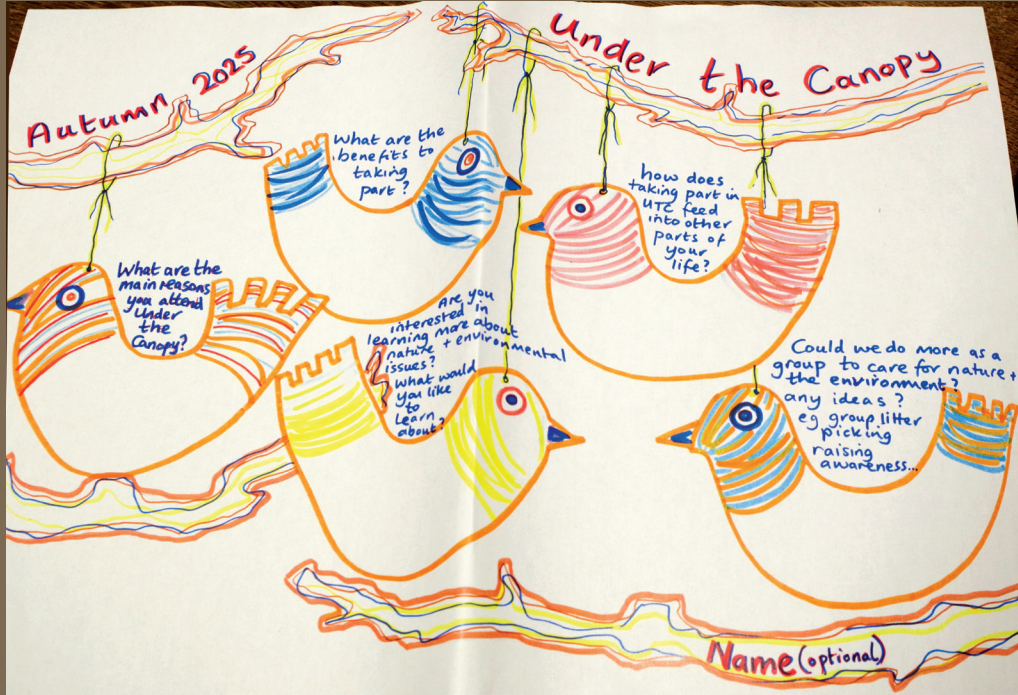
*“Given me time
to feed the inner
child. Helped with
forgetting for a
moment in time,
my mental load.”*

The Twelve Days of Hollybush (group poem)

On the twelfth day of Hollybush, the garden gave to me -
Twelve friends-a-laughing,
Eleven ribbons whirling,
Ten potions brewing,
Nine leaves-a-floating,
Eight pebbles rolling,
Seven swans-a-swimming,
Six soups-a-steaming,
Five woollen birds!
Four natural inks,
Three mushroom stumps,
Two wooden reindeer
And a robin in a plum tree.







"Meeting up and sharing lunch strengthens the bond of friendship, a time to chat or reflect."





When Winter Comes... (by Yvonne)

When the winter comes
Try not to do too much
Think of the plants and
what they do.
Watch and wait
And embrace the darkness
Your body needs the
recovery time
Keep a light burning
Even just a tiny little glow
The stars shine brighter in
the winter dark
And the night is full of sounds
You can hear everything –
The night creatures stirring
The footsteps of the mice
The cracking of the ice
on the canal.
Rest and wait and watch
and listen.
Make a decision to embrace
the winter!
The winter will embrace
you back.

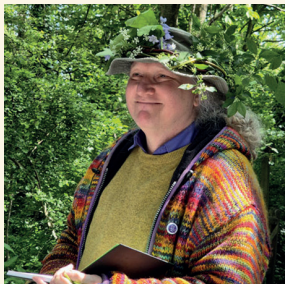




Under the Canopy (group poem)

A palette of parrots
A strut of coots
A clatter of crossbills
A peacefulness of doves,
A battering of bullfinches
A butchery of buzzards
A quirkiness of budgerigars
A quackery of ducks
A flattery of peacocks
An elegance of flamingos
A vibration of hummingbirds
A hovering of hen harriers
An abstraction of artists
A togetherness of members
Under the Canopy.





Dedication to Peter

This book is dedicated to Peter, a long-standing and much-loved member of our Under the Canopy group, who is greatly missed by all who knew him.

May be by Peter

A May King dances
A crown shines.
Flowers assembled,
An ensemble sings,
A chorus of Spring.



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Participants: Abi, Amy, Anne, Carol, Denise, Diane, Farah, Gienia, Helen, Jackie, Jean, Jo, Joy, Joyce, Joanne, Julia, Julie, Kate, Kausar, Lesley, Linda, Lynn, Marlene, Nicola, Pat, Peter, Sarah, Susan, Shelley E, Shelley S, Teresa, Yvonne.

Thanks go to everyone who's been involved in the project over the last four years. This book gives a flavour of the many shared hours 'Under the Canopy', the fun, laughter, friendship, creativity, poems and of course Matthew's potions! Thanks also go to Hollybush Conservation Centre who have been fantastic hosts and staff at Hollybush café for providing us with lovely soups and hot drinks.





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