



A JOINT PROJECT BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK CENTRE FOR CULTURAL AND MEDIA POLICY STUDIES AND CULTURE CENTRAL

# WHAT DO YOU DO ALL DAY?

HOW DO CREATIVE FREELANCE WORKERS IN THE WEST MIDLANDS MANAGE THEIR TIME?





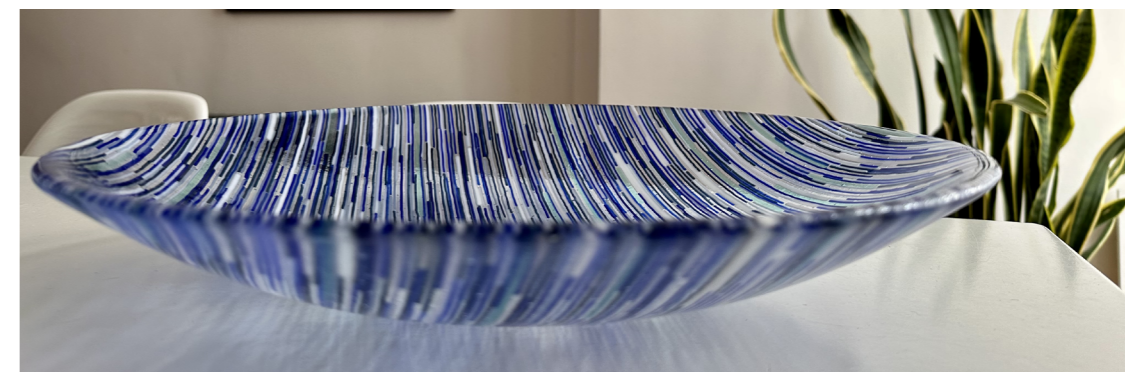
# WHAT DO YOU DO ALL DAY?

Over two weeks in April / May 2023, we asked six creatives to keep a video diary and a timesheet of their daily activities. Participants used their phone to film for up to one minute each day and to take one photograph. The aim was to show how creative freelancers manage their time and what it feels like being a creative freelancer. The results were edited into a short film which you can view here: <https://warwick.ac.uk/research/partnerships/place-based-research/our-projects/creative-freelancers/>



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## **CORINNE**

a disabled queer self-portrait artist producing photographic depictions from her bed. Her self-portraits are a form of therapy to ease her ongoing struggles with mental illness. Her work often focuses on 'Daisyland' a queer utopia created by Corinne and an imaginary friend named Daisy.



## **CZAFARI A.K.A CZARENA BROWN**

an alternative R&B singer-songwriter and DJ from Tipton, West Midlands. She began releasing music at just 17 years old in 2016 and has performed around the UK. She has also had radio plays on BBC Radio 1xtra and BBC Introducing West Midlands.



## **LOUISE STOKES**

an actor, writer, singer/songwriter, comedian, work shopper/facilitator and counsellor. She writes plays, poetry, short stories and novels and perform her own original songs under the name 'If The Dress Don't Fit'. She also paints a bit!



## **STEPHEN RUBACKI**

an art technician based in the Midlands, working mainly in art gallery or museum settings with a team of other freelance technicians. Occasionally he takes on other work such as fabrications for galleries or hanging artwork for private collectors.



## **AMY DALTON -HARDY**

A freelance producer, director and consultant based in Warwick, working across dance, festival, participation and community engagement projects across the UK, mentoring artists 1 to 1, and supporting companies and organisations with fundraising and business development.



## **ADAM HUSSAIN**

designs and makes handmade kiln-formed glass artworks and installations for a variety of different markets, from his studio in Coventry. He exhibits and sells his work through galleries, exhibitions, online platforms, craft events and from his website. He also creates work for private, corporate and public commissions.

# **MEET THE CREATIVES**



# HOW DO ARTISTS AND CREATIVE FREELANCERS MANAGE THEIR TIME?

Participants filled in a timesheet, saying whether a task was 'creative' or 'non-creative', and 'paid' or 'unpaid'. These categories often blurred into each other, highlighting the difficulty in categorising creative work. Multitasking and focus switching were common, with frequent interruptions and overlaps.



'When I first became a freelancer, I didn't separate it in my mind as there's creative work, non-creative work, paid creative work, unpaid creative work. Like, I never thought of it as a thing. I just did it. So like there'll be times when I'll be like searching for opportunities on Instagram. Obviously I'm not getting paid to do that, but it's still work because I'm trying to find work for myself.'

**-CZARENA**



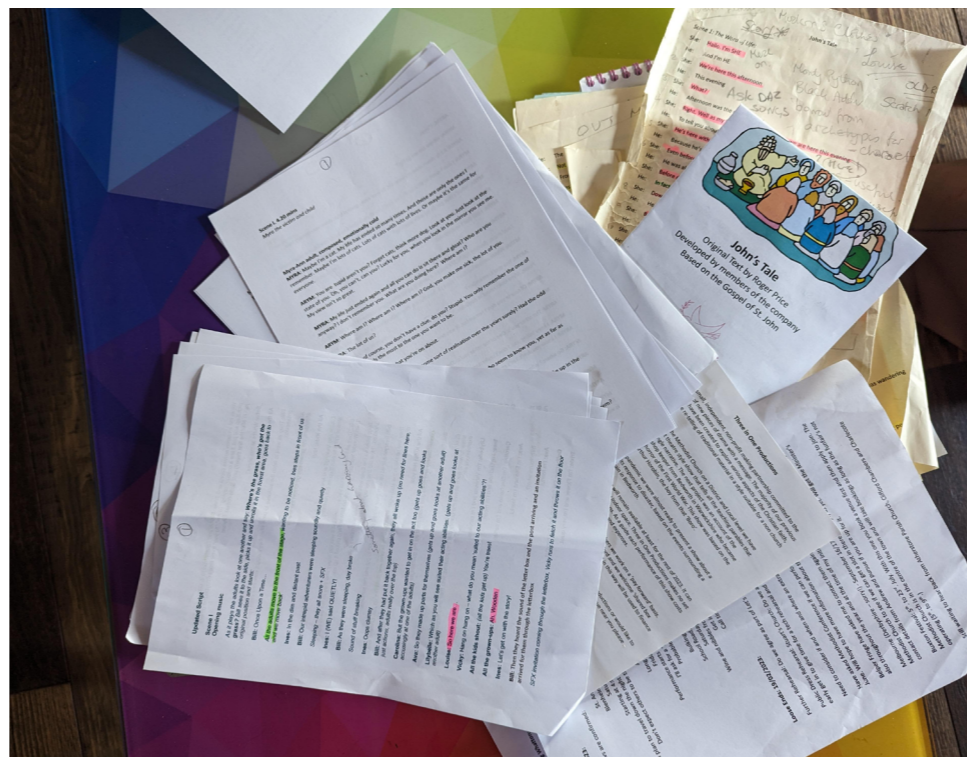
'I put it in two boxes because I'm not quite sure where it fits – not because I don't understand the form – it's just that the creative and the sort of less creative aspects can sometimes merge...'

**-LOUISE**



'There's a lot of tabs open in my brain and also quite literally on my computer... feels like I've been flipping between clients on an hourly basis'

**-AMY**



'I probably kind of do as much unpaid as paid work, but a lot of it feeds into the paid work'

**-LOUISE**



Sometimes I feel like I've got 20 laptops open in my head, and I know that if I don't close some of them my head can explode'





## 'ALTHOUGH WE GET PAID (SOMETIMES AND NOT VERY MUCH) FOR GIGS, WE'RE NOT PAID FOR REHEARSAL'

All of our participants commented on doing 'extra' time beyond the hours they are paid for. Sometimes this was admin associated with creative tasks, sometimes it was because they felt a sense of responsibility to 'go the extra mile' to support vulnerable clients, sometimes it was time spent looking for work or pitching. This 'hidden time' was mostly unpaid, but it produced benefit for clients, for the artists themselves and for the wider community (for example through voluntary work and caring responsibilities).

'Technically I'm paid for the 1 ½ hour session on a Monday (plus a max of half hour prep and debrief time either side) and that's it, so I'm not being paid for the sound design. But hey, that's my experience of most freelance work, we do way more than the actual paid gig fee entails.' **(LOUISE)**

'So I'm actually building up my stuff, even though I'm not getting paid at that moment, in the future I'll sell the work and then money will come in at the end, but obviously it's not guaranteed...' **(ADAM)**



'So if you're working on a commission, you've got the creative work. Then there's also all the research that goes into developing the concept. And there's like the, you know, you gotta do your invoice. You've got to sometimes fill out different forms and write up stuff. So I think there's a lot of admin. I think there's a lot of people don't realise that.' **(CORINNE)**

'I do all the groundwork which isn't paid. And then they decide that, oh no, they can't afford it or something's more important with the budget, sorry. But if you don't do those things then you're not getting out there to try and get those jobs. So we have a lot of unpaid work, doing proposals and also funding bids as well, especially since COVID'. **(ADAM)**

'Working with groups often there can be quite a bit of out of hours stuff and and contact. That's sort of, it's keeping the boundaries so the boundary doesn't get broken, but going that extra mile because we're dealing with sort of human beings who may need extra support.' **(LOUISE)**

# HIDDEN TIME



# HOW DO CREATIVE FREELANCERS SWITCH OFF?

Because of the blurred lines between working and not working, participants often carried on working and thinking about work outside normal hours. This could result in sleepless nights, stress and feelings of being 'overwhelmed' or 'burned out'. For freelancers dependent on commissions and clients, there is also a risk that 'saying no' now will leave them short of work in the future.



'I do end up working, and then I feel guilty if I don't as well. If literally I'm telling myself it's alright, have a weekend off or a day off it's OK, but I still have this thing about "I could be doing things".'  
**(LOUISE)**



Once you become not available for people, you kind of tend to get replaced. That's the other pressure, is always saying yes to everything so people know that they can rely on you and ask you back. But if you say that I'm busy or I can't do it a few times, then that place would tend to ask someone else.' - **(STEPHEN)**

'The stress stays with you, it's hard to switch off'

'I've got better at being a little bit more choosy in terms of not saying yes to everything. I used to say yes to everything and that yeah, it's good for your reputation and it might lead to more work, but especially at the moment I've got a lot of work on so.... But I am a bit rubbish at saying no, it's like oh, oh yeah, I'll do it.' - **(LOUISE)**



'Like there's been times where I've had to say no unfortunately due to my health due to childcare and they always say this won't have an impact... but you'll never hear from them again. And I always make sure I say, you know, please reach out to me again if you need anything, I can be available at a different time. But sometimes you do lose that. And I've noticed it as well. And it is quite annoying because sometimes you just have to say no, and you should be able to say no as a freelancer...'  
**(CZARENA)**



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During the period of this study, participants spent a majority of their time working alone, often working from home. But they also work in other spaces with groups and organisations. Getting out of the house and meeting with other people felt empowering and energising.

# WORKING WITH CLIENTS

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'A lot of things you're doing by yourself, and you can get quite lonely sometimes when you haven't got a team behind you to talk to, to socialise with. Whereas when I got to my part time job and I'm in an office, I get to talk to people and stuff. It can be quite difficult. So yeah, it can be quite lonely, and you know, it's hard to kind of get inspiration to start work sometimes. It can be quite draining to be honest. Like you have to really give yourself a kick up the bum to do certain things. **(CZARENA)**

”

'LOVE THAT PART OF MY JOB SO MUCH, LOVE IT, LOVE IT, LOVE IT'

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"I often feel very excluded from the art world because of my situation... One of the things I'm most worried about is forging long-lasting and meaningful connections both with other artists and with organisations I'm working with' **(CORINNE)**

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'Feeling really uplifted because the group was just lovely, all new people, so generous, lovely to end the day this way tonight' **(LOUISE)**

”

“

'Today I got to assist at a singing session with young families in Birmingham, honestly it's amazing to be outdoors, get a breath of some fresh air but also enjoy music with the local community – honestly: amazing...' **(CZARENA)**

”



# WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION OF FREELANCE CREATIVE WORKERS?

I think maybe **make it more accessible to know what a freelancer is**. Having that information out there for the whole world to see would be quite useful to everyone. I was explaining it to my parents. Dad didn't quite get it and I think it's probably because ... they didn't do that. So I think there does need to be a bit more information out there around being a freelancer, what it means to be a freelancer [Czarena]

I suppose maybe people don't realise that that's where a lot of disabled people that are freelancers. And I think there's a common sort of misconception that disabled people don't work and [...] I think **people maybe don't realise that there are a lot of self-employed or freelance disabled artists**. And in my opinion there really needs to be more awareness about the way that artists manage their health conditions and work as well - [Corrine]

Even though there are benefits for doing unpaid work for art and craft organisations, which might be to gain experience and raise your creative profile. I think that it would be good, if these organisations did **pay the creatives for their time and work**, that would help with their cashflow and standard of living - [Adam]

I think whenever somebody offers whenever gallery organisation, whenever they offer an in person opportunity, they should offer also **offer a virtual one as well** so that it's the same amount you know they should maybe say if they offer an in person residency at their studio space, they should say we're gonna **support an artist or a few artists to make work** - [Corinne]

**Unreasonable deadlines** are often put in place, again because **commissioners often don't understand** that a freelancer is most likely not only writing / rehearsing / planning / delivering / evaluating one, but **several projects at any one time**. The commissioners often query the fee, stating that the commission is 'only one hour' - as if the freelancer just turns up at the time of the performance, makes it up on the spot and leaves! - [Louise]

As hard as it is being a freelancer on the one hand, on the other hand, what it buys people is a greater amount of **values driven work**, purposeful work, opportunities to be creative and explore who you really are, freedom of creative practice. And that I believe leads to **much better mental health and emotional health outcomes** and feeling like a more rounded person than the nine to five rigmarole of delivering somebody else's vision and somebody else's belief system and a set of, kind of, duties, that aren't really your own. That is where the **seismic shift** needs to happen, because if people understood the benefits to freelancing in that sense from a holistic wellness point of view, I think more people would explore it as a viable option - [Amy]







**'WHAT DO YOU DO ALL DAY'**  
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**WHAT DO YOU ALL DAY  
VIDEO AVAILABLE HERE:**

<https://warwick.ac.uk/research/partnerships/place-based-research/our-projects/creative-freelancers/>

