



REVIEW 2021

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Opus is a not for profit 'think and do tank' based in Sheffield, established in 2008.

Opus's work focuses on developing 'upstream' solutions to the entangled ecological, social, economic, political and cultural crisis that we collectively face.

We do this through our platforms (Now Then and Festival of Debate), networks (that we have either developed or where we play a lead role), projects and services.

We operate across culture, politics, the arts and economics, and our work encompasses local, regional, national and international activities.

To maximise our impact, we collaborate with a wide range of partners ranging from neighbourhood groups, the voluntary sector and independent businesses, to research institutions and both local and national governments.

This approach works – ideas that we have championed such as Universal Basic Income and Citizen Hubs are now gaining significant traction and have become part of mainstream debates and discussion.

2021 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Festival of Debate 2021 - **46 live stream events** and 12 specially commissioned short films.

Citizen Hubs Paper presented to Sheffield City Council, November 2021.

It's Our Community: **3 online conferences** outlining a progressive vision for social care.

4 sets of teaching resources produced for **Learn Sheffield**.

UBI - We successfully campaigned to trigger the announcement by the Welsh Government of the **first UBI pilot in the UK**.

Now Then readership grown to **40,000+**

Opus Films videography service launched.

Two Now Then **Community Correspondents** recruited.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Our work focuses on two basic questions:

How can we be
kind to one
another?

How can we be
better stewards
of power?

We believe that many of the societal problems we experience are the result of a **complex mix of upstream or high-level systems** which impact on us all - resulting in the poverty, discrimination, powerlessness and ecological crisis that we see around us daily.

All of our activities aim to address these upstream issues by focusing on one or more of four systemic themes:

Serving Marginalised Voices

Amplifying lived and collective experience to highlight and dismantle structural inequalities.

Resolving the Democratic Deficit

Empowering citizens to act together in their communities and supporting participatory democratic reform.

Acting on Climate Chaos

Amplifying climate action and contributing to ecological protection and restoration.

Eradicating Poverty

Advocating for income redistribution, economic participation for all and supporting local economies and spending.

HOW WE WORK

We are a small not-for-profit organisation, but we do not want to limit ourselves to small ambitions.

We are enthusiastic and hopeful about contributing to a society which values all humans, is equitable, is ecologically sustainable and which prioritises wellbeing, quality of life and discovery.

To achieve change on the scale required, we need to maximise our impact.

We do this by...

- Ensuring that all our activities address at least one of our **four systemic themes**, so that there is a synergy between our projects.
- **Collaborating with partners and networks**, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. By doing this we can focus on what we do well, magnify the collective impact of our work and avoid duplication.
- Focusing our projects around **leverage points**. A leverage point can be viewed as an opportunity to address a specific, devolved component of a larger systemic theme. For example, our work on race and governance and our recruitment of Now Then Community Correspondents with a specific focus on disability, race and LGBTQI+ issues are both subsets of the theme of Serving Marginalised Voices.
- **Incubating** platforms, networks and projects, and sharing the learning from these with partners and networks in an open-hearted manner.

PLATFORMS

→ NOW THEN

→ FESTIVAL OF
DEBATE

NOW THEN

now then A Magazine for Sheffield

News & Views Arts & Culture Music Food Indie Trade Literature



Will eco-ableism compromise city centre green plans?

If the city centre moves forward but disabled people are left behind, Sheffield is falling its citizens.



Festive feasting

Get inspired with festive food suggestions and seasonal cooking tips from a small selection of Sheffield's finest independents: Zed's Wholefoods, Beer Central and Regarder.



Stand up for your local heritage!

At the Local Heritage Listing Project we want you, the people of South Yorkshire, to help protect your favourite historic places by nominating them for inclusion on our Local List.



A new event in town: Graphic Novel Reading Room

Imagine if you didn't know that films existed, with their beautiful diversity and variety - and then you suddenly found out about them. Graphic Novel Reading Room is a chance to sample comics in 2d.

Over the last 12 months our readership has continued to grow:

- In 2021, the Now Then website attracted **119,000 unique visitors** and almost a quarter of a million page views.
- Almost **35,000 'likes' and followers** across all social media platforms.

Now Then is a Sheffield based magazine supporting independents in art, trade, and citizen journalism. Local people are encouraged to contribute to Now Then, whatever their skills or experience, and the magazine regularly features artwork from local artists.

Now Then is all about supporting the things that make a community what it is – creativity, collaboration and conscience. We support the local economy and therefore we do not work with chains, corporations or multinationals. Instead, we work exclusively with independent traders, community groups, charities and local government.

Now Then was launched in 2008 as a free, print magazine published nine times a year. For 12 years the magazine was primarily a printed publication, but the onset of the pandemic resulted in the transition to an online-only presence.

We miss the look and feel of the hard copy Now Then and we are currently reviewing whether it would be possible to re-launch some form of printed magazine later in 2022. But having moved to an online only format, we now publish more articles per week than ever before, reporting on arts and culture, current affairs, holding power to account and putting solutions to the problems of the day front and foremost in our work. We have also added an 'Offers and Opportunities' section and are developing the NT Allies (formerly Trader) pages.

NOW THEN: 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Articles on key **Covid** related developments in Sheffield, linked with our role in the VAS-coordinated Covid Response Hubs Network.

Our **Community Correspondents** scheme was launched and we have recruited two new staff writers - [Shahed Ezaydi](#) and [Philippa Willitts](#) – who will add to our coverage of race, LGBTQI+ and disability issues.

Coverage of the **local elections** and supporting a successful local campaigning for Sheffield City Council to return to a committee system of governance.

Exclusive stories about [zero-hour contracts at Sheffield University](#), redevelopment plans for the [Sheffield Castle site](#), and [rent repossessions](#) at Sheffield courts.

Continuing the print magazine's tradition of a **monthly featured artist**.

Three long-read commissioned articles under the theme [Radical Roots](#), charting the city's radical past, present and future.

'Scoops' about the Council's [street trees inquiry](#) and [Labour candidates](#) for the 2022 mayoral election.

FESTIVAL OF DEBATE 2021



Founded in 2015, Festival of Debate is an annual series of panel discussions, debates, Q&As and other public events in Sheffield, exploring politics, economics and society. It is the largest non-partisan festival of deliberative democracy in the UK.

Notable events from the 2021 Festival included:

- In 'Another Now', world-famous economist **Yanis Varoufakis** asked us to imagine a world with no banks, no stock market, no tech giants, no billionaires. Imagine if Occupy and Extinction Rebellion actually won – what would the world look like and would we want it?
- Labour MP and author **David Lammy** discussed the themes from his most recent book, *Tribes*, exploring both the benign and malign effects of our need to belong.
- Local democracy activist and viral youtube star **Jackie Weaver** chaired a Question Time-style event with MPs **Olivia Blake** (Labour) and **Simon Fell** (Conservatives), **Hardeep Matharu** (Byline Times), **Zack Polanski** (Green Party) and **Philip Proudfoot** (Northern Independence Party).

FESTIVAL OF DEBATE 2021: THE METRICS

46

Live stream events

150+

speakers

12

specialty
commissioned
short videos

Over

27,000

joined the conversation this year



We attracted 1 million+ impressions across Festival of Debate social media channels.



All events were free to attend, reducing barriers to access.



Over 450 members of the public made direct donations to help the Festival of Debate happen.



Over 60 community organisations collaborated with us to develop the programme for the Festival.

We're still receiving feedback and news from over 60 partner organisations who are reporting an increase in awareness of their work and other direct benefits.

91.9% of our audiences rated our events 'excellent' or 'good'.

84% 'Strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the festival contributes to lasting social change.

Sheffield Renewables were invited to quote and complete a feasibility study for fitting solar panels on Sheffield's iconic Park Hill flats, after a member of the residents' association approached them having seen them speak at Festival of Debate.

NETWORKS

- CITIZEN NETWORK
- NEIGHBOURHOOD
DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT
- INDEPENDENT MEDIA
ASSOCIATION
- UBI LAB

CITIZEN NETWORK

Over the last 12 months, Opus worked increasingly closely with Citizen Network, as a member and collaborator. Due to our shared values and shared passion for bringing about systemic change, we expect this relationship to continue to deepen in 2022 and beyond.

Founded in 2016, Citizen Network's function is to connect together people, groups and organisations to bring about the personal and systemic changes necessary so everyone can flourish.

CN has more than 850 individual members and more than 200 group members from 34 countries. It was founded by the Centre for Welfare Reform in Sheffield and cooperates through the framework of Citizen Network Osk (co-op), a non-profit global cooperative registered in Helsinki, Finland.

Several of the platforms and networks listed in this review document - Festival of Debate, UBI Lab and NDM - are themselves part of Citizen Network, and Opus will soon become an organisational member of the co-operative. Opus is also currently working with CN to look closely at how the network functions, surveying and interviewing members with the aim of creating a more inclusive and active community within CN.



Change begins with ourselves. To create a better world we must think and act differently. We are all citizens, we are all equal and we all have a contribution to make.

Citizen Network is a cooperative bringing people together, from all around the world, to support each other to create a world where everyone matters.

UBI LAB NETWORK

Since 2016 Opus has been advocating for Universal Basic Income (UBI), a regular and unconditional cash payment to every individual.

In comparison to the current failing benefits system, UBI has the compelling advantages of being:

- **Equal** - Significantly reducing poverty and acting to address lack of equality for individuals and communities across the UK.
- **Simple** - Reducing the complexity and cost of the welfare state, making it more supportive and less intrusive.
- **Democratic** - Allowing people to contribute to their community and amplifying participatory, deliberative and representative forms of democracy.
- **Inclusive** - Ensuring that we leave no individuals or communities behind and listen to the concerns of others.



The **UBI Lab Network** is a worldwide partnership of citizens, researchers and activists, incubated and supported by Opus and now part of the **Citizen Network**. There are 40 UBI Labs across the world linked to the network.

Within the network there is a huge amount of expertise, experience and commitment. Despite limited financial resources, the UBI Lab Network has grown from strength to strength, developing a range of policy papers, position statements, sense-making tools, guides and resources that are used internationally to inform organising and knowledge sharing on UBI.

UBI LAB NETWORK: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2021

Over the last 12 months the collective efforts of the citizens, activists, academics, politicians and the core staff team who make up the UBI Lab Network have seen UBI become a mainstream policy proposition across the globe, one that has been taken increasingly seriously since the start of the pandemic. In 2021 the impact of the UBI Labs Network has surpassed all expectations in terms of both media coverage and the interest being taken in UBI within mainstream political discussions. Some of the key achievements include:

Over **30 councils** across the UK passing motions in favour of trialling UBI.

The convening of a **Cross Party Parliamentary and Local Government Group (CPPLG)** on UBI which spans elected representatives and parties across the UK and meets every six weeks.

A commitment from the Welsh Government to **pilot UBI** for the first time in the UK.

25 of the 60 seats in the **Welsh Senedd** elected with a pledge in support of trialling UBI.

29 of the 60 seats in the **Scottish Parliament** elected with a pledge in support of trialling UBI.

656 elected representatives - including local councillors, city mayors, and members of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments - have signed a pledge in favour of trialling UBI.

Councils across Northern Ireland coming together to advocate for a '**UBI as Peace Dividend**' feasibility trial and raising £100k to deliver this in 2022.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

The Neighbourhood Democracy Movement is a new and growing network, formed during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020.

Opus was one of the founding members of NDM and provides strategic input, administrative support and manages the NDM website.

The Covid-19 crisis caused immense difficulties across an already stretched social fabric. But it also demonstrated the enormous desire and capacity we all have to be full citizens, to help each other out, to decide things together and to work to improve our local neighbourhoods and society as a whole.

As the worst of the pandemic is hopefully behind us, NDM's purpose is to retain and build on these collective efforts and seize the opportunity to exercise our citizenship to the full, on both local, national and international issues - and to challenge and change the systems that are getting in the way.



NDM is not about 'politics as usual'. In fact, party politics would almost certainly destroy neighbourhood democracy, and it does not always mean electing people.

At the heart of NDM's approach is finding ways of involving everyone in debating, deciding and acting on local issues. It is not a standardised process and it is not imposed from the centre.

But neither is it anti-government; neighbourhoods benefit from good local government, well funded public services and strong constitutional protections for human rights.

WHAT IS NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRACY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Essential: Neighbourhood Democracy create the topsoil of a good society. We need citizens and communities to come together to make connections, form friendships and make things happen.

Neighbourhoods matter: We are proud of where we live and everyone wants their neighbourhood to be the best place it can possibly be.

People power: Democracy means people thinking together, making decisions together and cooperating so that we can make those things happen.

Real power: To create Neighbourhood Democracy we need places, behaviours and systems where everyone can get involved and where people can make plans, control budgets and create solutions together.

Real democracy: Neighbourhood Democracy opens up the possibility that everyone can be a full citizen and everyone can be involved in democratic debate. There is no true democracy without neighbourhood democracy.

NDM has ambitious aims. Since it was formed last year, NDM has already:

Recruited an informal membership of **192** organisations, groups and individuals.

Created a website and **open letter with 138 signatories.**

Built and developed **collaborative relationships** with infrastructure organisations and other allies working in this space.

Convened **six events** disseminating learning from local projects and created **four webinars** to share some of the successful approaches used by neighbourhood projects in Bury, Froome, Birmingham and Wigan.



Mainstream, corporate media is owned by a handful of billionaires. These media outlets reflect the narrow interests of their owners and have become increasingly dangerous for democracy. We believe independent media has a vital role to play in increasing media literacy and active citizenship, and exposing wrongdoing, corruption and abuses of power.

The Independent Media Association was set up to support the independent media sector, represent the interests of its members and showcase their work. As the publisher of Now Then Magazine, Opus is a founder-member of the IMA and Opus Managing Director James Lock currently holds the position of General Secretary. The IMA currently represents [44 independent media publishers](#) across the UK, with a combined annual readership of more than 20 million.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ASSOCIATION

In 2021, Opus Managing Director James Lock led a strategic review of the IMA, consulting across the membership. The review has identified three areas of activity for the IMA to focus on in the coming months:

Campaigning and Lobbying

- **Lobbying** - Facebook, Google, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Devolved Governments and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) to increase protections and respect for the IMA membership.
- **Public advocacy** - Increasing public awareness of and support for independent media.
- **Organising collective action** - Building an independent media caucus in the NUJ and/or cross-party groups of elected representatives.

Membership Support Services

- Deliver **training** in areas such as fundraising, marketing and legal support.
- **Promote members' work** through social media, email, the Independent Media Awards and the IMA newsletter.
- **Connect members with resources** such as video training, expert advice, speakers, interviewees, with the aim of building a member resource bank.

Collaborative Projects

- **Facilitate networking** between members to encourage collaboration.
- **Create and coordinate messaging** and promotion of each others' work.
- **Co-create content-based projects** between members.
- **Deliver shared spaces** to collectively access information and briefings.

PROJECTS

- CITIZEN HUBS
- A PROGRESSIVE VISION FOR SOCIAL CARE
- CULTURE, ARTS & HERITAGE IN SOUTH YORKSHIRE: A WAY FORWARD
- OTHER PROJECT WORK

CITIZEN HUBS

One of the major issues facing our society at present is the **lack of democratic involvement in decision making**.

The representative democracy model, whereby people participate by voting for a candidate every few years, is clearly not working – as evidenced, for example, by low voter turnout, particularly at local elections, and surveys which regularly report a **low level of trust and engagement** in the democratic process.

Whilst there is fairly broad agreement about the problem, practical solutions have been thin on the ground. 'More of the same' – just encouraging more people to vote – has clearly not been successful.

Over the last two years Opus has collaborated with a number of partners to develop the Citizen Hub model, a neighbourhood-level approach to engaging people in decision making around the key issue for their community.

Key elements of the model are:

- Led by trusted voluntary and community sector organisations, in partnership with the local authority and other civil society organisations.
- Adaptable to the particular needs of individual local communities. The model uses a 'menu' of deliberative options including citizens' assemblies, interactive digital spaces, creative interactions with GP surgeries, libraries and schools, ballot boxes and on-the-ground engagement, with the exact mix determined by individual hubs.
- Based on local authority wards, but deliberations would commonly take place at a more localised, neighbourhood level (approximately 5,000 people). Citizen Hubs will also need to connect with communities of interest and specific lived experience, as well as those of geography.
- Data from local deliberations will be collated and analysed by a central VCS team before being submitted to the Local Authority.

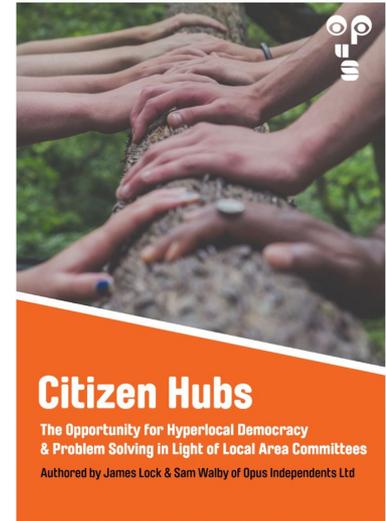
The Citizen Hub model is now gaining traction in Sheffield.

Following a referendum earlier this year, the Council is changing from a 'strong leader' model to a committee-based approach and also introducing Local Area Committees (LACs).

Whilst this is clearly a step in the right direction, the size of the proposed LACs at approximately 80,000 citizens could be a barrier to citizen involvement. Citizen Hubs would not be a replacement for LACs, but rather an enhancement, facilitating engagement at ward (approx. 20,000) and neighbourhood (approx. 5,000) levels and feeding these deliberations up to the LACs.

After a series of discussions with Sheffield City Council earlier this year, Opus formally presented the concept of Citizen Hubs to the council and relevant stakeholders in November 2021.

We are hopeful that the next stage of this process will be a feasibility study, mapping out the best way to pilot various elements of the Citizen Hub model.



*Citizen Hubs Paper presented to
Sheffield City Council - November 2021*

A PROGRESSIVE VISION FOR SOCIAL CARE

Social Care has proved one of the most intractable policy areas over several decades.

There is widespread agreement the current system is not fit for purpose – it is underfunded, frequently provides a poor quality service and lacks integration with health provision. The government's recent proposals in this area are regressive in terms of funding and do nothing to improve the quality of care provided. We can - and must - do better.

Opus, together with the Neighbourhood Democracy Movement (NDM) and Citizen Network are collaborating together on **It's Our Community**, a project to develop a radical and progressive vision for social care in England.

The work is rooted in Sheffield, but reaches out to connect with experience and good practice elsewhere.

The main principles behind our vision of progressive social care are:

- **Neighbourhood-focussed** - Organised to support and foster inclusive and welcoming neighbourhoods where everyone's contribution is recognised and supported.
- **People powered** - Creating respectful relationships and encouraging peer support and neighbourliness, backed up by responsive professional support.
- **Human rights based** - Giving people who need support freedom, clear entitlements and the ability to participate and contribute in the way that works best for them.
- **Economically secure** - With no means-testing and proper levels of funding to enable full contribution and fair incomes for everyone.

Progress to date:

Working with a range of institutional and civil society partners and social care services, we have run three mini-online conferences to date with a focus on **Disability and Chronic Illness** (February 2021), on **Later Life** (June 2021) and on **Families and Young People** (December 2021)

We intend to run two more It's Our Community conferences, the first of which will focus on how we might finance a progressive social care system and the last of which will act as a plenary, bringing together the learning from all of the work undertaken over the last 18 months.

The final output will be a mixed media report on **A Progressive Vision for Social Care** to be published in the summer of 2022. We intend to use this report to engage civil society and public sector organisations within the social care system, presenting an alternative vision for how they could deploy their resources and think of care within neighbourhoods by and for citizens.

IT'S OUR COMMUNITY PART THREE:

**A VISION FOR PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL REFORM
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

ONLINE | 9TH DECEMBER 2021 | 1:30-4PM

CULTURE, ARTS & HERITAGE IN SOUTH YORKSHIRE: A WAY FORWARD

As the South Yorkshire region works to bounce back from the impact of the pandemic, the **Culture, Arts and Heritage (CAH)** sector has the potential to play a key role - re-energising night life, driving the visitor economy, offering high-quality employment and skills development, making living in the region attractive and providing residents with unique experiences which build community.

However, at present there are significant obstacles to the region's CAH sector being able to deliver these outcomes.

The challenges facing CAH in South Yorkshire:

- South Yorkshire receives less funding for its Culture, Arts and Heritage (CAH) sectors compared with similarly-sized regions, employment is relatively low, most organisations are small and the majority of CAH jobs are located in Sheffield.
- Despite some successful collaborations, historically there has been a gap in resource, leadership and a joined-up CAH strategy on a regional level.
- This lack of collective vision has led to South Yorkshire organisations often being passed over by major funders like National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England, losing out to bids that do not reflect regional strategic priorities.
- Without a regional CAH strategy and advocacy network, South Yorkshire's CAH sector lacks a unified voice to attract audiences and investment.

In November 2021, Opus was awarded a tender by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (the MCA) to undertake a consultation with both the South Yorkshire CAH sector and with related stakeholders, the purpose of which is to address the issues listed above and contribute towards a region-wide CAH strategy for the sector.

In undertaking this work, our goal is to help build a CAH strategy which will:

- be aligned with MCA's Strategic Economic Plan
- make the region's CAH sector more attractive for funders and investors.
- reflect views on a regional narrative identity for CAH, which speaks to 'visitor economy' priorities and encompasses the whole region.
- be appropriate for both the largest and smallest stakeholders across all four local authorities of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield.
- empower CAH organisations to collaborate, co-design and join up their thinking.
- foreground and celebrate diversity of protected characteristics (e.g. gender, race).
- gather views on how to support CAH expansion in the region, including funding and investment, skills development, and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.



Over the next five months Opus will consult widely across the region's CAH sectors, collecting and analysing the data from these consultations and producing a final report, outlining a proposed strategy, together with recommendations to the MCA for its implementation.

OTHER PROJECT WORK: LEARN SHEFFIELD RESOURCES

One of the 'spin-offs' from the 2021 Festival of Debate was that Opus was commissioned to create four sets of learning resources based on discussions hosted during FoD. These resources focus on four key areas:

- **Structural racism**
- **Poverty and income inequality**
- **Climate action**
- **Male violence and consent**

The learning resources are designed to keep teachers informed about the social issues that affect their students. They include information on both the national and local picture, organisations who are campaigning for change, key term definitions, discussion points and short videos from experts in their field.

These resources will be sent to all teachers at schools and colleges in Sheffield and Learn Sheffield is also seeking out opportunities to franchise or sell this model of learning resources to other educational organisations.

OTHER PROJECT WORK:

RADICAL ROOTS & HOW TO BOUNCE FORWARD



In 2021 Opus ran a project exploring the radical roots of Sheffield, funded by the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust, as a way of framing present-day activism and campaigns for a more just, more equitable city.

The project consisted of 3 'long read' articles written by local people and published in Now Then, supported by 3 online live-stream panel discussions.

Topics covered were:

- **Work and The Wellbeing Economy** [links: [article](#), [video](#)]
- **Democracy and Voting Rights** [links: [article](#), [video](#)]
- **Anti-racism and Challenging Systemic Inequalities** [links: [article](#), [video](#)]

SERVICES

- OPUS FILMS
- OPUS DISTRIBUTION
- CONSULTANCY

OPUS FILMS

The Opus team has been making short videos and films for many years, but this has become an increasingly significant area of our work, both because of the increasing importance of digital communication in general and the impact of the pandemic in accelerating the move to online communication.

We make short films that provide the opportunity for new ideas, movements for change and independent businesses to reach new audiences and increase their profile in a creative and impactful way. We believe high-quality digital media plays an essential role in shaping new narratives, helping reach a wider range of people and starting the conversations needed to succeed. We are committed to helping other organisations – whether public sector, not-for-profit or independent businesses engage with and expand their audiences.

To achieve real impact requires a combination of high quality narrative driven media, alongside the mechanisms to communicate to a wide audience.

Opus Films specialises in both. It's what makes us unique.

Over the last twelve months Opus Films has worked with a number of clients including **Citizens Advice Sheffield, Voluntary Action Sheffield, South Yorkshire Climate Alliance** and social care organisations such as **iDirect**.



Hatty's Story

Hatty has schizophrenia. She has a long history of institutionalised care but with support is now living in her own flat. Opus films were commissioned by iDirect to tell Hatty's story. The Opus team spent three days interviewing Hatty and her family and following their daily routine. The resulting film is being shared with both mental health commissioners and other social care organisations, presenting a compelling case for how many more people could benefit from the kind flexible and personalised support that Hatty receives.

OPUS DISTRIBUTION



For over a decade, Opus had distributed publicity leaflets, flyers and informational material to a variety of shops, hospitality venues and public buildings across the South Yorkshire region. Our clients include independent businesses, arts organisations, universities and colleges and local government.

The pandemic and the resulting lockdowns meant Opus Distribution ceased operations for a number of months, but as the economy and society has slowly opened up, we are back distributing material for our clients across South Yorkshire.

We'd like to take this opportunity of saying a huge thank you to Opus colleague Ben Jackson, who took on the major task of re-writing all the distribution routes post-pandemic, travelling to around 5,000 locations in order to get the new routes up and running.

Rebooting Opus Distribution also required the recruitment of a new staff team of drivers and assistants. We are currently working with **Yes2Ventures** to understand how we can include people with lived experience of intellectual disabilities in our distribution workforce.

CONSULTANCY

Faculty for the Future

Recently successful in securing more than £1m of funding, Faculty for the Future are working to bring a range of academics and academic stakeholders across multiple universities and disciplines to address the issues associated with rapid biosphere breakdown. Opus are consulting on the set-up governance, social value and impact aspects of this new movement for change, advising on how best to understand the interdependence between the emerging values of the movement and its delivery aims.

Environmental Global Governance (EGG)

Over the last 12 months Opus have been consulting on a project to understand how to develop and step into a credible and inclusive environmental global governance system, above the nation state, to protect and restore the planet in the face of the existential threat of biosphere breakdown.

Within this project team Opus are leading on the development of a methodology to co-create credible and inclusive proposition designs, as well as providing facilitation, focus group, funding and outreach functions to a wide range of stakeholders to support and develop the project further. To date the EGG team have been successful in raising £750,000 to resource this work into 2022 and beyond.



PLANS FOR 2022

Our core platforms **Now Then** and **Festival of Debate** will continue to expand and develop over the coming months. Further improvements are planned for the Now Then website and we are working on a Now Then newsletter which will be launched in 2022. Organisations and individuals have been invited to make proposals for the 2022 FoD programme, and the early response suggests that next year's festival will be really memorable.

Sheffield City Council's move to a system of Local Area Committees has also opened up the potential to pilot the **Citizen Hubs** model. We look forward to discussing this with the Council over the coming months.

In 2021 we will also be launching **Now Then Allies**, a membership scheme for organisations who share our values and who want to work with us to thrive together, as organisations and as a city. We want to celebrate our allies and make sure that organisations, businesses, charities and community groups are seen by our audiences and celebrated for their impact in Sheffield. We want to use our collective power to share learning and resources. We want to support each other in a sustainable and ongoing way. **If this sounds good to you, [get in touch with the team](#) and find out how to become an ally.**

We will also continue to work towards a pilot for a **Universal Basic Income**. Our work on UBI becomes ever more critical as we see a growing realisation that the current benefits system (with the recent reduction in Universal Credit and rise in re-possession) is not fit for purpose.

In 2020 Opus supported a conference highlighting the lack of ethnic diversity on the governance boards of Sheffield's public, private, voluntary and community sectors. In 2021 we aim to be one of the partners collaborating on the launch of **25 by 25** – a campaign to increase the representation of under-valued ethnicities and communities on governance boards to 25% by 2025.

TEAM REFLECTIONS & HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021

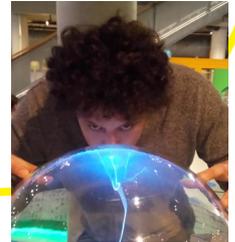
Ben Jackson



- Reinvention of our team Wellbeing Strategy, and carrying out what felt like the most open, honest and hopefully useful series of wellbeing conversations we've ever had at Opus, with individual agency and mutual support at their core.
- Creation and implementation of our first ever company-wide appraisal process, and in doing so eliminating the separation of a 'management class' by encouraging cross-company evaluation, reflection and support.
- Restarting the Opus Distribution service following a sustained period of hiatus, and navigating through unprecedented levels of uncertainty for the service whilst coming back from a personally very challenging time.
- Forming a partnership with Yes2Ventures, and increasing the organisation's inclusiveness by working directly with neurodivergent people who have experienced barriers to employment elsewhere.

- The growth of Now Then content in 2021 was really fantastic. This was supported of course by bringing on our two community correspondents Shahed and Philippa, but also by reporting we did during the local election and governance referendum, the Radical Roots mini-project and other 'long read' articles. Arguably our best year for content.
- I was really pleased to be involved in the formation of the Citizen Hubs proposal. The detail was flabbergasting at times and James and I spoke to a lot of people in bringing it together. I'm most proud of the way we saw a leverage point or opportunity in the form of the Council changing its governance structures, and acted on it positively and constructively.

Sam Walby



Flick Jackson



- Moving out of my comfort zone by learning to use Xero and taking on additional financial responsibilities.
- Being part of an outstanding editorial team for Now Then.
- Joining Ben on the wellbeing team to help ensure all team members are receiving the support they need. This feels particularly important at a time when mental health issues are on the rise.
- Working with Ben to coordinate the first appraisal process, to enable peer to peer reflection and support so that we can all grow together.

Joe Kriss



- Launch of Videography Service and seeing the fast growth in capabilities of the team/ increasing opportunities and ability of that service to meet social aims/impact especially in giving a platform to marginalised communities. Dorchester film shoot and production of Hatty's film.
- Learning more about social care through both videography work and the 'Its Our Community' conferences.
- Festival of Debate Online reaching over 30,000 people online.
- Didn't work on it directly but loved reading new Now Then content and seeing investigative and long read style content reach larger audiences.

James Lock



- A lot of the project work mentioned already I've been hugely enthused by - from Citizen Hubs to UBI through to the re-framing of Opus and what we do have all been hugely exciting experiences.
- Working on the Environmental Global Governance project was a real highlight for me this year.
- Being given the scope to develop my own thinking about global trends and entangled system problems within a large remit was compelling.
- Developing this to a point where I understood new structures 'Spaces' as distinct from 'Networks, Platforms, etc' has felt like a break-through and much of the knowledge gained from that exploratory project has been applicable to Opus, and opened up new areas of work and relationships for us.

Philippa Willitts



- Telling the stories of disabled and LGBT+ people using their own voices rather than just speaking to professional "experts"
- Working with a genuinely supportive, encouraging and inspiring team
- Reporting on the Firhill Rise abuse situation, which was covered extensively elsewhere, but I was the only journalist who spoke to people who could be directly affected by such mistreatment (the most important people to speak to)
- Building relationships with more people in the LGBTQI+ and disability communities in Sheffield and promoting their work, concerns and campaigns

Tchiyiwe Chihana



- Being trusted with becoming a Director at Opus was a key highlight and offered so much opportunity for my personal development and I hope to be of critical value to the organisation.
- Broadening my network, skills and knowledge through Environmental Global Governance work
- Hosting thought provoking media related sessions at Festival of Debate was enlightening, thrilling and bolstered my confidence and understanding of different dimensions in the media space.
- The Community Reporters addition to the Now Then team was a significant extension to how I further engaged with the magazine and how my much wider network related to it.
- UBI Lab Network had a lot of wins in the political space across the devolved governments i.e. Wales / NI.
- The expansion of the space occupied by Opus across multiple projects, platforms and networks placed it firmly at the meso level in 2021. Excited to see how we harness this in 2022.

- Working on the development of the Now Then Allies project - I'm excited about how this has evolved with our organisational aims in mind, from a marketing offer to a network which will bring organisations together to problem solve and make a difference.
- Being given the opportunity to work on design across a range of projects, developing my design skills and broadening my understanding of work across the company
- Being involved in events like the It's Our Community conference series and having the opportunity to listen to a wide variety of experiences and learn more about social care and other areas.

Natalie Burton



Tim Feben



- Seeing Opus Films develop - into a service with real potential, and showing the capacity to start exploring more ambitious plans.
- Working on the Stories from the pandemic project, working with other partners to create a city wide plan, and start interviewing people for the archive and hearing their experiences.
- The support and vibe from the whole Opus Team but in particular the Opus Film crew, making each day a good atmosphere for work and ideas.
- Having the opportunity to work on a short documentary from start to finish (Hatty)

Jake Barrett



- Launch of the videography service. Great team with amazing ideas coming forward with so much potential.
- Developing my skills as a filmmaker and feeling like my passion has more of a purpose.
- Learning more about social care, learning disabilities and mental health and using my skillset to make a difference.
- Meeting new people, listening to their stories and the journeys they've taken and having the platform and connections to be able to document really powerful moments..

Sam Gregory



- Building up Now Then as a serious 'hard news' organisation in the city, including high quality coverage of the local elections and the subsequent deal to form a coalition. We even beat the Star to a scoop a couple of times.
- Leading the city's coverage of the scandal surrounding Mazher Iqbal, with really well-written and thorough content involving original research and investigations, especially by Sam Walby.
- Running a hugely successful UBI pledge campaign during the elections to the Welsh and Scottish Parliaments and for English mayors in May, and getting dozens of our pledge signatories elected to the devolved assemblies (and to be Mayor of Greater Manchester).
- First Minister of Wales Mark Drakeford announcing that the Welsh Government would launch a UBI pilot within this Senedd term, as a direct result of UBI Labs' #PledgeForUBI campaign.

- Seeing, once again, for another year how Opus and the team have been able to grow and adapt and continue completely reshaping the organisation in the face of more unprecedented adversity.
- So many more steps and leaps forward taken by the Lab Network. Adding another 7 Labs including three in Wales, a non-geographic Food Lab and our first South American Lab in Buenos Aires. All the events we've hosted with different Labs and political parties and the ones we've been asked to speak at around the world. The proposals and working papers we've authored and launched as a Network. The incredible work done and progress made in Wales.
- Running the pledge campaigns in the lead up to the 6th May elections for Mayors, the Welsh and Scottish parliaments and the local council elections. How these pledges demonstrated how the Network is able to develop and evolve projects, and how we'll be able to keep building on this experience to run pledge campaigns around the world.

Jonny Douglas



