

What Happened, *Exactly?* Part.2

Magic Carpets Year 4 Review // 2021

**folkestone
fringe**



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Mary & Craig on the Folkestone Downs | Taken by Josh Jordan, June 2021

Magic Carpets 2021 felt like it properly began, on a hill. From a view where it feels like one can gain some perspective, quite literally above ourselves in a sense, you can start to attempt to answer what could be considered 'ultimate' questions. How does our town look the way it does, what foundations have needed to be put in place so we can make sense of where the paths and roads meet? How do we turn to breathe in that fresh sea air? Who first set foot amongst the bottom of these gateway hills first?... How did we end up here? The Kent Downs rest across a view that dips and dives, dotted with grassy corners that look like hidden fairy castles, in line with points of hilltops which seem like heaven could be reached from them. The footprints of cows, and a silence that gives us an inclination as to why people come up here to think, walk, and feel the wind in their hair; there is summer birdsong, juxtaposed with the hum of the tunnel that shoots through the hill, as the concrete leg-like structure both wraps around the little houses below as protection, and acts as the dominant lifeline between Folkestone & Dover. Mary Conroy & Craig Gell met on these hills, paired with Josh Jordan - who's images capture what felt evident on the day - minds ticking, as the two learned from one another, in an acknowledgement to the land which provides us with this aerial view. The macro infrastructure, colours, & shape, and the micro joints, passageways, and corners of a town, seen together. Two practitioners - a beautiful thing to watch from the inside & out - who's outlook on the world, and which directs the course of their work, primarily begins with the land, i.e. with what natural materials are in a place at that time, and through what we can all learn from engaging with those foundations. They work from what's '*there*', what is immediate to us, through a process of playing out this focus through socially engaged practice, including participation and intervention with the locals of a place. The work itself takes shape from these site-specific exchanges happening, via simple invitations to get involved - always free, with previous experience not considered - the work is completely utilitarian. Foundationally, Mary & Craig's work is driven by a want to physically see the connection form between people and place - a line of focus which has continuously allowed and allows us at Folkestone Fringe to reflect on what we ourselves do, and the benefits of believing in the power of this connection. Magic Carpets continuously prompts us to think about what is changing between us and the foundations which make a place, and further, what our job is within this. In a year which saw us carry out our Folkestone Fringe Triennial activity alongside Creative Folkestone's Folkestone Triennial - Magic Carpets interweaved through this in a way which felt safe within a slight sadness of it being its last year, set across a pair-backed programme which offered a hand in 'getting back to it', as the town, as well as ourselves, felt stretched to

our limits. As Guardian reviews flooded in for the public art which pops up about our town every 3 years, restaurants were fully booked, whilst more independent shops welcomed us in as London looked upon us - a Victorian ode, echo, nod, to all those that felt relieved, luxurious, full of life, when the halt of the train sounded into our shores; a meeting of pushes & pulls between what is felt through this quiet fishing town we call home, a town of fast-expanding cultural led-regeneration, and what ultimately brings us back down to earth as a ticket for our own survival.

At the end of June 2021, we were finally able to welcome travelling artist Mary Conroy from Limerick, who was nominated to do a residency with us by Niamh Brown from EVA International. Conroy is a socially-engaged artist and practitioner who is largely driven by investigating humans' connection with nature, i.e. to how the perception of clay & ceramic as natural materials can be used through a direct participation & intervention from the people that live amongst this geography, and prompts responses by seeing what mixed media pieces - from sculpture, drawing, digital tools, and installation - would fall into being from this collective practice. Similarly, local composer & sound-artist Craig Gell, who is a long-standing artist in residence for Folkestone Fringe, with this year having developed his practice through various project lines and responses, Gell consistently draws on geo-specific study to play out creative processes in order to demonstrate environmental findings. His Magic Carpets intervention focused on Folkestone's Pent stream, drawing on geo-scientific data, field studies, and research directly from this waterway.

“A range of outcomes explore what is ‘happening’ in the locality and aim to facilitate a connection to the natural environment, promoting awareness and environmental engagement.” - Craig Gell

The Covid-19 pandemic created a natural lineage of how the two could pick up what was realised from the Festival of Looking in 2020, allowing our Magic Carpets Year 3 response which brought together what felt integrally needed, what was possible, and what hadn't been able to fruition, to expand within the framework of an environment that would allow us to do so this year. The question of 'What's Happening, *Exactly*'? ran through it, as well as titled our summer & autumn Triennial programmes - a statement & question which has been carried through from lockdown to present day, and came into play through Magic Carpets in a way that was realised through a reflection and direct actions, around the relationship we have with our physical environment. It attempts to answer where we are now, have always been, and could be

in the future - as response to what has happened throughout the past two years: following the likes of Brexit, to a global pandemic, from a climate crisis, to a refugee crisis, through which this question feels like the only question that should be asked, and whatever is answered to it, can stand as a relevant response & effect from it - in the same way that 'looking' does.



What Are you Made of Folkestone vinyl | Taken by Josh Jordan, October 2020

The Festival of Looking saw Mary's hashtag initiative #WhatAreYouMadeOfFolkestone come into fruition, through which asked Folkestone's inhabitants to share an image of a material that they would regard as representing the town, which would later become part of a unique visual library. This insta-library is still open today, beyond her physical arrival to our shores. Craig's 'Pent' study developed through from last years' 'Pent Happening' events which introduced the people of Folkestone to techniques such as the 'float method', which was developed directly from Folkestone's waterways and its geoscientific data, and questioned how this could be presented via sonic representations (sound & image). By directly practicing this, Craig continuously had a question in mind, how or could we learn about our environment more within this digital age? In the physical happening of this year, it felt wholly needed at this time - and very much naturally acquainted between the two of them - in order for this progression of artist study & practice to have the sufficient time & space to be developed, and to take physical form in a time when we are more comfortably living alongside the pandemic. Just like the nature of the question, 'What's Happening, *Exactly?*', the nature of the

focus seemed to happen by a flawless progression across the last two years. It too made total sense for us at Folkestone Fringe during this time, as we are indebted to a vision and mode of working that has been continuously practised and met in planning/writing funding bids for one the largest programmes that we have delivered yet. To work, over time, with emerging artists that have grown alongside us, makes the work feel ever-lasting beyond this Magic Carpets year, and ever so more worthwhile from our standpoint as an arts organisation working in 2021.

The research and development period undertaken by Mary & Craig throughout July, consisted of many walks and excursions, exclusive trips to Folkestone Museum for archive hunting - through which the pair handled everything from roman roof tiles, to 250 year-old bricks made from local clay dug from the numerous brickfields that used to be around town, to 150 year old pressed plants & seaweed samples - with the fabric of Folkestone always in their hearts and view. There were trips outside of the town to gain new perspectives, and mostly, times of wandering, reporting back together about what 'new' eyes see, and whether that could be met with a reason or answer from those better acquainted with the area. I remember being told from one of Mary's walks, as to how 'looking up' was something she was practicing doing, something which commands us to remember the remnants of signage, what lay before us, and what has been forgotten by new structures. This resonated with me too. From suggesting actions like this, every journey, activity, and conversation felt entirely accessible for others to try and to follow in their footsteps, with Urban Room Folkestone as the hub to store materials & findings, it felt with both artists, that by simply looking and taking in your surroundings, is somewhere where anybody can start on their own journey to *feel* something. Mary & Craig brought relevance to these 'somethings', as well as everything, in making us feel a little less lonely in this arguably neoliberal & individualistic world, and in mind that there were bigger cogs turning away beneath us - and always would be - which keep us both curious and alive.

"I've actually started looking at a lot of bricks, and the colour of the bricks, they range from yellow to a really dark metallic black" - Mary Conroy

One time, we found Mary in an allotment, enlightened to experience what Folkestone residents grow, and what little slices of this place are chosen to be plotted in, and again throughout, she was always working within what exists, what is here, and what we live amongst. Mary also got to know the town by joining us at various events leading up to the official start of the Folkestone Triennial, such as Last Friday's

Folkestone - a community-led initiative through which any resident can show new work, on every Last Friday of the month. We drank beer, witnessed what brought artists here, and how responses differed. Mary got to know these people herself, through which the relationships and friendships gained grew strong, which felt evident when the community workshops came into play, as well as still do to this day. Craig spent much time gathering locations and expanding his research for the areas in which he worked, with 'Pent Happenings' - a title which lends a hand to the nature of 'What's Happening, *Exactly?*', by falling into that neutral space within. In light of Allan Kaprow's first use of the term 'happenings' during the 1950's to describe a range of art-related events, usually related to theatre, with - "...a purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse alogical elements, including non matrixed performing, are organised in a compartmented structure". Referring to this context, it seemed as though the term had been reclaimed and repurposed by Gell, a happening in this case means to be totally attuned alongside what the phenomena of the natural environment calls, through which the response/outcome of 'Pent Happenings' assisted to no order, no manipulation, just to the purity of the findings, and across a further sharing with the world undertaken by an honest creative expression. This chimed with the Folkestone Triennial, and the way in which public art can't intend, as it erupts our daily life in unexpected ways. Reflecting on the work resonates with this in a way which made Folkestone feel wealthy with potential, yet at the same time when comparing the two, vulnerable. The international art festival talked to a macro scale, as the final year of Magic Carpets talked to the micro scale. Yet, both used Folkestone in a way which mined for certain locations in order to reach a deeper meaning so we can all foster new perspectives in our everyday. We can thereby more easily access working for a greater good towards what we should be talking about, and to seek learning & inspiration from what is here, at home.



Flow Rate Events | Taken by Josh Jordan, July 2021

“The Pent stream descends from the chalk hills of the Folkestone Downs to meet the sea at Folkestone Harbour. En route it flows through the urban landscape, between properties and below ground and through the former village of Foord – a community which has experienced flooding on at least four occasions in the past 120 years.” - Craig Gell

Mary & Craig’s focus - both parties, like all Magic Carpets projects do, engage the public in some way across community-based workshops. Throughout July, clay was dug, sculpted, kilned, and water was researched, cherished, and transferred into sonic

representations. Not only did the workshops rely on creative expression and a hands-on approach in order to happen, they also brought the contemporary presence and historical use of such foundations into play in present time with one another. Mary's 'Exploring Folkestone's Clay' invited a small group of the public to join her on a walk down to the Folkestone Warren, through which the group sculpted pinch pots and foraged materials for mark making from coastal clay straight from the earth, with the intention of the pieces to enter the kiln later that week - somewhere where Mary was closely acquainted to. The group not only learnt about the existence and the ethics around using naturally resourced materials, but also could express their own line of creativity around it, with no pressure towards an outcome. Taking a trip to the Warren feels like you're on your own secret mission every time, a mission you want to hide from others, a makeshift trail that you can put your own adventure-head stamp on. Throughout this time, there was an infinite sense of how we could play out the 'What are you made of Folkestone?', through a physical tracking from 110 million years ago to present day, which synced to our humanness and mortality - as Georgie Scott mentioned in her exhibition text, if referred to a person - 'what is someone made of', would usually mean referring to someone's inner character. In peeling back the layers, the same tentative approach had to take shape, between the landscape and its communities.



Folkestone Clay Events | Taken by Josh Jordan, July 2021

“Place is formed over time by the actions of its inhabitants and events that occur there, both natural and through human engineering. These people and events leave traces of the past as building blocks for the future.” - Georgie Scott

In saying this, and what Folkestone Fringe can confidently say our mission is now - and something which has been consistently founded through the 4 years of Magic Carpets - in connecting us with where we live, can have a great impact on people's wellbeing. By getting outdoors, in the knowledge that these foundations still exist in a way of looking after human-kind, and through this, requires us to a level of responsibility and call to action to give back to it. Spending time with Mary put into perspective that her venture was digging into something bigger than ourselves, in the know to come out of one's own thoughts and physically do, see, feel, listen. Through physically digging pre-workshop, Mary found 3 different types of clay which had such different purposes to one another. The format of the workshop itself developed from

this site-specific trip, to as mentioned, the pieces going into the kiln, through which were later used within the final exhibition, and returned - a process that called to an age old memoir of what craftsmanship is, and a process which worked in sync with how the natural world forms. From the physical making, and collaborating with Folkestone residents, Mary's view of what form her final artwork would be, became clearer. The following weekend, the public were invited to Urban Room Folkestone for a drop-in workshop, through which participants made their very own clay tile using locally sourced clay & other materials found in the Folkestone landscape. This stood as key in the development of Mary's project proposal, which elevated the material in a way of testifying where something has come from and the attributes it holds, and at the same time, highlighted the direct response of what the final artwork for Folkestone could look like, whilst physically bringing people together through a co-making process. Materials were used from the beach, the streets, as a way to

“pull things together, from different people, as a kind of map of Folkestone, an artwork, a relic, an artefact of the future of that day in July in 2021.” - Mary Conroy

It became more clear that Mary & Craig's work - like we work with at Folkestone Fringe - always works in a cyclical manner through social practice over time - in speaking to what the fundamentals of living on earth are, giving purpose as to why we are here, and what we should know, and what we should care for. In dealing with these purposes, the work always spoke to the point of the process. The point of coming into Urban Room Folkestone was to make your very own tile from the foraged clay, through using shapes, materials, and various types of clay to make different effects, for the tiles to be fired & combined together to become part of a collective artwork put up on Tontine Street, to be exhibited in time for the opening weekend of the Folkestone Triennial and in line with the artists' final exhibition.

“A lot of the artworks I've exhibited have definitely been augmented through Mary's presence.” - Craig Gell

Craig similarly worked in such ways - through the development of Pent Happenings as response to the question of - 'What's Happening, *Exactly?*' - in comprising geo-scientific data, field studies, and research concerning Folkestone's very own Pent Stream and its environs. The events last year saw the introduction of the 'Flow Rate' events - which was a participant-led data collection in the field to calculate the flow rate of water in the Pent stream, and which grew into birthing a following event titled

'Flow Rate', which saw the sonification of the river flow rate data from the FR event to produce an audio-visual representation. Craig repeated a 'Flow Rate' event for the 2021 audience beginning in July, which to expand, works as: "An 'event score' contains instructions for performing the task by floating an object downstream and measuring its speed. The data can then be fed into a Pure Data (Pd) patch programmed to create a sonification (and visualisation) of the findings." Also as part of his public-facing community workshops this year, Craig hosted an expeditionary workshop titled 'Pent Sounds' which captured field recordings along the Pent stream that would contribute to an online sound map, which also included an introduction to field recording and acoustic ecology. The map now exists indefinitely on Craig's online blog, in demonstrating the various points of recording, and inviting visitors to add their own findings from points along the Pent using a smartphone or recording device. For the Magic Carpets 2021 final exhibition which the two put together for the end of July, Craig's focus expanded to present a sonification of live river level data recorded by the Environment Agency's flood monitoring station on the Pent, alongside his findings from the public participation workshops - a combination of live, collected, and research-based work. Throughout, the physical workshops felt intimate, bridging together ages, and mostly - accessible for all once again, in person, and via online sources through which you can submit data to an ever-accessible, and ever-evolving body of work. This calls to a level of learning from & using the environment in an ethical way to present the activity of Folkestone's waterways, the water levels themselves, their changeability to our actions, and how we learn this creatively - through which, over many years, Craig has proven to consistently demonstrate doing via numerous mechanisms and creations. After much myth, legend, and folk-tale, Craig creates a new mood, through a new way of engaging with what are the foundations of our town, and with what once was an unhidden lifeline, into a present understanding of how we need to respect ecology, and learn from it in need of protecting it. There is something about working one-on-one, led by an artist, where one can gain a sense of ownership of the learning themselves, as well as close inspiration. This is a token to the artist who ensures to include the community workshops and their findings, as a priority in realising the course of their very own project. Two yellow coats, as beacons of their craft, working to pinpoint what Folkestone is made of.



Craig & Mary Workshopping | Taken by Josh Jordan, July 2021

“The Flow Rate event gives people a chance to have a tactile relationship with the environment, by analysing exactly what’s happening.” - Craig Gell

This period of workshopping, and what was created throughout, led up to the build up of the launch of the Folkestone Triennial on July 22nd, which brought the whole of Tontine Street into a street party setting. Folkestone felt like a place you needed to be at that time. The creative community, and the openness to be part of it, chimed with those on their usual route home, and also with an echo of reflection to the street parties of the 70’s. As shops & businesses opened up special menus, music could be heard

from every corner, in a town that felt full of possibility. As Urban Room Folkestone became an artwork itself on the Folkestone Triennial map, it was delightful to see the Magic Carpets exhibition - put together by Mary & Craig - animate the exhibition space there. The Urban Room flung their doors open for that afternoon/evening, as visitors came to see the exhibition for the first time, a space where the walls filled up with their research on placards, demonstrating the sources and courses of their findings from the research and development periods through images and text. 'Pent Stream' could be watched & listened to on loop, with the 'Pent Sound' map as it was on display with carefully considered collected bits of used & found material on the walls, in an island cabinet, and on shelves. Each part fitting that chosen section of space, each material in a collection where it felt like it belonged. The 'What Are You Made of Folkestone?' project line, and some of the images generated from that, made up a zine on display too. Again, this sense of belonging struck me - a similar process of feelings through Mary & Craig's teaching of how we can engage with the natural environment. Everything had its place, and made perfect sense with one another, as context was given by a wrapping of words from Georgie Scott, our Magic Carpets curator. Suddenly, it was all here to show, through times of preparation across each project strand - on our front & the Folkestone Triennial front - unifying to create a sense of place for us all through what we might consider is the macro & micro surrounding this town.



Mary & Craig's Final Exhibition | Taken by Josh Jordan, July 2021

The following Wednesday evening saw us host a discussion between Mary and Craig, which was led by Georgie, that allowed us to learn more about Folkestone's natural environment - the thoughts, aims, & challenges of what getting underneath this means, and how the two projects ebbed and flowed in and outside one another. Listeners shared their experience and knowledge of their own Folkestone footsteps, in light of the many layers of folk tradition we all know some whisper of. This was our modern day tale. Before Mary's departure soon after the Wednesday discussion, the tile artwork proved to be ready to mount. What particularly struck me was the chosen location of this piece, which felt almost ironic as it lay over old pub tiles which once held noticeboards. Now above it, the foreboding sign of 'Party Bar' laid bare - Folkestone's only nightclub. The tiles made from the workshops put together as a mosaic-like wall art, entitled 'What are you made of Folkestone?', chimed with the interest felt across the Folkestone Triennial this year with what artists & practitioners wanted to show - a community mural from the people of Folkestone, for the people of Folkestone. As different imprints across the different materials were shown, the artwork also existed with the full knowledge that something could happen to it - it was not

protected in any way. Like street art, as a palimpsest to the many messages which came before it, and like how everything within this Magic Carpets year has seemed to have taken shape, it lived under the watchful eye and the command of nature. From that first day of production, the monument has stood in position, until very recently, when the natural turn of events and the people within it called, and Party Bar used it as a notice board once again. What I found fascinating about this piece, refers to how Mary described it as 'many' things - whatever a passerby perceived it as, that would be what it is and what it could represent, for who and for when, being unknown. That was the limitless beauty of it, something Mary wouldn't have had any other way too. Craig's legacy similarly lives on through our next festival planning outside of the Triennial year, and through the always accessible online resources he has to offer, which again, calls for the future outline of this project to be up to the people in line with what the environment calls of them. Both are neutral art-spaces. The show was up until August 6th 2021 as tote bags blew against the walls as people came in & out of the artwork whilst leaflets were exchanged, and Urban Room Folkestone assisted in what the spectacle of Folkestone was, and had created.



Closing Talk | Taken by Josh Jordan, July 2021

As we said goodbye to Mary at the very end of July, strangely, it felt as though she had always lived here - in doing the town justice in ways it deserves. Throughout the preparations for the Autumn edition of Folkestone Fringe's Triennial activity, at the same time, our curator Georgie Scott was thinking about the closing Magic Carpets

exhibition put together to fill the exhibition space of Urban Room Folkestone throughout September, which would encapsulate the 4 years of the platform through documentation such as photographs and film. A visible timeline ran around the middle of the exhibition space, with selected images from each year to visually document highlights, as all of the Magic Carpets films created looped on a screen, with context given for each yearly edition alongside a main body of exhibition text. From Siobhan's group getting to know parts of our landscape, to Jacob's choreography outlined in Lithuania, and Folkestone's very own train carriage made by Patrick, to when we hiked up to the sound mirrors & beyond - each visual documentation transported you to that very moment within this platform; each working together to truly tell a narrative from these 'happenings', and where glimpses of nostalgia worked their magic on each and every one of us observing. All experiences rolled up together to portray what Magic Carpets is - and how important it is and has been in bringing together different talents, mediums, and people. Sight & sound worked together in this September show - a time which always feels reflective nonetheless - and led up to the exhibition closing with a discussion which brought our thoughts together. Led by Georgie & Diane, this was to a small audience, but who had great listening intent. Up to present day, this time led onto the 'Magic Carpets Landed' exhibition over at the Magic Carpets headquarters in Kaunas, Lithuania, which brought together all of the curatorial partners like it does after each year to reflect. This time saw some of the artworks made in Folkestone by our local & travelling practitioners feature proudly. The exhibition now runs from the 5th November - 22nd January 2022.

As we now turn to reflect on Magic Carpets - and what stands now to be in reflection of the 4 years - our individual and collective minds spin across those moments captured in the pictures, as we ponder upon what is core about the platform. Thinking about this triggers us to look inward and to learn more about ourselves as a small organisation within this ever-expanding culture, landscape, and urban plan. And as Mary & Craig's work still stands as ever more accessible, we are left to think of the future.

"Folkestone seems to be ahead of the game in terms of using creativity and using art to develop a place or with the idea of place-making in mind, and it broadened my idea of working with people and what it means, and what needs to happen for it to be successful" - Mary Conroy

What has been touched on through this thought-piece is a consistent return to what our place within the natural world is - the point of it, as well as the many infinite strands to it - and what it makes us feel, and what it can make us learn about ourselves in sync with it, something which feels ever the more integral and necessary to be implemented into our everyday lives. With this, comes through the various levels of factors and effects between humankind and the natural world, and how the patterns of human behaviour, the building of landscapes themselves, alongside the way we extract from it, should ride through similar aims, ethics, and a knowingness for what allows us to live. And perhaps creativity is the way to start giving back in leveling out these big ideas, and the crises' that seem too big to contemplate for us as individuals to have influence over. And perhaps the focus to do this, is to actively learn, collaborate and feel inspired by what Mary quotes, "with the idea of place-making in mind". We have to understand what place-making means for us, here. As we take the 'What's Happening, *Exactly?*' into its next phase, and it being always responded to in the present tense whilst it's realised into something once again, we similarly have to continue answering it by thinking in terms of the global, yet acting under the terms of the local. Magic Carpets has required us to do this, and by every stretch, has heavily inspired this question to be a driving force behind our surrounding work, and for our most ambitious Triennial programme delivered yet. This is where place-making can take shape, at where what the macro and micro mean to you, and us, cross over one another, at points where they level out by acting on what lies in front of us. Then surely, how can one not feel a heightened sense of belonging within their place in the world? It is about understanding the responsibility of all of us to a sense of place, from looking deeper to taking action in the micro, with what is deemed necessary from the macro. As Folkestone, influenced by its opportunities and its plethora of countrysides & coastlines, became the 4th best place to visit in the world according to Lonely Planet in October this year, and as Folkestone Fringe becomes one of the UK partners in a European multi-organisational project titled Cultural Bridges, through which we work out what transnational culture means after Brexit - Magic Carpets has taught us before this & throughout how we need to approach what is important on a macro-scale, in the sense of what this can do to protect the local. And now, about how gaining high-profile, can be done right. As we think about the friendships we have made across Europe, it all starts by learning the detail as Mary & Craig so distinctively carried out this year, in utilising space in different ways whilst using artistic ventures & a free expression of creativity to bring us into where these scales can cross-over. We can all learn through exchange. And so perhaps, Magic Carpets helps hand us our mission for the upcoming future - to listen intently to what the macro calls, and always be vigilant

to this; to understand what our part should be within the local; and to share this knowledge through engagement which is accessible; an accessible means that allows people to express themselves with it, so we can all do our bit for ourselves & for the benefit of our collective earth...

... and so we can finally belong.

“It is a rich experience, I learnt a lot about the people of Folkestone through these different projects. It has made me feel like I belong in Folkestone. It's all about connecting people with place, and creating that stronger sense of belonging” - Georgie Scott

“The opportunity to bring people in from the outside, and to see the town through their eyes anew and afresh, has also helped us be more ambitious, and I think also strive to be a better, more relevant organisation locally.” - Diane Dever



‘What are you made of Folkestone?’ co-produced tile panel set in place by Mary, Mitchell, & Georgie for Tontine St | Taken by Josh Jordan, July 2021

... By Olivia Franklin // Folkestone Fringe Team Member, Charity Worker, Freelance Writer