



# **Annual Report**

## **2024 – 2025**



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# FOREWORD

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**Made By Mortals (MBM) has continued to bring lived experience to life through audio stories, film, theatre, interactive workshops and music throughout 2025. We co-produce this work with partners in health and social care, professional artists and diverse groups of people who share their lived experience to improve the lives of others. Our 2025 report highlights where we have continued to innovate from our founding question, 'what is possible from an arts project that has 'community participation' at its heart?'**

Alongside project delivery under our For Research, Training & Events and Armchair Adventures programmes, 2025 has been a year of growth, creativity and planning for the sustainable long-term future of MBM. This puts us in a stronger position than ever before to deliver on our vision and mission. Significantly, this has included the development of a new 5-year business plan, to be supported by a task and finish group, and launched publicly next year.

Financial investment into the organisation continues to grow, which has enabled us to deliver a higher volume of projects with increasing artistic quality, reach and impact. This has included developing new relationships with funding bodies such as the GMCA Foundational Economy Innovation Fund, The Ideas Fund and the Energy Saving Trust.

We're proud that MBM strives for artistic excellence in all of the projects we deliver. This year has seen us work with more freelance writers, film makers, composers and musicians than ever before, alongside further investment in production equipment. Earlier in the year, we worked with a freelance photographer for the first time, on our project 'Stuck', and will continue to bring this visual element into our work more in the future. Our in-house team has also received further development training on audio production, film making and script writing. Investment into the artistic quality and production values of the work we produce is of high importance to MBM, in order to achieve greater social impact. Often the arts can appear 'fluffy' or as 'a nice thing to do', however regardless of who is involved in its creation, we want people to be wowed and inspired when they experience a MBM piece.

The lived experience groups we work with continue to be the beating heart of our organisation and we wouldn't be where we are today without all of them. Thank you to them, our team and the wider MBM community for everything we have achieved together this year.

**Paul & Andy**  
**Directors of Made By Mortals**

# OUR MISSION

Our mission is to empower people to use their creativity and lived experience to make life happier, healthier and fairer for all.

MBM 'brings lived experience to life' through immersive audio stories, film, music, theatre and interactive workshops. However, it's not just the artistic products we make, but our methodology of combining participatory arts practice and the principles of co-production in the creation of this art, which provides the foundation for the impact we strive to achieve.

The MBM community consists of:

- Participants from our two community creative groups.
- Participants from lived experience groups (hosted by our partner organisations or us).
- Individuals who work or volunteer for our partner organisations and invest in our work.
- Our in-house team.
- Freelance artists and subcontractors.

We cultivate our community by asking them to invest in us and each other. Together we do this by aligning our work with three aims:

- **Happier:** Providing high quality creative and cultural experiences for each other and our audiences.
- **Healthier:** Improving each other's health and wellbeing through the art we create and how we create them.
- **Fairer:** Challenging stigma and health and social inequalities within our society and systems.

All of MBM's work is united with these fundamental strategic aims. This includes our For Research, Training & Events and Armchair Adventures programmes, alongside our regular community groups, and our approach to marketing, fundraising and business development. Together, these key aims will help us achieve our vision of a world where people use creativity and lived experience to serve themselves and others.



# THE BIG PICTURE



**150**

CO-CREATION  
WORKSHOPS



**306**

COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS



**47**

PODCASTS, AUDIO STORIES  
& MUSIC PIECES CREATED



**13**

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS



**10**

AUDIO INSIGHT PACKAGES,  
VIDEOS & RESOURCES PRODUCED



**24**

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE  
PARTNERS



**41**

PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS



**13**

VCSFE PARTNERS

TOGETHER WE  
REACHED OVER  
**400,000**  
PEOPLE

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# FOR RESEARCH

MBM supports research teams in making the research process and outputs more inclusive, accessible, beneficial and creative for the people that matter to the research area. Over the last year, we have continued to use our participatory arts approach in research. The community participants we have worked with have bravely shared their lived experience and their imaginations to benefit others, whilst improving their health and wellbeing, and developing new skills through creative participation.

In 2025, we have continued to help make research **more equitable** for communities to participate in, particularly those who are underrepresented and marginalised, ensuring research is done *with* people and not *to* them.

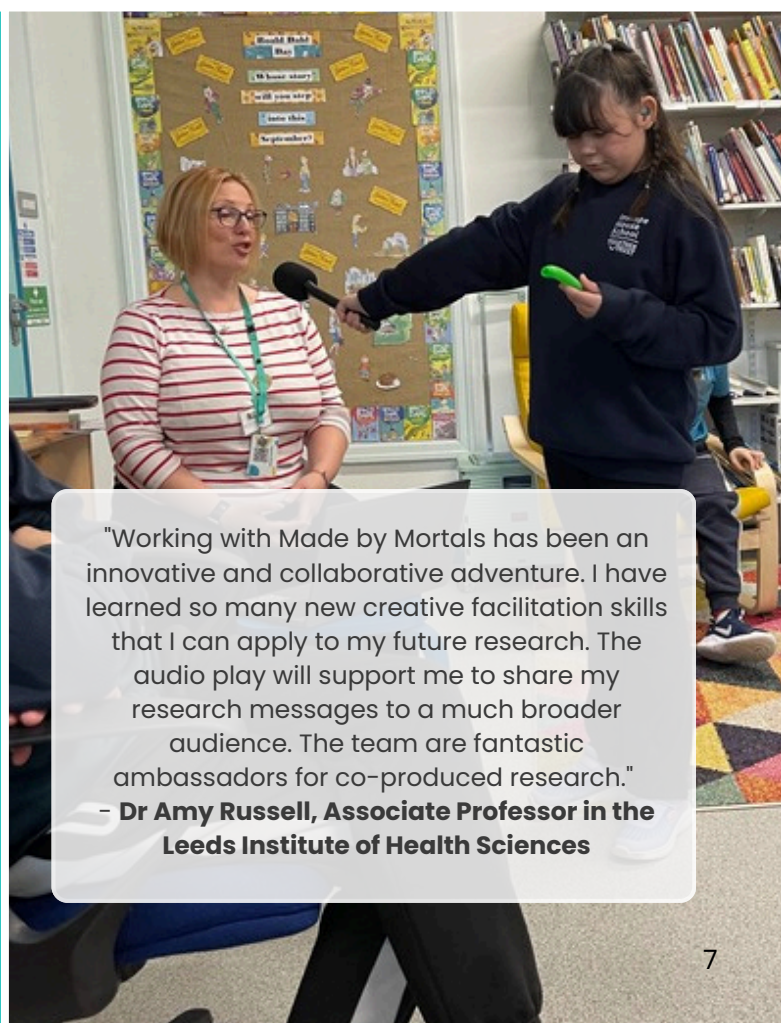
Over the last year, we have supported research teams to discover new learning and creatively share findings on **health and social themes** such as:

- **Learning disability** – promoting reasonable adjustments within primary care and around capacity and consent.
- **Analogue to digital** – which fits with the three core NHS strategies. Providing community solutions that best support people who may struggle and be left behind as we move towards a more digital society.

We have also had a particular focus on improving **creative engagement** for **children and young people**. In 2025, we have:

- Coproduced audio stories, tool kits, music and videos with diverse groups of young people with **lived experience of mental ill-health**, including those from groups with **protected characteristics**, aimed at improving research engagement, and changing policies and practices around mental health crisis.
- Supported **children under 10** to participate in the creation of new knowledge and research outputs through our Armchair Adventures programme.

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"Working with Made by Mortals has been an innovative and collaborative adventure. I have learned so many new creative facilitation skills that I can apply to my future research. The audio play will support me to share my research messages to a much broader audience. The team are fantastic ambassadors for co-produced research."

- **Dr Amy Russell, Associate Professor in the Leeds Institute of Health Sciences**

# NEW ART FORMS



During 2025 we've had the opportunity to use **songwriting and singing as a research dissemination tool** for the first time. We've also begun working on our second **short film**, exploring social care in prisons.

"We can trust you to get the inclusion bit of research right. Everybody can participate and feel safe and there's follow up and there's feedback, and there are outputs that we can share. It's that whole package." **ARC GM**



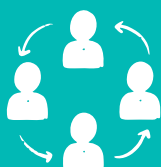
## Sharing our creative methodologies with the sector, we have:



Presented at the Children and Young People's Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement National Collaborative Event, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust Research Dissemination Day, and The North West Research Community Meeting.



Co-authored a paper submitted to the Public Library of Science ONE, a peer-reviewed journal, to be published in 2026.



Been active contributors to the GM Respectful Research Charter.



Supported over 50 community researchers to take a more creative approach.



Launched a blog series revealing how the relational aspects of our practice have been formed and maintained to deliver long-lasting impact.

The older members of our community groups have continued to engage with our For Research programme through their ongoing work on SAFE, a project uncovering the experience of feeling safe again after an instance of financial abuse.

# TRAINING & EVENTS

MBM's training and events programme empowers researchers, health and social care professionals, and VCSFE organisations to deepen their understanding of lived experience through creative, immersive learning. This year we expanded the programme across Greater Manchester and beyond, building on our mission to make research, policy and practice more person-centred by placing community voices at the centre.

The programme brings together musicians, facilitators, researchers and people with lived experience to co-create workshops that challenge assumptions and spark new thinking. Through audio stories, film, forum theatre, live music and discussion, participants are invited to **step into someone else's shoes** and reflect on the barriers, strengths and complexities that shape people's lives. This approach enables participants to build confidence, develop practical skills in co-production and gain a deeper understanding of how lived experience can shape more inclusive work across health, research and community settings.







Throughout the year we partnered with universities in Manchester and elsewhere in the UK, NHS trusts, safeguarding boards and community organisations to deliver a wide range of sessions. Workshops such as A Mile in Their Shoes, Why Can't You Be Normal, STUCK and CRISIS supported participants to explore themes including addiction and recovery, digital inclusion, the realities facing community champions in research, and communication between young people and mental health practitioners.

These projects allowed us to welcome new collaborators, test out new creative formats and reach people working across research, health, local authority and youth settings. The learning generated through these sessions has already helped partners **redesign engagement approaches, strengthen community relationships** and embed more **person-centred** ways of working.



In total, the programme engaged over 300 people, with participants consistently describing the sessions as inspiring, thought provoking and practical in helping them work more confidently with communities. As one public sector worker shared, "A really lovely way to think creatively and use my professional experience to come up with new solutions. Really fantastically facilitated."

Looking ahead, we will begin testing a pay per person model and hosting our own immersive learning conferences, beginning with a White Ribbon Day event in partnership with Oldham's adult and children's safeguarding boards. All the audio stories and resources created through the programme remain publicly available on YouTube and in our Members Area, supporting wider learning and continued professional development.



# ARMCHAIR ADVENTURES



**Armchair Adventures is MBM's programme of work celebrating inter-generational play and creativity. For 2025, the programme included a join-in story podcast for children and accompanying spin-off quiz show, and a school's outreach project.**

We launched season 5 of 'Armchair Adventures', which, amongst others, included episodes about ancient Egypt, William Shakespeare and Greek Gods. We were also commissioned by the Energy Saving Trust to create an episode about the environment and recycling, and by the NHS England North West and the British Society for Immunology to create an episode explaining how vaccinations work for our little listeners. Commissions such as these are incredibly important for the sustainability of the programme and also enables us to reach a wider in-person audience. For the commissioners, Armchair Adventures continues to provide a child friendly, educational and safe platform for them to get their messages directly to their desired audience.



2025 also saw the introduction of Armchair Adventures spin off show, 'UNPACKED', and this has been a real success! UNPACKED enables us to create quality content for our young audience, much quicker than for full episodes. It also enables us to bring young and older generations in the room together to learn, share ideas and have fun! Creating UNPACKED means we're also able to delve deeper into the topics of an episode to embed further learning. All of this helps the future sustainability of the programme.

There is a desire for podcasts to have visual output to complement their audio releases. So, next year we're aiming to film UNPACKED episodes in real time and release on our YouTube channel.



**200,000** LISTENS



**#3** APPLE PODCAST CHARTS  
(KIDS STORIES)



**28** NEW EPISODES



Our two community groups continue to create Armchair Adventures, alongside a team of professional artists. This year we were also delighted to have worked with Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Plastic Shed, Dr Campbell Price (an Egyptologist from Manchester Museum) and Doctors Rachel Isba, Pallavi Patel and Donald Palmer. Working with these organisations and individuals enables us to get expert knowledge and learning into our podcast, which in turn ensures that Armchair Adventures is a safe entertainment platform that parents can trust.

Throughout 2025, we were also very grateful to have continued our partnerships with Yoto, the kids audio player, and Virgin Atlantic, who continue to have us as its in-flight kids audio entertainment.

Armchair Adventures also has a schools outreach project connected to the programme. This enables local children to participate in the development of episode content, ensuring that views are authentic and topics are explained in a child friendly, and suitable way. School children also participate in the recording of episodes, so that listeners can hear other young voices in the podcast to support their own 'join-in' moments. Being involved in the programme means that our partner schools receive free music and drama sessions at a time when funding for such enrichment activities is at an all-time low.

We're very thankful to Millbrook Primary School, Arlies Primary School and Oakfield Primary School for their continued involvement and support.







Throughout the year, we continued to develop relationships with other reputable children's podcasts and this resulted in us being invited to speak at the Podcast Show 2025, the biggest international podcasting festival. Andy represented Armchair Adventures alongside representatives from three other leading kids' podcasts. This has led to further conversations about the launch of a new 'kids podcast collective', watch this space...

Going into next year, we're excited to launch season 6, including working with partners from Parkinsons UK and Groundswell, among others. We'll also create the pilot of a new video format of a 'join-in story' and explore the opportunities of a kids' YouTube channel.



"What a fantastic podcast! Full of fun and interesting facts about all sorts of fascinating topics. Great sound effects and voices, not to mention the songs – a super adventurous listen!"

**5\* Podcast Review**



# COMMUNITY GROUPS

"It makes your heart feel full. You always come away feeling better than when you went in."  
**Group participant**

Our two community groups, Hearts & Minds and the Johnny Barlow Theatre Company, remain at the core of MBM, bringing humour, imagination and lived experience to everything we create. Their work underpins our intergenerational storytelling programme **Armchair Adventures**, shaping both the themes and the creative direction of each episode.

This year, members contributed ideas, characters, music and sound effects to a new series of join-in adventures. The groups also helped launch UNPACKED. Both groups continue to demonstrate how lived experience enriches storytelling, whether through playful improvisation, reflective discussions or musical collaboration.

Beyond Armchair Adventures, members worked with academic and health partners to explore key wellbeing topics such as digital inclusion, ageing well and workplace health. Their creative sessions with NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, the University of Sunderland and Lancaster University with ARC NWC, helped shape new research insights and training materials.

The year also included taster sessions, social gatherings and our much-loved Christmas and summer celebrations, which brought the wider community together to share food, music and achievements.

With 44 active members, both groups are looking forward to another year of storytelling, including upcoming collaborations with Parkinson's UK, Groundswell and partners across health and social care, as well as plenty more brews, biscuits and creative adventures.





# ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This year has seen MBM partner with more freelance artists than ever before. This has included working with writers, composers, musicians, choreographers, sound designers, graphic designers and a photographer. Using a photographer in the promotion and presentation of the products we make, in addition to documenting the creative process, is new for MBM and something we will be exploring more in the future.

## Character Case Study

Working with diverse groups with shared lived experience to create and record a fictional character profile brought to life by **sound design, music and video**.

This new product also includes lived experience **audio insights and community-led solutions**. It is super **shareable** and perfect to **support learning within workforces and influence changes** in practice, policy and strategy.

So far, we are developing a Character Case Study called Struggle, exploring community-led solutions to mental ill-health in the workplace, supported by The Applied Research Collaboration North West Coast. We have also just begun developing a new piece with people caring for loved ones living with cancer called With Dad. This piece is being developed with GM Cancer User Involvement and The Christie, and will launch on World Cancer Day on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

This new product has a price point that opens up our original co-produced products to a wider market.

# 2

## NEW PRODUCTS

### Immersive Learning Conference

This involves MBM hosting a full day conference. The conference begins with a **character creation exercise** where the delegates create a character so they can **project their learning** onto the character as the day unfolds, placing them in the **role of the experts**.

The conference also contains **audio stories and films** co-produced by people with **lived experience of health and care themes** and live original **musical composition**. It is our aim to develop this new product into a pay-per-person offer in the coming year.

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In 2025, we have **raised additional funds** from grants, foundations and trusts to support projects that have been commissioned by our **university and charity partners**. This strategy allows us to **increase the artistic quality** of our work and **increase the social impact** we make.

For example, working with homelessness charity Groundswell, we have secured an additional £70,000 from the Arts Council of England to match their original investment. We are now co-producing audio stories and interactive workshops that will support people with lived experience to change policy and strategy around temporary accommodation. Next year this work will tour Greater Manchester, London and Bristol. We will also be able to create work for the benefit of children and families, supporting their understanding of what it's like to live in temporary accommodation.

Over the next year, we'll also be looking to the Rayne Foundation to enhance our work with the University of Sunderland and Age UK, supporting older people to feel safe after an incident of abuse.

Finally, MBM has been in operation for over eight years now and is **sustainable through our diverse income streams**. This year we have seen an **increase in our digital income**. Although still only about 1% of our overall turnover, this new income stream is achieved through advertising revenue from YouTube, subscription fees from our Armchair Adventures fan club and a licensing agreement with Virgin Atlantic airlines.



# WITH THANKS TO

## **Commissioners, Funders, and Supporters**

Groundswell  
University of Nottingham  
Applied Research Collaboration  
North West Coast (ARC NWC)  
Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester (ARC GM)  
GM Cancer Academy  
NHS GM Cancer Alliance  
Energy Saving Trust  
GM Live Well  
Blackpool Better Start  
Blackpool Council  
The University of Leeds  
Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust  
University of Manchester NHS Foundation Trust  
National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)  
The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies  
Young People's Mental Health Research Centre  
University of Sunderland  
Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board  
Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership  
Ideas Fund  
Wellcome Trust  
British Science Association  
GMCA Foundation Economy Innovation Fund  
GMCA Culture Fund  
Robin Estill Fund  
GM Integrated Care Board  
Arts Council of England  
NHS England North West  
British Society for Immunology  
Lancaster University  
University of Leeds

## **Schools and Colleges**

Oakfield Primary  
Millbrook Primary  
Arlies Primary  
Redgate Primary  
Xaverian College

## **Community Partners**

Bury People First  
Bloom Allotment at LEAP  
Wai Yin  
Awakening Minds  
Guide Bridge Theatre  
Early Break  
MFT CAMHS  
Alder Hey Children's Hospital  
Dipak Dristi  
St Gabriel's Place of Welcome  
New Life Church  
Action Together

## **Armchair Adventures special guests**

Caitlin Atherton  
Dr Campbell  
Dr Rachel Isba  
Dr Pallavi Patel  
Dr Donald Palmer

## **Musicians**

Liz Hanks  
Hannah McCabe  
Svetlana Mochalova  
James Dee  
Mike Smith

## **Writers**

Becky Prestwich  
Natalie Beech

## **Actors**

Gemma Cousins  
Russell Richardson  
Jennifer Reid  
Jessica Ellis  
Noah Fox  
Hannah Donelon

## **Consultants/subcontractors**

GOTO Creative  
MIC Media  
Sophie Smith  
Hallidays HR  
Blueprint Studios  
Lumb Accountancy



# FURTHER INFORMATION

Thank you for your interest in Made by Mortals. For more information on how we can support your project, please get in touch, we'd love to hear from you. The best way to reach us is by calling **0161 804 2078** or emailing **admin@madebymortals.org**. Alternatively, if you prefer, you can drop us a message via any of our channels below.



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