

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE ONE STITCH AT A TIME

How can we raise awareness of important issues and encourage positive change without sounding like we're berating or lecturing? An effective campaigner wants to call people in rather than calling people out. A particular method for campaigning for change is proving rather adept at this. Across the world, nimble-fingered crafters are turning creative hobbies into tools for social change. Meet the craftivist: a mash-up of craft and activist.

In contrast to angry words in a newspaper article, or shouting at a public protest, craftivists plan their creations with quiet consideration, hoping to engage and persuade their audience thoughtfully. Craft-based campaigns are eye-catching, taking people by surprise, for example, with cross-stitched messages pinned overnight to public fencing. Passers-by might be playfully invited to consider unfairness that needs redressing, presented with useful information or simply have their day brightened by a positive message or a beautiful piece of public craft.

The UK has seen successful campaigns such as that of the Craftivist Collective to persuade M&S to pay staff the living wage. Lead by Sarah Corbett, stitchers created personalised messages embroidered on M&S-bought handkerchiefs to appeal to board members.

Women's Institute members attracted politicians' attention with offerings of beautifully embellished green textile hearts to ask for action on the climate change emergency. Close to home, artist Helen Davies and historian Jenny White responded to Manchester Town Hall's set of only male statues by adorning them with the crocheted faces of famous local women including suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst and



novelist Elizabeth Gaskell. Did the statues look a little absurd? Of course! But so is an institution that ignores the achievements of half the population. Even closer to home, we have our very own Chorlton Craftivists. Set up during the early days of COVID by local craft enthusiasts who connected on social media, we raised awareness of NHS workers' hard graft to keep us safe, while they worked long hours without sufficient protective equipment. Local people who had never met in real life made blue and white granny squares, crocheted viruses and knitted rainbows to create a display outside Chorlton Precinct.

The group has gone on to draw people's attention to the realities of food poverty in the UK by decorating a post-box with a knitted Christmas dinner, contrasted with an empty plate embroidered with 'No-one should go hungry'.



Labels were added inviting passers-by to join campaigns run by the Trussell Trust foodbank and support local organisations providing food to people in need.

If your fingers are itching to get crafty for a cause, new members are welcome to join the upcoming campaign, *Blinded by the Light*, raising awareness of the detrimental effects of artificial lights on wildlife and humans. An outdoor display is planned to feature in this year's Chorlton Arts Festival, *On the Road Again*, running 11-19 September. Find out more at www.chorltoncraftivists.org.uk and join the friendly group at www.facebook.com/groups/chorltoncraftivists



Creative hobbies offer practical and therapeutic benefits. They can also help communities connect and grow through shared creative endeavours that can positively challenge power holders and institutions. Next time you, as a crafter, hear a derogatory comment about your crochet or sewing being a trivial pursuit, you can explain that these hooks and needles are the tools of imaginative, passionate campaigners for social change.

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References:

How to Be a Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest by Sarah Corbett.
Craftivism: the art of craft and activism by Betsy Greer