

THIS IS CROYDON

OUR STORIES

Photo: Chris O'Donovan for Croydon Council.

KATE SCANLAN

SCANNERS INC, IGNITE GRANT RECIPIENT

During *This is Croydon*, London Borough of Culture, the funding scheme, **Ignite**, supported local people and community arts organisations to get directly involved in the programme. Many grant recipients were able to use their award as leverage on applications to funders, attracting an additional £75,000 of investment to the borough.

IN NUMBERS

Ignite grant scheme

During London Borough of Culture:

27 large and medium projects were funded

Kate Scanlan, founder of street culture organisation Scanners Inc, received an Ignite grant for Popin' Pete's Pop Shop and Friends. With this and further fundraising, a 2,000-foot unit at Centrale and Whitgift Shopping Centre was transformed into a festival to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Hip Hop. Reflecting on the year, Kate talks about bringing creativity and unity to the high street and the significance of working in her home borough.

Tell us about the history of Scanners Inc and working in Croydon.

I formally constituted my company in 2018, but I've been trading as Scanners Inc since 2013. I grew up in Norbury and Thornton Heath but never knew you could work as an artist in Croydon. In 2018,

I was working at Battersea Power Station, and thought "Right, I'm going for it." I quit my job and said, "I'm going to focus on my own practice and build from my home borough".

You certainly achieved a lot during London Borough of Culture. Tell us more.

I got £10,000 to do Popin' Pete's Pop Shop and Friends. It's a project I've been running for 10 years with a dance artist from America, who is a pioneer of popping. For London Borough of Culture, I pitched the idea to bring the Pop Shop into a retail unit as a community resource. Let's face it, central Croydon has a lot of empty retail units.

We had classes, panel discussions and parties, recorded a podcast and a held a dance battle. There was always a DJ. There were MCs, graffiti artwork on the walls, and the chance to do your own art in the Art Zone. It was a very immersive experience. This is Hip Hop culture.



Beyond the Pop Shop, what else did you organise during the year?

I did three other events in the Whitgift Centre and workshops in schools to celebrate 50 years of Hip Hop, which was great and helped tell Croydon that the Pop Shop was coming. Then, I was asked to be involved in the closing weekend. I was given eight puppets of Croydon's musical icons, a small budget, and five weeks to put together a show that would

be part of the London Borough of Culture finale. It was hard work, but an incredible opportunity. It's been a really rich year.

What did it mean to you to run these events in Croydon?

It was a privilege to do projects in my home borough. Croydon has a reputation, which is sad because the people are great, and we deserve world class opportunities. I love that I can be producing an event and someone I went to primary school with will walk past.

What was it like working with local artists?

I paid 44 artists, many from Croydon. I didn't even realise some of them lived in Croydon! I knew there were artists working in Hip Hop here, but I discovered so many that I never knew were based here - like DJ Shortee Blitz, who's lived here 15 years. I only found out because I bumped into him walking through Croydon Hospital car park!

What about the participation?

It was an amazing turnout – 1,100 people visited the Pop Shop. 67% were from London and, of those, 23% from Croydon. The age range was three to 60+. We had a lot of old school, UK Hip Hop pioneers in their late 50s and early 60s. An artist I know, Simone Sistarelli, has a project that teaches popping to people with Parkinsons. They came and took a class. I'll never forget one dancer arriving using walking sticks, then doing a 90-minute class. There were professional dancers through to hobbyists - such a mixed group of people.

What has been the most fulfilling aspect?

I've always wanted to create spaces for local people, especially young people, to come together. Creating intergenerational spaces through music, dance and art is a signature of Scanners Inc. Some young people don't have positive relationships with older generations, and vice versa. The Pop Shop is a space where this happens – there is equity and expertise in all generations. Young people aren't always welcome in town centres, so I love that so many events in Croydon's London Borough of Culture year centred young people and made them feel welcome.

What setbacks did you face?

The marketing of events was challenging. Suddenly, from there being nothing, there was everything. It needed a calendar to signpost everything that was on as part of the year.

My tiny team and I turned into our own street team – we hit the streets with flyers and posters. By the end, the Pop Shop was everywhere - lifts, shops, the station. I knew Poppers would travel globally to attend and I was right, but I wanted local people to experience it. I was proud that they did. I think any setbacks were overcome with the sheer good will of the Culture Team, local artists and local people who all wanted the year to be brilliant.

Have any positives come from the year?

London Borough of Culture provided space for new voices, and I really welcomed the opportunity to do work I'm passionate about. I feel excited that there is a commitment to

developing arts and culture in Croydon and that everybody had an opportunity to get to know the people who make the decisions. It feels like more of an open playing field.

What's next for you and Croydon?

My mission with Scanners Inc is to connect people through the arts. Connection is the medicine we need in society today. The Pop Shop solidified my desire to open a long-term community culture hub in the very unit I had in Centrale. I love that unit, and I have a brilliant plan. Now I need to fundraise and develop partnerships. I'm also talking with other boroughs about initiatives in public spaces, so, please do get in touch with me and we can create some magic.



This is Croydon Finale, Croydon Remix. Photo by Vipul Sangoi

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