



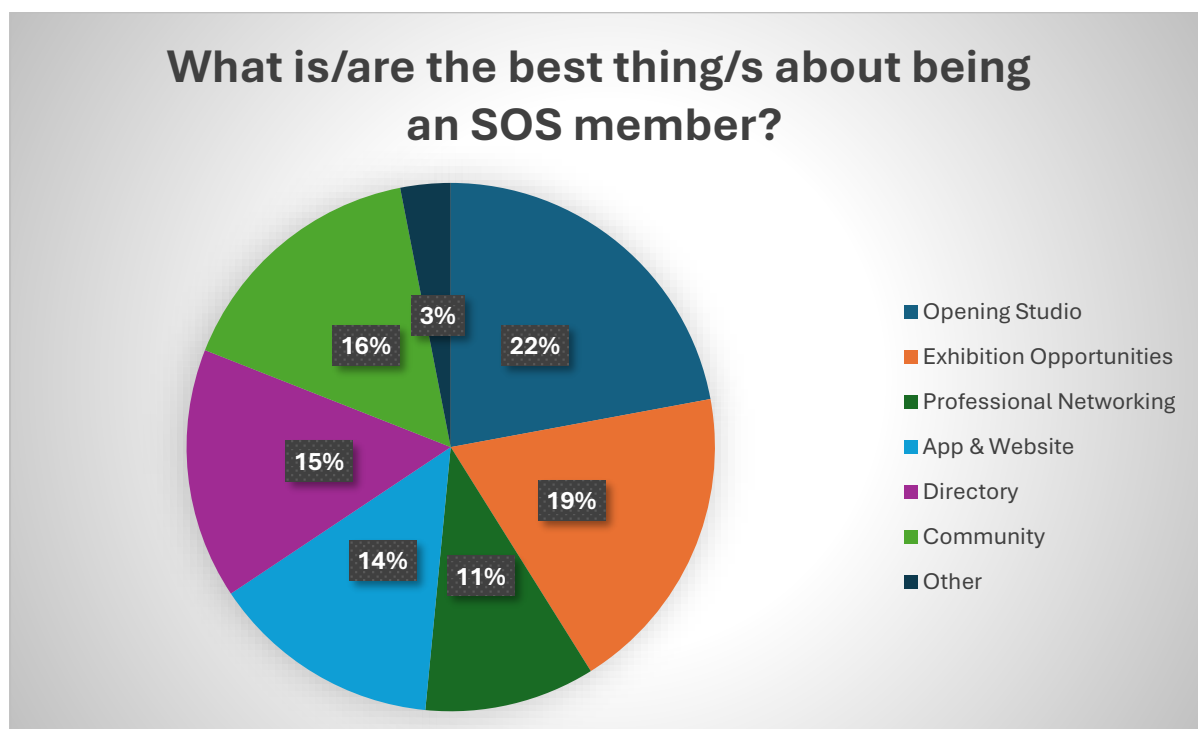
MEMBER SURVEY JULY 2024

This survey was carried out via an online questionnaire shortly after the main June Suffolk Open Studios event in 2024. In total, 44 members (opening and non-opening) completed and submitted the survey form. This accounts for just under a quarter of the total membership that year. As this sample was self-selecting, we do not know whether those members who chose not to complete the survey were generally satisfied, as in they had nothing in particular to report, or whether those who were very happy/unhappy felt more motivated to send feedback. The results should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

Below you will find both a visual analysis of survey responses, plus a listing of the narrative answers given, including any actions taken subsequently by the SOS Committee in response to specific feedback or suggestions. These new initiatives demonstrate how the ideas put forward via the survey (which were later discussed at the AGM) have had a real influence on the way Suffolk Open Studios operates. SOS is an organisation run by artists for artists, with its steering group elected from and by its members, so the Committee would encourage all members to complete the June 2025 survey when it comes around, and to help shape its future.

Question 1: What is/are the best thing/s about being an SOS member?

The chart below shows the distribution of responses received. Members were allowed to submit more than one response to this question.



It is interesting to note the relative importance of 'community' and 'networking'. General visibility (via county-wide promotional materials and members' group exhibitions) is also a key point of focus.

1b. If you answered 'Other' above, please share further details here:

- "I have not been welcomed into the Suffolk Open Studio community. It doesn't seem that you are interested in galleries taking part."

[ACTION TAKEN: Committee Member, Leigh Driver, contacted and subsequently visited the gallery in question, where she had a long and positive conversation with the owner on site. Although the lack of footfall at this location during the Open Studios event in June could in part be attributed to its location, Leigh, as Membership Secretary apologised for the perceived lack of welcome and has taken steps to help all new SOS members feel valued and integrated into the collective. Leigh also reached out to other Gallery members by email to ask for their suggestions as to how they could be made to feel more welcome in future. Those that responded said they were very happy with their SOS membership.]

- "Feeling I have a presence in the art world and a goal each year to work towards."
- "In previous years the best thing about being an Associate Member of SOS has been having an online presence on the website and also taking part in the group exhibitions. However, I don't have an online presence this year because I joined after the cutoff point in Jan and the website isn't working for me. Every other associate member's images are linked to the internet so if a search types their name in their images come up."

[ACTION TAKEN: Joining as an Associate Member after the cutoff date for the Directory does not affect the way in which a member's listing appears on the website, and the listing of this member has been checked and is working correctly. How a member appears in internet search results is, unfortunately, largely beyond our control. In the case of this member, the Google 'web crawler' seems to have chosen to feature the Category page in which the artist is listed, as opposed to their individual listing, although a Bing search does take you directly to the artist's listing on the SOS site, as desired. We have subsequently edited the artist's listing and modified the website URL they provided to include their listing's page name in the hope that this will improve search results in future.]

- "Meeting interested and interesting people who are also makers, many of whom come to me for the 'textiles'"
- "Can't find a positive, unfortunately. It has been a terrible and confusing experience."

[ACTION: This reply set alarm bells ringing, and membership secretary, Leigh Driver, immediately reached out to the member in question to offer apologies,

support and assistance, but unfortunately received no reply. Nevertheless, in response, Leigh has put together a ‘Welcome Guide’ (in PDF form) which will be sent to all new members when they join. Hopefully this will minimise confusion and emphasise the importance of contacting the Committee at the earliest opportunity should any issues arise. It has been the Committee’s experience that nearly all of the (rare) member complaints it receives have come about through simple misunderstandings, incorrect assumptions or unmet expectations and is making greater efforts towards clarity in its future communications.]

- “Instagram cross-sharing”

Question 2: Which weekends were you open this year?

Week 1:	13 studios of survey respondents were open on 1/2 June
Week 2:	21 studios of survey respondents were open on 8/9 June
Week 3:	15 studios of survey respondents were open on 15/16 June
Week 4:	17 studios of survey respondents were open on 22/23 June
Week 5:	15 studios of survey respondents were open on 29/30 June

Number of weekends open:

One	15 respondents opened for one weekend only
Two	16 respondents opened for two weekends
Three	4 respondents opened for three weekends
Four	3 respondents opened for four weekends
All five	2 respondents opened for all five weekends
None	4 non-opening Associate members responded to the survey

3a. How many visitors did you have across the whole event? If you didn’t count them, an estimate would be fine. AND 3c. How did this compare with your expectations?

Below are the individual experiences of the artists who answered this question:

- Studio open for one weekend: **2** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for five weekends: **40** – Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for two weekends: Sorry forgot to count – Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for five weekends: **None** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for one weekend: **25** (15 Open Studios, 10 passing traffic) – Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for two weekends: **About 10** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for two weekends: **25** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for one weekend: **10** – Lower than I had hoped for

- Studio open for three weekends: **18** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for one weekend: **35** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for two weekends: **45** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for two weekends: **16** – Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for one weekend: **18** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for two weekends: **Around 40** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for one weekend: **Hundred plus** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for five weekends: **5** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for four weekends: **30-40** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for one weekend: **31** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for one weekend: **50+** - Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for one weekend: **6** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for one weekend: **23** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for two weekends: **6** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Showcase open for two weekends (with others): **350** – Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for one weekend: **50** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Showcase open for two weekends (with others): **200+** - Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for three weekends: No visitor numbers given
- Studio open for two weekends: **50** - Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for two weekends: **60-70** - Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for three weekends: **60** – About what I was expecting
- Showcase open for two weekends (with others): **145** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for two weekends: **45** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for one weekend: **15** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for three weekends: **100** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for one weekend: **Approx 60** – About what I was expecting
- Studio open for two weekends: **15** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for one weekend: **About 20** – About what I was expecting

- Studio open for four weekends: **15 approx.** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for two weekends: **37** – Exceeded my expectations
- Studio open for two weekends: **2** – Lower than I had hoped for
- Studio open for four weekends: **10** – About what I was expecting

One conclusion that can be drawn from the above responses is that the degree to which a member's Open Studios experience matched with their expectations depended on what those expectations were in the first place, and whether or not they were realistic. Long-standing members of Suffolk Open Studios tend to know what to expect. They understand that there can be good weekends and bad weekends, as well as good years and bad years for visitor numbers and sales (plus you can have good sales from low visitor numbers and vice versa).

If visitor numbers were lower than the artist hoped for, it was easy for them to become despondent and demoralised. Members who have participated in Open Studios for many years realise that low footfall is not an indictment of their worth as an artist or the quality of their work, even though it may feel that way at the time. Nor is it necessarily a failure on the part of the Suffolk Open Studios organisation. Many factors come into play: the weather, the location, how many years the artist has been showing their work i.e. their personal following, how long the artist has been established in the area, whether there were other events taking place locally, nationally or internationally (e.g. major sporting events covered on TV) that competed. One further piece of analysis that will be carried out in due course is to map the responses geographically, but in the meantime, it would be fair to say that it is impossible to come up with a formula that would *guarantee* a successful June event, and of course that in part depends on an individual's definition of 'success'.

Some words of wisdom, shared by long-term members at the AGM, suggested that a good strategy might include the following:

- Not spreading your audience thinly across all the weekends in June, but instead, concentrating on **one or two weekends only** (the first two weekends seem to have the best footfall across the county).
- Doing **a lot of your own targeted local publicity**, in addition to that carried out county-wide by Suffolk Open Studios: sending invitations to your mailing list or handing them out at social gatherings or classes you attend, putting something in the parish magazine, and holding a Private View (i.e. have an 'event' within the event).
- **Coordinating opening dates with nearby artists** (if you are fortunate enough to have some), which can be taken one step further with the organisation of a local arts trail for which your own maps can be printed and distributed, or holding a pre-event showcase exhibition with nearby artists.

To an extent, it's a case of trial and error, albeit informed by the pooled knowledge and experience of long-term SOS members. What works for one artist may not work for another. Members are playing the long game here, building (hopefully) year on year. Raising their profile, becoming established within their area and their sector, making useful connections and building relationships that may be a slow-burn but which could sustain them for years to come, particularly if their directory/website listing states that visits by appointment at other times are possible. Having said that, even established artists can have a blip from time to time. It's just not predictable unfortunately, but there are things you can do to maximise your chances of success, and they are contained in our PDF "Ideas for a Successful Open Studios Event" updated and emailed to members annually.



3c. Which was your busiest weekend?

It was quite difficult to analyse the data for this question as several respondents did not answer while others only opened for one weekend, so it was a moot point.

Others wrote:

- "Didn't open this year – new location"
- "Only did first weekend"
- "Both the same," or "even," or "none."

Moreover, when people answered "the last one" or "the second one" – it wasn't clear whether they were referring to the event as a whole or to the specific dates they

themselves had their studio open. The wording for this question will need to be revised for the 2025 survey.

From the 22 answers where specific dates were mentioned the data was split across the event as follows:

First weekend	Second weekend	Third weekend	Fourth weekend	Fifth weekend
5	10	0	4	3

Anecdotally we are told by long-time members that the first two weekends of the event tend to be busiest.

3c (cont.) Can you think of a reason why?

This question is trying to dig deeper into the reasons for higher footfall on certain days:

- “The weather maybe – not hot enough for the coast, not wet enough to stop people going out. My visitors were other SOS artists who I’d met through being a member/on the committee”
- “Nope. I carried out a good social media campaign, but SOS did not collaborate or expand on this.”

[ACTION: The Committee now has two volunteer members working on social media, one of whom is coordinating promotion and publicity across all forms of media for every SOS event. In addition, a **dedicated email address** has been set up to which members can email their images and information to be posted on the SOS social media accounts. If members remember to tag SOS (@suffolkopenstudios and/or #suffolkopenstudios) in their own posts, the social media team will like and share as many as they see – otherwise they are completely at the mercy of the algorithm. As a matter of policy, SOS does not ‘collaborate’ on social media posts. If you would like to be promoted on the SOS social media accounts, please make sure to provide the team with a ‘ready-to-go’ post (i.e. images and text) as they do not have time to create these from scratch. For SOS2024, the social media team (of two) worked incredibly hard and spent an awful lot of their time liking, commenting, sharing and re-posting to the extent that they neglected their personal social media accounts somewhat and the Committee would like to thank them sincerely for a magnificent effort.]

- “The weather was nicer? Last weekend for people to enjoy Open Studios?”
- “I think it was because the village fete was at the end of my road and I had a stall with a sign telling people to come along (only got about 6 though!!).”
- “Unexpectedly, weekend one was fairly busy. This was surprising because it was the only studio open in [the town] that weekend.”
- “There is a LOT going on during weekends in June in the Coastal area.”

- “The weather was slightly better! The venue is in a country park so majority of visitors would be park users. If weather is horrible the footfall is lower.”
- “Three studios open in the village though not everyone I asked visited all three. Weather was good-ish.”
- “Weather – not too hot & not rainy. Other things on locally to draw passing trade. A supportive post from our local council announcing my open studios. And people fresh and raring to go into the SOS month.”
- “No, sorry!”
- “Publicity of the showcase plus SOS brochure/app and social media and word of mouth.”
- “Define busiest? Most people or most money, the answer would differ for either question. Busiest in terms of people 22/23 – better weather. Busiest in terms of money 15/16 – bad weather, got to do something and spend money.”
- “The weather was much better this weekend compared to the next weekend which may have had an impact.”
- “I was only open for that weekend.”
- “Lots of friends came for the first weekend I opened.”
- “Not enough visitors to be statistically significant.”
- “I’ve always found it best to concentrate on one weekend and not spread through month. I’m sure I miss a few people, but neighbours opened every weekend and had 6 people in total over other 3 weekends (they were also very busy first weekend).”
- “Broad answer: I promoted my two SOS weekends at all my other events and I put my postcard/business card in every one of the directories I distribute. Having been a member for over a decade (and one year opening all five weekends) I realised that only doing two makes folk focus and make the effort. Also having done this for so long means many return visitors sometimes over a span of years – people get used to you and your work and word of mouth plays out over time.”
- “No.”
- “Some friends and family rocked up as well as visitors.”
- “Weather was better on these days. I noticed no visitors on any of the Sundays.”
- “Just think there may be too many studios open and people weren’t sure of when they were open. I think ideally it should be just two weekends. Concentrate the mind.”

[ACTION: The idea of a compulsory weekend or cutting the length of the event to just a couple of weekends was discussed at the AGM and on balance it was agreed that it was important to hold the event over every full weekend in June to accommodate as many artists as possible. However, the Committee is strongly encouraging artists to try to open on one or both of the first two weekends if they can as the majority of promotion will be concentrated at the beginning of the event, they tend to have the highest footfall anyway, and it helps the public if the majority of studios are open at the same time. Visitors will not be able to visit everyone in one or two (or even four) days, but visitors tend not to visit everyone anyway and at least this would help them make their selection.]

- “Over the four days there were quiet times, and then a steady stream. No reason I can think of why this was so.”
- “Because it was good weather and people were out and about.”
- “I was not open on the Saturday, only Sunday due to unforeseen circumstances. However, weather did contribute to possible lower numbers on the Sunday.”
- “Relocated to Suffolk – new studio not finished in time.”
- “Weather and others opening locally, although some people came specifically to see me, which was nice.”

3d. Which was your quietest weekend and why?

- “I hadn’t paid to have my work showcased on socials and as no one knows who I am, and it’s [name of town].”

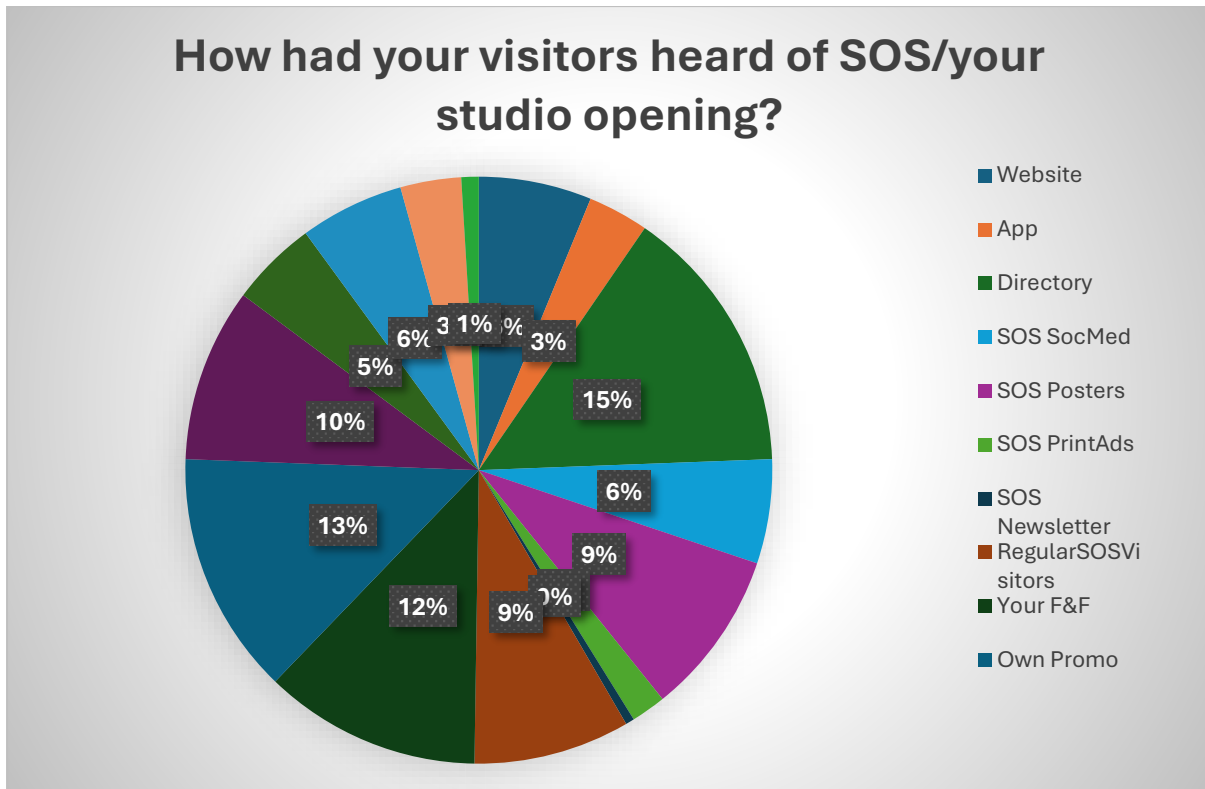
[ACTION: Membership Secretary, Leigh Driver, contacted this member to explain that SOS never charges members for featuring their work on its social media accounts and the member accepted this was a misunderstanding and retracted their comment.]

- “Last – weather and other people closed nearby.”
- “DNA - As a new member the organization didn’t welcome or support me.”
- “1/2 June - Because I made a mistake, thinking this was the weekend I was open – so next door came but no one else.”
- “Five weekends is too many.”
- “29/30 - There were a lot of other things happening in the area – weather wasn’t great.”
- “29/30 - Pos the weather.”
- “2nd weekend in June – No [idea why]”
- “4th weekend – No visitors.”

- “Weekend 4 – “Generally the weather was poor. My studio isn’t near any others. I only had about 10 people who didn’t know me.”
- “I think it’s because I live in [name of area] at the northerly point of Suffolk and there aren’t many artists in the area.”
- “2nd weekend – 15/16 June – The weather was pretty grim and there were also several local craft events taking place on the Saturday. I also hadn’t realised it was Father’s Day on the Sunday.”
- “15/16 – No, sorry!”
- “Weekend 5 (my second and last weekend) but not by much – it was nearly as good as the first. – One of the days was rainy and grey. Perhaps by the end of the month, prospective visitors have studio fatigue (though none expressed this – just my speculation).”
- “Weekend 5 (Sunday).”
- “15/16 June – Heavy rain didn’t help.”
- “15/16 June”
- “First Saturday (only one person all day) – I am just too far out on a limb I think!”
- “22/23 June – Weather not great? People possibly wanting to watch Euros (football)?”
- “Both”
- “First, third and fourth – Not really, several people who had promised to come didn’t make it at all. The weather could have played a role but it’s probably that I’m on the edge of the county and my offer wasn’t enticing enough to drag people over here when there were no other artists in the vicinity to visit and make the trip worthwhile.”

Artists seem to agree that the weather plays a significant role. This is particularly true for artists who display their work outside with no cover. There had been some speculation that June would be too hot – but as it turned out wind and rain were issues for many. Some members were able to link with other events taking place locally to drive their footfall whereas others found them to be too much competition. There seem to be a greater number of ‘other events’ taking place in eastern, particularly the coastal, parts of the county while west Suffolk is fairly quiet in June. West Suffolk has been described by Arts Council England of being ‘culturally frozen’ to the degree that it funded a Creative People and Places project in the area in an attempt to raise engagement with professional arts. West Suffolk artists tend to have some pre-existing cultural inertia to contend with while the eastern side of the county is often seen as more ‘arty’. Further research could be carried out to ascertain the truth of these statements.

4. How had your visitors heard of SOS/your studio opening.



This chart shows that the split is roughly 50:50 between SOS promotional efforts and those carried out by the artists themselves.

If you answered Other above, we'd love to hear more here...:

- “We didn’t do an art trail this year, although I did do a map, no one seemed to be interested though.”
- “I didn’t ask visitors in depth where they heard of the event.”
- “I wasn’t aware of visitors due to the app or directory. I don’t ask everyone but know most came in response to my own publicity or they were friends.”
- “Passing footfall.”
- “We held a very successful private view before the showcase exhibition opened.”
- “A group of us organised ‘Summer ’24’ Showcase at Holton Lodge Barn Gallery. We opened for 9 days – 11 to 5, 1st to 9th June so covered weekends 1& 2. Footfall, sales and commissions exceeded expectations. SOS members taking part in the exhibition that were open on Weekends 3, 4, and 5 were promoted during those 9 days. At least 12 of my 60 visitors had come to the exhibition and as a result wanted to see my studio and full range of work.”
- “Only one group of people (two were local -with a couple of friends visiting from Liverpool) had any knowledge of the SOS network/directory. They had spent the previous day going around Suffolk and then on the Sunday 9th came to Asylum studios and my way. They did buy a painting for £195 so that was good!”

5. What do you think worked well for you this year?

- “Networking as a member of SOS. Social media.”
- “Video posted by SOS. My own videos, publicity posted on social media outlets. Designed my own ‘flyer’ advertising my weekends with some images, website, details, times and dates. Publicised by other local SOS members and I in return.”
- “Word of mouth and social media.”
- “Show at Snape Maltings [SOS launch exhibition?] meant I was more prepared with cards... which sold well. Also was able to let people know of the additional opportunity to see work. The other thing that worked well was being part of a studio trail... three of us in our village plus others nearby. We had a flyer, but it would have been more effective if it had been ready in time for the SOS website/app.”
- “No idea – I used the same signage, bunting, leaflet dropping etc. and got much lower footfall overall :(“
- “I had proof that the printed trail that I created and shared with some other artists close to me was being used.”
- “Having two of us at the same venue worked well (ceramics and jewellery)”
- “Brochure” [SOS directory]
- “The weather was good on both weekends. This meant people combined a walk with a studio visit.”
- “Organised an art trail and had 9 artists, helped with promotion and putting posters up.”
- “Summer ’24 Showcase made a huge difference. A total of 21 artists and artisans (the majority of whom were SOS full members) paid to hire Holton Lodge Barn Gallery. The core organising group ensured that every artist/artisan had at least 5 pieces of work. We had promotional postcards, paid advert in the SOS Directory, free promotion in Halesworth Hoot (including an editorial) and Southwold Organ. There was a well- attended PV and the gallery owner organised two visiting art groups which we co-hosted.”
- “I worked really hard to promote myself and I was really pleased with how word spread. As well as handing out the SOS Directory I made my own leaflets and posters, and asked for them to be displayed in my local bakery, pub and holiday lets. I also gave leaflets to nearby artists and community groups like WI. I asked our parish council to help promote me to our local community, which they did. I tried to be really active on social media and was delighted with the SOS support in sharing my posts and featuring me on their profiles and emails. I also made signs for the road to help direct visitors and capture passing trade, and baked

cakes to have with cups of tea to make my studio extra welcoming. Oh! And I offered gift wrapping and got a really inexpensive card reader so I could take payments in formats that suited my visitors. I also aimed to have examples of work in its different stages so I could engage with interested visitors.”

- “Mostly my visitors and more importantly my customers were as a result of my own efforts in promoting and inviting collectors to attend.”
- “Organisation of the group [Summer ’24 Showcase] was really good, as was the publicity. Artists invited their fan clubs to the private view, and we made a lot of sales.”
- “Having a venue in a busy town worked well to get the visitor numbers up but I’m not sure if connecting it with Open Studios made much difference. I covered the hire costs over the whole week but not much more.”
- “Lovely venue.”
- “Good signage leading to the Studio, promotion of the Directory at local shops etc.”
- “Having had a bit of a fallow year the pressure of opening spurred me to produce an unexpected new body of work. Most of my visitors were interested and positive about my work, luck?”
- “Personal invitations.”
- “Lots of my own publicity – flyers for a long time beforehand in many venues, email out and Instagram as a reminder. My yoga teacher also kindly offered to forward her classes and several who knew me or lived locally came due to that.”
- “Not sure anything went particularly well but it was a good experience talking to people about my work for the first time. People said they enjoyed looking at my work and hearing how I use different media.”
- “Nothing.”
- “I’m always amazed how many people come and it’s got better every year. Probably majority of people are regular or come from my own promo. Quite a few came from just our road signs. I gave out loads of brochures [SOS directories] as lots of people didn’t find one this year.”
- “Really admire how active social media was (having done it for SOS myself in the past) full and varied posts.”
- “It was good to be part of the [name of town] art trail, because we are only a very small town so combined forces with those artists hiring [a local venue].”
- “The weather was quite neutral!”

- “My word of mouth dropping booklets [directories] in trickles throughout the month down the Woodbridge thoroughfare.”
- “As only 6 people (strangers) came via the directory I would say that having a private view with friends and family really helped and pushing it to contacts on Instagram.”
- “It was my first opening and I had a lot of friends support me – opening on the HWAT a few weeks before helped to spread the word too.”
- “The Snape Exhibition [SOS Members’ Spring Group Exhibition] was good.”
- “This was my first time opening with SOS and I had only moved into this new studio six months ago so still establishing myself. My previous studio was in Essex, so I wasn’t expecting previous studio visitors to travel out to see me. I wasn’t expecting to have lots of visitors, but it was steady. I know though from my SOS neighbour that it was quieter than usual. It helped that there were two of us at the same location. I think the directory, maps and website area all a great way to promote artists.”
- “My studio was reasonably tidy, and the garden looked wonderful!”
- “Given the poor visitor numbers on previous years, this was going to be my last time opening. However, I was very pleased with numbers and responses from the public. Unfortunately, the two enquiries I had for works did not materialise into orders, but it was still a good experience.”
- “Exhibited in the [Pond] Gallery show will submit for the Clare exhibition.”
- “I enjoy meeting fellow artists who come to collect their directories from me. Sales were the best ever this year. I also showed pieces and writing from my forthcoming book and received great feedback and some pre-orders.”

6. What do you think you might do differently next year e.g. do you think you could have done more to attract visitors to your studio?

- “Pay to to be showcased on socials (although it would be fairer if everyone was no matter what they pay) And I would do more of my own advertising. Maybe we could be sent the logo to make our own advertising.”

[ACTION: As stated previously, the idea that members needed to pay to be featured on SOS socials was a misunderstanding. A section of the website is being created from which members will be able to download graphics for all SOS events that they can then use for their own promotional activities. The downloads will be available from February 2025]

- “I will try and share my space with other members as I did last year.”
- “The fact that I had another artist open their studio nearby helped encourage people to make the effort to come to my studio. I still get more drop ins from

passing traffic as I do from Open Studios and significantly less than the other [name of town] artists.”

- “I think I personally could spend more time circulating friends, relatives, library, shops etc.”
- “I would still only open for two weekends, but I have a couple of local exhibitions before then so hope to raise my profile through them and by offering workshops in my studio throughout the year.”
- “I think I may not do it again.”
- “I would probably put some flyers around the local village area.”
- “I think sadly the event has quite a low profile maybe more events banners across thoroughfares but all down to how much individuals are prepared to do. A Woodbridge trail might help.”

[ACTION: At the AGM the current profile of Suffolk Open Studios was discussed. From being ‘well-known’ some years ago, awareness of the Open Studios concept as a whole seems to have dipped, possibly since Covid but also possibly as part of a wider trend. Understanding that SOS is once more in the ‘building’ phase, the Committee is discussing a range of initiatives to boost recognition among the general public. SOS has also been instrumental in the setting-up of a nationwide network of open studios organisations, and has become a founding member, so that we can better understand the impact of our activities within a national framework as well as benefiting from shared ideas for future profile-raising activities.]

- “Larger posters required. All artists to name their studio on direction posters.”

[ACTION: For SOS 2025 we will be providing A2 and A3 posters to opening members. Graphics for artists to print their own A4 posters will be provided.]

- “I’m not sure what else I could’ve done but visitor numbers were very disappointing.”
- “I would do the same: take a high level of responsibility for encouraging folks to visit, never chasing a hard sell and demonstrating my process with enthusiasm.”
- “Think about printed brochure [SOS directory] distribution. Pre-Covid was fine but people go out less and many places I used to leave them closed or won’t accept anymore, really felt like although message got out online that SOS was happening not many people had app or had seen a brochure.”
- “Not take part.”
- “Contact people in my area and try to get a trail organised. 4 weekends is a lot to do and I realised I needed to do 4 as it was my first time, and I had to catch as

many people as possible. I was exhibiting the first weekend so couldn't do all five."

- "I think I covered most bases."
- "Put my own details on the front of the brochure [SOS Directory] and making it clear everyone is welcome with no obligation to buy."
- "I will open for more than one weekend. I will be more proactive in marketing in the local area. I would send some videos and images to SOS to use in social media. I only sent one little reel, and I think it was too late and wasn't used."
- "I took a very low-key approach this year, as I thought I'd had a bit of a fallow year, and as the studio is small it takes a lot of organising. However, next year I will be more pro-active inviting people (e.g. Tai Chi class!) and will have a private view."
- "My studio is fairly remote – people have to travel/plan to visit and although separate from my house and made as welcome as I possibly could, I think going somewhere new, for many people, can be a little intimidating especially if you haven't experienced an Open Studio before. I think I need to explore the idea of opening with other artists either in a 'known' location or as part of an art trail next time."
- "Better signage, more of signage."
- "I'm not sure I will open next year. It was a lot of effort for little reward."
- "Extra signage in the immediate area would make us easier to find."
- "I will do more personal invitations via social media and my mailing list."
- "Feedback from the exhibitors [Summer '24 Showcase] was very positive. They want to do the same next year. Weekends 1 & 2 exhibition, subsequent weekends individual studios open. That would improve if everyone opened for the same weekend(s) – less would be more!"
- "Have debated changing the venue but decided against it as venue is perfect. Need to do more marketing as people said they were surprised to see us i.e. hadn't seen posters/flyers."
- "Advertise it more – but folk got fed up with the amount of things on – Aldeburgh Festival, art trails, garden openings etc."
- "Maybe more local publicity (letterbox drops, etc.)"
- "Social media! I am not using it and I know I should."
- "Don't know!"

- “Possibly a joint event as we did last year in our village hall with 4 artists as having a café as well drew a lot more visitors and kept them there... alternatively getting a flyer onto the website in time!””
- “More self-promotion and personal invites.”
- “I am in the process with other local SOS members to try and form a network of artists and craftspeople where we can help each other promote our work, possibly get together an SOS art trail although we are scattered around a bit.”
- “I actually don’t think I could have done anything more. I feel SOS is so disorganised, so many mistakes even before the event. Several people not knowing how to do their jobs. I understand it’s voluntary, I feel that there is scope to pay somebody and it would be much more professional. I have had good experiences in [name of town] of SOS but I feel the artists’ community is strong, so it works. Having just myself and one other in [name of city] tells me that it hasn’t worked in the past. I have asked a few members locally and their experiences weren’t good. It could be amazing.”

[ACTION: As stated previously, Leigh Driver reached out to this member to apologise for their negative experience and to try to glean more detail from them about the mistakes mentioned but was unfortunately unable to obtain any further information. Without making excuses, the 2023/24 committee was almost entirely ‘new’ with three members dropping into roles at the last-minute without any form of hand-over due to several artists stepping down in quick succession (having been elected at the previous AGM) due to unavoidable and unforeseen circumstances. Until these replacement committee members volunteered to take on some major roles there was a very real danger that SOS2024 would not happen at all. Inevitably, when people are learning on the job, things are unlikely to go perfectly and without the sterling efforts of Marian Lishman, we would have been completely lost! However, there was a significant level of talent, expertise and professional experience on that committee, and everyone did their very best to get up to speed as quickly as possible, all working incredibly hard as a team to make SOS2024 a success, despite its somewhat inauspicious start. It is difficult, while trying to get to grips with a new role, to really put your mark on it, so SOS2024 was something of a hybrid between how things had been done in the past and new initiatives. We are grateful for the patience and understanding of the membership and hope they will feel their forbearance is suitably rewarded in 2024/25.]

- I’ll make my studio more of a destination in itself. Offer demonstrations. Have the garden open. Offer refreshments etc. also more personal promotion – not rely so heavily on SOS.

7. What do you think SOS could do next year to improve the June Open Studios event for artists?

- “I don’t know.”
- “Nothing springs to mind.”
- “Have more participants in the art trail.” [COMMENT: Art trails are not set up by SOS but are organised by groups of artists local to each other]
- “June is the month for open gardens and therefore this draws people away. As most artists host the event in their gardens possibly a dual event? Last year I combined both on the same weekend. 2 attended for Open Studios. 198 attended for open gardens. For open gardens each person had paid £5 for the brochure. The year I did [name of town] open gardens, 700-900 people turned up to view the sculpture trail I had undertaken.”
- “I am new to SOS but I feel that the directory, apps etc. are really good and a great way to promote artists.”
- “I think you all did a fantastic job and am really grateful for all the hard work behind the scenes which was evident. I’m not sure there’s much more you could have done from your end – I think it’s really down to the individuals to step up the marketing and thank you Leigh in particular for all your conscientious communication and pragmatic advice and help with getting onto the SOS website/platform which nearly defeated me so I would have to say that that was the most difficult part of the process. I particularly love the joint exhibition opportunities and think that’s a real plus point as is the more than reasonable sign-up fee which really swayed it for me.”
- “Larger posters x 2” [COMMENT: They’re coming!]
- “More promotion.”
- “Really impressed with the energy, thought and planning that’s being applied all round. Also, your focus on empowering members and reminding them you are a volunteer team – anyone who has an idea should be encouraged to step up and enact it!”
- “Trails were pushed more in past and deff helped. We didn’t do this year and can be tricky to get organised but were good in past. Maybe work on website as app didn’t seem that well used – could website do all app does so people don’t have to download anything?” [COMMENT: We are actively exploring ways in which the website can aid both with the formation of art trails and in route-planning for visitors.]
- “Number people in the same area consecutively so visitors can look up everyone and their opening days more easily. You can still list us alphabetically on another page. This will help us in connecting with each other and help encourage visitors

to go to other places nearby. Bigger posters – especially those we write on with our weekend details. A couple more smaller ones to aid directions.” [ACTION: The re-numbering of artists in the Directory is being looked at and will hopefully happen for SOS2025!]

- “I would prefer to end the day sooner, five pm seems quite late. Maybe 4pm would be sufficient if others agreed.” [COMMENT: Opening times will remain 11am-5pm for SOS2025, however, if there is more support within the membership for a revised opening schedule in 2026 we will vote on it at the next AGM]
- “I think it’s all very well and enthusiastically organised. Perhaps trying to get artists in the same area to open on the same weekend.”
- “An official SOS banner to display outside.” [COMMENT: in the past ‘feather’ flags were offered to members and could be again (or similar) at cost price. This is being looked into, but depends on the amount of money available, which won’t be known until membership closes at the end of January 2025.]
- “I didn’t open my studio this year because of holiday commitments, but as in all previous years, publicity is the key. Any promotion on radio, newspaper, social media etc. is a must. SOS is very good at taking advantage each year and using it as an advantage. So any improvement in this aspect would help.”
- “I was very impressed with the Directory and posters – Thank you so much. Brilliant. Xx Maybe have an option to join/offer collaboration with other artists for more remotely located studios? (you may already do this and I have missed the information- so sorry if this is the case).” [COMMENT: The Committee is actively looking into ways to support the self-organisation of local ‘hubs’ of artists.]
- “Send pdf version of the posters so that individuals can print off large size posters for A-frames. Collection of posters & directories needs to take into account where the artist lives and not the studio address or alternatively ask the artists where they would wish to go.” [COMMENT: There is a section in the application/renewal form where you can select a preferred pick-up point. You can also email us by the end of February if you have any particular needs in this regard.]
- “I used to be part of an arts trail in South Northamptonshire that worked by getting several artists and makers to show as a group in a range of venues such as churches and village halls. Each person attracted their own visitors and shared the invigilation. The event went on for about ten days I think and covered two weekends Unless you are very well known in the area it is difficult to get visitors to come to your house through the brochure and my studio is not very accessible as in a cellar.”

- “Just keep going with the distribution of the paper brochure [directory]. It is very popular. Raise awareness via radio/TV news?”
- “I take SOS to mean the volunteers on the committee. I don’t think there [is] anything SOS volunteers can do to improve the experience for artists. What I think artists can do to improve the experience for themselves is stop whinging and be more positive, proactive and co-ordinated locally – there’s a reason the Reydon & Southwold Art trails allegedly get more visitors. It would also help if artists opened from 11 to 5 and not decide to close at 4 because it is more convenient for them. Actually, being in their studio to greet visitors would help – I had one visitor who came from another venue where they were in the studio for 5 minutes, but the artist never appeared.”
- “Posters with space to write venue address on. Provide as a pdf so we can print them.”
- “Up the profile of the linked exhibition. People who attend the exhibition generally want to find out more and visit studios looking to buy from particular artists.”
- “Keep printing the brochure [directory].”
- “A lot of people had no idea that SOS was on. Publicity is obviously important, but I don’t know how much more SOS can do to spread the word.”
- “I spoke to someone in Northants Open Studio and they seem to put on more events in more visible places more often – worth a look into?? They also split their county into north and south... maybe we should consider East and West given how geographically wide Suffolk is?” [COMMENT: The possible splitting of the county was discussed and rejected at the AGM. However, the Committee will try to find ways in which it can support the formation of local ‘hubs’. This may require a new Committee role to be created e.g. Hub Coordinator – and consequently a new volunteer Committee member would be required. The organisation of local ‘hubs’ would remain something that we would expect members to do themselves, but the Committee would aim to make this as easy as possible for them and offer its support.]
- “I don’t have any specific ideas as think it is well organised generally.... I still seem to have some issues with logging in to the members’ page not sure why. Having the opportunity to do group shows at Snape and Clare is great, particularly as the latter is close by...I hope the publicity will be better in Clare this time though... as there were no posters advertising it in the town last year... appreciate it is up to people there of course.”
- “Possible banner advertising in some towns (they aren’t too expensive to produce). A concerted effort to get as many participating to ‘get it out there’ on Social Media, maybe supplying jpgs, PDFs of SOS posters/publicity suitable for

Instagram, Facebook etc.” [COMMENT: If members would like to discuss with local councils the possibility of a large banner being displayed in a particular location in their town/village and get a formal agreement in place (including who would physically hang the banner) the Committee would be willing to fund the printing and supply (if details of all necessary dimensions and fixing requirements are provided). Committee members would not be able to hang such banners themselves.]

- “Bigger posters. More radio coverage.”

8. What do you think SOS could do next year to improve the June Open Studios event for visitors?

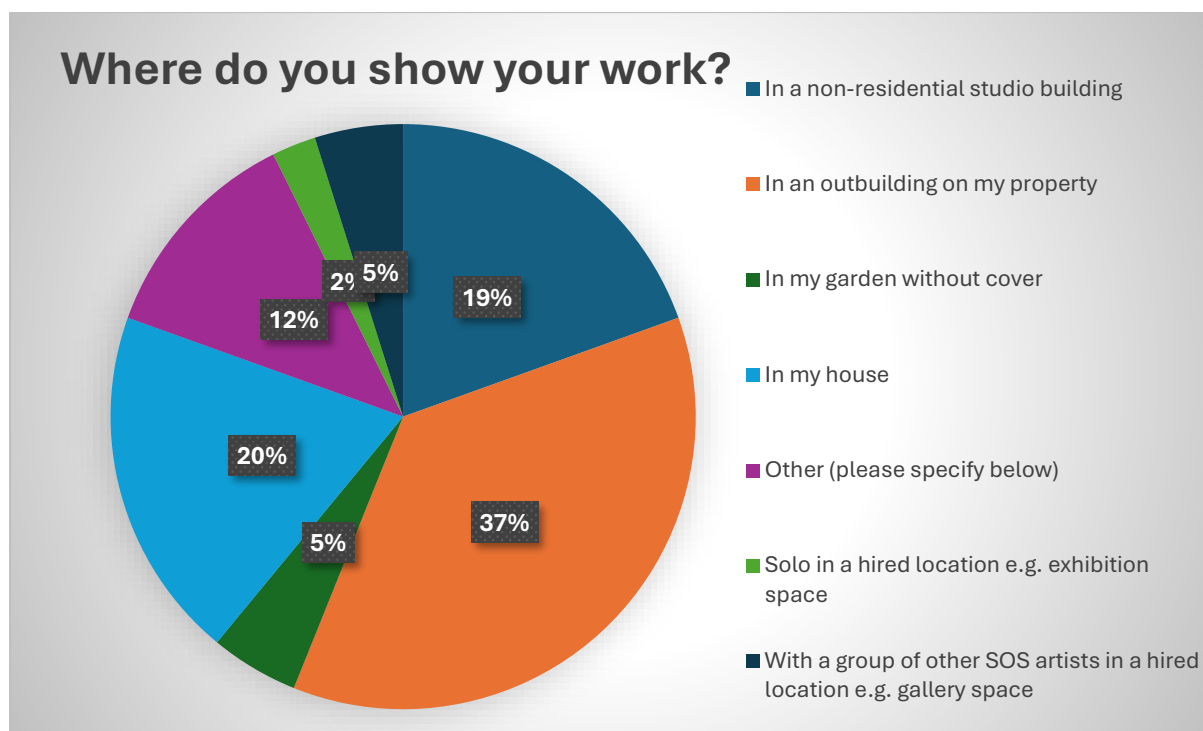
- “Showcasing every artist on socials.” [COMMENT: Just send your images and text to the social media team.]
- “Perhaps have a slot on ‘Look East’ including a guided tour.”
- “Having only done one SOS there’s not really anything I can comment on at this point. I need to [do] a couple more for comparison.”
- “Feedback from visitors was that the website didn’t work very well for them and they found the opening dates difficult to navigate as so many people opened on different dates.”
- “Making the website more user-friendly for beginners or IT numbskulls like myself!”
- “Advertise on all media as much as poss.”
- “Focus on reminding members and the public that this is a look behind the scenes and a chance to interact, which can often lead to sales after the event. Not a hard sell event which can discourage visitors and disappoint members. Perhaps promoting ‘justacard’ to gently encourage the public to make a very minor support purchase?”
- “Compulsory opening. Visitors not able to readily plan a route as you have to refer to the pages giving opening details. Then finding that the weekend artists are open are variable so cannot be linked to make a good day out. Many comments about only one or two weekends open not being helpful.”
- “By more prominent promotion that entry is free and everyone is welcome to attend.”
- “I know some artists got together to have a joint opening at Clare, would it be possible to offer similar group openings that could be applied for at other venues in the area? Visitors could then see a variety of artists without having to travel so widely? As a newbie, this would also feel a little safer being in a group? I did have one visitor who was a little ‘strange’ and it struck me that I was inviting people

into my 'space' whom I didn't know/have a contact number for and it did make me feel a little vulnerable." [COMMENT – The issue of the safety of lone-working is of concern. We would recommend having a friend or family member present if this is likely to be the case for you. Joint openings/showcases are usually self-organised by members. If the Committee was to get involved, we would need to recruit more committee members to cover those responsibilities. The Committee is looking for more ways to connect artists with each other, however.]

- “Getting the brochure and posters out early is very helpful.” [COMMENT: We aim to have them ready for collection by Easter each year – sooner if possible.]
- “A rethink of the organisation of the SOS Directory. There were a number of visitors who did not find the numerical alpha-listing helpful. They would have preferred something more date or geographically listed.” [COMMENT: In hand.]
- “For those who know, the experience is good.”
- “One visitor said they had trouble with the app... I'm not sure why as I preferred to use the paper copy when visiting.”
- “A chance of winning some original piece of art? Raffle? Some demonstrations taking place at some studios if practical at set times listed in Directory? Visitors seem really keen on viewing examples of techniques used, getting tips to introduce/incorporate into their work, work in progress, ideas, thought, sketches, doodles! Not just an exhibition of finished work where they may feel pressure to buy.”
- “Larger photos in the printed directory. More advice to artists as to how to make their studios really visible from the road.”

With regard to increased publicity – the Committee is committed to undertaking county-wide promotion. Artists themselves are usually best placed to have knowledge of local independent digital radio stations, parish magazines or similar, not to mention art groups, arts centres, galleries and other opportunities for promotional activities in their immediate area. Moreover, building these local relationships is so important for audience development for those artists who are interested in this aspect of growing their art business, it would not be helpful if the Committee tried to cover this very local promotion – and frankly there isn't (currently) capacity to do so. The Committee would however, be more than happy to support any local initiatives member artists would like to arrange, whether by providing graphics or someone for interview and if sent information by member artists across the county, we could compile a list of 'friendly' organisations or potential partners that all members could access as a central resource.

9. If you opened this year, where did you show your art?



If you answered Other above, please share further details:

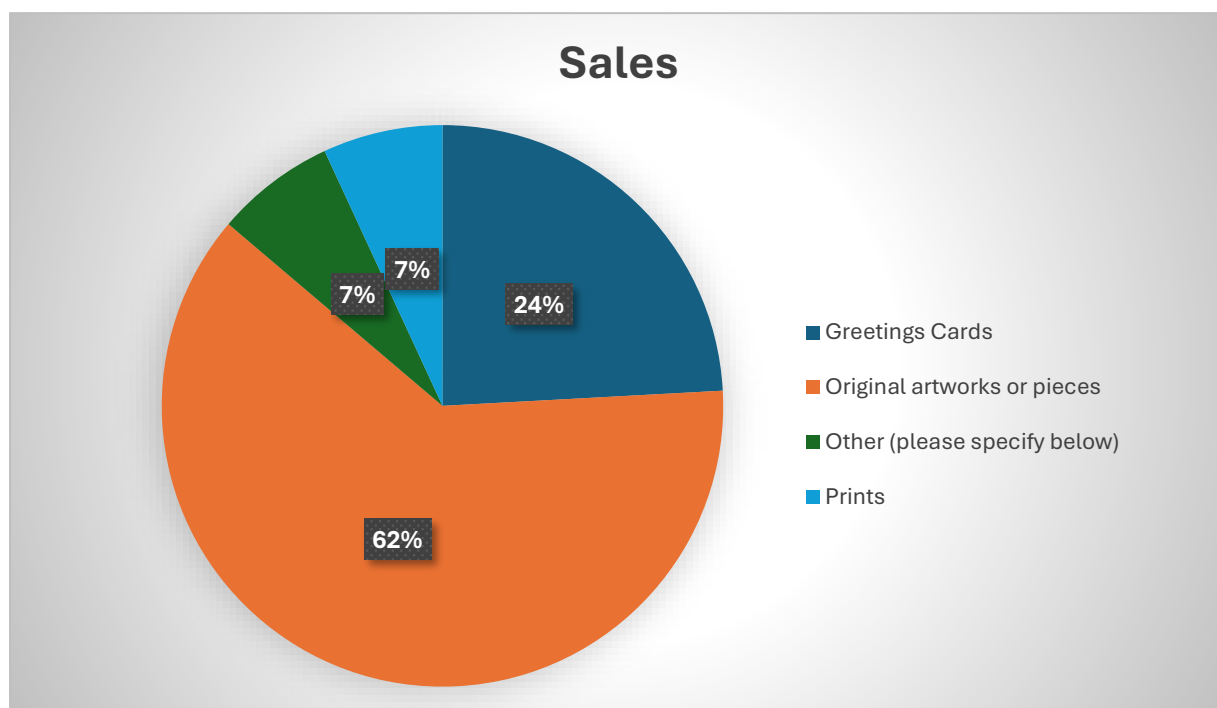
- “I opened the workshop and had a gazebo in the front.”
- “I extended the exhibition to two rooms in my house.”
- “My studio isn’t big enough to show larger work, so I had to hang pieces in the garden – difficult with the rain this year – pieces were in and out like a yo-yo!”
- “I also opened part of my house as a ‘gallery’ space which was successful, although needed a second person to be present in the second space. The garden also helped... with my husband able to meet people there and talk about plants etc.”
- “The SOS group hired our barn and stables which is set up as a gallery. My studio is part of the complex.”
- “Both with a group of other SOS artists in a hired location AND in a non-residential studio building.”

It is interesting to see the variety of solutions to the various challenges that taking part in Open Studios can present. From the advisability or otherwise of lone-working, to the issues of driving footfall to remote, county-edge locations when there are no other participating artists nearby. The idea of a showcase exhibition. followed by opening studios up, seems to offer a good compromise, if artists are able to connect, and organise them. They are not simply selling opportunities but a way to establish relationships with the public and possible collectors that can entice them to the participating artists’ studios afterwards. In fact, in 2025, the SOS Members’ Spring Exhibition takes place right at the end of May and into the first days of June so presents

a very useful lead-in to the main June event, particularly for artists in the Framlingham area.

Visitors really do want to see the artists' studios on the whole. Many of those visitors are artists themselves. It would be a shame to lose the 'studio' aspect of the June event entirely as it is a key element to the concept, but finding imaginative solutions to the footfall issue is also vital to retain members and ensure the sustainability of the organisation.

10a. If you were selling art, which items sold best?

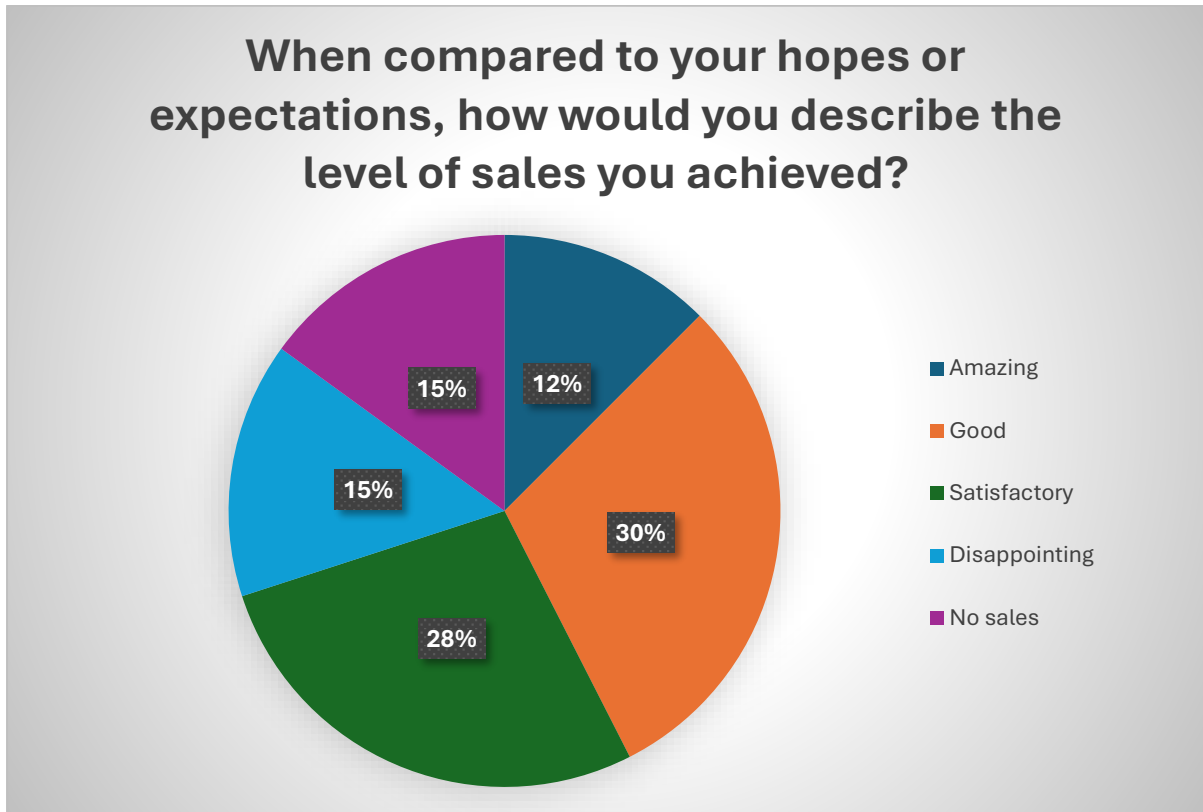


If you answered Other above, please tell us more:

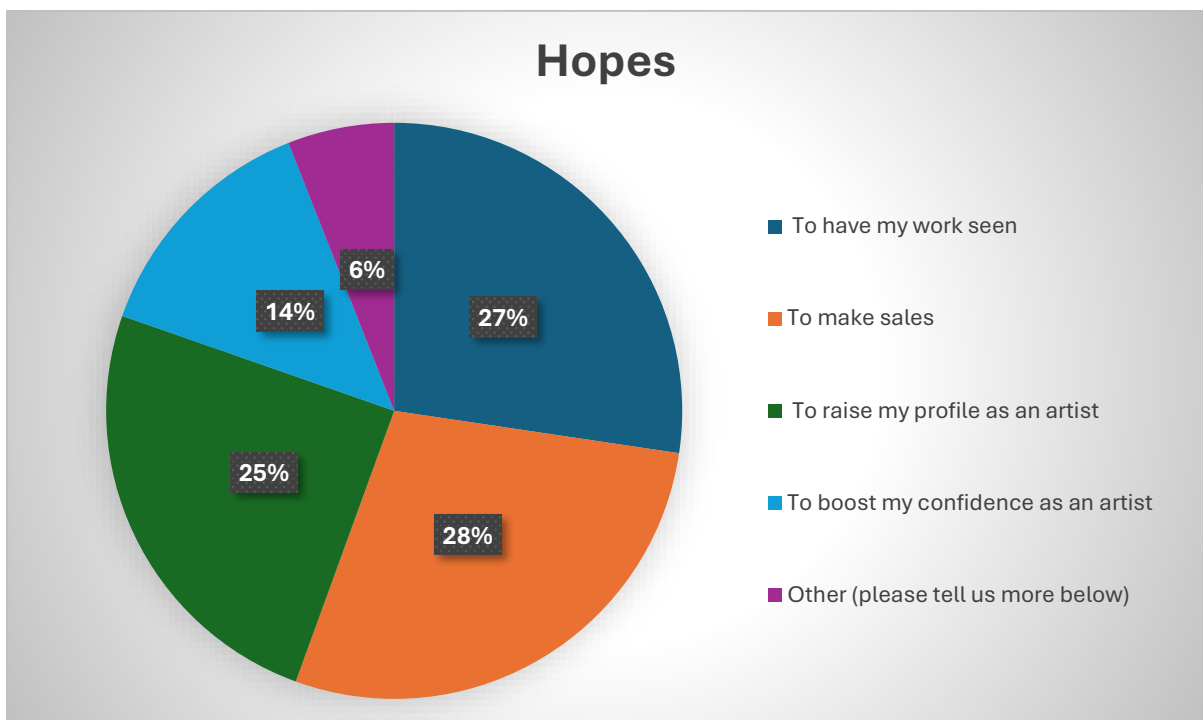
- "Cards always sell and cushions created a lot of interest."
- "Unframed stuff in the magazine rack sold."
- "We aren't all artists. Some of us regard ourselves as artisans. The full range of my work sold – knit, felt, millinery, weave, basketry, striding sticks, hand-spun yarn, naturally dyed yarn; and a full price range (£4 to £180)."
- "We sold a lot of cards as well as paintings, prints, pottery, small sculptures and baskets."
- "I sold two unframed paintings on paper @£95. I also took about £300 in jewellery sales. The [venue] costs £400 for a week."
- "Didn't sell anything."
- "I [had] collages for sale and to view, as well as ceramics which are my main thing. I was pleased as they were fresh work and different for my friends, although done in lockdown, whereas the ceramics were old as not been able to make any new ones as been in hospital and then recovery for the last year."
- "None sold."
- "My ceramics."

- “Surprised the cards didn’t sell better.”
- “As before I sold nothing, but had two strong requests for commission pieces but assume they didn’t like the price. But did get a commission from a passerby.”

10b. When compared to your hopes or expectations would you say the level of sales you achieved was:



11. What did you hope for from the Suffolk Open Studios June Event 2024?



If you answered Other above, please tell us what you were hoping for?

- “To get off my backside and paint every day!”
- “To promote my other events and reward buyers who haven’t seen the process who will find it exciting and interesting.”
- “To have a vehicle to open my studio and usually make new work, it really helped me to reengage with my identity as an artist again after my long difficult health experience.”
- “To make connections. Being new to the area I hoped to meet other artists. And I did.”
- “To promote my workshop bookings.”
- “To make the move from selling jewellery to selling art but without the jewellery sales I would have made a considerable loss.”
- “To promote our gallery space.”
- “To meet interesting people and hear about their ‘stories’. The vast majority of people who visit ‘make’.”

12. Please share any further thoughts you have about the Suffolk Open Studios June event

- “Well done for arranging it.”
- “A lot of artists did not collect their directories and posters. I have nearly 400 directories left over. I’m not sure the system worked very well.”
- “I don’t think SOS is interested in having galleries participate.”
- “I appreciate all the hard work put into this by the organisers.”
- “Compared to my previous experience of open studios where it was down to the artists in the studio complex to arrange everything, this was such a great experience to be part of something established and so well organised. I think the directory is brilliant and really helps raise the profile of the arts in Suffolk.”
- “It’s great. I really appreciate it and the support and ideas. I also realise it’s run by volunteers so really it’s an amazing event well done and thanks.”
- “I only opened for one weekend and the weather was terrible so probably not fair to make too many judgements, but I felt like it wasn’t really worth opening my studio.”
- “Thanks!”

- “It was great and a huge thank you to all the committee for organising and working so hard.”
- “I’m glad I had cards printed. Exhibiting in Snape was a poor experience and I wouldn’t do it again. I would create some smaller pieces which might have sold – my work is generally quite large.”
- “I think you have all covered the SOS well on social media and I found it all interesting. Thanks and well done to all concerned. The directory is good, the distribution seemed well organised and I am very grateful to the people who work hard on our behalf.”
- “As previously mentioned, I didn’t open this year but have enjoyed the opening other times in the last four years. Appreciation to the committee for all the back room work, and organisation. For me, the regular event in June is essential. It would dissipate the event if we chose another month or spread it out over the year. SOS has been known for the June opening and over the years it becomes established. To alter it would undermine the work done to date.”
- “The Directory and Advertising posters were excellent. Collection of the materials was well-organised and easy. My own situation is that I am in a fairly remote location and in retrospect, I think coordinating opening with other artists in my area in a central location may work better another time in terms of number of visitors, ease of finding and personal safety concerns.”
- “I had a very positive first year and I think SOS is a fantastic institution.”
- “Suffolk Open Studios is a great organisation.”
- “Still believe in the concept of local hubs based on key towns across Suffolk is a way forward. A high-quality venue showcasing the work of local artists followed by studio visits.”
- “Maybe we could limit it to just two weekends and have more people open on those two rather than spreading it over the whole month??”
- “It would be brilliant to have another show at the Apex in Bury one year as closer to home. I enjoyed the show at Snape this year at the Pond Galery though ...more than at Aldeburgh.”
- “If you are not living in an ‘arty’ area e.g. Woodbridge, Framlingham etc. and out on a limb you can feel a bit isolated and disadvantaged.”
- “I think it’s a great thing to be part of and it would be lovely if there were more members near me.”

13. Would you like to share any of the comments made by your visitors? This could be about your work, your studio setup or Suffolk Open Studios in general:

- “They loved the garden and were very positive about my work – one comment was inspirational! One visitor said he wouldn’t be buying any of my work because he wanted to encourage his wife (who was with him). To do more painting herself!”
- “Lots were confused about what was open and on which days of the five. It made navigation difficult. It would be good to have more hubs where groups of artists were together in one place. Pubs are good for this as it benefits everyone (happens in London) and it’s less lonely than sitting in your studio hoping someone may turn up.”
- “Enjoyed the setting and the garden!”
- “V. positive. Professional, like my work. Liked the Open Studio concept.”
- “No comments.”
- “Very good comments about my work and the way it was set up. Visitors found planning a visit to an area difficult due to the variable open weekends and the layout of the directory.”
- “They thought my work was interesting and of a high standard. They liked the depth and effect oil and cold wax can create.”
- “Not many comments about SOS as most visitors came through personal contact I think.”
- “We have a lovely garden and put out seating and provided free refreshments but encouraged people to make a donation to EACH for tea/cake etc. which raised nearly £50. We were fortunate in having good weather for our weekend and all our friends who came said how much they enjoyed it.”
- “Visitors to my Studio were very supportive and enjoyed looking round.”
- “My visitors were so kind. They were especially complimentary about my studio and were very encouraging with their praise of my work.”
- “Appreciation of ‘the tour’ – the history of the building, its renovation, the story behind the looms, technical information on the processes I use. Appreciation of the range and quality of my work.”
- “3 people made comments and entered contact details. The comments were complimentary.”
- “All very positive... the group that had travelled around said mine was the best studio they had seen (mind you they might have said that to everyone!!!)”

- “Most visitors were doing a day of visits, something they tend to do most years. Some comments were made about area grouping would be helpful.”
- “So lovely to meet you and see all your beautiful work”
- “Who do you recommend I visit next?”

14. Please tell us in just a few words how you feel about the support you have received from the Suffolk Open Studios Committee:

- “They have been really helpful and accommodating.”
- “Very good indeed, thank you.”
- “Excellent website and directory.”
- “I feel it was friendly and supportive.”
- “Considering the committee is run by volunteers I think you do an amazing job and I have felt totally supported.”
- “Good.”
- “Good support thanks.”
- “Warm and excellent.”
- “V. good.”
- “Someone always contactable. Communication from the committee clear and concise.”
- “Excellent.”
- “All seemed good and operated smoothly.”
- “Good work – thank you.”
- “Great! I loved the email about getting prepared as it was so fresh and real and a little humour too.”
- “Very supportive.”
- “Very helpful when I had technical hitch. Leigh sorted it out for me.”
- “I feel the support from SOS couldn’t be better. The work done is very much appreciated. Thank you.”
- “I am very grateful to this group of volunteers committing their time and energy to keep SOS going. It was good to meet Leigh when she visited my studio, and to hear her enthusiasm for developing the project.”

- “Great communication and easy to follow instructions – plenty of information to support a successful opening given. Thank you so much x”
- “Very good.”
- “The committee is very supportive and give us all the information the artists need to run their own event.”
- “There has been plenty of good information via email, which has been very useful. The distribution of brochures and posters worked well.”
- “Very good.”
- “I had great support from the committee. Leigh came to see me! Thank you Leigh.”
- “The committee are amazing and always very supportive.”
- “Always appreciated. Having been on the committee for a short while, I know not only the time involved but the ‘nervous energy’ that is required at times!”
- “Very good.”
- “I think SOS is a fantastic organisation, great value for the fee we pay. Thanks to everyone on the team who make this event possible.”
- “Very well organised.”
- “Clear and enthusiastic emails.”
- “Good support and clear directions. However, remember the deadline was very rushed for directory info and didn’t feel there was enough advance warning about it... having thought it was not yet due.” [COMMENT: The deadline for directory content is 9th February 2025]
- “Support was of a good standard you’re doing a good job!”
- “I feel very happy with the support of the SOS Committee, you have kept us informed, suggested ways to get more visitors, promoted SOS members via Social Media. No complaints!”
- “Non existent.”
- “I think we’ve been great!”

15. What would you like to see Suffolk Open Studios doing in 2025?

- “More exhibitions?” [COMMENT: We’d love to – we’d need more exhibition organisers to volunteer though.]
- “Same please.”

- “Grateful for the efforts of the committee – well done.”
- “A bigger splash on social media, Arts programmes, Look East presentations, more Gallery opportunities (like Snape).”
- “ONE SOS weekend in the run up to Christmas.” [COMMENT: Our “Clare at Christmas” members’ exhibition may be of interest.]
- “More hubs and group shows. Fewer weekends (2).”
- “More media coverage, banners in larger villages/towns, consider trail opportunities – strangers might find this helpful.”
- “More exhibitions. Ability for customers to buy from SOS website.”
- “Happy as is.”
- “For me it works really well as it is. More trails and tie-ins with local businesses? (Trail including local pub/café/shop recommendations with some work and brochures in the pub/café/shop).”
- “Agree on the number of weekends that the event takes place and make opening compulsory for participating artists.”
- “It would be nice to meet up with SOS members before the weekends – networking opportunities with wine! Or perhaps it could happen at the end of the year. Some people know each other while others are new. Could do it in areas so it’s not too big an event. We could bring a bottle?”
- “Organised trails. Huge publicity drive.”
- “Personally I would like to see more opportunities to exhibit. I think the exhibitions that are put on by the team are fantastic. I know they are a lot of work but if a couple more could be manifested, it could work for the artists that don’t have that opportunity. I also think the number of printed directories could be reduced. There are so many thrown away each year. Maybe expand the website to include more examples of artists’ work.” [ACTION: We have doubled the number of images that can be posted on each listing from 10 to 20.]
- “To provide the opportunity for more cohesive exhibitions. Imagining no limitations, we should have a permanent or regular pop-up exhibition space that showcases smaller groups of artists in a more focused way. “
- “Opportunities to share opening with other artists at various locations over the year, not just June – Suffolk Open Studios Weekend Events? Opportunities to organise groups of artists for support/media interest/ chat/ coffee – i.e. local potters group, local glass artists group, local sculpture group etc.”
- “When stewarding at the joint exhibitions it would be great to have an experienced person teamed up with a less experienced person. There’s a lot to

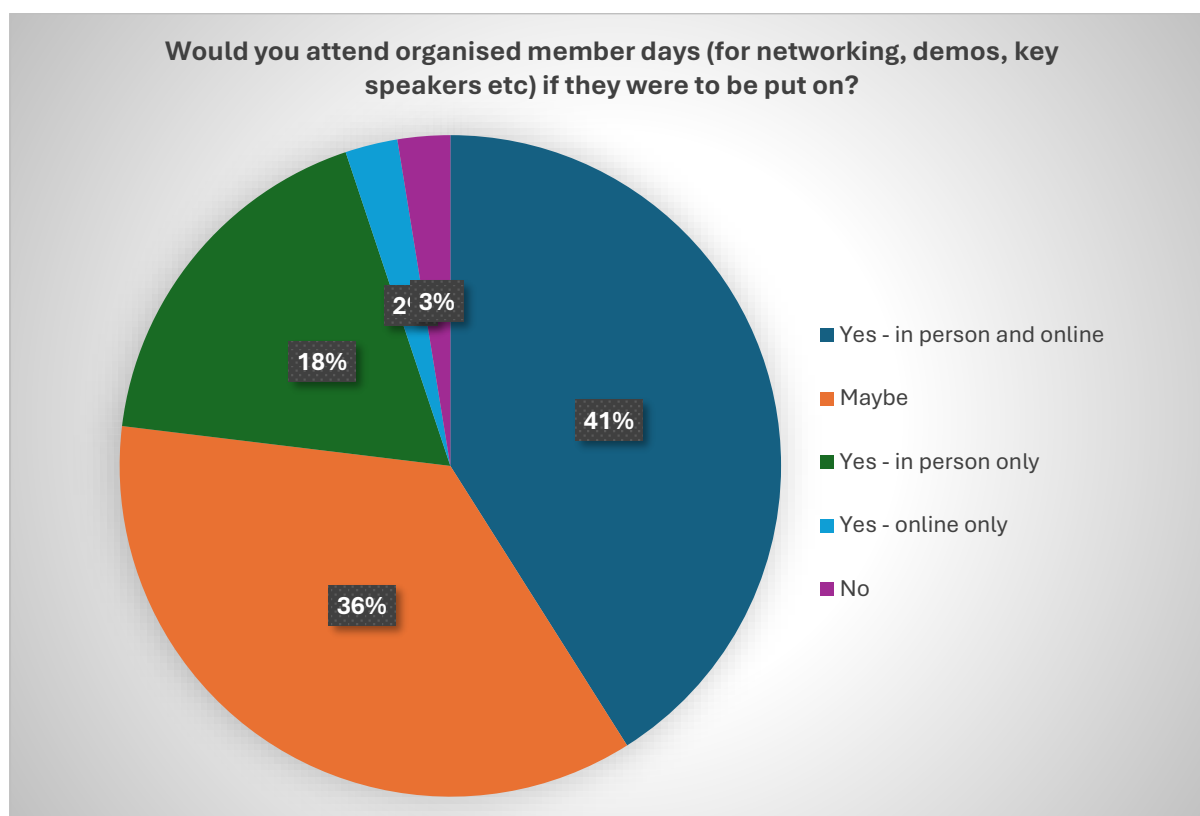
think about process-wise: form-filling, recording visitors, operating the card machine, wrapping items (especially jewellery which might have special boxes and labels etc.) The venue might be unfamiliar, so locating keys can be tricky. I know it's a lot to ask, but it was quite daunting with a room full of visitors and we don't want to appear unprofessional." [COMMENT: Completely agree that it can be daunting, and we do not want to appear unprofessional. As artists choose their own stewarding slots it would be difficult to ensure that an experienced person is part of each duo, but we are trying to keep every exhibition as similar to all the others as possible so that it won't be long before everyone is confident. Also, if we are successful in retaining members, the chances of being partnered with someone who has prior experience will grow considerably.]

- "Is it possible to increase the number of images per web page? Ten including the key image is hardly enough." [COMMENT: Done.]
- "Just getting the message out to the general public, if anyone has any media contacts?" [COMMENT: Absolutely – this is one of the strengths of pooled knowledge.]
- "Decentralised to town-based hubs who feed upward to an over-arching umbrella organisation whose purpose is to provide an online presence of artists and SOS dates. Down to local groups to take on the promotion and organisation. Local 'commitment' to opening the same, but not necessarily all, weekends. Moving to September or October. Rebranding." [COMMENT: Re town-based hubs, as mentioned earlier, unless we are able to recruit more committee members it will remain up to artists to organise themselves locally. However, the Committee is committed to supporting the formation and sustainability of these local groups as much as possible and will be taking steps to make networking easier. SOS is an umbrella organisation. It is also a collective. SOS provides a framework within which artists can make things happen for themselves and offers the benefits of county-wide promotion, exhibitions, networking and an arts community, all under a recognisable banner. The greater the number of volunteers we have joining the Committee the more we will be able to assist with the various activities of the membership. Our ultimate goal, though, is to empower our members to take the initiative – while providing as much support as we can to ensure their success. This might mean helping members to see opening their studio in June as very much their own event which they must commit to promoting themselves, but which has the immense advantage of taking place as part of a large, synchronised, county-wide promotional push with a clear overarching identity. It might also mean helping members to form themselves into local hubs which have a life and enjoy success beyond SOS. The issue of rebranding was discussed at the AGM and it was decided to revitalise the existing branding, which has the benefit of a long history.]
- "Print brochure [directory]."

- “Somehow or other, spread the word more widely.” [COMMENT: Yes. We need everyone’s help with this though, both to promote our events and to recruit members.]
- “I would welcome help with Instagram.” [ACTION: We will be arranging some peer-mentoring activities and creating some short, ‘how-to’ videos]]
- “Join up with existing Art Clubs and create stronger links to existing events? Have a stall at the Suffolk Show?? Ideally placed in last week in May so could be a no-brainer!!” [COMMENT: As mentioned earlier, SOS is now part of a nationwide network of ‘Open’ organisations. We are also members of the Suffolk County Council Culture Network. We also have one or two members who already attend the Suffolk Show and promote SOS on our behalf. Forging new connections with other bodies is part of the role of ‘Chair’ and as you know we currently do not have a Chair, but the rest of the Committee is doing its best to ensure SOS always has a seat at the table. We would appreciate it very much if members could email us the details of any opportunities for partnership or collaboration that they might identify.]
- “I think what is being done is great as organising shows is a huge task. So happy for the same next year!”
- “In the lead up to 2025 showcase a different area every few days on social media? Make it clear to visitors that whilst buying original art and cards is appreciated, it’s not compulsory. I felt an awkwardness from some visitors. I just appreciate them showing an interest and making the effort to visit – although a sale is great!”
- “Open exhibition in a big venue.”

[COMMENT: In 2025 all three of our exhibitions are in ‘big’ venues – Framlingham Old Theatre, Holton Lodge Barn and The Old Goods Shed Clare. An SOS Art Fair has also been suggested – which is a wonderful idea – and depending on the size of the venue could be opened up to non-members by way of a recruitment drive. However, this would take a lot of organising – it would need a sub-committee of its own and definitely wouldn’t happen in 2025. We would also have to think about hiring screens, hanging systems, electrical supply etc. Never say never though. If there are enough members willing to step up and make it happen it could be amazing.]

16. Would you attend organised member days (for networking, demos, key speakers etc) if they were to be put on?:



This partly addresses the comment earlier about help with Instagram. We would love to organise peer-mentoring groups – either online or in person. As far as social events are concerned – an SOS summer picnic has been mentioned with a BYOB etc. – again it would need some organising, and the current Committee is already at capacity – but It’s a wonderful idea. In the meantime, please make use of the three Private Views we have each year for our members’ group exhibitions. By popular request, all the artists will be offered a badge at these events so it will be easier for us to recognise members, approach them for a chat and forge new connections.

17. As SOS is run by volunteers, are there any skills you would be able to volunteer to assist the organisation? This doesn't necessarily mean joining the committee (although we do need more committee members - we meet on Zoom) and it doesn't have to be for the whole year e.g. we always need extra help at events and during busier times.

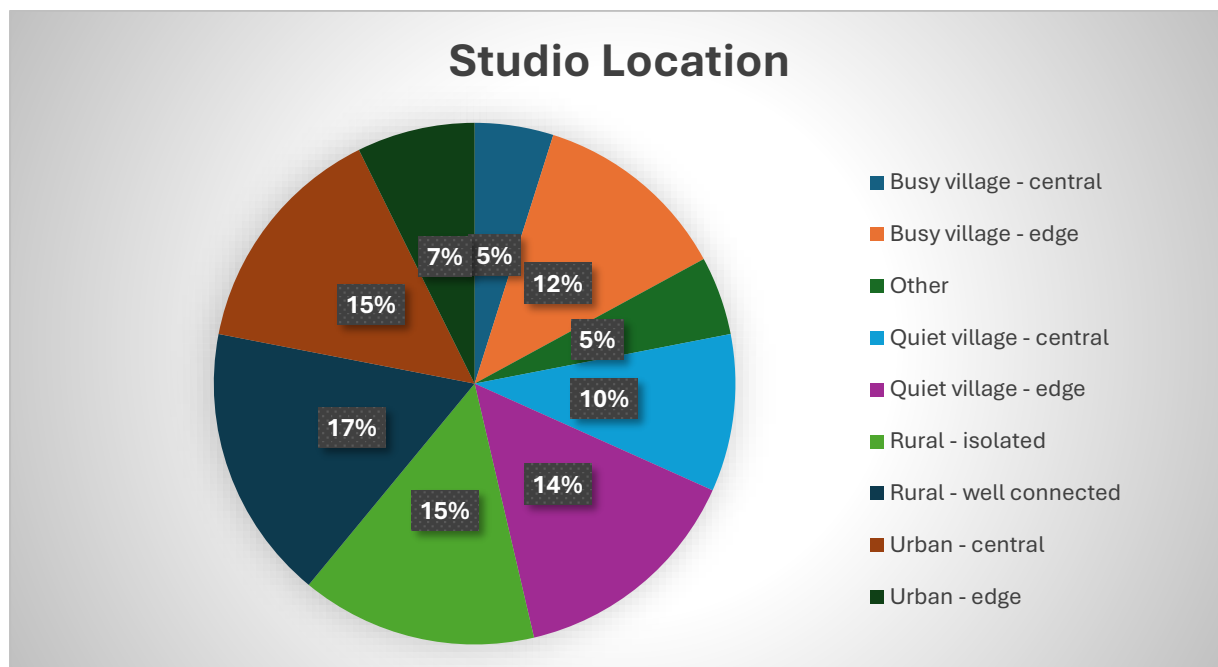
- “Helping set up exhibitions?”
- “I’ve done my bit already.”
- “Volunteered for stewarding and will do so again. Willing to help with hanging.”
- “If a local event, I would be willing to help out.”
- “Happy to make films and reels.”
- “Help with exhibitions.”

- “Already a committee member.”
- “I have volunteered to help at the Clare exhibition.”
- “Sorry - already done.”
- “Sorry I am not in a position to offer much at present.”
- “I have a lot of experience of initiating and curating exhibitions of student and professional artists in my various roles at arts schools. However, these have been by invitation or submission and jury. I’m not sure SOS is the right organisation to pursue this but am happy to discuss.”
- “Event help. Admin skills.”
- “I am happy to act as a hub in my area for collecting and distributing things.”
- “I am currently happy to help with the exhibitions that are put on, but due to family commitments, unable to offer more time. This may change in the future.”
- “Happy to provide occasional extra hands at more local events – in the past when I have put work in for an SOS exhibition, I’ve always done a stewarding stint.”
- “I created a physical printed trail leaflet courtesy of Photoshop. I MIGHT be able to help others do the same. I am self-taught, by no means fluent.” [COMMENT: Peer-mentoring opportunity again. Thank you.]
- “Happy to provide workshop/demo opportunities to fellow SOS members.”
- “Happy to offer help at events e.g. at Clare... getting over to coastal areas not so easy as transport a case of sharing a car! Am helping with take down on 18th August [2024].”
- “Always happy to steward and enjoy stewarding but unfortunately limited to help in any other way at the moment due to family illness.”
- “I have run many businesses in the past, having this level of disorganisation is fatal.” [COMMENT: It would be really helpful to have some more information on this.]
- “Already on the committee.”

A sincere thank you to everyone who has offered help. The relevant Committee members will be contacting you individually in early 2025 to see how best we can take you up on your kind offers. To everyone else, if you are unable to take on a role at the moment, we do understand. Time is our most precious commodity. Just a few minutes here or there would be wonderful if you can spare them. If not, your thoughts, ideas, encouragement, and simply your membership are all vitally important to Suffolk Open Studios. Something really helpful, that absolutely everyone can do, is to read the emails we send out (I’m sorry if they’re a bit long) and make a careful note of their contents 😊

18 – this was postcodes – not reproduced here for reasons of promised confidentiality.

19a. Which of the following options best describes the location of your 2024 Suffolk Open Studios event?



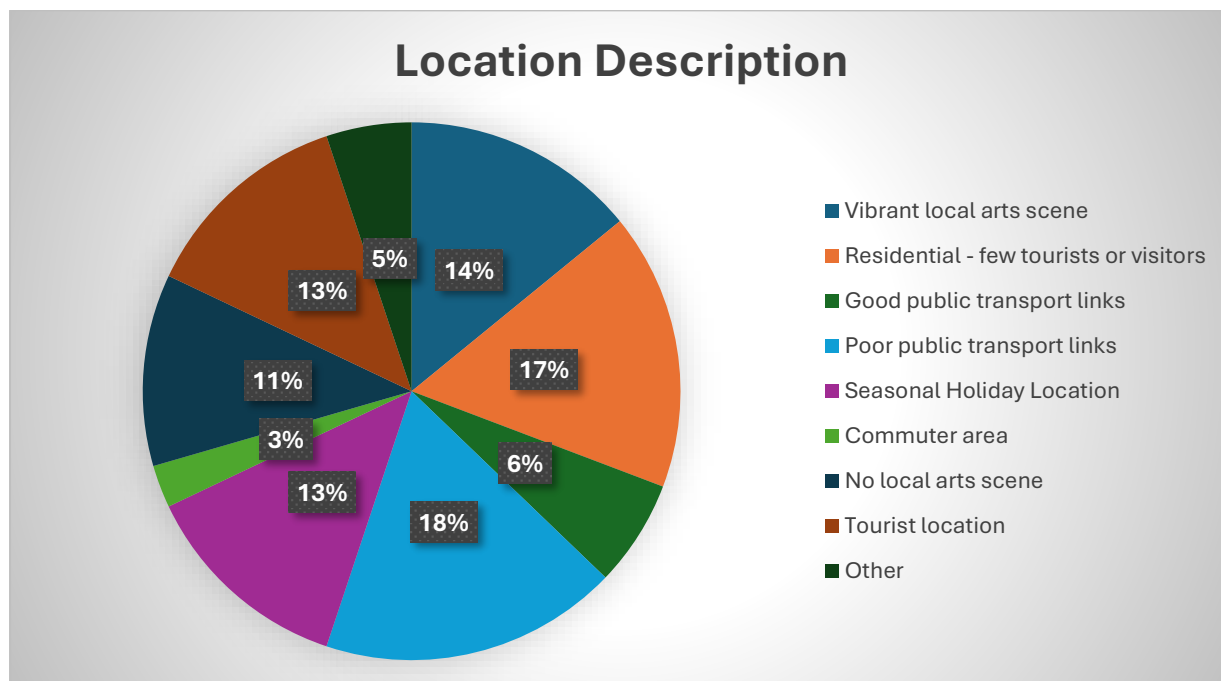
If you selected Other above please tell us about the location of your 2024 Suffolk Open Studios event.:

- “In the outskirts of [name of town], I guess urban edge applied.”
- “On a peninsula... I think this is the real issue – any further and they fall into the North Sea!!!”
- “Edge of a busy town and close to forest which is a tourist attraction.”

We are interested to see how an artist’s location within the county influences the number and type of visitors who attend studios during the June event. There are a number of variables to be taken into consideration and more analysis will be done on this data in due course, although the relatively small number of responses to the 2024 survey mean that its usefulness could be limited. We hope for a greater number of replies in 2025.

Even if, as many suspect, location is indeed one of the major determinants of footfall, it should not be seen as an insurmountable problem to members who find themselves ‘out on a limb.’ Suffolk Open Studios is for all Suffolk artists, wherever their studio may be. More work will be done in 2025 in an effort to find effective solutions to address this issue.

19b. Which of the following options best describes the location of your 2024 Suffolk Open Studios event?



If you selected Other above, please describe the location of your 2024 Suffolk Open Studios event:

- “Next door to a wedding venue.”
- “Isolated rural studios but in tourist area 1 mile from popular village. 3 or 4 other studios open on the complex, and we try to coordinate and encourage visitors to all. Really helps and means 3 or 4 lots of personal promo also bringing more people in.”
- “Several artists and potter in the area so there is an art scene and close to [name of village] in a tourist location.”
- “Some local arts, but not as vibrant as it used to be and mostly amateur. Few professional arts connections.”

20. Any other Feedback/Additional Comments:

- “Thanks for all your hard work.”
- “It is always good to be asked for comments – helps one to feel part of the Arts community.”
- “Thank you team for all your help and making it the success that it was.”
- “Thank you so much perhaps the Snape opportunity too near the opening. Great chance to see other artist’s work.”

- “Thanks again.”
- “THANKS!!”
- “Only a big thank you for the team’s hard work. Next year I will open the studio and participate like I have in the past four years.”
- “I think the most disappointing aspect of SOS for me is the exhibitions. Although I applaud the fact that they are not selective this does lead to a bit of a hotchpotch show both in terms of nature and quality. Additionally, owing to the pressure of space the size limit of works does not work for me. One possible solution may be to have themed shows, which would at least be a self-regulating way of reducing the entries and lend some sort of cohesion to the shows. The themes could be pretty general e.g. landscape, abstract etc. or more specific and topical e.g. Anthropocene, water, transport.....”
- “Thank you for all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes xx Greatly appreciated x”
- “Thank you to all the committee for your hard work and dedication. It’s a great organisation to be part of.”
- “A group of us held a showcase exhibition together which attracted a lot of visitors and buyers.”
- “Just a huge and heartfelt thank you.”
- “We live in a small hamlet of 11 households between [name of town] and [name of town]. There are three studios in the hamlet and all three were part of SOS. This helped in attracting visitors.”
- “Gratitude.”
- “Thanks to all the volunteers... I know you all work very hard x”
- “Appreciate the voluntary work of the organisers.”
- “I appreciate all your help with all the organising of SOS, the directory, exhibitions, publicity, website etc. Many thanks.”
- “Why was this survey so long?”

Many thanks to everyone who took the time to complete this survey. As you can see from the ‘Actions’ and ‘Comments’ the Committee does really value your input. While it’s true that the relatively small number of responses makes it difficult to draw any general conclusions, this in no way invalidates any of the individual member experiences expressed above. The survey responses do appear to cover the full range of opinions held by SOS members, even if the proportions may not be entirely representative.

Many good ideas have been shared and the Committee has acted on as many of them as possible – following discussion and agreement at the 2024 AGM.

The survey also raises many interesting questions?

If there aren't many other artists in your area, can you help to recruit more? If some are lapsed members, maybe they could be encouraged to re-join when they learn of the changes that are being made. This is not to say, of course, that at any time in the past Suffolk Open Studios has not been run well, only that it continues to evolve in response to the wishes of its ever-changing membership. Spread the word.

If there are other local events taking place at the same time as Suffolk Open Studios in June, can these be seen as opportunities rather than competition? It's not always possible to turn a seeming negative into a positive, but it's always worth a try. Rather than deciding not to open on Father's Day weekend, is there a way we could use it to our advantage? Open Gardens events would seem to work well with Open Studios, as do craft fairs – how can we tap into those audiences?

The weather. There's not much we can do about that - even if we move the event to another month. But we can have contingency plans – cosy wet-weather spaces with hot drinks and broly stands or fans and iced drinks if the sun decides to shine. Think about parking and access – a muddy lawn or slippery decking are probably not ideal, and nobody will take time to browse if they're uncomfortably hot. Also, as a comment above alluded to, people frequently feel uneasy about entering a stranger's space, so if you are opening a home studio, how could you make stepping over the threshold seem like the easiest, most natural thing in the world to do? Just leaving the door open is a good start!

Promotion and publicity. The following comment has been made, "If we have to do all our own publicity, what's the point of Open Studios?" Well, I don't think anyone has ever said you have to do ALL your own publicity – SOS does a ton! As well as producing thousands of printed directories and the app, we have several thousand followers on social media, nearly a thousand subscribers to the mailing list, and frequently appear in the press and print publications, although it would be to your advantage to do some of your own promotion as well. However, the above survey responses have provided a number of excellent answers to the question – 'Why be part of Suffolk Open Studios?':

Strength in numbers – like-minded people all working toward the same (or very similar) goal at the same time with the dedicated support of an overarching count-wide organisation that has a decent budget and a reach far beyond that of most individual artists.

Connection – being part of an organisation that brings together artists, artisans and makers from across the local region, enabling professional relationships and collaborations to be forged, either through artform or location (or both). We can learn from each other's experiments and experiences, using peer-mentoring or friendly advice to help us raise our game. We can share venues, share costs, celebrate 'wins' together and offer support when things don't go to plan.

Community – You may like to work in isolation. You may not want a whole load of instant new friends. But making art can be a lonely experience and sometimes it simply feeds the soul to spend time in the company of others who ‘get it’. It’s not all social media – it’s real life, face-to-face connection. And if that fills you with dread, nobody is forced to ‘join in’ – just know that the more you put in, the more you will get out of the experience.

What do SOS members value? Well, many of them value opportunities to sell their work such as during the June Open Studios event and the group members’ exhibitions. Others value the same events just as much but view them rather as opportunities to have their work seen, to raise their profile as professional artists, to share their love of making, to establish relationships with possible collectors, to demonstrate their process to existing collectors, to promote their classes and workshops, to meet other artists. Many find it useful to take the pressure of ‘selling’ out of the equation entirely, instead using these events to connect – with the delayed gratification of a sale or shared exhibition further down the line. Of course, footfall is important for all of this – we’re working (with you) on that.

Of frequently underestimated value are the printed Directory and the digital App. Many Open Studios visitors keep their SOS directories long past the end of the June event, some even have collections of directories from multiple years. They are invaluable guides to high-quality art and artists that many art-lovers in the region return to time and again – all your contact information is right there and if you’ve said you’ll accept visits at other times of the year by appointment, all the better.

Art can be an impulse buy – a ‘got to have’ even if it breaks the bank, but often art sales can be a (maddeningly) slow process – a process that only starts when your work is seen. Re-framing the June Open Studios event, and even the three members’ exhibitions to an extent, as opportunities for your work to be seen – both in isolation (at your studio) and alongside that of other amazing artists (in group shows) can help to underline the value of being part of an organisation like Suffolk Open Studios. It’s not all about June, but June Open Studios is still a big deal, and we have plans to make it even bigger. There are also plans to tweak the directory, making the images larger, changing the paper so pictures are clearer, and colour-coding areas of the county to make the planning of studio visits easier, not to mention emphasising the value of the publication itself far beyond the June event.

If you are taking part in Suffolk Open Studios 2025 we hope you have found the results of the 2024 survey interesting, perhaps even useful, and we would ask you to please complete the 2025 survey form when it comes out in July.

Thank you and best wishes for a successful 2025.

SOS Committee