



THE FABRIC OF PROTEST



February 2021

**Health and safety risks to
garment workers**



A monthly textile workshop by People's History Museum (PHM) and artist Helen Mather. Learn new techniques and discuss the issues that matter to you. In this month's session we will continue to explore migration and textiles, by focusing on the health and safety risks to garment workers and homeworkers in the fashion industry.

This resource introduces some of the ideas and techniques that will be explored during the online session on Saturday 27 February 2021. Use it to prepare for the session or as inspiration for your own textile projects.

Recommended for 11+ (under 18s must have an accompanying adult present during session)

[#fabricofprotest](#)

phm.org.uk



Transport & General Workers Union banner around 1981 © People's History Museum

We will be taking inspiration from this Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU) banner in the museum's 2020-2021 Banner Exhibition.

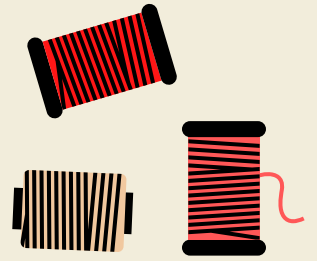
This homemade banner is made from hand painted, red, plain woven, hessian sacking. In the centre is a tractor, above it are the words 'T.&G.W.U. AGRICULTURE' and below it, is the 'TGW' logo. White painted stripes frame the border and it is finished with a single yellow tassel. The banner measures 788mm x 1043mm.

The banner probably dates from 1981 when farm workers entered the TGWU.

The TGWU led a campaign to regulate the practices of gangmasters – in farming these are people who oversee and organise the work of casual manual labourers, often migrant workers. This was in response to the drowning of Chinese cockle pickers in Morecombe Bay in 2004.

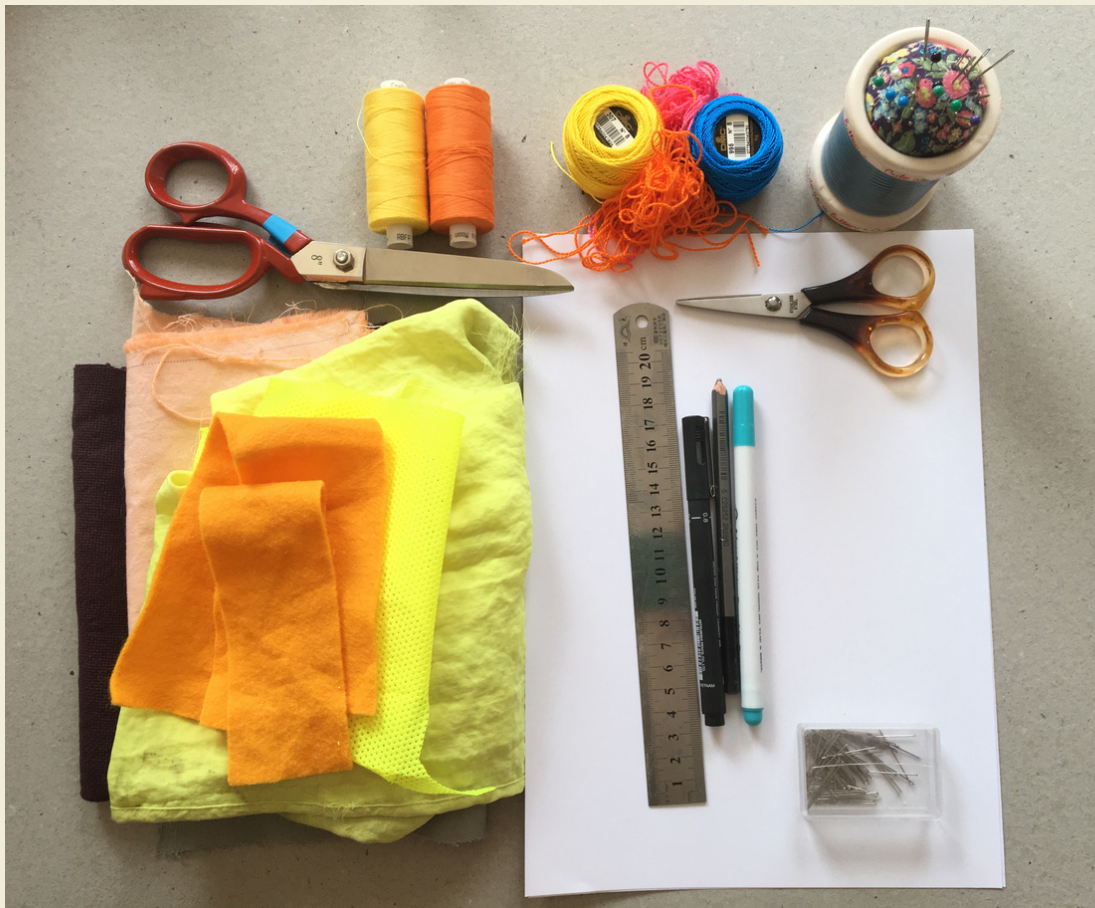
Today many migrant workers are working in unsafe working conditions in the garment industry both in the UK and elsewhere in the world.

Health and safety symbols



This month we will be looking at garment workers' health and safety, drawing attention to the risks facing these workers and what can be done to support them.

We will be making a square that will highlight the health and safety impacts for workers in the garment industry. Using the symbols that are used in workplace health and safety, appliqué and stitch.

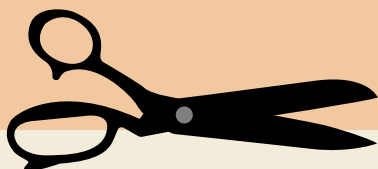


Materials



Gather some materials from around your home.
Here are some suggestions:

- Fabric: 20cm x 20cm
- Sample pieces of fabric: including some bright colours, if you have them
- Thread: Embroidery thread/sewing thread
- Needles
- Scissors
- Pen, paper and ruler





What do you know about garment workers' health and safety (H&S)?

If you have time before the session you could find out about the risks to workers. We have listed some starting points below:

- The collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh, 2013, highlighted the dangerous health and safety conditions garment workers have to work in. The collapse killed 1,136 workers leaving around 2,500 injured and was the worst disaster to ever hit the garment industry.
- Factories under economic pressure are often set up in unsafe buildings that breach H&S regulations. Some have inaccessible fire exits, faulty electrics, and no provision of fire training or equipment such as extinguishers.
- Hours are long and people suffer from exhaustion, repetitive strain injuries, chronic bad backs, poor eyesight and general ill health.

Many factories use chemical processes such as dyeing and sandblasting, how do you think this might impact people's health and safety?

Garment workers are predominantly women and girls, how might workers' genders impact their treatment?

With the outbreak of Covid-19, what additional risks has this meant for the garment workers?

You may want to start sketching; if that helps you develop your thoughts about these issues.



Further reading



You might find these links useful starting points for your research.

Campaigns about the health and safety of garment workers:

- <https://labourbehindthelabel.org/campaigns/worker-safety/>
- <https://cleanclothes.org/unsafe-workplaces>
- <http://www.homeworkersww.org.uk/campaigns/all-work-no-freedom-women-garment-workers-in-tamil-nadu>

Fire Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh - this agreement came into effect due to campaigning and union involvement in 2013.

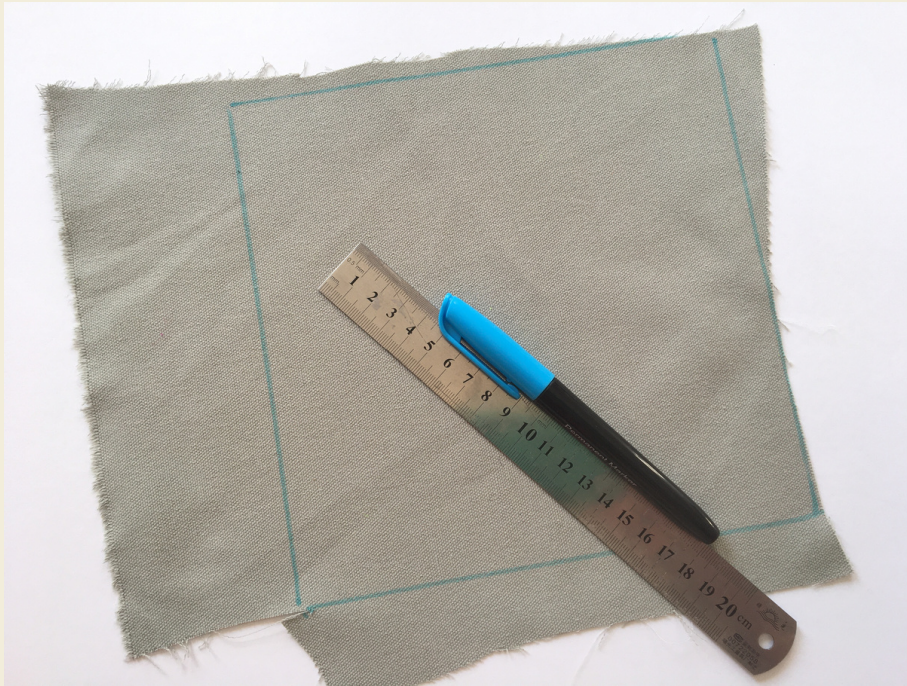
- <https://youtu.be/SUOAXL8ksUQ>

Episode 2 of the Fashion Revolution podcast discusses health and safety:

- <https://workerdiaries.org/listen-to-the-fashion-revolution-podcast/>

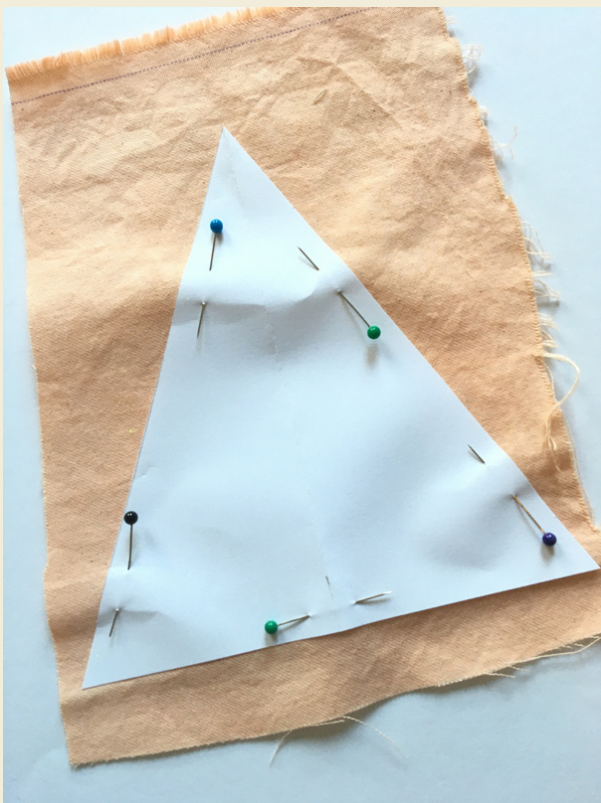


Getting started



Gather your materials as listed on page 3.

Mark out (with pins or marker) a square 20cm x 20cm on a piece of fabric.

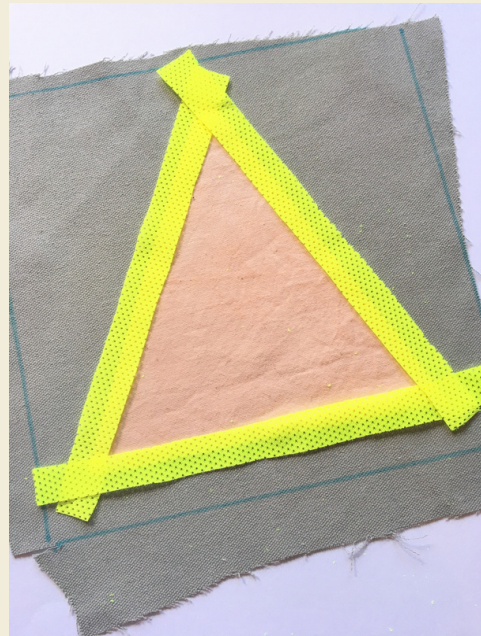
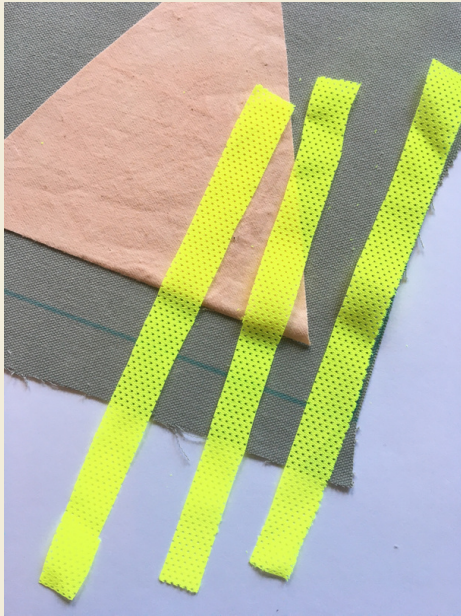


Using a ruler and pencil, draw a triangle on paper to fit within the square – no bigger than 14cm high and 14cm wide.

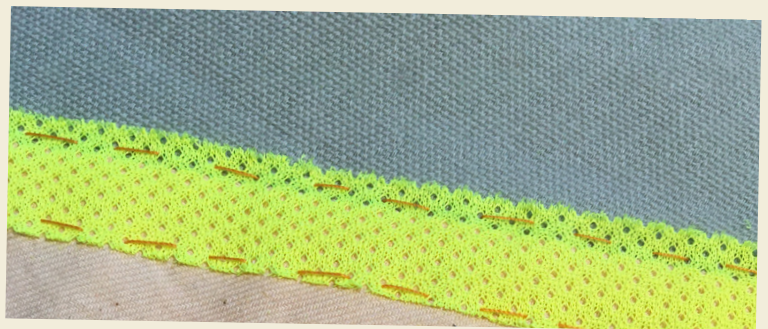
Pin the paper triangle to a piece of fabric and cut your triangle out of the fabric.

Stitching your triangle

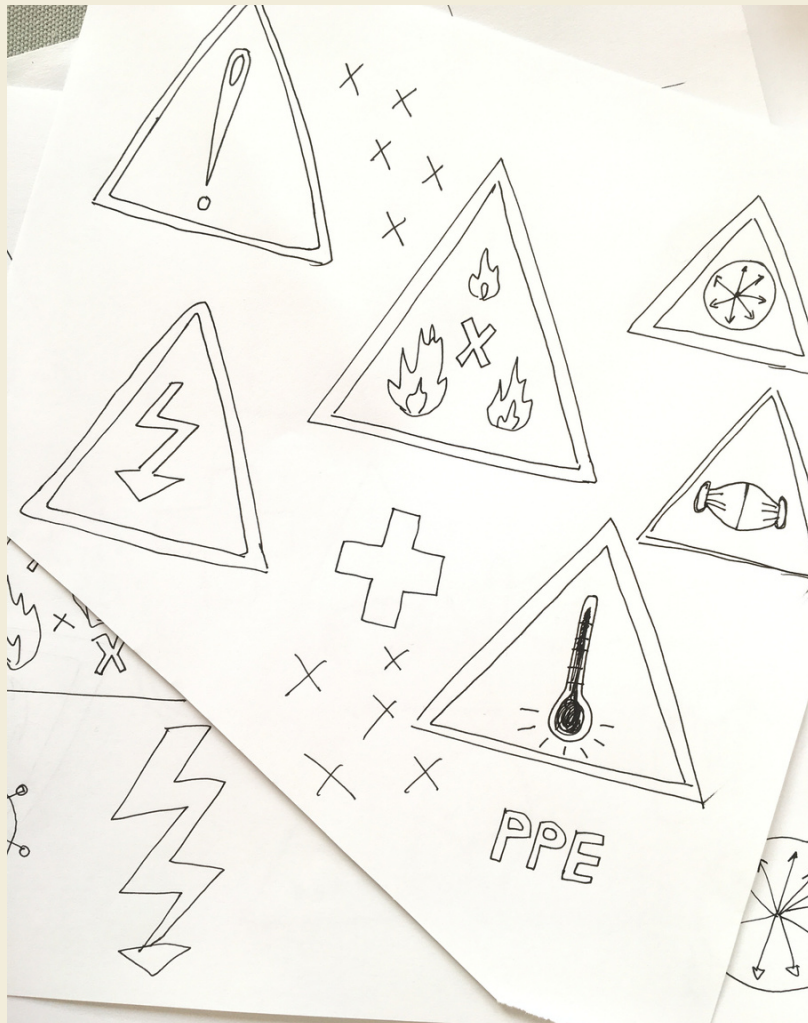
Cut 3 strips in another fabric (a bright one if you have it) around 1.5cm wide and pin them around the triangle, making sure to pin through the triangle of fabric.



Use a running stitch on both edges of the strips to secure the triangle to the square. You can use a sewing thread or embroidery thread for the running stitch.



Drawing your symbol



The centre of the triangle is a space to put a symbol, word or image that represents the threats to garment worker's health and safety.

Take some paper and draw ideas that relate to the issues such as being overworked, repetitive strains, chemicals, fire, building collapse and Covid-19.

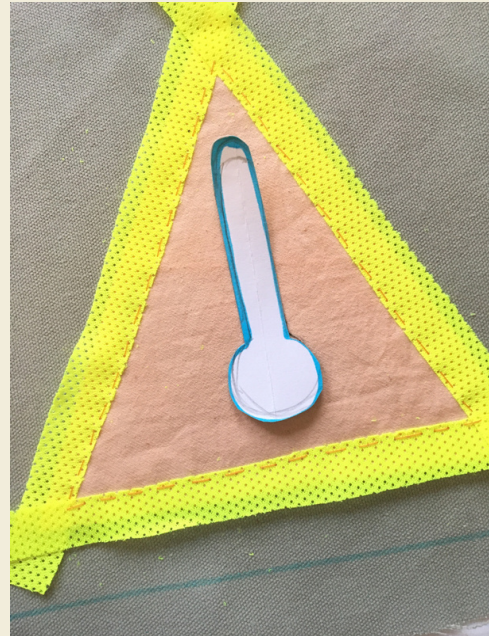
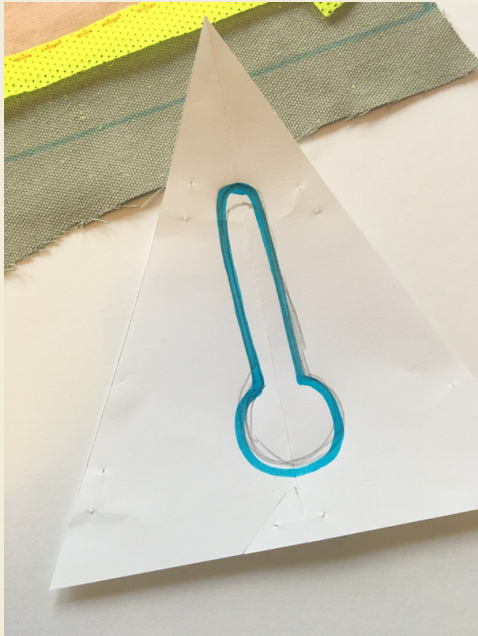
Consider how can you put this into an image or symbol, using the style of health and safety signage.



Stitching your symbol

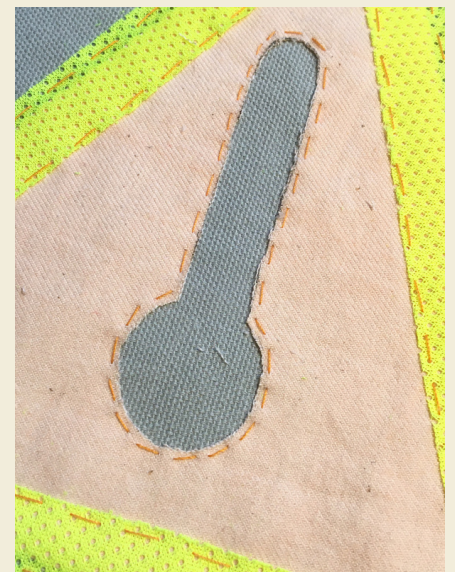
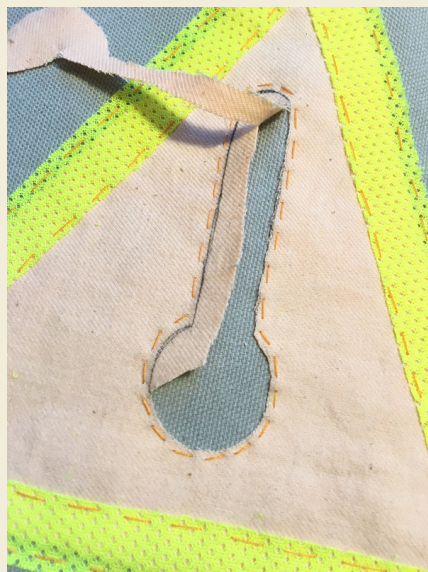
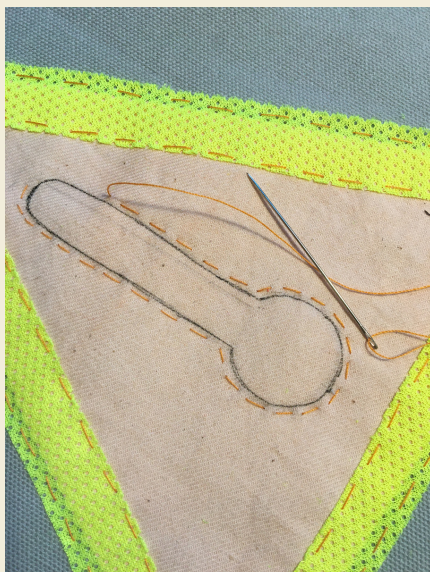


When you have decided on a symbol or image, draw the shape onto your triangle paper template. You can cut this out and use it as a template.



For this part, you can use reverse appliqué or appliqué.

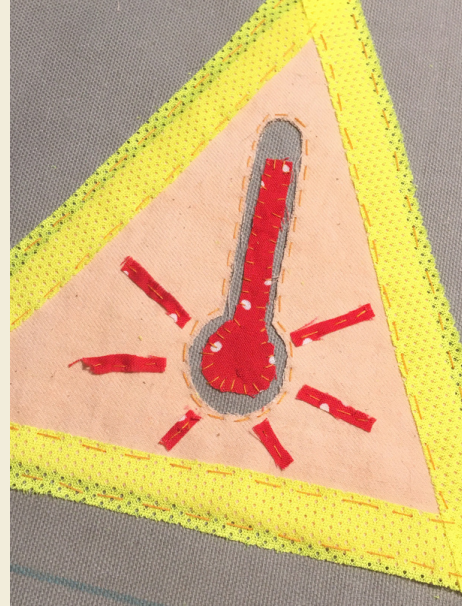
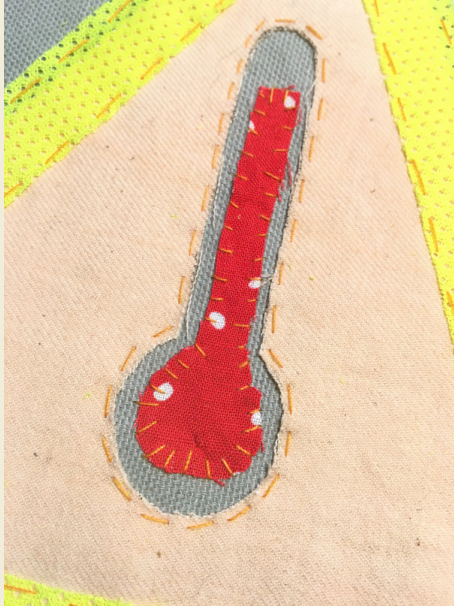
If you are using reverse appliqué, draw around the template onto your fabric triangle. Next, stitch around the shape (through both layers of fabric), and cut away the top layer to reveal the fabric beneath.



For appliqué, cut out your shape in fabric and stitch in place.

Stitching your words

Continue with your design, cutting fabric and stitching it onto the triangle using any stitch you like!



You might want to add words in the space around the triangle.

Think about what words compliment your image or symbol. Use pen to write them on, then backstitch over the letters.



When you have finished your piece, you can cut it to size, following the markings (20cm x 20cm).

Join us on Zoom to get creative

If you would like to join artist Helen Mather and others to stitch, chat and share ideas inspired by this resource, [book onto the online Zoom session](#).

Don't forget to bring a cuppa!

This month we'll be online on
Saturday 27 February,
2.00pm - 3.30pm.



Share what you have created!

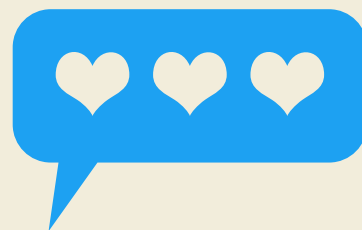
We would love to see what you have created!

We plan to bring together photos of participants' creations to make a digital patchwork banner.

If you use social media, please share photos of your creations using #fabricofprotest.



Or if you prefer you can email a photo of your creation to learning@phm.org.uk.



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