

CREATIVELY MINDED AND IN RECOVERY

Exploring participatory arts for people with addictions

By Dr Cathy Sloan



CREATIVELY MINDED AND IN RECOVERY: EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY ARTS FOR PEOPLE WITH ADDICTIONS

About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent foundation which protects and advances human rights and promotes inclusion. We believe in the role of a strong, independent civil society nationally and internationally. We use our resources to enable civil society to work with people facing discrimination and disadvantage and to act strategically to tackle the root causes of injustice and inequality. More can be found in *A History of the Baring Foundation in 50 Grants*. Since 2020, the Foundation has focused its arts programme on creative opportunities for people with mental health problems.

This is the latest in our Creatively Minded series of reports about the UK arts and mental health sector. See page 74 for a full list of those reports.

About the author

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Contents

Foreword by David Cutler	05
Introduction by Dr Cathy Sloan	06
Case studies:	11
Bristol Drugs Project: Rising Voices Recovery Choir and Bristol Recovery Orchestra	12
British Ceramics Biennial: Recast project	15
Dante or Die	19
Fallen Angels Dance Theatre	23
Geese Theatre Company	26
Glasgow Barons	29
Mixed Bag Players	31
New Note	36
Not Saints	39
Outside Edge Theatre Company	42
Portraits of Recovery	45
small performance adventures	48
Theatre Royal Plymouth: Our Space	52
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Shipley Gallery	55
Vita Nova	58
Moving forward by Dr Cathy Sloan	62
Directory and map of recovery arts projects	70
Bibliography	73
Baring Foundation resources	74

> [Click on a chapter above to go to its page.](#)

> [From any page in the document, click on the page header to come back to the contents page.](#)



Photo © Natasha Bidgood,
courtesy of New Note.

Foreword

BY DAVID CUTLER

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation

Since 2020, the Baring Foundation has been funding creative opportunities for people with mental health problems and within this we have funded work with people in recovery from addictions. From early on, it became clear to us that there was a distinctive and exciting group of arts organisations specialising in this work. We have brought many of them together in a report with a similar approach to our previous *Creatively Minded* reports and been delighted that one of the preeminent academics in the field, Dr Cathy Sloan, has agreed to introduce the report and give her reflections on the case studies herein.

Work with people in recovery feels somewhat different to the work we often see in the many hundreds of projects across the UK working with people with mental health problems. The most obvious difference is that in recovery arts both the creative workforce and participant groups seem to have a higher proportion of men. The comparative underrepresentation of men in the broader arts and mental health field is something we are seeking to address in our most recent funding round and report, *Creatively Minded Men*.

As Dr Sloan remarks, there is a strong case for more research in this area. What is the impact of creativity on recovery from addiction?

How many people are engaged in these activities? Given the concentration of work geographically, it feels that there is a case for expansion. Could more recovery services use the arts in the way that Bristol Drugs Project exemplifies? Should more mainstream arts organisations work with people in recovery like Theatre Royal Plymouth or the British Ceramics Biennial? And given the concentration on music and drama, could other art forms be used more, as Portraits of Recovery and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums are doing with visual arts? What role could the Digital Art School produced by Hospital Rooms play?

More than anything though, this report should be seen as a celebration. Firstly the report assembles a series of wonderful examples of the importance of the arts in the lives of people in recovery. Next, it often feels artistically ambitious with, for example, performances at the Royal Opera House, and inventive, as can be seen in the creation of the world's first abstinent music label, Not Saints. Lastly, it feels as if the significance of this work is gradually being accepted which can be seen in the steady growth of this work.

A movement is emerging which will only become more important in years to come.

Introduction

BY DR CATHY SLOAN

Cathy Sloan is Senior Lecturer in Applied and Socially Conscious Theatre at London College of Music, University of West London

CONTEXT

Addiction remains a significant problem effecting the wellbeing and physical health of people across the globe. In the UK last year, 290,635 adults were in contact with drug and alcohol services from April 2022 to March 2023, with a higher number entering treatment than the previous two years.¹ During the same time frame, 12,418 young people (under the age of 18) made contact with treatment services for substance misuse issues.² These statistics, however, only reveal part of the picture. They do not show the hidden numbers who do not manage to seek treatment or those who enter recovery through undocumented support networks, such as Twelve Step recovery. Also missing are the wide-ranging types of addictions, including behavioural orientated forms, not just substances, that impact the wellbeing of individuals, families and society.

Extensive research into causes of addiction have influenced a variety of approaches to treatment too extensive to list in this report. However, as the title of MacMillan's west end production states, both addiction and recovery involve navigating either negative or positive connections with 'people, places and things.'³

Social environment is, therefore, key to recovery as much as personal development. The creative arts are particularly effective processes that enable self-discovery, through imagination and storytelling, and facilitate participation in supportive social environments. Such activities can create 'atmospheres of recovery'⁴ that increase wellbeing and, subsequently, contribute to sustained journeys of recovery.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Creatively Minded and in Recovery examines the role of the creative arts in supporting addiction recovery. It identifies a range of examples of arts practice whereby people with lived experience of addiction have benefited from participating in arts practice that engages with ideas and processes of recovery either directly or indirectly. The selected organisations represent a cross-section of arts forms, including theatre, sculpture, film and music. By highlighting the features of practice described in the case studies included, this report aims to highlight the distinct nature and value of recovery arts.

- 1** Statistics drawn from the most recent report from the UK Government Office for Health, Improvement and Disparities. Available here: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2022-to-2023/adult-substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2022-to-2023-report.
- 2** Statistics drawn from most recent report on young people accessing drug and alcohol services from UK Government Office for Health, Improvement and Disparities. Available here: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-young-people-2022-to-2023/young-peoples-substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2022-to-2023-report.
- 3** Duncan MacMillan's play *People, Places and Things*, written in 2015 and recently staged at Trafalgar Theatre May to August 2024, explores the protagonist's experience of residential drug rehabilitation.
- 4** Dr Cathy Sloan's book, *Messy Connections: Creating Atmospheres of Addiction Recovery through Performance Practice* (2024), documents examples of how creative arts contribute to atmospheres of recovery.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The case studies included in this report were identified as examples of good practice via the Addiction Recovery Arts network's directory and through the Baring Foundation's existing research connections. Selection focused on providing a range of art forms and types of organisations. These include companies that have been founded by artists with lived experience of addiction recovery, peer-led groups, participatory arts practitioners who work with people affected by addiction and arts services managed by addiction service providers. Through providing such a range of organisation style and type, this report demonstrates the various ways in which recovery arts can operate in community locations across the UK.

There have, of course, been limitations to the scope of this report. Recovery arts as a visible movement is still in its formative stages and there are both gaps in current provision as well as knowledge of what exists beyond the larger organisations who have had greater publicity of their work. For instance, when compiling the list of case studies, it became evident that the south-east of England has a concentration of recovery arts organisations. This is especially the case in Brighton: a city which can boast of a recovery orchestra, music label, film company, participatory theatre-making and so much more. Conversely, regional countries such as Northern Ireland and Scotland seem to be less well served by dedicated recovery arts projects at present, or at least they are not yet connected to the growing movement of recovery arts across the UK.

There is still considerable stigma attached to addiction which further hinders access to, and visibility of, creative arts that specifically address lived experience of recovery. This also has funding implications, given that several of the organisations in this report have meaningful impact on the lives of participants who engage in participation across a sustained

period of time.⁵ Long-term and iterative access to recovery arts activity requires a different funding model to what presently exists.

THE HISTORY OF RECOVERY ARTS

The recognition of a distinct field of arts practices specialising in working with, by and for people affected by addiction is somewhat new. The provenance of a movement as such within the UK can be traced to the first ever conference, held at Kingston University and in partnership with Liverpool Hope University in April 2012, titled 'Addiction and Performance: The New Normal'. The concept for the conference emerged from a conversation between Dr James Reynolds, then an academic at Kingston University and board trustee of Outside Edge Theatre Company, Dr Zoe Zontou, an academic at Liverpool Hope University and Phil Fox, the founder of Outside Edge Theatre Company. The conference brought together performers, applied arts practitioners, therapeutic professionals and researchers to explore and discuss connections across their disciplines under the theme of addiction and performance. Following the success of the conference, the first ever book sharing research on addiction and performance was published.⁶ This marked a moment whereby recognition of a unique approach to performance practice was documented.

However, at that point, the field of addiction recovery arts was limited to approximately four leading companies, Outside Edge Theatre (founded in London in 1998), Fallen Angels Dance Theatre (founded in Liverpool in 2011), Vita Nova (Bournemouth in 1999) and Portraits of Recovery (founded in Manchester in 2011). Three out of four of these organisations were founded by people with lived experience of addiction recovery. For them, their artistic practice was very much part of their own ongoing recovery journey. To some extent, their work in this field was the equivalent of what people in Twelve Step recovery would refer to as 'service' (Step 12) which involves

⁵ Chapter 5, 'Creative Kinship', of Sloan's book (noted above) explains the need for 'sustained relations of care' and community kinship through recovery-engaged arts activities.

⁶ *Addiction and Performance* (2014) is an edited collection of chapters written by contributors at the 2012 conference, compiled by the organisers Reynolds and Zontou.

sharing experience with others in the hope that it will support and inspire others in their recovery journeys.⁷

There have been isolated arts projects on addiction by socially-engaged and applied arts groups, but the dominant practice is that of the pillar organisations mentioned above with the addition of new organisations that emerged in Brighton and who have become rapidly successful: New Note Orchestra (founded in 2014), small performance adventures (founded in 2018), Not Saints (founded in 2018) and Horizon Film and Media (founded as an offshoot from Edit Sweet in 2019). These organisations all have a common link within the Brighton recovery community and their propensity for initiating collaboration with each other and other organisations has been key to their success.

All leading recovery arts organisations tended to be embedded within or connected to recovery communities and have structures that involve peer-led support, much like recovery groups. They each tend to embrace recovery in a broad sense to include all forms of addiction, both substance-related and behavioural, as well as mental wellbeing. There is a recognition that people affected by addiction may also suffer from a diagnosed mental health condition, often referred to as dual diagnosis⁸ and that cross addiction is common.⁹ The power of the work of these arts organisations comes from a dedication to high quality artistic outputs, not just participatory workshops. Aesthetic quality is connected to their potential for impact and advocacy, representing themes of addiction recovery in carefully framed performance-based projects. Portraits of Recovery was unique amongst the original organisations in that its first projects focused on portraiture, rather than performance.

With the rise of the arts for health and wellbeing movement, particularly subsequent to the publication of the findings of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

inquiry into creative health in 2017,¹⁰ interest in recovery arts has grown and new projects focusing on addiction recovery have emerged. This has also opened funding channels to the leading recovery arts organisations who, prior to this, had very limited avenues of financial support. Addiction – with the unhelpful stereotypes and stigmatisation attached to it – is not an issue that draws popular support in the way that other social issues might. Embracing the trend towards arts for health and wellbeing, therefore, allows recovery arts organisations to contextualise their work within the area of wellbeing. Portraits of Recovery were the first recovery arts organisation to be awarded national portfolio funding by Arts Council England (ACE), acknowledging the shift in ACE's strategic plan (2020-2030) to include targets for arts, health and wellbeing. Nonetheless, it should still be appreciated that recovery arts are a distinct set of practices in how they directly engage with processes and rituals of addiction recovery, as this report shall illustrate.

CREATIVE RECOVERY (KEY THEMES)

The phrase creative recovery denotes the ways in which people in addiction recovery can harness arts practice as a key element of their recovery process. This is not to be confused with the specific disciplines of art, music or drama therapy. While arts therapies can be used in rehabilitation settings, it is participatory and community arts practices to which this report refers. These may have therapeutic effects, but the main focus is artistic expression and collective cultural experience.

Increasingly, addiction service providers in the UK have recognised the powerful impact of arts for health and wellbeing both during and post treatment. Organisations such as Cascade Creative Recovery, Brighton, and Creative Recovery, Barnsley, base their activities on the

7 Step Twelve of the Twelve Step recovery programme states “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” In practice this involves acts of service to the recovery community by sharing ‘experience, strength and hope’ and supporting others in their recovery journeys.

8 Dual-diagnosis is the medical term to denote when someone is assessed as having both an addiction problem as well as a clinically diagnosed mental health condition, such as bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia or an anxiety disorder.

9 Cross addiction is a term used to describe the transference of addiction from one form to another. For instance, someone might stop consuming alcohol but instead engage in another compulsive form of behaviour such as gambling or smoking.

10 The APPG report can be accessed here: nch.org.uk/appg-ahw-inquiry-report. It advocates for arts as an effective mechanism for supporting wellbeing in community settings.



Photo © Natasha Bidgood, courtesy of New Note.

premise that creativity is essential to recovery and, consequently, provide their service users with a programme of creative social activities.¹¹

The case studies in this report highlight important themes of recovery that are positively impacted by creative arts. They indicate how the arts practices discussed directly contribute to recovery capital; a term used to describe the internal and external resources an individual can utilise to support their recovery journey.¹² These themes include:

1. Self-expression – supporting self-reflection and discovery to develop a sense of self beyond an ‘addict’ identity.¹³
2. Challenging stigma – supporting people affected by addiction to move beyond shame and stigma which often inhibits engagement in recovery support.¹⁴
3. Positive social interaction – supporting people who have experienced self-isolation to interact with others in a caring, recovery-focused creative space.¹⁵

11 The mission statements for both organisations can be accessed on their websites here: cascadecreativerecovery.com/ and here: creativerecovery.co.uk.

12 Dr David Patton, a specialist in criminology and addiction research, explains how creative arts are an important asset that can boost a person’s recovery capital. His article, ‘Capital Ideas’ in edition 4 of *Performing Recovery* magazine outlines this idea in an accessible way: recovery-arts.org/pr-magazine/issue-4.

13 Dr Zoe Zontou’s chapter, ‘Staging Recovery From Addiction’ in *Addiction and Performance* (Reynolds and Zontou 2014), illustrates how the personal storytelling enabled through the creative process of Fallen Angels Dance Theatre supports the development of new personal narratives of recovery. This assists the participant in moving beyond their old life narrative towards a new recovery-orientated identity.

14 The National Health Service’s Addictions Providers Alliance has an ongoing campaign #StigmaKills that highlights how societal attitudes about addiction can exacerbate the problem and prevent people from accessing treatment. The campaign can be viewed online here: www.stigmakills.org.uk.

15 Dr Stephanie Kewley’s evaluation of Geese Theatre’s ‘Staging Recovery’ project identifies how the collaborative theatre-making process facilitated the development of pro-social behaviours as well as the recovery capital needed to support positive changes in identity. The article can be accessed here: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0197455618302077.

4. Connection to recovery community – introducing people in recovery to a local network of people with lived experience of recovery which can become a valuable source of peer support and ongoing social outlet.

STAYING CONNECTED

In September 2022, the Addiction Recovery Arts network was formally launched at an event hosted at the University of West London (UWL). The impetus for this event was created through a culmination of informal meetings held between leading organisations in the field throughout the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-21 and from a succession of knowledge exchange activities emerging from the artistic research of Dr Cathy Sloan, a former Artistic Director of Outside Edge Theatre Company and currently an academic at UWL.¹⁶ There had been a growing consensus and desire for collaboration as a network to generate visibility and greater advocacy for addiction recovery arts practices.

In addition to the initial group of organisations, mentioned earlier, there now exists a growing movement of artists, practitioners and organisations who identify their work as recovery-engaged or recoverist.¹⁷ Through the publication of *Performing Recovery* magazine¹⁸, the discovery of previously unknown or lesser-known projects has been made possible. The Directory continues to grow and includes initiatives in the USA, such as the Creative High film project and Passenger Recovery who support touring musicians. This report represents a small sample of this emergent field of arts practice.

¹⁶ Sloan's first experimentation with curating a recovery arts knowledge exchange event occurred as a culmination of her doctoral research on addiction recovery arts practice. A discussion of this event, hosted at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, can be found in the following journal article (2021): www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13569783.2020.1844562.

¹⁷ A recoverist is someone who supports the rights of people in recovery to fair and equitable treatment. The Recoverist Manifesto emerged in 2016 from a Europe-wide arts project facilitated by Portraits of Recovery in collaboration with Dr Clive Parkinson, Director of Arts for Health at Manchester School of Art. Further information can be accessed here: www.portraitsofrecovery.org.uk/news/introducing-the-recoverist-manifesto-a-collective-voice-of-recovery.

¹⁸ Accessible online here: recovery-arts.org/performing-recovery-magazine.

CASE STUDIES



Traces through Time by Fallen Angels
at the Royal Opera House.
Photo © Point of View Photography.

Bristol Drugs Project: Creative Communities

BY SOPHIE WILSDON

Sophie is Creative Communities Lead at the Bristol Drugs Project.



BDP's Rising Voices choir. Photo © Robert Browne.

Creative Communities is a part of Bristol Drugs Project (BDP), a harm reduction drugs charity that has operated in Bristol since the mid-1980s. Creative Communities was born 10 years ago when I had the idea of starting a regular weekly singing group as a complement to our structured day care programme. As a group worker, I was finding it increasingly difficult to support people to find words to describe their coming round the cycle of change once more, why they were falling into the same patterns whilst sitting in the same rooms with the same group workers, doing the same worksheets. I had recently joined a community

choir and thought the model could be replicated at BDP. The choir leader was up for the challenge and BDP was open to a new idea, so we were off.

The choir soon formed a core group who wanted to stay on after they had finished the programme. So we knew we had started something unique in the treatment system and decided to open it up to the wider recovery community.

We now have seven weekly creative groups and partner with four major arts organisations: Rising Voices Recovery Choir, Bristol Recovery

Orchestra (alongside Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra), Oi Polloi theatre group (alongside Bristol Old Vic), Beginners Music (alongside Changing Tunes), Recovery in Motion movement group and Hip Hop Garden, which brings together permaculture principles with Hip Hop. We also run Bristol Sober Spaces, a project that puts on quality music nights for the sober and sober-curious communities.

Creative Communities was born out of looking for creative ways to support people to make changes in their drug use in a harm reduction setting. As a musician, I knew the benefits of music on my own mental health, and also could see the strong correlations between creativity and recovery. I had friends for whom music had been both a blessing and a curse in terms of providing solace, but also that the gig scene could become somewhere where problematic drug use could be hidden in plain sight.

“ I can honestly say being part of MY CHOIR is my proudest achievement in recovery. It's given me confidence and crushed my anxiety. And my PTSD didn't stand a chance when I replaced it with the peace, stability, support and a million good things. ”

Participant

Each group is slightly different, but all operate under harm reduction principles in that anyone is welcome at any stage of drug use and change, as long as they are in a fit state to engage. Performance is very much a part of our model, which our members tell us is confidence building, builds community, and gives of sense of achievement and pride. We've performed in all the major concert halls in Bristol, including Bristol Beacon, St. George's and Bristol Old Vic.

The choir is led very much from a natural voice network ethos – anyone can sing, and you don't need to read music. The orchestra requires people to be able to follow chords or written music as the pieces are more complex. Oi Polloi is open to all, as is Beginners Music, hip hop and Recovery in Motion. One of our aims is to open up the arts to people who are likely to have been stigmatised and excluded. We enhance these opportunities by having

access to free tickets for concerts, thanks to our friends and partners at Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Fitzhardinge Consort and Gasworks Choir.

We regularly get feedback from people that the group they are in is the central part of their week, and their recovery.

“ Creative Communities has been the cornerstone of my recovery from the outset. Harmony, connection, continuity, mutual support and belonging. It encourages trust, self-discipline, mindfulness, sociability, self-confidence and it's FUN!!! ”

Participant

We attract new members to our groups all the time, and it is a pleasure to see how quickly people can feel connected and excited by new possibilities. R joined the orchestra in January 2024, and says it had taken him years to stabilise after decades of heroin use, unstable housing and managing his schizophrenia.

“ Eventually, after a suicide attempt, I got a prescription for schizophrenia and methadone which I'm still on now. Although my health has become very poor and still have hardships, like my best friend dying last year, I am keeping positive with the help of those around me including the Recovery Orchestra. I've only been playing with the orchestra since January but have found it such a boost to my wellbeing, a target to go for and also a challenge. It gives my music a good outlet and gives me some structure with something good to aim for. ”

Participant

We are invited to perform all over Bristol and beyond, which increases people's sense of purpose, confidence and pride in what we do.

“ We were invited to sing at Newport Cathedral to help celebrate 20 years of Kaleidoscope - a joyous and life-affirming event where we met workers and clients from over the water, who immediately said they want to start their own choirs. So proud that we're spreading the word about music in recovery! ”

Participant

We also offer opportunities for members to become peers who support behind the scenes, or to join our steering group which is made up of members and external arts professionals. H has been a peer supporting the projects since 2016.

“ My weekly sessions with Bristol Recovery Orchestra and Rising Voices serve as a continual inspiration for the way I aspire to live. I strive to capture and carry that joy with me daily. ”

Participant

Our partnerships with arts agencies are something we are especially proud of, and equally, we know it benefits them too.

“ We have learnt a huge amount from our 5 years of working together with BDP and hold it up as a hugely successful partnership. The care and community of BDP staff and volunteers underpins the success of the Recovery Orchestra, allowing Jon James and the BSO supporting musicians to do what we do best – facilitating extraordinary music making. We have replicated this blueprint in similar projects across the southwest. ”

Lucy Warren, Head of Participate for Community Health and Wellbeing at Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Later this year, we will celebrate ten years of Creative Communities with a Gala Fundraiser. We will showcase all our groups, celebrate our members talents and put another dent in the stigma that surrounds people who use or have used drugs. We are incredibly proud that we have survived funding cuts, changes in treatment systems and the pandemic, and are now stronger than ever. Let's see what the next ten years brings.



British Ceramics Biennial: Recast

BY JOANNE MILLS

Joanne is Studio & Community Programme Manager
at British Ceramics Biennial.



A Recast session in progress. Photo © Jenny Harper.

“With the clay, and along with your recovery, if something isn’t working for you, smooth it out, rebuild it, and try a different way and see how that works for you.”

Participant

The British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) develops, sustains and expands innovative ceramics practice and improves lives together with artists and creative communities. We do

this by delivering an engaging year-round programme of artists’ commissions, education, and community projects, all of which feed into a festival of contemporary ceramics that takes place in Stoke-on-Trent.

Established in 2009, the BCB festival has grown to be the single largest contemporary ceramics event in the UK. We present artworks from the UK’s leading ceramicists alongside work by international artists, in exhibitions and special events held across the city every two years.



Recast exhibition, 2023. Photo © Jenny Harper.

We work in partnership with organisations and individuals in the museums, cultural, industry, business, education, community and voluntary sectors across the city in the development and delivery of projects with a particular focus on public engagement. British Ceramics Biennial receives generous core funding support from Arts Council England, Staffordshire University and Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

“ For creativity, you’ve got to allow for mistakes and mishaps, and I think you need to accept that straightaway, because, if not, it will just ruin the whole experience. ”

Participant

The Recast project began in 2017 with BCB providing drop-in, weekly clay sessions from Stoke Recovery Service’s (SRS) building in the city centre, Hanley. These sessions were artist-run and became a popular part of the offer to new and existing clients. The service

manager at the time observed the sessions and began to spot the parallels between working with clay and the recovery journey. The tactility and immediacy of the material, along with the transformative processes involved in making ceramics, attracted clients to the programme and kept them engaged. The clay provided an alternative way of communicating, a pathway to socialising, and resulted in the making of something tangible. The rich ceramic heritage of the city affectionately known as ‘The Potteries’, added another layer of connection for those who lived in the area, with some clients having worked in the industry in the past.

“ I used to do gilding and painting – all sorts with pottery, working with clay. It’s reconnected me to what I did when I was a teenager. I’ve not done it for years. It’s good to get creative again and get all my expressions out. ”

Participant

Following a year of delivery in this way, BCB and SRS worked together to devise a project plan that intentionally took the clients through a guided eight-week programme, exploring their recovery journey through making with clay. This was delivered by a professional ceramic artist and a recovery worker together. This continues to be the model, with an additional co-lead artist now added to the team to provide additional support. Each year, we run a ceramics ‘residency’ at the BCB studio at Spode Works. This gives participants access to new techniques and equipment, as well as giving them more time to focus on developing their ceramic work. We also host sharing events, which focus on building confidence, challenging stigma and celebrating achievement. This year we participated in Ceramic Art London at Kensington Olympia, with a team of participants and staff accompanying an exhibition of works to the event. We have produced a podcast and a beautiful [artist’s film](#)¹⁹, which documents the experience of being a part of the Recast project.

¹⁹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=woNrGqrxo-8

“ When giving talks about the Recast project, we got some beautiful feedback and had people laughing, crying. It was clear to see how touched people were by the work being done in the Stoke recovery community through working with clay. ”

“ When we were sharing about our experience while in active addiction, we found others coming forward and opening up about their own struggles with substance misuse, which was empowering! ”

Participant

Caz has been a part of the Recast project since 2022. She first attended the eight-weekly sessions at the recovery service. One of the first things that she made during this time was a ceramic box to contain her recovery tokens.

“ When it was suggested, I thought, clay, no, it’s cold, it doesn’t feel very nice. But I went and it’s very calming, focusing, keeps me quiet, which is saying something. Not just relaxing, it’s mind-clearing. ”

Caz, participant

Despite her initial scepticism, Caz has become an advocate for clay, creativity and the Recast project. She quickly recognised that working with the clay alongside others gave an opportunity to connect not only with yourself and the sensory experience of the material, but with others, as you discuss what you are doing, learn from and with one another, whilst forming friendships and strengthening the support networks that are crucial to living in addiction recovery.

“ Recovery is impossible by yourself. While you’re busily doing whatever you’re doing, sometimes, if you’re relaxed, a lot of things will come out. The chatter between you. You get the help from your connections with others. ”

Caz, participant

She describes the piece that she made for the Recast exhibition at Airspace Gallery in 2023 here:

“ My garden means tranquillity, contentment and serenity to me, it’s an important piece for me as its part of my ongoing journey back from the dark depths of alcohol dependence.

The pond is tranquillity, the bridge is the journey over my demons (hence the trolls beneath it), the trees and the small creatures are personal growth and on-going recovery, and the meditation stones and stepping stones are places to sit to reflect. ”

Caz, participant

Artwork by Caz (above) for Recast exhibition, 2023.
Photo © Jenny Harper.



Following a period of volunteering, Caz has become a member of the Stoke Recovery Service staff team, and has been supporting others to participate in the Recast project.

“Starting a brand-new life with new activities and interests.”

Caz, participant

Recast is a dynamic project with BCB staff, associate artists and Stoke Recovery Service staff continually reviewing the content, approaches used and outputs of the project to ensure that it is as relevant as possible to those in substance misuse recovery in

Stoke-on-Trent. We have recently trialled a new strand to the project, *Recast: Clay Talk*, which uses the amazing collections of ceramics within the city to explore self-expression through discussion. We have also expanded the project to include those who are not yet able to access the abstinence-based programme at Stoke Recovery Service, through a series of drop-in sessions for those in the early stages of their recovery. At BCB, we are thrilled to have recently opened a wonderful new community ceramics studio at Spode Works and are looking at ways to help bridge a connection between being a Recast project participant and becoming a studio member, able to access our facilities twice a week, all year round.



Dante or Die: Odds On

BY TERRY O'DONOVAN

Terry is Co-Artistic Director of Dante or Die



Photo courtesy of Dante or Die.

ABOUT US

Dante or Die is an award-winning, internationally recognised theatre company specialising in creating and touring unique site-based performances. Led by co-founders Daphna Attias and Terry O'Donovan, our mission is to bring communities together creatively to confront knotty contemporary topics and inspire people to see every day local spaces in a new light. We create bold, celebrated performances that entice local people into Dante or Die's world through surprising takeovers of familiar spaces, telling stories that resonate with modern life. We gently transform everyday buildings – from hotel rooms to swimming pools, chapels to

cafés, storage units to leisure centres – to create distinctive, intimate and memorable theatrical experiences for people of all ages. Our work affects change on the spaces that we use: dismantling stereotypes and portraying new perspectives on sometimes forgotten and disregarded sites which can reinvigorate and inspire new activity.

Over the last 18 years, Dante or Die has developed a reputation as an organisation that creates high quality, original new performance work that is of national significance. We collaborate with community focussed organisations such as Ideas Test alongside venues such as Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York.

ABOUT ODDS ON

Odds On is a project that explores addiction to gambling, with a focus on online slots. The project started life when I was in a betting shop with my Dad in the South West of Ireland. I was looking around this room and I thought there are so many stories to explore in a bookies – aspiration, winning, losing, hope... And betting shops were popping up on so many high streets at the same time as the rest of the high street was struggling. As we started to research the topic, Covid-19 hit and life went online.

Suddenly we were reading so many stories about how people affected by gambling were at huge risk. We reached out to Henrietta Bowden-Jones who set up the NHS Problem Gambling Clinic and she spoke with us about how the world of online gambling was becoming ever more problematic and was something that wasn't being talked about. So we began to make plans to make *Odds On*, an interactive short film that fuses narrative, gameplay and animation. With a female protagonist in her sixties, it invites the audience to play an online slot machine game. When they 'win' the screen flips around, placing us *inside* the game watching Felicity as she becomes more and more immersed in the seductive slots.

OUR APPROACH

The project has had three different stages to date spanning 2021–2023:

1. An R&D period that included creative workshops with 60 people with lived experience of gambling harm. All participants were invited to join a lived experience creative advisory group (CAG).
2. A creation period that included 12 online monthly sessions with the creative advisory group. This culminated with digital distribution of the film with 11 arts organisations across the country and included three public screenings with CAG members on post-screening panels alongside public figures involved in gambling harm.
3. A 12-month creative participation project with Gordon Moody in the residential treatment programme for gambling addiction across four sites in England: London, Manchester, Dudley and Wolverhampton. Gordon Moody is the UK's leading charity dedicated to providing support and treatment for those severely affected by gambling harms.

Throughout these different elements of the project we used creative practices that we employ when creating new work. Led by

Photo courtesy of Dante or Die.



our Participation Producer Lucy Dear, we sensitively developed creative exercises to ensure trust could be built between our team and participants, and helped support sharing of ideas, feelings and thoughts about the impact of gambling. These often included creating characters in order to create distance from personal experience, encouraging participants to be creative rather than disclose personal information.

“It helped me think about my life and addiction from a different angle.”

Participant

OUR IMPACT

The different stages of *Odds On* have been very successful. It's a unique arts project in that most arts practice in the field of addiction recovery arts (as documented via the Addiction Recovery Arts network) focuses on alcohol or substance addiction. Arts-based interventions for gambling addiction are very rare. We ensured it was accessible through embedded captioning and an audio-described version. Since launching in June 2022, it has been touring digitally, presented by 11 arts venues across the UK. Following the initial launch, we had feedback from people who have experienced gambling harm that the interactive nature of the film was triggering. We responded by creating a non-interactive version to ensure accessibility. Following an in-person screening at the NHS National Problem Gambling Clinic, the film will be shown to every person who uses the clinic's services.

The film itself has been celebrated for its artistic innovation alongside its impact on the community and wider public. The Anthem Awards honour the purpose and mission-driven work of people, companies and organisations worldwide, and the project won a prestigious Silver Award for Digital Innovation. Arts Council England's Digital Culture Awards selected the project as Digital Content Award winner.

“From a solid research base and working in collaboration with people with lived experience of gambling harm, Dante or Die have experimented successfully with form to create a work that elicits real empathy and in doing so have created a valuable resource that they've worked diligently to embed in service provision where the work can achieve the greatest impact.”

Judge Derek Richards, Arts Council England's Digital Culture Awards

We embedded a feedback form into the end of the film, which is free to access on our website.

“I think of gambling addiction as about money. It was interesting to see how it affected other parts of the characters' lives. I liked seeing the tactics used by the game and whilst I'd like to look down on the character I could probably fall for something similar.”

Audience feedback

The year-long programme of work at four Gordon Moody residential centres allowed us to experiment with a new form of engagement. Each group watched the film before Dante or Die's facilitators spent a full day with them, leading a creative exchange day. Facilitators commented that the film “gives the trust, the buy-in” for the workshops and was an effective device for priming participants for the creative workshop, supported by participant comments:

“The film hit the nail on the head, it was fantastic.”

“The film encapsulates gambling to a tee.”

Participants

Creative tasks enabled reflection on lived experiences of recovery in a safe and meaningful manner. Participant responses confirm that the workshops assisted direct reflection upon their own experience of addiction as well as developing their awareness of it through listening to the experience and insights from others in the group. Many survey comments specifically mentioned how the workshops helped them to reflect on their addiction from a different perspective and, also, how it had impacted others. For example,

“ Made me realise
I am not on my own and there is help
and support out there. ”

Participant

One participant referenced one of the creative tasks as being very effective in supporting his reflection on recovery:

“ The way out exercise
was by far the most important because
everyone came in here not knowing that
there is a way out.
Now everyone in here knows there
is a way out. There’s hope. ”

Participant

The post project film, *Finding the Words*²⁰, was created from participant responses to some of the reflective workshop activities. The use of recorded voices from the actual participants added authenticity to the representation of the lived experiences shared through the animations, representing thoughts on gambling addiction and hope for the future. The animated and audio recorded segments of memories of first gambling experiences was very effective

in highlighting the beginnings of many of the participants’ addiction journeys, while then tracking their thoughts on the experience of active addiction through powerful metaphor and imagery and culminating in a hopeful sharing of thoughts on ‘the way out is...’. It was clear how some of the writing tasks from the workshop had directly contributed to the film.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Following feedback from our work at Gordon Moody that there is very little creative content available about gambling harm, we are about to embark on a new creative engagement project called *Inside Odds On*. We will utilise both *Odds On* and *Finding the Words* in a newly reimagined live event, culturally activating empty high street units. We will create an artificial betting shop to take over empty shops in Derby, Harlow, Rochdale, Wolverhampton and Lincoln over 10 weeks beginning in July 2024. Visitors will be transported to the surreal underwater world of Pearls of Fortune. Five stations will depict fruit machines. Instead of playing on the slots, audience members will watch *Odds On*, experiencing how it feels to sink deeper into the grip of gambling addiction.

Inside Odds On will incorporate an engaging exhibition, including information gathered as part of research, testimonials from those with lived experience of gambling harm who supported its development, outputs from workshops with Gordon Moody residents and information and resources for anybody needing support.

Integrated into the exhibition is a creative outreach programme: we will collaborate with targeted educational establishments and local community groups in partnership with our arts partner to facilitate creative opportunities for young people, those at risk of gambling harm and those who have been impacted through on-site workshops, discussions and screenings.



Fallen Angels Dance Theatre

BY CLAIRE MORRIS

Claire Morris is co-founder and Creative & Strategic Director of Fallen Angels.



Traces through Time by Fallen Angels at the Royal Opera House. Photo © Point of View Photography.

ABOUT US

Fallen Angel Dance Theatre (FADT), the UK's only company providing dance theatre experiences for people in recovery from addiction and those living with mental health conditions. It has produced high-quality artistic productions since it was founded in 2011 by professional dancers Paul Bayes Kitcher (Artistic Director of former soloist with Birmingham Royal Ballet) and Claire Morris.

Fallen Angels is based in **Chester** and has been at the forefront of recovery arts for over a decade, advocating the power that the arts and creativity can have on enhancing recovery. Placing Paul and the dancers' lived experiences

at the heart of its work, FADT has performed and delivered work in community, recovery, and criminal justice settings across the north-west of England and nationally through its performances, workshops, and digital work.

Artistic Director Paul's lived experience of addiction and recovery encapsulates the complex barriers that those in recovery face including mental health issues and neurodiversity. From the outset, Fallen Angels included people in recovery in the creative process and performances. Starting with just one or two people, we now work with over 100 people a year on a regular basis, and this continues to evolve our creativity and performance work.

“It’s really amazing when you see people who can feel broken light up on stage. And then once they light up on stage the ripple effect starts to transform into other areas of their life.”

Paul Bayes Kitcher

Fallen Angels became a recipient of Arts Council England’s Elevate programme in 2020, leading to significant growth and the realisation of ambitious artistic programmes, such as the *Traces through Time* project below.

OUR APPROACH

FADT’s movement practice uses a methodology which links creative movement practice to recognisable processes used in addiction rehabilitation. Movement exercises feature breathwork and visualisation designed to awaken the body and quieten the mind; creative movement tasks allow people to embody their pathway in recovery in a supportive environment whilst gaining new physical skills.

Set in their own communities, people with no previous experience of movement and dance are welcomed into outreach sessions or workshops at specialised settings such as rehabs or criminal justice facilities. Here they can develop confidence in self-expression, learn movement vocabulary, feel body confident and gain a sense of being part of a community. Consistent progression instils a sense of achievement. Performing is optional. Performance opportunities place an emphasis on the group experience and achieving something special together.

TRACES THROUGH TIME WITH THE NEW NOTE ORCHESTRA

In 2023, Fallen Angels Dance Theatre embarked on a new partnership with the New Note Orchestra (see page 36), creating a collaborative performance, *Traces through Time*, which involved 33 people in recovery.

This project marked the beginning of a longer partnership that we want to develop with New Note and forms part of our wider strategic aim to engage more widely with the recovery sector nationally.

The project involved seven of Fallen Angels Dance Theatres’ Recovery Dancers from our community workshops in Chester and Liverpool. Recovery Dancers are individuals who have experienced FADT workshops, made a commitment to the projects, demonstrated a creative ability and talent, and bring their life experiences to FADT creative projects and productions. For this production, the Recovery Dancers danced on stage with professional dancers. This was the most ambitious progression project at FADT to date: in the past only two of our recovery artists have been included in professional stage productions.

The dancers experienced all aspects of being part of a dance company: the collaborative process and achieving a performance at mid-scale with live recovery musicians. The group experienced development in the studio with Paul, advanced their skills to create, learn, and sustain development, and then the performance of an hour-long production. They were challenged to work to the complex rhythms and work at an increased rate, with commitment and discipline.

“I love the whole piece! Performing with the other dancers creates a sense of connectivity which is healing in a way too. I know it is a performance, but for me is truly real and I can feel it in my body and the sense of freedom arising from within.”

“I couldn’t believe my granddaughter came to see the show, she said she was so proud.”

Participants

Production values and approaches to the working environment were refined, and encouraged, and they demonstrated exemplary focus and dedication to the work.

At times this was too challenging, and the team listened and adapted to feedback. Having an engagement worker on stage and throughout the production week proved invaluable in supporting their access needs.

We held a sharing of progress in Brighton and performances in the Storyhouse, Chester and at the Royal Opera House, London. Creative writer, Louise Wallwein MBE, helped us to interweave spoken word, drawn from interviews with New Note and Fallen Angels participants into the finished work.²¹

“This was an incredible opportunity for me, and one I will never forget.”

Participant

They cited the importance of a collaborative project together, experiencing working with professional dancers, recognising this as a vehicle for improving the standard of both their skills and their community.

And seeking to further develop themselves as individual through dance and personal growth, and with their peers.

Other highlights included:

- Working as a team and family
- Making connections
- Meeting inspiring dancers
- Taking my loved ones on stage with me
- Experiencing the team dancing on stage together
- Standards were raised
- Standing ovations in all three performances – Brighton, Chester and London
- Family expression of pride in their shared achievement
- Performing with diverse, expressive, talented people
- My daughter witnessing the show and supporting me
- Breakthroughs
- Gratitude

Fallen Angels and New Note have also been collaborating with the Royal Ballet for the Royal Opera House Creative Exchange project, with the Royal Ballet supporting the team to develop further the relationship of music and dance. This led to a sharing of the process and performance in June 2024 at the Royal Opera House's Paul Hamlyn Hall. Together we are also exploring and scoping out the viability of a recovery appropriate tour for 2026.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Fallen Angels Dance Theatre are also working towards a mid-scale dance theatre production at the Storyhouse, Chester, launching in Autumn 2025, which will draw on text and movement to explore real stories of addiction recovery,

In our community work, we are also seeking to sustain weekly movement sessions with people in recovery from addiction and those living with mental health conditions through our hub groups, workshops and 'Movement for Change' courses in Chester, Liverpool and Greater Manchester, and to develop more targeted activity to increase engagement for underserved groups.



www.fallenangelsdt.org

²¹ See here for Insights: Traces through Time, a panel session with Fallen Angels, New Note and Dr Cathy Sloan: www.youtube.com/live/YNKyaU025Oc?si=xpsqYJISboMCZEUV and a documentary about the making of Traces through Time: youtu.be/Inmphlg4RZI?si=PRarEYWP-z48AmD2.

Geese Theatre Company: Staging Recovery

BY ANDY WATSON

Andy is the Artistic Director / CEO of Geese Theatre



Staging Recovery ensemble. Photo by Fovea Creative for Geese Theatre.

ABOUT US

Geese Theatre Company is a charity, based in Birmingham, UK, with a remit to work in criminal justice and social welfare settings. Established in the UK in 1987, the company consists of a permanent staff team of actor-practitioners who deliver a broad range of projects and performances in prisons, youth offending institutions, secure children's homes, secure hospitals and in collaboration with community-based organisations.

Geese is an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation and has received numerous awards for innovative practice, including a BAFTA and twice being recipients of the Royal Society for Public Health's Arts and Health Award. Whilst the Geese team has a base in Birmingham and most projects are primarily delivered all over the UK, we are also regularly invited to collaborate with international partners, including recent projects in Norway, Australia and South Africa.



Photo by Fovea Creative for Geese Theatre.

The company's mission statement is to "use theatre and drama to enable choice, personal responsibility and change amongst individuals who have offended, other vulnerable or marginalised groups and those who work with them". Some of our work in both prisons and in the community is specifically designed for people in recovery from substance misuse and can take many forms: from performances to short-term groupwork inputs to long-term creative projects. The company works regularly in a number of prisons across the UK in partnership with Drug and Alcohol Recovery Teams, as part of Dependency and Recovery Services or on Incentivised Substance Free Living units, as well as in community settings, often in partnership with recovery agencies.

“The masks were incredible. I've never seen anything like it before.”

Participant

What runs through all these projects and performances is our use of mask, one of the central metaphors in our work. We talk about mask as the 'front' we portray to the outside world and the idea that we all have many different masks – for when we are at work, when we are in public, when we are at a social function, or to help us survive prison. The metaphor also allows us to explore what happens when we 'lift the mask', when we

reveal the hidden thoughts, feelings, attitudes or beliefs that might lie behind the front we habitually show to the outside world.

ABOUT OUR PROJECTS

Staging Recovery

One long-term project we have been delivering is Staging Recovery: a community ensemble for people in recovery from substance misuse, which was formed by Geese in 2015. The ensemble has developed into a group of creative and supportive individuals who come together three times a year to co-create performances with practitioners from Geese. Their work has explored a variety of themes, including explorations of identity, stigma, the need for consistency from support services, and the media portrayal of addiction, mental ill-health and offending. Their work has been performed at Birmingham REP, Midlands Arts Centre, Liverpool's Everyman Playhouse, and they have created pieces specifically for International Overdose Awareness Day, HMPPS Insights Festival, BEDLAM Arts Festival and Birmingham 22 Festival. The ensemble has collaborated with a variety of other arts organisations, including Birmingham Royal Ballet, Fallen Angels, Music in Prisons and Ascension Dance.

“This has helped me with my recovery. I've met some amazing people and feel confident. I don't feel trapped anymore, I feel positive. Instead of feeling nervous, embarrassed and scared I wake up happy.”

“...the best thing I've ever done in my life... It's really helped me out. It made me come out of my shell... I stayed in the house for two years... I couldn't even go out the door, I couldn't answer my phone... If somebody knocked at the front door I couldn't do it, I was a nervous wreck. But, since I've been doing Geese I'm able to go out by myself and speak to people.”

Staging Recovery Ensemble members

All the work with Staging Recovery is co-created: the ensemble take responsibility for making decisions about what they want to explore and the style in which they want to work. Geese practitioners are on hand to help guide the process but with an understanding that their role is primarily to enable each ensemble member to have an equal opportunity to contribute to the performance.

Uplift

More recently we have developed a partnership with the Service User Involvement Team in Wolverhampton (SUIT). SUIT supports vulnerable people with substance misuse problems and all their staff and volunteers come with lived experience. We are collaborating with SUIT on UPLIFT, a three-year project working across the Wolverhampton community and HMP Oakwood. Like Staging Recovery, UPLIFT provides participants with the opportunity to creatively explore their experiences of criminal justice, addiction and recovery; to work collaboratively with other people with similar experiences and histories; and to co-create performances which foreground their voices. The ambition with UPLIFT is that the residents we might work with in HMP Oakwood's Incentivised Substance Free Living unit can be offered the opportunity to continue working with Geese when they are released.

“ This is one of the most positive, amazing experiences I have had not only in my recovery, but in my life. I think that I have found inner strength and capabilities that I never knew I possessed. ”

Participant, UPLIFT

OUR IMPACT

Geese's work in substance misuse, addiction and recovery, and specifically the ongoing Staging Recovery project, has been independently evaluated by Dr Stephanie Kewley from the School of Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University. This three-year, longitudinal study culminated in two, peer-reviewed articles published in the journal *Arts in Psychotherapy* and *The International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* and both articles speak more broadly to the value inherent in arts-based approaches when working with recovery communities.²²

“ The study found the work of theatre practitioners not only provided recovery participants safe spaces to explore sensitive and difficult recovery themes but the use of theatre techniques and ethically driven practice exposed participants to high-quality, social, cultural and human capital. ”

**Dr Stephanie Kewley, the School of Psychology,
Liverpool John Moores University**

The importance of creating spaces which people see as safer than others they occupy, of working ethically, and of providing high quality creative experiences, runs central to the whole portfolio of work at Geese and we are proud to be engaging with people with a history of addiction as part of a burgeoning arts and recovery community.



www.geese.co.uk

²² Kewley & Van Hout, "I'd probably be dead now": Evaluating the impact of theatre practitioners working on a recovery-based community drama project, *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 2022, Volume 20, Number 2, p1212.

Glasgow Barons

BY PAUL MACALINDEN

Paul is Musical Director of the Glasgow Barons.



Photo © Campbell David Parker.

ABOUT US

The Glasgow Barons are Govan's music charity. We breathe life into our historic and modern venues, bringing diverse people together to revitalise the neighbourhood across musical genres. This helps with social cohesion. We also run several community and school initiatives like Baby Strings, Recovery Rap, The Linties senior singalong sessions and Musicians in Exile for asylum seeking and refugee musicians. We focus our resources on paying locals to help us deliver our charitable objectives, avoiding the parachuting professional syndrome of much of the third sector.

We work with folk struggling with addiction because Govan, a long-standing area of deep multiple deprivation, has prominent communities of addiction. As a resident, our Artistic Director, Paul MacAlinden, sees how folk use drugs and alcohol to cope with living in an area saturated poverty, vicarious and intergenerational trauma. We also have a strong partner in Sunny Govan FM community Radio, and in particular Donna Boyd, who has broadcast the weekly show, Making Recovery Visible for the past couple of years. Donna also runs FREED UP, which delivers sober events for the recovery community.



Photo © Campbell David Parker.

OUR PROJECTS

We have two activities for folk in recovery. Recovery Rap runs in a residential rehab facility in Glasgow, helping participants to create their own rap. This gives everyone access to a free evening activity, teaches story-telling and sharing through rap, and also helps participants to process difficult emotions that are surfacing in the very vulnerable few weeks and months of becoming sober.

The second activity is to support Donna Boyd at FREED UP to run events and provide musical content. Sometimes that will be people who've done Recovery Rap, and have the self confidence to get up on stage and do a turn. It's when they tell us that their performance was the best high ever, that we feel we've helped someone. As well as the wider recovery community, people who are not performing, but took part in Recovery Rap, come along to support their mates. It is this interconnected support of performing artists who identify as being in recovery that we find important as nascent role models.

Last year, one participant of Recovery Rap, Dazza JFT, really took to hip hop and gave an outstanding performance at FREED UP FRIDAY at our Govan Music Festival. Johnny Cypher, our very experienced workshop leader, supported him beyond the performance itself to help him create his first hip hop video, Disease of Addiction, which we pushed on our YouTube channel.²³ Now, he's developing his career as a Scottish rapper, often in partnership with Tribal John. As is the case in 12 Step programmes, Dazza gave his first performance at last year's FREED UP FRIDAY as a volunteer to support the wider community. But in this year's Govan Music Festival, when we jointly produced another FREED UP event, a showcase of new Scottish hip hop and a tribute to MC Mallorca Lee, who sadly passed away from cancer earlier this year, we hired Dazza and Tribal John to do a warm-up act and share their latest material. It is important to us to recognise that the people we work with, however marginalised and disenfranchised, are also adults with bills to pay. That first invoice for making music can go a long way to making the journey as an artist feel worthwhile.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We plan to carry on developing our Recovery Rap programme and supporting Donna and FREED UP in Govan. Of course, the background problems are very complex and embedded and I don't have any illusions about the impact we're having. But, critically, if we understand what size and shape of jigsaw piece we are in the larger picture of provision, then what we offer as a charity and as a partner with lived experience recovery organisations, will count.



www.glasgowbarons.com

²³ www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPde5B26vE

Mixed Bag Players

BY TOM NIGHTINGALE

Tom runs the Mixed Bag Players in York.



Photo courtesy of the Mixed Bag Players.

ABOUT US

Originally, I created a project called 'Give It A Go, Joe', whilst studying at York St Johns university, the aim of which was to "broaden social circles and challenge stigma around minority groups in society, through the use of theatre". The inspiration was personal insight from having schizophrenia and finding it incredibly difficult to socialise with anyone who is not themselves diagnosed with a mental illness. After completing my degree, I eventually admitted to myself that I also have an addiction issue as well as a diagnosis of schizophrenia and went to rehab in 2016. This very much influenced why and how I wanted to make theatre.

I have always wanted to make theatre that brings people together and helps create integration between different parts of society. I also have personal experience of how drama can be used as a tool for building self-worth and confidence, two areas I personally struggled with due to my mental illness and addiction. Playing drama games like Park Bench, Yes And, and making a circle story had helped me heal from my own self-loathing and built up my shattered confidence by discovering how much fun could be had by theatrical playfulness. I was and remain curious as to how this connects people who wouldn't normally meet.

In 2018, 'Give It A Go, Joe' put on a production in conjunction with a community organisation Tang Hall SMART, in York, called *Nightingales Game. Pretend to be like who?*, a comedy about schizophrenia, which I wrote based on my own experiences. I would describe it as Tom, a confused schizophrenic patient, battles with which is craziest: him? Or his revolutionary alter ego T Nightingale? And with it, the politics of greed, tobacco, and smoking.

The play was well attended and received, and a documentary called 'How to Breathe' was made about the process of creating the production, which is available to watch on the Mixed Bag Players Facebook page.²⁴

“ One of the most rewarding things that I have done over the last few years. ”

“ For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be part of a theatre group but lacked the confidence to do anything about it until I discovered Mixed Bag.

From the very start there wasn't any pressure to be amazing or any judgement when you weren't, mostly because most of the group have very little if any theatre experience and we were all as nervous as each other. ”

Participant

Sadly 'Give it a go, Joe' folded, unable to recruit and keep members we already had after the pandemic. So, in 2022, I approached [York in Recovery](#),²⁵ a peer led CIC, to set up a new project called 'Step Out' which ran once a fortnight and ran improvisational games for people in recovery from addiction issues. I also volunteered in the rehab centre I attended, doing mostly improv games. This was facilitated by me and another volunteer. This ran for about three months in 2022 and again due to a lack of being able to recruit members was discontinued.

So in 2023, I asked York in Recovery, if I could put on the same play, *Nightingales Game*, with people in recovery, with a view to creating a

new theatre group by putting on a play I wrote and inviting people in recovery and not in recovery to be in it. We had our first rehearsal in a church hall and 13 people turned up.

Nightingales Game has been developed and edited quite a lot since its first production in a hall at Tang Hall SMART. I have created and written in extra characters, including a narrator, so that everyone who wanted a part could have one.

After we had been rehearsing *Nightingales Game* for just under a year, I asked the group what we should call ourselves. One lady suggested: "The Mixed Bag Players", and that became our name.

The Mixed Bag Players are York in Recovery's drama club and provide us with a place to rehearse and helped to promote the production by printing posters and fliers. They also help to recruit members to be in The Mixed Bag Players and have assisted greatly in funding issues with our theatre group.

OUR IMPACT

Reflecting on comments we receive from participants, I would say that the aim – to create a theatre group that broadens social circles and challenges stigma around minority groups – has been a success. Especially considering that one of the comments is from someone who is not in recovery but just enjoys being in the Mixed Bag Players.

“ Over the weeks I became more comfortable within the group and in turn more confident as a performer. ”

“ We started out a group of strangers but now I really look forward to meeting up each week with my unconventional theatre family and am genuinely proud of what we have achieved but more than that, I just love been a part of an amazing group of people doing something really enjoyable. ”

Participant

²⁴ www.facebook.com/groups/835222381575024

²⁵ www.yorkinrecovery.org.uk

“I have really enjoyed being part of the Mixed Bag Players. It's a very happy supportive group. I've made many friends.”

Participant

WHAT NEXT?

Our future plans include running more workshops with a focus on personal stories and life experiences and more devised creations. The Mixed Bag Players has been entirely generated by *Nightingales Game*, and although I feel it is a worthy play, we hope to do something new after this year's production.

As well as growing and continuing with the Mixed Bag Players, I personally would like to establish 'Give it a go, Joe' as an umbrella organisation that delves into music, art and is always based on the key concept of broadening social circles and challenging stigmas around minority groups in society.





A celebration for Maggie Telfer
by Bristol Drugs Project Recovery
Orchestra and Rising Voices Recovery
Choir. Photo © Evan Dawson.



New Note

BY MOLLY MATHIESON

Molly is the founder and Chief Executive of New Note.



Photo © Point of View Photography.

ABOUT US

In 2013, I was making documentaries for the BBC and Channel 4, when I formed a friendship with James McConall, a recovering alcoholic whose son had overdosed at the age of 18. As a musician, James used music to support his own recovery alongside processing the grief of his son's passing. We often discussed how music could be healing and how we could use it to support others. Channel 4 commissioned us to make 'Addicts Symphony' which featured James working with people affected by addiction to compose a new piece of music with the London Symphony Orchestra. The show followed ten musicians in recovery who supported each other both musically and in their recoveries from addiction.

I had been around addiction for most of my life and had seen the traumatising affects that addiction can have on individuals and families. I didn't really understand the concept of 'recovery' or the life-changing impacts it could bring. Working and supporting people in recovery during the making of the TV show was personally very healing; in fact it was transformative, so in 2015 I jacked in my TV career and started a community project – the multi-award-winning New Note Orchestra.

I was born in Brighton and had moved back to raise my daughter. It had always been colourful and interesting with a dark underbelly. When I launched New Note in 2015, Brighton had been given the gruesome label of being the drugs death capital of the UK. At the time

there was only one other community grassroots organisation called Cascade Create Recovery, who are a fantastic resource, run by people with lived experience of addiction.

I left leaflets around the city for the first-ever New Note Orchestra session and crossed my fingers that people would turn up. In the meantime, I had met Roger, a homeless alcoholic who was a guitarist. He turned up to the very first session along with 20 other people. I knew then that there was a real need for community-based high-quality music engagement within the city.

New Note Orchestra is the first recovery orchestra in the world. Anyone can join, regardless of musical experience. Many of the musicians are new to music making and don't read notated music. Alongside addiction, the musicians often have complex challenges, such as social isolation, mental health problems, and trauma. Over 70% of the musicians have also experienced homelessness.

OUR APPROACH

New Note has become a nationally recognised model for addiction recovery. We are experts at working with vulnerable adults and use improvisation and co-creation to build trust and a sense of belonging. We work hard to remove barriers and make participation in high-quality music-making and performance accessible to all. In addition to music, there are opportunities to develop skills in stage management, costume design, performance techniques, and communications, including photography.

New Note now offers four distinct projects, all of which are free to attend. The groups share these core principles:

- create safe spaces where people feel part of a creative community
- build confidence and challenge negative self-beliefs
- develop new skills
- raise awareness about addictive behaviours
- encourage sober friendships, build new community connections, and promote volunteering
- provide a sense of purpose and direction
- create opportunities for creative expression through learning and performing.



Photo © Point of View Photography.

2023 proved to be our most ambitious and rewarding to date. New Note Orchestra collaborated with the award-winning Fallen Angels Dance Theatre (see also page 36) to create a new show called *Traces Through Time*, which was performed in Brighton, Chester, and at a sold-out performance at the Royal Opera House in London. This was a seminal moment in our evolution of creating high quality arts engagement for people in recovery from addiction. Our work with Fallen Angels Dance Theatre led to the launch of **New Note Dance**, a new community group led by Lauren Dowse, a former musician from the New Note Orchestra. Create Recovery co-fund New Note Dance and this partnership represents a significant moment, supporting Lauren in her journey to become an artistic director.

In May 2024, Roger and I went to Buckingham Palace to receive the prestigious King's Award for Voluntary Service, an MBE for charities and the highest award given to volunteer groups in the UK. It was fantastic to take Roger, who has been an integral part of the New Note Orchestra's evolution.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Currently I'm developing the first music leadership programme for people in recovery from addiction called **New Note Key Changers**. This programme unlocks hidden potential by enabling musicians affected by addiction to use their talent and lived experiences to connect with and inspire others. Their positive stories will become a beacon of hope, demonstrating that recovery is possible, and music can be a powerful tool for transformation. Creating a career pathway for participants to become facilitators will help New Note grow beyond Brighton and Hove.

I feel proud to have steered New Note through some very choppy waters including austerity, the pandemic and more recently the cost-of-living crisis. Brighton, along with the rest of the country, has seen extreme and damaging cuts to drug and alcohol statutory services. A third of all publicly funded drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres in the UK have closed in the last five years. However, against these difficult circumstances, Brighton has a thriving recovery scene. It would be too grand to assume New Note had created this, but I like to think its ambition has been infectious and allowed others in recovery to know it is possible to start something from scratch. If you're thinking about starting up a project, my advice would be, crack on and get on with it



Not Saints

BY CHRIS DE BANKS

Chris is the founder of Not Saints.



Photo courtesy of Not Saints.

ABOUT US

Not Saints is the world's only record label working with musicians in recovery from alcoholism, drug addiction, and related social issues.

Established in 2018 it is our mission to bridge the gap between recovery and conventional music culture. Based in Brighton, we operate across the whole UK and thrive on collaboration with other creative recovery organisations. Formed from Founder Chris De Banks' experience in the music industry and his own experience of alcoholism and drug addiction, Not Saints is unique in its approach in the music industry and as a not-for-profit organisation.

Chris wanted to breathe new life into music and create opportunities for those who otherwise wouldn't be able to participate due to their previous alcoholism and/or drug addiction. Not Saints is a safe space free from the barriers and triggers of contemporary music culture where people can explore their creativity without fear, or simply enjoy attending an event without having to worry about alcohol and drugs, be free to dance and sing along with no risk of beer being thrown over you!

All of our directors, staff, and volunteers have first-hand experience of addiction and recovery so we know the importance of creativity and opportunities. Being personally affected by addiction we have seen the barriers, stigma

and lack of education facing our community when it comes to participating in events and music culture. Many of those we work with could never have dreamed of pursuing music as a pathway prior to meeting Not Saints due to the potential for relapse, but with our support they have gone on to thrive in their recovery using music as a tool for expression and healing.

“ I’m now in multiple bands, playing a new instrument and writing music with my peers. Something which has only been possible through Not Saints existing and working with people like myself. ”

Jax Burley, Daffodilos, No See Ums, Glitterbombs

OUR APPROACH

With music as our principal medium we find that a collaborative approach helps people to grow and enhance their skills and abilities.

By playing with others they form bonds and connections not just musically but in their personal relationships.

We have hosted songwriting workshops to help people with little to no experience get involved in making music. We then have recording and production of our roster’s work, so that they have a goals-based approach to be proud of, helping build self-esteem and confidence.

The other side of our work is putting on sober space live events, bringing together the whole recovery community in a place of safety to enjoy live music with no fear of drink and/or drugs being present. We know that live events can be potentially triggering so we create peer led safe spaces, so that all can enjoy music without putting their recovery at risk.

Hana Piranha is our latest release and most successful artist to date. With her album *Wingspan* released in November 2023, Hana came to us after a friend suggested Not Saints as a label to release the album. She found her own recovery in mid-2022 and was looking for a label with a difference. Not Saints is not-for-profit so any money that comes in goes straight back into working with people. We are

Photo courtesy of Not Saints.



firmly community focused whilst putting quality at the forefront of what we do. Hana's latest album currently sits at 50,000+ streams on Spotify with the two singles both reaching over 11,000 streams each.²⁶

“Joining the Not Saints has been hugely inspiring to me. Finding a community of musicians who are committed to a sober life provides me with both support and accountability in my career. I think coming from a rocky past can often make people exceptionally motivated and I feel like this is certainly the case for Chris and the people behind Not Saints - not only dedicated to their own future but the future of the artists they work so hard for. I am proud to be a Not Saints artist and excited to leave my own rocky past behind me in our journey forward.”

Hana Piranha

WHAT'S NEXT?

Our plans for the future involve finding more funding so we grow and spread our reach wider! We want to work with new artists and new communities who are yet to experience music at its most fulfilling. We want to get more people involved in the running of Not Saints, bringing on more staff, volunteers and artists. We are aiming to work with new geographical locations across the country to develop new relationships. Putting out more music and hosting more sober live events! Let's recover loudly!



www.notsaints.co.uk

26 Listen to Hana Piranha: soundcloud.com/hanapiranha.

Outside Edge Theatre Company

BY MATT STEINBERG

Matt is the Artistic Director and CEO of Outside Edge Theatre Company.



Photo courtesy of Outside Edge, performance at the Royal Court theatre, London.

ABOUT US

Outside Edge Theatre Company (OETC) is the UK's first theatre company and participatory arts charity focused on addiction. Based in London, we support recovering addicts and those at risk or affected by addiction. We produce theatre to raise awareness of substance misuse and other addictions. In 2023/24 we supported 667 participants and 87% said OETC's activities supported their recovery.

OETC was founded in 1999 by Phil Fox, who was an actor, director, playwright and recovering alcoholic and heroin addict. It has grown from delivering one weekly drama group

in Hammersmith and Fulham's substance misuse treatment service to delivering 456 sessions for 12 weekly and monthly drama, creative writing and dance groups across multiple London boroughs.

Participants join OETC's drop-in activities through Taster Session outreach work in treatment facilities, word of mouth self-referrals and recommendations from key workers, social workers and NHS social prescribing link workers. Activities are free at the point of access and the only requirement is that participants are sober on the day of the activity.

Our weekly activities include three Drop-in Drama groups, two Write Now groups, Moving Recovery, Women's Drama Group and Peer-led Check-in. Following sustained commitment and engagement, participants are invited to join intermediate and advanced groups Edge Two, Write Two and The Company. To foster peer-support social networks, we provide free theatre tickets through a monthly Theatre Club, deliver a monthly Masterclass and host quarterly social events. The arts activities are person-centred and trauma informed, and throughout we provide pastoral care and wraparound support to help prevent relapse.

To maintain a freelance workforce with lived experience of addiction and recovery, OETC has a series of Participation Pathways for participants, which includes opportunities for training as Peer Volunteers and paid facilitation work.

OUR IMPACT AND APPROACH

Although we don't provide clinical treatment or drama therapy, the physiological and psychological responses felt by engaging in OETC's arts-based activities include the reduction of stress hormones and enhanced self-worth. This paves the way for participants to feel improvements in the Five Ways to Wellbeing (be active, connect, take notice, learn and give), which are essential foundations for the outcomes required to build Recovery Capital (the internal and external resources required to prevent relapse):

1. Reduce social isolation/loneliness.
2. Improve mental/physical health.
3. Strengthen financial resilience (employment, housing, etc).
4. Encourage community integration/ de-stigmatising recovery.

The combination of these four outcomes builds Recovery Capital, which is vital for relapse prevention (Granfield and Cloud, 2008).

Between 2021/22 and 2023/24 OETC participants reported the following impact:

- 88% said OETC supported their recovery
- 86% said engaging with OETC gave them direction or purpose
- 76% had new aspirations and life goals
- 75% helped to take control of their life
- 71% were more physically active

- 67% were helped to find a job/return to training/university
- 64% had improved relationships with family/friends
- 63% with Clinical or Mild Depression showed improved WEMWBS scores.

The impact of these positive Recovery Capital outcomes is reflected by the differences in substance use data from Baseline Assessments (B) versus quarterly Follow Up Assessments (FU) from participants who accessed OETC's arts-based activities over the last three years (B vs. FU).

- 'Used in last 7 days': 16% vs. 11%
- 'Used in last month': 13% vs. 6%
- 'Used in last 6 months': 18% vs. 11%
- 'Used in last year': 12% vs. 6%
- 'Not used in last year': 41% vs. 66%

To achieve these outcomes, OETC delivers sessions for most groups 50 weeks each year (like 'creative' AA meetings) and offers opportunities for long-term engagement with their peer-support Recovery Community, with some participants having attended for over 20 years.

OETC also produces new professional theatre productions about issues related to addiction, which have been presented in treatment facilities and venues such as Chelsea Theatre, Soho Theatre, Shoreditch Town Hall and Hoxton Hall, as well as on BBC Television. They run a script competition (The Phil Fox Award for Playwriting) to develop plays about issues related to addiction. The last competition received 350 entries and 70% of the playwrights who submitted scripts identified as being affected by addiction.

OETC puts their participants at the heart of their service, including Board Service User Representatives, giving them an active role in designing the content and structure of their offer from planning through to delivery. For example, participants in their drop-in writers group helped to shape plans for a new intermediate group for writers (Write Two), which OETC delivered in partnership with the Royal Court Theatre and was led by professional playwrights in recovery with the goal of producing a full-length script. Participants were given one-to-one dramaturgical support from the Royal Court's

literary department and selections from their scripts were rehearsed by the theatre's Associate Directors and performed by professional actors.

From the participants who took part in Write Two, one was offered further support from the Royal Court to develop their script and another's play was given a public reading by the Royal Shakespeare Company in their 37 Plays national playwriting project.

“ I had a threshold moment when I took part in the rehearsal ... I walked into the room as Roberta and I walked out a writer! I'm not sure exactly how it happened but I do know that 'something' happened in this creative process... Before the rehearsal, I was super nervous, awkward, and told [the director] I'd be quite happy to sit in a corner and observe. By the end I wished it could've gone on longer. Afterwards I remember thinking I don't 'want to' be a writer; I am a writer. ”

Participant

WHAT'S NEXT?

Looking forward, we are building our capacity to manage the increase in need for our recovery maintenance activities, which was exacerbated by Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. These events drove up the need for our activities by 189%; in 2019/20 we supported 231 participants versus 667 in 2023/24. OETC continues to develop projects to reach new participants who are historically underrepresented in both substance misuse treatment services and participatory arts activities. For example, in 2024/25 we are delivering a participatory arts project for Muslim-identifying substance misuse treatment service users in East London, which has been funded by the Baring Foundation.



Portraits of Recovery

BY MARK PREST

Mark is the Founding Director and CEO of Portraits of Recovery in Manchester.



A moveable feast, a commission by Jez Dolan for Recoverist Month, 2023. Photo © Lee Baxter.

ABOUT US

Portraits of Recovery (PORe) is a pioneering visual arts charity based in Manchester, inspiring and supporting people affected by and in recovery from substance use (Recoverists).

We are the UK's only contemporary visual arts organisation working within this field. By working collaboratively with leading contemporary artists, people in recovery, and communities in recovery, we share the human face of the recovery experience – breaking down barriers and promoting inclusion. Addiction does not discriminate. Addiction is a health, social and cultural issue.

My own lived experience and resilience led me to found Portraits of Recovery in 2011; a space that opens new conversations about addiction and recovery through the lens of contemporary art. We engage those in recovery by empowering them as artists and creators, growing their participation in culture, demystifying the world of contemporary art and giving a powerful voice to an often-marginalised community.

Our key stakeholders, people in recovery from substance use, engage with and create high quality inspirational art, as a critical part of their recovery journey. Our work is inclusive,



Towards a Recoverist Future event, 2023. Photo © Joe Fildes.

activist and process based. Through culture we build ambition by empowering a stigmatised community to enable systemic change.

We envision a changed society. One in which those in recovery from substance use are, through the transformational power of the arts and culture, empowered to creatively shape the world around them.

The philosophy that guides our work is Recoverism: an inclusive social movement borne out of the story of both PORe and Manchester itself – the birthplace of social movements like Trade Unionism, Suffrage, and the Cooperative Society. Our work reimagines ways in which people and communities affected by substance use and in recovery are represented and understood. Recoverism is a form of cultural activism: encouraging us to change the world and our place within it through collaboration and mutual support, between those in recovery, artists, and wider society.

OUR APPROACH

Our work covers a range of art, from the visual arts, music, performance and a range of participatory workshops. We also host regular community outings, through Recovery Culture Fix, so that our Recoverists have a safe space

to explore the arts and culture together and can build essential relationships as part of their recovery journeys.

In September 2023, we launched Recoverist Month; an annual event that brings together Recovery communities and increases positive visibility through a public program of performances, exhibitions and events.

CHAORDIC: Recoverist Curators Project with the Whitworth

Recoverism, pioneered by Portraits of Recovery (PORe), is a burgeoning art and social movement in the north-west of England that celebrates individuals and communities in recovery from substance use. Based in Manchester, a historical hub of social activism, Recoverism promotes a collective, responsible lifestyle free from harmful behaviours. Recovery is viewed as an ongoing social process rather than a finite destination, encompassing cultural, contemporary, and moment-to-moment experiences for individuals, families, and communities.

Portraits of Recovery combines lived experience with professional arts expertise to foster inclusive, activist-driven projects, such as Recoverist Curators.

Funding from the Baring Foundation supports the implementation of Recoverist Curators. Led by PORE and in collaboration with the Whitworth. This initiative also aligns with the Whitworth's mission as a "Useful Museum" for positive social change, utilising its art collection to promote Recoverism's ideology and philosophy.

Recoverist Curators empowers individuals in recovery to co-curate exhibitions, develop new understandings of the gallery's collections, and organise events that challenge societal perceptions of recovery. Through partnerships with organizations like SANDS and the LGBT Foundation, The Whitworth has a track record of community-focused initiatives, such as the Still Parents program supporting families affected by infant loss.

The project responds to the marginalisation and stigma faced by those in recovery, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on support services. By providing professional development opportunities and mentoring, Recoverist Curators aims to shift power dynamics, promote inclusivity, and address systemic barriers within the cultural sector. It seeks to amplify the voices and experiences of the recovery community while challenging stereotypes and fostering understanding.

Evaluation of previous collaborations identified the need for collective efforts to address the cultural needs of Manchester's recovery communities. Recoverist Curators aims to fill this gap by developing skills, disseminating cultural sector knowledge, and creating lasting partnerships.

Ultimately, Recoverist Curators seeks to leave a legacy of enhanced cultural inclusivity and understanding within Greater Manchester's cultural landscape. Through exhibitions, symposiums, and evaluative frameworks, it aims to set a precedent for collaborative, community-driven projects that empower marginalised groups and promote social change.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the future, we aim to widen the reach of Portraits of Recovery through our annual Recoverist Month programme of work, which brings together recovering people, artists, venues and audiences from across Greater Manchester through a public programme of exhibitions, performances and events. Our Chaordic partnership with the Castlefield Gallery, The Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery will deliver three newly commissioned art projects. The Chaordic commissions represent a bold step towards reshaping the cultural landscape and promoting dialogue around addiction and recovery. Each project is designed to engage audiences, challenge stereotypes, and inspire meaningful change. The commissions include Recoverist Curators at The Whitworth; Let's Talk About Chemsex at Manchester Art Gallery, led by international artist Harold Offeh; and an Artist in Residence with the Castlefield Gallery and ANEW drug and alcohol rehab in Tameside.



small performance adventures

BY KATE MCCOY

Kate is the founder and Artistic Director of small performance adventures.



Photo © Annie Murray / Edit Sweet.

ABOUT US

small performance adventures (spa) make performances, workshops and events with people who have been affected by life, currently working with those in recovery. Small – not everything has to be big, the everyday can be profound and magical. Performance – we come together to playfully create, knowing that all of life is a performance. Adventures – we are always ready to go on an adventure with tenacity, vulnerability and joy. Spa was set up in 2018 by artistic director Kate McCoy to provide a focus for creative work and to provide training and employment opportunities for the recovery community. Based in Brighton,

spa works in partnership with arts and social care organisations in the city and across the UK working in a range of community settings. In 2023 we also worked in New York, San Francisco and Bucharest.

spa create spaces for play where people can meet as their authentic creative selves, freeing ourselves from the everyday hierarchies and judgements we live with (external and internal!). As firm believers in Recoverism (we are all in recovery from something and we come together to learn and grow humbly together), we know the value of creating, playing and learning together.

OUR APPROACH

“One of my highlights of Brighton Festival..... a generous ego-free ensemble performance and the best of people's theatre.”

Colin Grant

spa uses creative techniques from the worlds of theatre, therapy, performance and live art, creative writing and also works in partnership with a range of creative and social care organisations. spa's very first project, created in partnership with Cascade Creative Recovery in Brighton, was *The Washing Up*, a performance with songs about the practice and politics of this everyday act. It was devised by a cast of fifteen artists in recovery and premiered at Brighton Festival's Your Place in 2018. The show toured to Manchester, Liverpool and London, with an accompanying audience engagement programme that saw us working in homelessness, drug use, university and other community settings. Workshop attendees' stories were woven into the show with opportunities for tea towel related participation!

“Punk rock theatre.”

Jameel Hadi MBE

'Terminal Uniqueness', our pandemic project about improving our mental health collectively used social media and digital technologies to create an online recovery community of nearly 1,000 people and created paid digital art commissions for recoverists.

INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

We run annual projects for International Overdose Awareness Day. In 2018 spa worked with Cascade Creative Recovery to create several pop-up performances as acts of remembrance and respect for those who have lost their lives to overdose and to raise

awareness. At the evaluation meeting, one of the participants who was moved by the power of the experience for performers and audience suggested that it would be amazing to do this all over the country. We wanted to make this happen, so in 2019 we created simultaneously live streamed performances in Brighton and Bristol working in partnership with Bristol Drugs Project (see page 12), Not Saints (see page 39) and Edit Sweet (recovery-led film makers).

In 2020, our plans were slightly hampered, yet we managed to also work with Outside Edge in London (see page 42) and Theatre Royal Plymouth (see page 52), creating four films using phone and film footage which were viewed online over 10,000 times. In 2021, we commissioned New Note Orchestra (see page 36) to create a piece of music and Fallen Angels (see page 23) to create some choreography. Participants from seven cities met online to learn the choreography led by Fallen Angels and then we filmed in person in each city, with each group choosing their perfect background and location. For example in Bristol the suspension bridge was our background and in Brighton the cliffs of Ovingdean. In addition to existing partners we also worked with Geese Theatre (see page 26) and Our Room in Manchester.

In 2022, we worked with the writer Deborah Bruce to train participants to run creative arts workshops in their cities which culminated in a collective ritual poem video with artwork and writing from all over England adding [TiPP²⁷](#) (youth justice creative arts), Portraits of Recovery (see page 45) and Changing Lives to our list of partners. This was an extension to our 'Ritual' project which looked at creating brand new secular rituals, big and small, for a post pandemic world. In 2023, we created a digital and paper publication that displayed the work from 2018-2022. Through this project we wanted to do a range of things including (but not limited to) bringing creative recovery communities across England together to learn and grow, provide a space for people to work through their experiences of overdose through art, make beautiful work that will engage audiences and honour those who have lost their lives to overdose.

“ A powerful way to work through difficult emotions non-verbally. ”

“ It was so powerful and beautiful, I cried all the way through. Really important work. ”

“ What a beautiful group of humans. I wonder if my dad’s story would have ended differently if he had a creative group around him. ”

Audience feedback

WHAT’S NEXT?

spa are currently working on their creative ageing project developed after Kate McCoy’s Develop Your Creative Practice grant from Arts Council England, which saw her travelling to the USA to research dynamic arts practice with older people. spa are also partnering with TiPP to deliver a Public Health England project as part of the Prison Drug Intervention strategy, delivering creative residences in prisons in the North West of England.



Small performance adventures performing *The Washing Up* in Lewes. Photo courtesy of spa.



Theatre Royal Plymouth: Our Space

BY LEE HART

Lee is the Creative Director of Our Space.



Photo © Dom Moore, courtesy of Our Space, Theatre Royal Plymouth.

ABOUT US

Our Space started as a response to people rough sleeping in the doorways of Theatre Royal Plymouth (TRP) and using drugs in the toilets. They were invited in for a hot drink, to socialise, and to keep warm. A drama practitioner was brought in to help facilitate creative interaction and over time a weekly workshop was born.

A steering committee of participant advisors came together regularly to feedback on how the workshops were going and suggest services we should partner with to reach more people.

Fifteen years later, it is now a large-scale art project based at Theatre Royal Plymouth, with four main focuses currently:

- 1. Community:** our weekly groups at Theatre Royal Plymouth and in hubs across the city.
- 2. Prisons and Probation:** previous projects at HMP Exeter and Dartmoor, and currently weekly sessions at HMP Channings Wood. We have relationships with Devon and Cornwall Police, Pathfinder and the national Integrated Offender Management programme.

3. **Armed Forces:** a pilot project, funded by the Veterans Foundation, working with wounded, injured, and sick armed forces personnel and veterans.
4. **Productions:** annual performance projects which platform the culmination of the weekly sessions, inside HMP Channings Wood, in site-specific city spaces, and on the stages at the theatre.

OUR APPROACH

At the heart of addiction and indeed most mental health challenges, is a breakdown in connection – to self and community. What we have discovered through many years of working in the community is that theatre and the practice of ‘play’ is a form of reconnecting. It’s at the heart of the work and so we want to share it with the people who need it most – the most socially isolated. If we want to live in healthy, functioning communities, then everyone needs to be welcomed back into participation. The work of Our Space is a creative tool for doing that.

The theatre-making process is truly collaborative and blends many forms and practices. An Our Space session will include an opening circle – developing the ability to listen to others and to share one’s own present experience. Participants will then move into warm-up games and exercises that engage the body and imagination, and perhaps most importantly invite and encourage a sense of play. We laugh. Mistakes are celebrated and encouraged, and we realise that those moments generate the most fun of all. We are learning to turn up in this very moment with a spirit of curiosity and to respond with whatever feels good.

In 2019, Our Space collaborated with Nudge Community Builders seeking to create a performance in a former furniture warehouse and homeless shelter in Plymouth. We looked at how the action of a play might move through a space. Where micro performances might be discovered around corners, or behind doors. Where the audience might journey alongside a character as the story unfolds around them. In trying to use as much of the atmosphere of the performance space as possible to inform the devised content we explored a ‘night in the city’. The creatures that come out after dark. The secret life of dark city streets. The



In My Dreams I Dream I’m Dreaming by the Our Space theatre company, 2016.

underworld... the underbelly. We looked at classical stories of journeys to the underworld and one in particular struck a chord – that of Orpheus. One aspect of the story resonated strongly with the group. That of a man looking to reconnect with what he has lost, and journeying into the darkness within himself to reclaim his life. It became a powerful metaphor for all of us to explore just what we have lost in the misadventures of our lives. Pete, who first connected with the project in 2016, took on the role based on Orpheus.

“ I can’t put it down to one thing, It’s helped me in all aspects of my life, 100%. Up until 3 years ago I’d never performed on a stage sober. I’d been a drug addict for 35 years. I’d been hiding behind a number of masks and weird, unhealthy coping mechanisms. I found that what being at Our Space allowed was to be authentic. It’s like a safe space, and what it actually did, it kind of softened me, softened my heart, and allowed me to form healthy relationships with people.

I'm so much more confident, I've got so much more self-esteem, that's come about from doing live performances.

Being at Our Space allowed me to be my authentic self and grow from that point. [It] gives us this freedom to create and feel ownership, it's very empowering [...] it's given me a sense of community, belonging to a community, giving to a community, helping a community. ”

Pete, participant

WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the next three years, as well as increasingly ambitious production work starting with an Autumn '24 show in the Drum at Theatre Royal Plymouth, the creative team will be sharing the methodology far and wide. We will be setting up collaborations across the UK, and with our associate artists, delivering training packages to organisations that want to bring a more creative, sensitive and trauma informed approach to working in the community.



Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Shipley Art Gallery

BY BEN JONES AND ZOE BROWN

Ben is Recovery & Ceramics Project Coordinator at Shipley Art Gallery.
Zoe is Outreach Officer at Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM).



Recovery & Ceramics session at Bensham Grove Pottery, photo courtesy of TWAM/Shipley Gallery.

ABOUT US

Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) includes nine museums and an archive covering the area of Tyneside. We have a strong civic responsibility and believe we are well placed as a creative organisation to respond to the societal challenges that people in the north-east of England face, particularly health inequalities. Our mission is to welcome and connect people to the past, present and future of the north-east through stories, shared spaces, and experiences.

The Shipley Art Gallery is the only TWAM venue located in Gateshead. The vision of local solicitor and art collector Joseph

Shipley (1822-1909), opening in 1917, it housed 504 European old master paintings and watercolours. The Shipley is the north-east's primary centre for the exhibition and study of British ceramics. The Shipley's craft collection began in the 1970s, when efforts were being made to record and document local and threatened craft activities. The craft collection has grown to include textiles, jewellery, metalwork, furniture, and glass, with a particular focus on ceramics.

TWAM's Culture, Health and Wellbeing programmes were set up over a decade ago to respond to the challenges the north-east faced with health and wellbeing. One programme is



Recovery & Ceramics session at Bensham Grove Pottery, photo courtesy of TWAM/Shipleigh Gallery.

Recovery, which focuses on supporting people through their addiction recovery journey, by collaborating with recovery professionals and their clients.

The rationale for setting up and continuing the programme stems from the health inequalities in the region, specifically around substance addiction issues. Currently the north-east has the highest number of deaths linked to drugs misuse – twice the national average, making the work we do vital. The Shipleigh itself is in a socially disadvantaged area and Gateshead currently has the third highest rate of alcohol related admissions to hospital in England and the highest rate for alcohol related hospital admissions for males in the region.

OUR APPROACH

At the Shipleigh we work with a wide range of community groups, statutory organisations, and local people. We are located on one of the main roads from the town centre and in the middle of three suburbs. We report to Public Health through Gateshead Council, meaning all the work we do has to consider the health and wellbeing benefits of creativity and the arts. The craft collection is the most accessible part of the collection and used widely with groups. Opportunities include gallery tours, object handling sessions, creative workshops, pop-up

exhibitions and other opportunities to give people a chance to create their own craft object inspired by the collection.

One such project, Recovery & Ceramics, is an eight-month programme funded by the NHS through the Gateshead Community Mental Health Grant Fund. Working with Recovery Connections, part of Gateshead Recovery Partnership, and ceramicists from Bensham Grove Pottery at Bensham Grove Community Centre, weekly sessions take place inspired by our extensive studio ceramics collection. The programme works with people in recovery to develop new creative and practical skills to support people in their recovery journey. It brings together TWAM's Recovery programme and the Shipleigh's remit, to help Gateshead people with their wellbeing through creativity.

Led by ceramicists Christine Constant and Lisa Delarny, participants come to the Shipleigh every Friday morning and learn different ceramic techniques, from simple coiling and pinch pot making, to more complex techniques such as using a pottery wheel, glazing, and firing. We also encourage group work through communal making with raku and smoke firing.

“Being able to attend sessions at Shipleigh has expanded the creative side of my personality and gave me a safe environment to explore, where I have been able to learn new styles of creating art and inspired me to attend museums and art galleries in my private time. Shipleigh has a calming effect.”

Participant

The work they make over the course was displayed in a co-curated exhibition in the gallery during June 2024. Alongside making their own work, the group have co-curated a display of ceramic pieces from the John Christian ceramic collection in our new community cabinet. The cabinet is in our new exhibition, 'Makers in Clay: British Studio Pottery' alongside work from the Christian collection. For this they were supported by the Shipleigh's Keeper and Project Coordinator and walked through all aspects of curating an exhibition from idea, design, interpretation, and installation.



Participants' work, Shipley Gallery.

This aspect supports them in developing and gaining new personal and professional skills, and thereby helping their confidence and wellbeing. They are developing research, curatorial, interpretation and workshop facilitation skills by displaying work from the Shipley collection; curating a pop-up exhibition of their own work; and organising a public workshop. The purpose of this part of the programme is to support employability through transferable skills into employment and further education.

OUR IMPACT

There is now a core group of 10-12 participants, including Recovery Connection workers who all have lived experience of recovery. When asked about why they

attended the programme, most say to support their wellbeing through creativity, alongside developing practical skills and knowledge to support future employment; developing new creative skills and knowledge; and meeting people for social engagement.

One of the workers commented that coming to the Shipley and being creative has resulted in a clear difference in how people are for the rest of the day and that attending these sessions result in participants being more relaxed.

“ I have been so happy doing this today. I cannot remember being this happy for some time. ”

Participant

WHAT NEXT?

Over the years many people in recovery have shared that they felt they had lost their identity due to addiction, but the recovery programme supported them using culture and heritage to recover their identity. The plan is that some of the current participants will go on to be volunteer mentors for future participants on the programme. By treating people equally and learning alongside them, we give them confidence to engage with museums and creativity as well as develop trust in us and their peers.

We are looking to continue the programme after its initial funding ends in June 2024 and are actively looking for further support to make it a regular part of the Shipley's community programme.



Vita Nova

BY DR SHARON COYNE

Sharon is Artistic Director of Vita Nova.



The Nest by Vita Nova (Sam phoning / Pride: wait a minute. What are you doing? / Shame: No! He's not going to want to hear from you! Are you mad, crazy? He never wants to see your sorry scummy face again). Photo © Martin Coyne.

ABOUT US

In 1999 as co-director of Bournemouth Theatre in Education, based in the now closed Bournemouth Centre for Community Arts (BCCA), I was asked to devise a secondary school drug education programme. I took myself to a 'dry' social club and asked if anyone would help me create a play for young people. No one said much, so I heard myself saying "... you know a play to tell people about drugs misuse... or how to take drugs safely". One of those present said, "there is no safe way for us. If there was I wouldn't be here". His words were the beginning of my education into the disease of addiction. A group of recovering addicts found their way

to the BCCA and together we created Vita Nova's first play *Scratchin' the Surface*. It was a profound experience for the group and myself as facilitator. Vita Nova delivered a dynamic educational message whilst being therapeutic for the participant actors. Nobody wanted to stop and so Vita Nova was born.

Vita Nova is based in Boscombe, an area of deprivation. It offers a range of purposeful arts activities, supporting participants ongoing recovery, a stepping-stone for those leaving rehabilitation centers, building participants' self-esteem within a safe environment. Members talk about Vita Nova as 'family'.

As a facilitator, I have grown with the group. Over the years I have gained knowledge about addiction and as consequence, knowledge of myself. I have often asked myself why I work with marginalised groups. It became a theme in my PhD. I discovered that to an extent I am a wounded healer. This can have benefits, as empathy is necessary within this field of work. It can also have its drawbacks as facilitators often deal with traumatic situations. As my practice has grown, I have become more aware of the necessity of boundaries and how to pace myself. Facilitators have a deep responsibility to protect those we work with. This is why I use fiction, which offers a form of distance between the participant and the theatre piece. The rewards are great. It is a privilege to share in people's stories and accompany them on their recovery journey.

OUR APPROACH

As a facilitator, I am inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Both practitioners view education as a way of challenging societal or psychological oppression. Most of the people I work with at Vita Nova struggle with inner oppression, what Boal terms 'Cop in the Head'. Freire said that 'problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming'.²⁸

Theatre/drama work is to do with exploring the human condition. Through a variety of techniques such as improvisation, role-play devising and working with a script, we can begin to understand ourselves and 'become'. The intervention of drama/ theatre work can have positive long-lasting effects on people's lives.

THE NEST

Since my return to Vita Nova 2020, we have been touring *The Nest*. A play that focuses on protagonist 'Sam's' struggle with addiction before asking for help. *The Nest* emerged out of drama sessions I ran at a local treatment centre; one participant described his rock bottom as being confined to one chair, 'his nest'.

Others in the group then described their nests... a small section of a bed, a corner of a room, of anywhere they were able to create some vestige of control. The word 'nest' conjures up a sense of safety and nurture when in fact



The Nest by Vita Nova (Sam surrounded by the voices in her head Fear, Shame and Pride). Photo © Martin Coyne.

it is a form of prison. With these thoughts in mind, I wrote the play. The voices in Sam's head are Pride, Shame, Fear, and Quiet Love. Although the voices echo Sam's struggle with addiction, they are also relatable to everyone's experiences.

“ To accept yourself...
always know when to ask for help. ”

“ It made me feel
sympathetic towards other
people's experiences. ”

“ It surprised me
that it is incredibly difficult
to recover from drugs/alcohol without
asking for help. ”

“ It felt surreal having the emotions being
portrayed as characters – great idea. ”

Audience feedback

²⁸ Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, page 60.

Vita Nova's plays are accompanied by testimonies from the cast where they share their lived experiences and a Q&A session. Vita Nova will not perform without this element. The plays become platforms for dialogue. This format has proved to be very powerful.

The Nest has been seen by schools, universities, treatment centres and the wider community. Young audiences gain informed choices about drug and alcohol abuse. Stereotypes surrounding addiction are challenged. Importantly, students are made aware that asking for help, be it about drugs, drinking, body dysmorphia, or low self-esteem, is a sign of strength.

For treatment centres *The Nest* is more about hope. The very presence of the group as survivors gives the audience confidence. They can identify with the play and this has a cathartic effect on the audience.

“Really different, really refreshing, you are all brilliant.”

“ [The play] was resonant and emotional.”

“ The phone call made me cry. It touched my heart. Beautiful.”

“ The character of 'Fear' I know. ... the retching ... it was all wonderful.”

“ I was in a shitty mood before I came in. I am glad I did come in. I feel better.”

Audience feedback

For the actor participants, although sharing their lived experiences at times can become painful, the group support each other and see it as a vital part of the programme: not just for the audience but for their own journeys of recovery.

The benefits of taking part in what I call purposeful drama work can be transformative for participants. They are learning self-discipline and commitment; this counters

isolation, which for addicts is a particularly vulnerable state. Working with others as a team who are also in recovery, is affirming. It is about finding your voice, which gives individuals self-confidence. Vita Nova is delivering work that is not just useful but I would say necessary.

“ Coming into schools and talking to you is very important for me. To share my story.”

“ It's my way of making amends for all the chaos I caused. If we can anyone by what we are saying it's worth it.”

“ It's like a reminder of where I came from. Where I am now and where I could return if I don't keep up with my recovery.”

Participants

WHAT NEXT?

Our key plan for the future is to keep going. Vita Nova like so many charities is hampered by a constant need to apply for funding. Without core funding, we depend on grants and the small revenue we obtain from performing. Our team consists of a creative producer, educational and arts administrator, marketing officer, and myself as artistic director. We are all part-time and working with an increasing number of participants, some of whom are socially prescribed or directed from food banks. Increasingly, as services are reduced, we have become almost social workers. We know that apart from the great therapeutic value of Vita Nova, we save the government thousands of pounds by keeping people out of the NHS, prison and other vital services.

On a more positive note we have gained an Arts Council England grant, which enables us to take our artistic work onto another level. From September 2024, we will have a new piece that will be performed in arts venues and therefore reach another audience.



Recovery is impossible by yourself. While you're busily doing whatever you're doing, sometimes, if you're relaxed, a lot of things will come out.

For creativity, you've got to allow for mistakes and mishaps, and I think you need to accept that straightaway, because, if not, it will just ruin the whole experience.

I used to do gilding. It's reconnected me to what I did when I was a teenager. I've not done it for years. It's good to get creative again and get all my expressions out.



Moving forward

BY DR CATHY SLOAN

Cathy Sloan is Senior Lecturer in Applied and Socially Conscious Theatre at London College of Music, University of West London

This section provides a summary of the findings emerging from a narrative analysis of the case studies in this report. It also identifies areas for potential future growth.

KEY OBSERVATIONS ON PRACTICE

While each case study shares a unique example of recovery arts practice, there are some common features of practice worthy of note to highlight the ways in which creative activity is used to support recovery.

Storytelling

The examples of creative practice in this report each demonstrate forms of expression that draw upon lived experiences of addiction. Even if not directly biographical, participants are able to express themselves physically and metaphorically in a safe, contained manner. Their perspectives or experiences might become part of the dramaturgy of the piece, such as small performance adventures' performance 'The Washing Up'. It may involve expressions that do not require spoken word, such as the devised movement of Fallen Angels Dance Theatre's productions or the ceramic sculptures crafted for the Recast project. Such forms of artistic expression allow people in recovery to reimagine themselves and change their life narratives, growing in confidence as they continue their pathway towards recovery from addiction.

Creative storytelling, through voice or bodily expression, seems especially popular in recovery arts. Even visual art-based projects, such as those of Portraits of Recovery, involve a dimension through which participants tell their story or share their perspectives. This aligns with the emphasis in many recovery programmes, including Twelve Step recovery, on sharing 'experience, strength and hope'²⁹ in order to take account of one's own life narrative and also share insights that might support others in their recovery journeys. Deep self-reflection and accountability for one's actions are very much assisted by performance activities that involve role play or imagined worlds through which participants can either act out bothersome feelings or experiment with new ways of interacting with their surroundings. The liminal and interactive space of performance facilitates self-discovery through supportive environments with others who have a shared understanding.³⁰

Co-creation

Each project involves some form of co-creation, whether through devising a performance together, participating in a workshop with a creative outcome or working with or alongside others to achieve a creative goal. This co-initiative occurs amongst groups of people with similar experience in that all participants identify as being affected by addiction. It contributes to a recovery-engaged

²⁹ This is a phrase often used in recovery circles to describe the act of sharing lived experience with others in a support group in order to take accountability for one's narrative as well as assist others by showing that recovery is possible.

³⁰ More on the liminal and affective space of theatre-making in recovery arts can be found in the following articles: Sloan, C. (2018). Understanding spaces of potentiality in applied theatre. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 23(4), 582–597. doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2018.1508991 and Zontou, Z. (2017). Under the Influence of ... Affective Performance. *Performance Research*, 22(6), 93–102. doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2017.1412660.



Participants in small performance adventures' Ritual project. Photo © Matt Cotton, Disruptiv media.

atmosphere, whereby the group are not only employed in creative activity but through it they become a potential source of peer support. Playfulness is an important aspect of the collaborative experience, as indicated in the case studies of Our Space, The Mixed Bag Players and small performance adventures. Fun and laughter are crucial elements in creating an atmosphere conducive to personal growth and positive social interaction. This is especially important when guiding people beyond the shame and stigmatisation that inhibits recovery. Working as an ensemble is a distinctive aspect of performance, which New Note Orchestra (see page 36) and Geese Theatre (see page 26) illustrate as an integral aspect of their co-creation initiatives.

Advocacy

Much of the work of recovery arts organisations simultaneously involves advocacy for greater awareness of issues relating to addiction which in turn can assist in developing a better understanding of what supports journeys of recovery more effectively. As recovery involves both personal and environmental

factors, providing a platform for people with lived experience of addiction and recovery is a valuable societal contribution that all examples of practice in this report have made. In particular, the film created by Dante or Die from contributions by workshop participants (see page 19), and the plays created and toured to local schools by Vita Nova (see page 58), function as powerful educational tools. Providing a platform for under-represented and often marginalised voices also enables the participants involved to develop their confidence and move beyond shame-bound narratives.

The performance or exhibition of artistic work often occurs within the community setting in which it is created. This could be within an addiction treatment centre, a local arts venue or gallery, community centre or prison. However, increasingly, and given the focus as mentioned earlier on high quality artistic outputs, performances and displays of work are staged in mainstream venues. Outside Edge Theatre has performed in off-west end venues across London, Portraits of Recovery have exhibited at the Whitworth Gallery,

Manchester, and Science Gallery, London, Fallen Angels have performed at Liverpool's Everyman theatre and more recently both Fallen Angels and New Note have performed together at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. This marks their practice as distinct from organisations that focus on participatory arts for health and wellbeing in community settings because public, aesthetically innovative and impactful performance is an essential element of their work. Recovery arts is as much a cultural movement as it is a vehicle for supporting health and wellbeing.

“Recovery arts is as much a cultural movement as it is a vehicle for supporting health and wellbeing.”

Sober-friendly cultural environments

Each case study provides an example of a social environment which is sober-friendly in that the participants and facilitators understand and actively support recovery. This is done in some ways by default because those involved in creative activities have lived experience of recovery from addiction. In most cases, participation is subject to a commitment to arriving to the activity sober. Arts projects, such as Recast, that work alongside treatment services may well work with participants who are still using (taking substances) or are on opioid replacement treatment. However, the leading independent recovery arts organisations operate as sober environments in which members can feel secure in the knowledge that they will not be exposed to the discomfort of socialising with people who are actively under the influence. This is an important feature for relapse prevention purposes, given the recovery mantra that desistance requires avoidance of people, places and things that might trigger cravings or addictive behaviours.

Some organisations in this report are founded by people in recovery, while others involve practitioners with considerable experience of working with people affected by addiction. These insights, and the inclusive ethos that embraces all forms of recovery and identity expressions, generate recovery-engaged

atmospheres that feel safe for people who may feel vulnerable in environments that might trigger their addictive behaviours. For instance, Not Saints (see page 39), through their representation artists in recovery and curation of sober music gigs, exemplify the desire for access to sober-friendly cultural spaces. Glasgow Barons (see page 29), with their Recovery Rap nights, also reveal the increasing demand for sober music events. The case studies in this report also show how sustained connection to forms of recovery community are made possible through cultural events that emerge from the creative activities of recovery arts organisations and projects. Increasingly, there are regular recovery festivals across the UK, such as the Recovery Street Film festival in London or the Essex Recovery festival. Creative arts by people with lived experience of addiction recovery form a key element of these sober gatherings.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

Geographical disadvantage

During the research for this report, it became evident that there are concentrations of activity in some locations, while there are absences in other areas across the UK. The largest organisations tend to be based in cities, such as London, Manchester, Liverpool, Brighton and Bristol. Even within these cities, very few are served by multiple organisations. For instance, Outside Edge now have satellite groups across London, but this is insufficient to enable access to the sheer number of people in recovery that could avail of their activities. Other projects do exist, such as The Recoverist Project in Islington. However, when in early recovery, people require activities that are within a short, easily commutable distance. These locations of activity then become a hub for social activity and community support.

This is perhaps why, in recent times with the development of creative recovery initiatives, there has been a growth in recovery arts organisations in locations such as Bristol, Brighton and Staffordshire. Addiction services in these areas have embraced creative activities and supported their growth. People leaving these services are perhaps more likely to seek out, or even set up, recovery arts projects. For instance, The Mixed Bag players emerged from the drama group facilitated by York in



Photo courtesy of Geese Theatre. Photo © Fovea Creative.

Recovery and Bristol Recovery Orchestra and Choir are facilitated (and funded by) Bristol Drugs Project. The Detox factor (a music, creative writing and film-making group based in Stafford) is organised by Chase Recovery which is a peer-led organisation supporting addiction recovery aftercare across Staffordshire.³¹

Funding models

A common feature of each example of practice in this report is that access to participation is free. This seems vital to enable access to those who face economic disadvantage, especially for those in early stages of recovery who might also face homelessness and / or unemployment.

Currently recovery arts organisations tend to support their work through the following sources: charitable foundations or trusts that fund community or arts projects; commissions from addiction service providers for workshops or bespoke projects; Arts Council or other arts-related funding; and private fundraising initiatives.

The challenge of these avenues of funding is that they tend to focus on providing financial support for a stand-alone project. Private

fundraising is indeterminate and requires significant initiative and connections to potential donors to be sufficiently fruitful to cover core costs that are often not accounted for adequately in funding bids for individual projects.

Yet, greater impact for participants occurs from engagement with activities over a sustained period of time rather than a short intervention. This can be witnessed in the familiar faces that one sees returning to projects with organisations such as Fallen Angels, New Note and Outside Edge. Regular attendance is part of their ongoing recovery activity.

Finding appropriate and sustainable funding streams is an ongoing challenge for the organisations represented in this report. Nonetheless, the wider societal value of supporting long-term recovery journeys is self-evident.

Recruitment and demographics

Recruitment of participants can involve a blended strategy of targeting local addiction treatment providers, social media and public events. Often word of mouth within

³¹ More information on Chase Recovery can be found on their website: chaserecovery.co.uk/about-us.

recovery circles plays a significant role. Some organisations deliver taster workshops at local treatment services and attend addiction service conferences. However, recruitment of under-represented groups can be difficult, particularly those who have experienced marginalisation or prejudice due to their race, gender or sexual orientation. Recovery arts organisations tend to be intersectional and inclusive, but people from minority identities are still underrepresented across the sector.

As yet, there has not been a survey of demographics of recovery arts participants across the sector. Whilst the larger organisations will gather this information for their funding applications, this has not been gathered centrally. There is work to be done on this, which the Addiction Recovery Arts (ARA) network is keen to do. Informally, from observing the demographics of the organisations contained in this report, there is a predominance of male participants and those identifying as white. In terms of age, they tend to be adults aged in their late 30s to late 50s. Outside Edge, based in London, does have greater diversity in age, race and

gender, which perhaps reflects the location of their programmes. These informal observations on demographics do correlate somewhat with the data gathered by UK government bodies on engagement with treatment service. Specifically, the 2022-23 statistical report, cited in the introduction to this report, records that 68% engaging in treatment were men and 60% of those attending services were over 40 years old.

The addiction research of Nancy Campbell and Elizabeth Ettorre highlights the obstacles that prevent women and those identifying as LGBTQ+ from engaging in addiction treatment services that in the past have not addressed the specific needs of these groups. Given the stigma around addiction, people who already experience marginalisation are less likely to access treatment. Subsequently, they are also less likely to be aware of, and access, recovery arts projects. Women who have experienced gender violence may not feel comfortable in a mixed gender group. Some recovery arts organisations, such as Outside Edge, have set up a women-only group for this reason. More recently, in July 2024, there was a 'TransSober'

Photo courtesy of Not Saints.



exhibition at the Ledward Centre in Brighton, celebrating trans identities and addiction recovery. This shows how the arts can assist in celebrating the diverse identities within the recovery community and, in turn, support better representation of their needs within addiction treatment provision.

Measuring impact

There is still limited research into this unique area of arts practice. Qualitative analysis of the impact of the work can be gleaned from some arts-based research publications. Within the UK, academics Dr Zoe Zontou and Dr Cathy Sloan specialise in this field of performance research and, through their research outputs, illustrate in depth the benefits of the artistic processes involved. There have also been evaluations by psychologists, analysing the benefits of participation, such as the report by Dr Stephanie Kewley on the work of Geese Theatre³² or Dr Fay Dennis' report on a theatre project exploring lived experience of drug addiction³³. Each organisation will of course conduct individual evaluation reports for their funders, but these are unpublished and, as yet, not collated across the sector.

Measuring impact is an imprecise task in this field of practice due to the perpetual and uncertain nature of addiction recovery. Targets focusing specifically on desistance do not necessarily capture the effectiveness of the arts intervention. The risk of relapse is always a factor in any work in addiction recovery. Nonetheless, the relapse of a participant does not necessarily mean that the project failed. Indeed, engagement in the experience may well have sustained their recovery longer than might have occurred otherwise and the potential for re-engaging with recovery more successfully is enhanced through the recovery capital enabled via the creative arts community.

Organisational structure and venues

Recovery arts organisations tend to be small and location-specific. They operate as community interest companies or registered charities with a small team of core staff

and perhaps also freelance facilitators. This is perhaps due to the precarious nature of funding, the majority of which is provided for individual, time-constrained projects rather than core costs. The more experienced, longer existing organisations have enhanced their reach and profile of their work through collaborations within other recovery arts organisations or with external, cultural industry partners.

Only one of the recovery arts organisations, Vita Nova (see page 58), currently has its own venue for workshops and/or performances. Creative activity often takes place in rooms within community arts centres, community halls, local treatment services or spaces hired for particular projects. Cohabiting within other organisations is useful, particularly if it enables the sharing of resources. If based within a building managed by an addiction treatment provider, referrals from the service can be made more and participants in the arts project can be signposted to aftercare support within the building.

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The documentation and research of Recovery Arts as a distinct practice has, so far, been largely UK focused. However, creative projects with, by and for people in addiction recovery do exist globally. Through the online publication of *Performing Recovery* magazine it has been possible to showcase projects from outside the UK. For instance, edition one features The Creative High, an award-winning film created with and by artists in recovery in the USA.³⁴ The producers are based in San Francisco, though the film screenings have been toured across America. Edition two featured Turn Up For Recovery,³⁵ a live music events movement which was set up to fundraise for Crossroads Antigua, a treatment provider in Antigua. The gigs occur in the USA, UK and online and are supported by music industry celebrities. The Florida-based theatre initiative, called the Recovery Project,³⁶ was also included in a subsequent edition as well as an article from

³² The article can be accessed here: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0197455618302077.

³³ Dennis, F. (2019). Making Problems: The Inventive Potential of the Arts for Alcohol and Other Drug Research. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 46(2), 127-138.

³⁴ Find out more about The Creative High here: thecreativehigh.com.

³⁵ More information on TUFRR can be found here: turnupforrecovery.org.

³⁶ More information on Sean Daniels' project here: www.uncsa.edu/kenan/art-restart/sean-daniels-restart.aspx.



Glasgow Barons. Photo © Campbell David Parker.

one of the founders of [Passenger Recovery](#)³⁷ sharing how the organisation supports musicians in recovery on tour. Other individual projects may also exist, such as the theatre performance 'Four Legs to Stand On' that was facilitated by the Creating Outreach About Addiction Support Together organisation in Rhode Island to share the experience of families affected by the opioid epidemic.

There is still work to be done in developing a cohesive, global movement of recovery arts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

From the discussion above there are clear points for future development of this field of arts practice:

1. Widening access requires the development of recovery-engaged arts projects or organisations in geographical locations where there is currently no provision. This could be assisted by the facilitation of

training programmes run by existing leaders in the field or via the Addiction Recovery Arts network who can guide people in local settings in how to set up a project and practice in a way that supports addiction recovery. If people in recovery can access recovery groups anywhere in the UK, then they should also be able to access recovery culture wherever they are.

- 2. Referral processes** from treatment providers to recovery arts activities could be improved. The existence of The Directory on the ARA network³⁸ website goes some way to signpost what currently exists; however, it would be particularly effective if there was a more concerted approach to establish links between local recovery arts providers and addiction treatment providers so that people are supported in making that first step to attend an arts activity.
- 3. Projects designed for underrepresented identities** are important to consider when developing new initiatives. The nature of

³⁷ More information on Passenger Recovery here: passengerrecovery.com.

³⁸ recovery-arts.org/the-directory

these projects should directly engage with and serve the needs of those who may feel excluded from participation due to race, religion, gender or sexual identity.

- 4. Funding long-term projects** requires a review of how recovery arts projects are evaluated and supported financially. This might involve conceptualising such funding as a necessary element of addiction treatment provision and aftercare.
- 5. Recovery Cities and CLEROs** (College of Lived Experience of Recovery Organisations) represent a new wave of initiatives across the UK designed to highlight and support recovery communities. It is essential that both movements acknowledge and involve recovery arts, since culture is an integral element of contemporary society and therefore recovery culture should involve the arts. Work towards this has begun via the Addiction Recovery Arts network and leading figures of the recovery city and CLERO networks.
- 6. Further research** is needed to gather statistics on involvement in recovery arts across the sector and collating the impact records from individual organisations to support the advocacy work that the ARA network aims to do.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The existence of the Addiction Recovery Arts Network demonstrates the desire for collaboration and mentorship across the growing movement of recovery arts. The joint performance project of Fallen Angels and New Note Orchestra, culminating in public performances at the Royal Opera House in Convent Garden, London in November 2023 and June 2024, shows how collaboration across the network and with external partners, such as the Royal Ballet, can lead to high profile and successful performance events that extend the reach and awareness of the positive role of creative arts in supporting addiction recovery.

There remains work to be done to develop projects in regions where recovery arts projects do not yet exist. There may well be organisations that are still to be discovered. Nonetheless, if recovery from addiction requires positive connections with people, places and things, then the future of this field of practice must look outwards towards making and sustaining further recovery-engaged connections.

Directory & map

DIRECTORY AND MAP OF RECOVERY ARTS PROJECTS

This list includes the mainly arts and cultural organisations engaging people with addictions that we know about in the UK, including but not limited to the case studies in this report.

We'd love to hear about more – if you're not here and think you should be, you might like to be in the next edition of the Baring Foundation's Directory of Arts and Mental Health Organisations. You can email us on baring.foundation@ing.com to tell us more about your organisation/project.

BY LOCATION

Number = counties on the map opposite.

ENGLAND

01 London

Outside Edge Theatre Company

West Midlands

02 Staffordshire

B arts, Stoke-on-Trent
British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent
Chase Recovery (The Detox Factor)

North East

03 Tyne and Wear

Tyne & Wear Museums & Archives

North West

04 Cheshire

Fallen Angels Theatre Company, Chester

05 Merseyside

Liverpool Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

06 Greater Manchester

Portraits of Recovery, Manchester

Yorkshire & Humber

07 South Yorkshire

Creative Recovery, Barnsley

08 West Yorkshire

Dance United Yorkshire, Castleford

09 North Yorkshire

Mixed Bag Players, York

South East

10 East Sussex

Cascade Creative Recovery, Brighton
Horizon Film and Media/Edit Sweet, Brighton
New Note, Brighton
Not Saints, Brighton
small performance adventures, Brighton

South West

11 Bristol

acta community theatre
Bristol Drug Project
creativeShift, Bristol and Gloucestershire

12 Devon

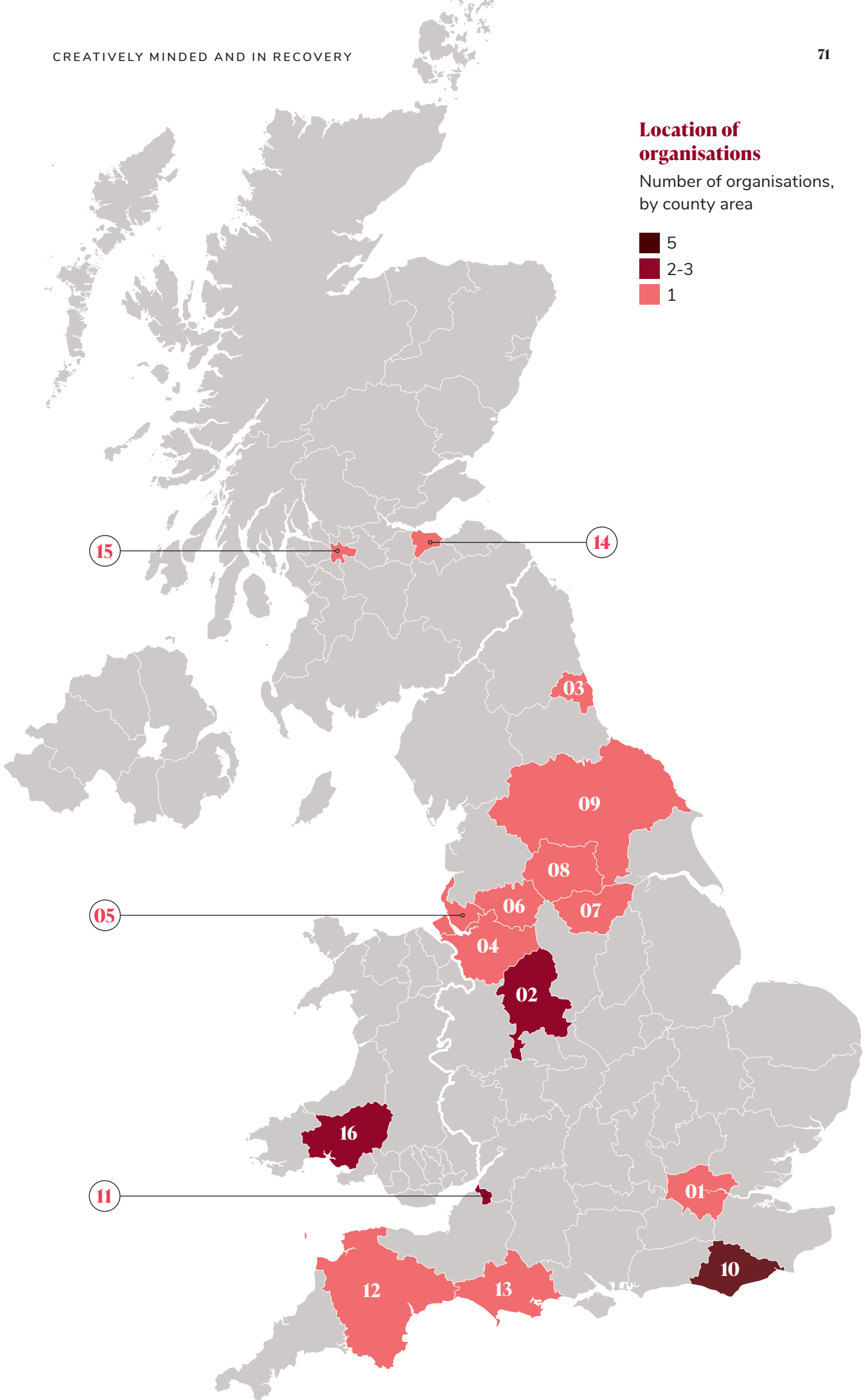
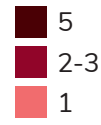
Theatre Royal Plymouth

13 Dorset

Vita Nova, Bournemouth

Location of organisations

Number of organisations, by county area



SCOTLAND**14 Edinburgh**

Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh

15 Glasgow

Glasgow Barons

WALES**16 Carmarthenshire**

Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru/Literature Wales:
Ar y Dibyn

NATIONAL/TOURING

Dante or Die
Geese Theatre

A-Z

acta community theatre
B arts
Bristol Drugs Project: Rising Voices Recovery
Choir and Bristol Recovery Orchestra
British Ceramics Biennial: Recast project
Chase Recovery (the Detox Factor)
creativeShift
Dance United Yorkshire
Dante or Die
Fallen Angels Dance Theatre
Geese Theatre Company
Glasgow Barons
Mixed Bag Players
New Note Orchestra
Not Saints
Outside Edge Theatre
Portraits of Recovery
small performance adventures
Theatre Royal Plymouth: Our Space
Tyne & Wear Museums & Archives
Vita Nova

Bibliography

Messy Connections: Creating Atmospheres of Addiction Recovery Through Performance Practice, Cathy Sloan, 2024. Published by Routledge. It is available in hard copy and e-book via various retail outlets. It documents and analyses examples of addiction recovery arts practice, including the author's own practice.

Addiction and Performance edited by James Reynolds and Zoe Zontou, 2014. Published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. It is available in hardback and e-book via various retail outlets. It is an edited collection of essays examining examples of performance that engages with experiences of addiction and/or recovery.

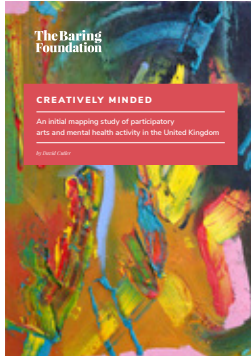
(2023-present) *Performing Recovery* edited and published by the Addiction Recovery Arts Network. This [online magazine](#) is produced by an editorial board that represent the Addiction Recovery Arts Network. Articles are contributed by artists, practitioners and organisations who identify as working in the field of recovery arts. The magazine contains features on practice, topics and concepts relevant to recovery arts, interviews, poetry and art. The website also contains a blog and directory. Accessible here: recovery-arts.org/performing-recovery-magazine

Stephanie Kewley, Changing identities through Staging Recovery: The role of community theatre in the process of recovery, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 2019, v.63 p84-93.

Cathy Sloan, Understanding spaces of potentiality in applied theatre. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 2018, 23(4), 582–597.

Zoe Zontou, Under the Influence of ... Affective Performance. *Performance Research*, 2017, 22(6), 93–102.

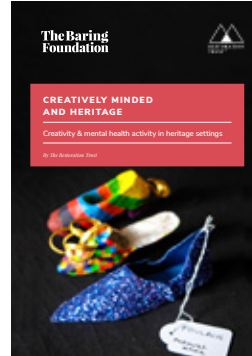
Selected Baring Foundation resources



Creatively minded
David Cutler
2020



Creatively minded
and young
Harriet Lowe
2020



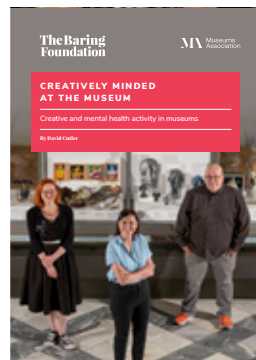
Creatively minded
and heritage
The Restoration Trust
2021



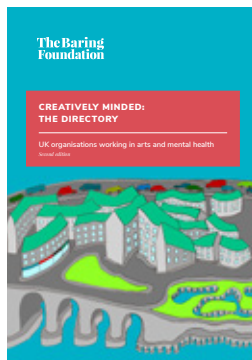
Creatively minded
and the NHS
David Cutler
2021



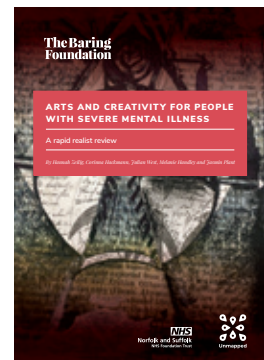
Creatively minded
and ethnically diverse
Compiled by
The Baring Foundation
2021



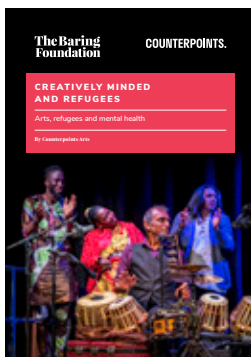
Creatively minded
at the museum
David Cutler
2022



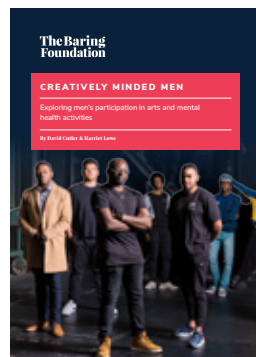
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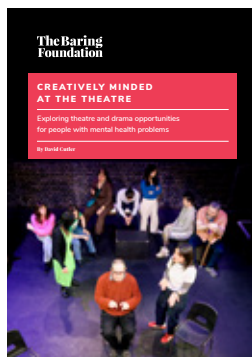
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