

## CREATIVELY MINDED IN THE ART STUDIO

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Exploring visual arts offers for and by  
people with mental health problems

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By David Cutler



## CREATIVELY MINDED IN THE STUDIO: EXPLORING VISUAL ARTS OFFERS FOR AND BY PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

### 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.

### About the author

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation and leads its Arts programme. He is the author of several related reports including *Creatively Minded*, *Creatively Minded Men*, *Creatively Minded at the Museum* and *Creatively Minded at the Theatre*.

### Acknowledgements

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This report was edited by Harriet Lowe, Communications and Research Manager at the Baring Foundation, and designed by Alex Valy.

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'Untold Stories' exhibition,  
Bristol, image courtesy of  
Studio Upstairs.



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## Summary

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The Baring Foundation is an independent funder, which since 2020 has supported creative opportunities for and by people with mental health problems across the UK. This report is the eleventh looking at aspects of creative mental health. As well as the 16 case studies which form the heart of this report, there are many more in other publications in the Creatively Minded<sup>1</sup> series or published as blogs on our website.

The visual arts, broadly defined, have a long history of association with people living with mental health problems, including through some of the world's most famous artists. Participatory visual arts, which are the focus of this report, happen when trained artists co-produce work with untrained participants. A separate article in this report (page 13) describes the differences and similarities between qualified art therapy and participatory visual arts.

There are many examples of this work and they can to some extent, be traced back to arts in asylums or mental hospitals; the outsider art movement; and to the participatory, community and disability arts movements.

Visual arts offers that are targeted at people with mental health problems and run by arts organisations are scattered across the UK, largely according to the happenstance of where a founder started their work. Additionally, other organisations might offer opportunities, especially NHS organisations or charitable mental health services, such as local chapters of Mind. Participatory visual arts organisations have focussed on engaging people with mental health problems since at least the late 1970s and the most recent example in this report was established in 2017.

Finally, although these case studies are deliberately quite different, at the end of this report some reflections are offered as to what they teach us, including how organisations start; a rough typology of organisations; different financial models; variations in scale and in participants, as well as the rich variety of the art produced and accompanying services and opportunities for participants.

<sup>1</sup> See: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resources](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resources).

# Introduction

BY DAVID CUTLER

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation and leads its Arts programme.

## THREE EXHIBITIONS

Three artists have recently been presented in three museums across London. All have produced fascinating work. Two are among the most famous artists of all time. For all three, mental ill-health was a key part of their lives, shaping their work to different degrees.

‘Poets and Lovers’ was one of the most-visited shows ever to take place at the National Gallery. It marks the prodigious creativity of Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) in the South of France over just a two-year period when he was producing masterpieces on a weekly, almost daily basis. For some of this time, Van Gogh was under the care of a local asylum, as described in *Starry Night* by Martin Bailey<sup>2</sup>. At the end of this period, he took his own life.

Soon after Poets and Lovers, the neighbouring National Portrait Gallery opened an exhibition of portraits by Van Gogh’s rough contemporary Edward Munch (1863–1944). The Norwegian artist produced perhaps the most famous painting of all time to be associated with mental distress, *The Scream* (1893), although its motivations are less certain. Munch experienced severe mental health problems throughout this life, including a stay in a psychiatric hospital. He felt he had ‘inherited’ his illness from his father and his sister also experienced great mental health struggles.

Lastly, the Museum of the Mind presented the work of the highly talented, but less well-known, Charlotte Wahl Johnson (1943–2021). The exhibition, titled ‘What It Felt Like’, displayed paintings that she made in 1974

during a nine-month stay at the Bethlem Psychiatric Hospital. The paintings often refer to the poor, almost cruel treatment she endured there, as well as her concern for her beloved family, which included a future Prime Minister. She seems to have made history by insisting that the exhibition of her work named her as a patient there.

These are just three examples. There are countless others, such as, including Yayoi Kusama, who for many years has lived in a psychiatric hospital in Japan and may be by some measures the most popular artist in the world. It is clear that the visual arts and people living with mental health problems often intersect in powerful and complex ways.

## ARTS AND MENTAL HEALTH AND THE BARING FOUNDATION

The arts – in particular participatory arts – have been a major area for Baring Foundation funding for a long time. The Foundation funds across art forms and throughout the UK. We tend to fund with a focus on a specific theme for ten years or more as we believe change is hard won. We approach the arts through a human-rights lens: while aware that participation in the arts can have many benefits, including for health and wellbeing, our primary concern is the right of everyone to be creative.

Since 2020, our Arts programme has funded creative opportunities which engage people with mental health problems – deliberately targeting people experiencing mental

<sup>2</sup> *Starry Night: Van Gogh at the Asylum*, Martin Bailey, 2022.



health problems, rather than funding more preventative work or 'arts and wellbeing'. Alongside our grants, we have published a series of reports using as a brand the title of our first publication, *Creatively Minded*, which served as an exploration of the field we were entering into. Since then, we have published more than ten reports, often using a case-study model as we have here. Perhaps the most similar to this report is *Creatively Minded at the Museum*.<sup>3</sup>

## WHY WE WROTE THIS REPORT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OUR OTHER PUBLICATIONS

The purpose of our *Creatively Minded* reports<sup>4</sup> is to shine a light on a particular aspect of practice in creative mental health and to map notable projects, and then to make suggestions as to how the field can be further strengthened.

Although we have not been able to identify a report that specifically covers the issue of targeted visual participatory arts across the UK, this current volume does to some extent overlap with some of our other reports.

At the end of this volume you can see the ten other reports that we have written in this series (see page 76). A number of these also include case studies of arts organisations using visual arts. We have decided largely not to then include these in this new volume. The following is a flavour of other case studies we have collected and is not comprehensive.

- **Creatively Minded at the Museum:** All 18 case studies use visual arts and a number of these are in partnership with *Outside In*. We have deliberately not included any museums or art collections in this report.
- **Creatively Minded and Heritage** includes *Belfast Exposed*, which is a centre for excellence in the use of therapeutic photography. There is often an affinity between nature and visual arts, and the same volume includes the work of Art Branches and Radiate Arts for instance.

- **Creatively Minded and Young** includes *42nd Street* in Manchester and *Soft Touch Arts* in Leicester, both of which have art studios for young people.
- **Creatively Minded Men**, includes examples from the Men's Shed Movement, which has 1,100 chapters across the UK. Although not confined to men with mental health problems, some men will have this experience and can use arts and crafts such as wood turning, ceramics, painting and 3D printing at many locations. Also included in this report are *Fabrica* in Brighton, *North Tyneside Art Studio* and *Arts 2 Heal* in Blackburn.
- **Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse** includes *Art in Healthcare* which works across Scotland and the *British Ceramics Biennial* in Stoke-on-Trent, which has a long running ceramics workshop for people in recovery from addiction.
- **Creatively Minded and in Recovery** focusing on people in recovery from addictions includes the Manchester based organisation, *Portraits of Recovery*.
- **Creatively Minded Refugees** includes *Artcore* in Derby, *Art Refuge* (Kent, Bristol and France) and the *Maryhill Integration Network* in Glasgow.

Some useful general advice for the sector can be found in two works published by the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA), the creative health network for England. We commissioned CHWA to publish *From Surviving to Thriving*<sup>5</sup> and a helpful approach for working in any art form can be found in the *Creative Health Quality Framework*<sup>6</sup>.

## SOME DEFINITIONS

### Mental health problems

Mental health is a highly contested area including in the language that is used. This report uses the phrase 'mental health problem', which is commonly deployed by organisations such as Mind and the NHS, but we recognise that some people may prefer other terms such

<sup>3</sup> *Creatively Minded at the Museum*, Baring Foundation, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> All our *Creatively Minded* reports are available on our website.

<sup>5</sup> *From surviving to thriving*, Victoria Hume and Minoti Parikh, 2022. Available at: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/from-surviving-to-thriving](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/from-surviving-to-thriving).

<sup>6</sup> Available at: [www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/resources/creative-health-quality-framework](https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/resources/creative-health-quality-framework).

as mental distress. While we do indeed all have mental health, this report looks beyond preventative work on mental health with the whole population, wellness or mindfulness. While valuable, more has been written about this and it is not the focus of the Baring Foundation's funding programme.

An entire book could be devoted to defining mental health problems, but currently these tend to be grouped into: psychoses (affecting around 3% of the population), of which Bipolar Spectrum Disorder is the best known; and the much more frequent Common Mental Disorders, especially anxiety and depression. Addictions, such as to drugs and alcohol, are included as mental health problems, as are conditions such as eating disorders and the poorly defined Personality Disorders.

### Visual arts

This report wishes to use a broad definition of the visual arts. We include painting, drawing, illustration, printmaking, sculpture, photography, textiles, ceramics, crafts such as wood-turning, applied arts and design. Film-making is tricky to categorise, as it is sometimes more a performance art and sometimes more of a visual art form.

### Participatory arts

We define these as creative activities in which a trained professional artist of any art form is sharing their training and expertise with people who do not have their training. This process is often called 'co-production'. The term community arts is also sometimes used. A much fuller description and history of participatory arts can be found in *A Restless Art* by François Matarasso.<sup>7</sup>

## THE HISTORY OF PARTICIPATORY VISUAL ARTS AND CREATIVE MENTAL HEALTH

The current picture of provision of creative opportunities using the visual arts for people with mental health problems has its roots in many places.

This report will look at five:

1. arts in mental health hospitals or asylums;
2. Outsider Arts;
3. participatory or community arts;
4. Disability Arts;
5. the arts and health movement.

Not all developments can be connected to these five approaches, however, and the significance of individual experience, whether that is living with a mental health problem oneself or witnessing it in a loved one, has also been a powerful motivation behind the work of many organisations.

The use of painting and drawing (along with music and performance) in mental health started at least as early as the early 19th century in what would then have been called asylums. This can be traced back to the founding of The Retreat at the end of the eighteenth century by William Tuke – a pioneer of 'moral treatment' – as an alternative to the York Lunatic Asylum. Given the absence of other treatments for mental illness, the main thing on offer in an asylum would have been peace and quiet, with time to talk to nurses and doctors. Drawing and sometimes painting were encouraged. As asylums became more overcrowded, dirty and busy, these opportunities would have declined but not ceased. The use of arts therapy is discussed elsewhere (see page 13) but, by the 1950s, the use of drugs became ever more important, followed by talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. During the 1980s, deinstitutionalisation and care in the community meant that the psychiatric estate itself was shrinking rapidly. However, sometimes, former patients came out into the community wanting to maintain their art practice. This is how Art Angel in Dundee (see page 22) was started, for example.

The term 'Outsider Art' tends to be more used in continental Europe and in the USA than in the UK. It was coined only in 1971 as an English-language equivalent to 'Art Brut'. It continues to be associated with the visual arts and is rarely applied for instance to theatre and dance. While its origins firmly lie in psychiatry, its expansion to 'untrained artists' (in my view

<sup>7</sup> *A Restless Art*, François Matarasso, 2019. See: [arestlessart.com/co-creation](http://arestlessart.com/co-creation).



### The Prinzhorn Collection, Germany

Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933) went to work at the Psychiatric Department of the University of Heidelberg in 1919. In addition to being a doctor, Prinzhorn held a PhD in art history, as well as being an accomplished singer and a World War I veteran. His superior in the Department, Dr Willmans, had already begun a small collection of artwork by mental health patients, primarily with an interest in any light this might shine on their treatment. He found an enthusiastic colleague in Dr Prinzhorn and they wrote to other hospitals for examples of work to quickly and enormously expand the initial research collection.

Then something very interesting happened. Prinzhorn developed the view that the artefacts they were gathering, from diary extracts to drawings to sculptures, should be regarded not from medical viewpoint but for their intrinsic artistic merit. In 1922, he published the groundbreaking book, *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. This influenced key artists and writers of the day such as Salvador Dali, Paul Klee, André Breton and Max Ernst. It has been described as the Bible of the Surrealists. As Charlie English puts it: 'the result was that, for a few giddy years in the 1920s and 1930s, art inspired by insanity stood at the forefront of the avant garde'.<sup>8</sup> This drove interest in the

wider theme of Art Brut which was principally championed by Jean Dubuffet as a label for what might be called untrained artists in the 1940s, followed by the term 'Outsider Art' coined in the 1970s.

This already remarkable story then took a terrible turn. First, examples from the collection were used in the infamous Nazi exhibition of so called 'degenerate art' (Entartete Kunst) that toured Germany in 1937. The propaganda purpose was obvious: modern, non-Nazi art implied mental illness. Then, and far worse, the Nazi Government in 1939 began a secret programme that acted as a forerunner to the Holocaust, whereby a variety of people with medical conditions including learning disabilities and what was then called schizophrenia, were murdered by medical staff. Numbers are extremely hard to ascertain but it is generally thought that there were between 215,000–300,000 Germans and Austrians killed in this fashion. Tragically, among the murdered were a number of the artists in the Prinzhorn Collection.

The Prinzhorn Collection survived the war and is housed by the University of Heidelberg. It comprises 6,000 works dating from 1840. Since then, a further 20,000 items have been added to the original collection. The stated aim of the museum is to dispel the stigma of mental illness.

at least) has led to a category without the benefit of clear boundaries. (More recently the terms self-taught or visionary art have been applied and curator Lynne Cooke prefers the term 'outliers'). While it is used to refer to artists who have experienced homelessness or imprisonment or similar hardships, it could potentially be used for amateur painters in comfortable retirement in leafy suburbs after a career at the Bar or in finance. (Equally, in the biopic 'Typist, Artist, Pirate King', Audrey Amiss is keen to point out that although she painted in an asylum and her style was similar to some 'outsider artists', she wasn't one as she had trained at the Royal Academy.) The most significant development in the UK in terms of outsider art has been the creation of the charity,

Outside In, by Marc Steene. Founded in 2006, Outside In is now a national organisation, using a digital platform for outsider artists to sell their work commercially. It has now supported over 3,000 artists who face difficulty entering the arts world and held more than 50 exhibitions. Steene has also written a key book on the field *Outside In: Exploring the Margins of Art*.<sup>9</sup>

Britain has an especially strong participatory or community arts sector in comparison to, say, many European countries. This has been further strengthened by the ten-year strategy of the Arts Council England, 'Let's Create', with its emphasis on grassroots creativity. This movement can be traced back to at least the 1960s. In its vanguard

<sup>8</sup> 'The Gallery of Miracles and Madness by Charlie English review – the fate of Hitler's 'degenerate' artists', *The Guardian*, 5 August 2021. [www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/05/the-gallery-of-miracles-and-madness-by-charlie-english-review-the-fate-of-hitlers-degenerate-artists](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/05/the-gallery-of-miracles-and-madness-by-charlie-english-review-the-fate-of-hitlers-degenerate-artists).

<sup>9</sup> *Outside In: Exploring the Margins of Art*, Marc Steene, 2023.

were a group of radical, mainly young, artists across art forms who wanted culture and creativity to be available to anyone regardless of class, gender or ethnicity. As time went by, this loose collection of artists developed new understandings or priorities, such as including LGBTQI people. Hence, a number of participatory visual arts organisations include a strand of work around people with mental health problems, for example, [Soft Touch Arts](#) in Leicester.

The Disability Arts movement is also an important influencer of this work (where artists have a 'disability' which may or may not be the subject of their work). Although often associated with physical disabilities and learning disabilities, and more recently neurodivergence, disability arts organisations sometimes also include people with mental health problems. Disability arts organisations regard the

principle 'nothing about us without us' as critical and society itself as disabling due to the stigma attached to say, mental health problems. These organisations often emphasise voice, activism and social change. A good example of this approach would be [ArtLink Edinburgh](#).

Lastly and more recently, the increasing awareness of the relationship between creativity and access to culture and health, or 'arts and health' is another significant influence on this work.

While separate from qualified arts therapy, this branch of arts practice has an explicit interest in the impact of the arts on health and wellbeing. As a field it has waxed and waned in terms of public funding and policy over the last thirty years. For example, a number of arts and health charities were set up in and around Manchester in the 1990s. An important aspect of the

## International projects

There is a small number of specialist psychiatric museums all of which use participatory arts as part of their community engagement process. There are three in England (the Museum of the Mind, Glenside Hospital Museum near Bristol and the Mental Health Museum in Wakefield). They have sister museums in Finland ([Lapinlahden Lähde](#) in Helsinki); the [Museum of the Mind](#) in Haarlem in the Netherlands; the [Museum Dr Guislain](#) in Ghent, Belgium; and the [Museum Ovarfati](#) in Aarhus, Denmark.

The Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg has already been mentioned (see page 09) and there is also a major collection of outside art in Lausanne in Switzerland building on Jean Dubuffet's original collection. The Prinzhorn Collection was preceded by interest in the psychiatric patient, [Adolf Wölfli](#), whose work is now found in the Museum of Fine Arts in Bern. The [Cunningham-Dax Collection](#) on similar lines can be found in Melbourne, operating as an arts charity under the wing of an Australian mental health charity, Sane.

It is noticeable that there are many, what might be called 'supported studios' in Northern Europe at least. They often work with people with learning disabilities, neurodivergent artists and people with mental health problems. I have visited highly impressive ones in Cologne

([Atelier Goldstein](#)) and in Rotterdam ([Galerie Atelier Herenplaats](#)), but there are many more. These provide space and professional support from artists and often seem to be linked to social service charities that include employment options. These and other organisations are sometimes linked through the [European Outsider Art Association](#), though its membership is broader than visual arts with people with mental health problems.

The Belgian organisation, [KAOS](#), takes a different and very interesting approach in Belgium, where it places artists in residence in psychiatric hospitals.

Although a combined arts form organisation, [Workman Arts](#) in Toronto, which is based in a psychiatric hospital, has a major strand of visual arts. This includes an annual juried exhibition [Being Scene](#), exhibiting work by members of [Workman Arts](#) and by service users of the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#). In Hudson, New York, the [Stigma Free Arts Gallery](#) operates an artists' programme and the enormous [Kings County Psychiatric Hospital](#) in Brooklyn New York has held residencies with Dutch visual arts agency, [Beautiful Distress](#).

The annual [Outsider Art Fair](#) which first took place in 1993 alternated for a long while between Paris and New York but is now only operating in New York.



development of arts and health has been an accelerating body of scientific research. A recent example of this is *Music as Medicine* by Daniel Levitin<sup>10</sup>. (Among art forms, music probably has the strongest evidence base in terms of its neurological effects.)

A landmark survey of practice across art forms came in England in 2017, with the publication of *Creative Health* by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing.<sup>11</sup> This led to the creation of the National Centre for Creative Health. The largest state intervention came with the establishment and NHS funding for social prescribing to be made available though all GPs in England. This required the appointment of over 3,000 link workers, as well as establishment of the National Academy of Social Prescribing. Link workers refer patients to non-clinical interventions including local arts and heritage offers. Although the NHS funds the link worker posts, it rarely funds the services which they are referred to, however.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF VISUAL PARTICIPATORY ARTS AND CREATIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Our ability to indicate geographical availability or spread of opportunities is especially limited. This report only includes 16 arts organisations focusing on this work. They tend to be somewhat focused on large cities such as London and Manchester, but then are scattered around the UK, largely due to the happenstance of where their founders started.

It is likely that, in addition to this, many mental health charities offer visual arts opportunities with professional guidance. Link workers attached to GP surgeries will sometimes direct patients to community visual arts offers which may or may not be run by professional artists. Beyond this, Hospital Rooms – through its Digital Art School – offers classes anywhere and supplies free art boxes throughout England to psychiatric wards (see page 47). Outside In (see page 09) has a national offer for artists. Arts Care (see page 27) works across Northern Ireland and Arts in Healthcare operates across Scotland, but mainly in the Central Belt.

We have included an A-Z and a map of organisations engaging people with mental health problems in the visual arts on page 71 of this report. However, the picture that emerges is much more complicated than these might immediately suggest.

This brief introduction is intended to show a little of the long history of mental health and visual arts in the UK and internationally, together with the diverse paths that have brought us to the current rich and complex picture. The stage, we hope, is set for looking more closely at some of the impressive work happening now across the UK and then finally to ask what we can learn from all this.

<sup>10</sup> *Music as Medicine*, Daniel Levitin, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> [ncch.org.uk/creative-health-review](https://ncch.org.uk/creative-health-review)



Bethlem Art Fair 2024,  
courtesy of Bethlem Gallery.



# Art therapy and participatory arts: commonalities, differences & collaboration

BY DR VAL HUET

Dr Val Huet (PhD) is Visiting Professor, MA & MSc Art Therapy Programmes, at the University of Hertfordshire and Ulster University.

We all have a story with art: from childhood, creative activities connect us with joy and playfulness and help us make sense of the world. Therefore, when facing adversity, we often reach for the arts to help us find or rediscover what gives meaning to our lives. This is particularly so when encountering mental health difficulties, as these that can affect our ability to communicate with ourselves and others, and can be a lonely and isolating experience. As the arts are excellent at supporting communication and relational processes, arts therapies and participatory arts can significantly improve the lives of people experiencing mental health difficulties.

Participatory arts in mental health are part of Creative Health (Arts in Health). Participatory artists provide arts experiences to people within a range of healthcare, education, community resources, and across settings including art galleries, museums, theatres, etc. The focus is usually on the arts processes, engaging in these and building a sense of shared and meaningful experience. Participatory arts can have a lasting and transformational impact on communities and individuals' quality of life (Fancourt & Finn, 2020).<sup>12</sup>

Arts therapists are employed in the NHS, education, charities, prisons, etc., and often work in multi-disciplinary teams with service users experiencing complex mental health issues. In the UK, Arts Therapists are trained

to MA/MSc level, are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and are expected to meet its statutory standards. The HCPC's main function is public protection, and any complaint against a registrant is subject to a formal legal investigation. Arts Therapists have a statutory duty to undertake continuing professional development (CPD). They are expected to engage in supervision throughout their working lives to ensure they provide best practice and to support their self-care.

Arts therapists provide individual and group work and offer different levels of client-centred interventions. For instance, (visual) art therapists run studio groups with an emphasis on artmaking rather than on exploring relational dynamics through art. Studio groups are attended by mental health service users who want to use art and need to be with others, but cannot engage in more intensive processes. Over the past 20 years, UK arts therapies have pivoted from a 'one size fits all' psychoanalytically-influenced stance towards interactive, evidence-based approaches focusing on the impact of biopsychosocial and cultural factors on mental health.

Arts therapists and participatory artists share a passion for their art forms and many practitioners work across these roles, whilst maintaining an active artist identity. Nevertheless, these fields have been perceived at times as oppositional and ruthlessly competing for resources. It is, of course,

<sup>12</sup> What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. D Fancourt and S Finn, 2020.

important to acknowledge that participatory arts practitioners and arts therapists bring different perspectives and foci on aesthetics, artifacts, processes, aims of interventions, and purpose of work. However, it is helpful to consider how service users may at times need access to arts therapies, may prefer to engage in participatory arts, or may wish to continue their arts engagement following the end of their arts therapies. This spectrum of needs requires flexible approaches and benefits from partnership work between arts therapies and participatory arts, and perhaps service users are best placed to articulate which modality works best for them, when and how.

An overview of professional journals confirms that there are many instances of partnership work and some significant benefits, as outlined in a study by Hume (2023),<sup>13</sup> who interviewed creative health practitioners and arts therapists who have worked together.

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“Working together has supported the professional development of each collaborator, helping them to better define their skill sets, strengths, and capacities.”

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“Partnerships also supported participants, modelling creative risk and co-production.”

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Whilst these partnerships have been developed through individual collaborations, access to participatory arts and arts therapies is sadly still a postcode lottery. Additionally, much of the funding is short-term, which affects freelance practitioners detrimentally and does not reflect the longer-term aspect of many mental health conditions. Therefore, policymakers, funders, and professional bodies need to develop strategies leading to more sustainable, equitable, and accessible resources. At a time when oppositional and polarised perspectives seem more common, they also have an important role to play in modelling and supporting a collegial and collaborative stance.

<sup>13</sup> 'Mutual Support?' by Victoria Hume, in D. Betts & V. Huet *Bridging the Creative Arts Therapies and Arts in Health: Toward Inspirational Practice*, p. 41, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2023.



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light green long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is painting a wall. She is holding a paintbrush in her right hand and a small metal can of paint in her left hand. The wall is covered in a dense, intricate pattern of black, branching lines that resemble a network or a web. The background is a light, textured surface. A red rectangular box is overlaid on the top left of the image, containing the text 'CASE STUDIES' in white, bold, uppercase letters, flanked by two horizontal white lines.

## CASE STUDIES

Artist Rachel Rea works on a wall-based installation as part of her New Creatives exhibition, *Radix*, at Everybody Arts. Photo © Matt Radcliffe Photography.



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# ACAVA

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**BY ISABELLA NIVEN**

Isabella is Head of Social Practice at ACAVA.



An Introduction to Circular Carpentry with Sasha Tishkov, Make and Reuse Creative Workshops, ACAVA Maxilla Men's Shed. Photo by ACAVA Shoots.

## WHO WE ARE

ACAVA is an award-winning arts education charity that evolved from artist-led initiatives in the 1970s. For 50 years, we have been among the UK's most progressive affordable studio providers.

With 14 studio buildings across nine London boroughs, Ardleigh in Essex, and Stoke on Trent, we support over 300 creative practitioners and cultural organisations.

ACAVA tackles structural inequalities in access to arts and culture, addressing underrepresentation, mental health, and barriers to creative careers. With 30 years

of NHS partnership, our pioneering community programmes have delivered positive health outcomes.

Activities include family and adult workshops, storytelling, gardening, and our community makerspace, supporting communities experiencing multiple barriers to arts participation, including in North Kensington, Brent, and Stoke City Centre. ACAVA's team includes eight full and 12 part time staff, and a pool of freelance artist-facilitators.

“On a Monday I don't like to do difficult things because I know Tuesday and Wednesday I'll have been hanging out at the Shed and will feel more positive. It's a refocus... Coming to the Shed takes my mind off issues, it's a huge distraction from these things... a mood enhancer which puts me in a better frame of mind to deal with other situations later in the week.”

**John, Men's Shed participant (see box)**

## OUR WORK

Since 2019, the focus of our adult mental health provision has been the development of our community makerspace and the **Maxilla Men's Shed** programme in North Kensington, London. It was initiated in partnership with the NHS following the Grenfell Tower Fire which killed 72 people in June 2017.

In 2018, local research identified the need for a community-based project that could provide mental health support to older men, a group that was not engaging with other post-Grenfell support on offer. The NHS committed funding for the project and we proposed a project inspired by the International Men's Shed movement. Our model is based on inspiring creativity by providing the community with the resources to develop and maintain a creative practice, and supporting local people to participate in, and create culture on their own terms.

Under the expert guidance of Rasha El-Sady, ACAVA's Curator for Makerspaces, also an artist and North Kensington resident, Maxilla Men's Shed has grown to become a popular community resource. We aim to tackle the negative effects people experience from social isolation and loneliness, which is compounded by the traumatic impact of Grenfell and the pandemic. We do this through community building, skills development, and creative expression.

Most people come to us through word of mouth, but we also take referrals from the NHS Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service and other community organisations. Since we opened our doors in September 2019,

## STAR STORY...



John, 77, has been living in supported accommodation locally for 16 years. Since the pandemic John has felt that he is less supported by his housing provider. While he still feels like he lives in a community, it is much smaller than it was, in part due to pandemic and age-related deaths among his peer group.

Before the pandemic John describes the Grenfell Tower Fire as an event that 'flipped him on his back'. He was sign-posted to the Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service (GHWS), where he was able to access much needed mental health support and found out about Maxilla Men's Shed. His first thoughts were 'A place full of tools? That sounds good! My life has been that sort of stuff.' He was also interested that it was run by ACAVA; he thought 'I might be an artist!'

When asked what keeps him coming back he says, "the tea!". He also credits the people, sense of purpose, and shared experiences with 'birds of a feather'.

Of the Shed community, he says:

“If people want to tell me things I'll listen. If people have issues, you can have a cup of tea and give them space. You can see it fall away in a matter of days.”

The shed is an important focus for John's weekly routine. He structures his time around the support he gets from the Shed community.

over 832 individuals have engaged with the programme. More than 50% of our community are men, and 48% are aged 50+, with 27% being over 60.

We run four Tinkering Sessions each week, operating an open-door policy to remove as many barriers to participation as possible. Local people are welcome to make use of the workshop to pursue their own projects, share skills, or simply socialise over a cup of tea. We have an average monthly attendance of 190 for these sessions.



**Leatherworking Creative Thinking and Design with Yusuf Osman, Make and Reuse Creative Workshops, ACAVA Maxilla Men's Shed. Photo by ACAVA Shoots.**

For the past three years, we have also offered a range of specialist skills courses, which have supported the growth of our community and introduced new skills. 224 people have attended our Make and Re-use courses which inspire participants to re-use materials and contribute to the circular economy by learning sustainable approaches to making, including leather-working, marquetry, and textiles.

## OUR IMPACT

This year 81% of course participants have reported that participation in Shed activity has had a positive impact on their sense of personal wellbeing; 85% felt more confident approaching new challenges; and 72% felt part of a meaningful social network as a result of participation.

Participants have told us that they have found a sense of purpose, found distraction from problems in their lives, made new friends and even found people to spend Christmas with rather than spend it alone. Our impact is tangible and life-changing.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Exploring new collaborations is a priority for us, including partnering with the Shubbak Festival in 2025. We are also keen to explore ways in which the makerspace can also support the mental wellbeing of frontline community and statutory service providers working in Grenfell-recovery contexts.

In order to ensure long-term sustainability for the programme we are working to diversify our funding streams, adding earned income from corporate team building workshops, and corporate sponsorships to the mix of statutory funders and trusts and foundations.





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# ArcadeCampfa

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BY CLARE CHARLES AND GAIL HOWARD

Clare is Co-Director of ArcadeCampfa and  
Gail was lead artist on the Twilight Barking project.



Image courtesy of ArcadeCampfa.

## WHO WE ARE

ArcadeCampfa (AC) is an artist-run organisation based in **Cardiff**. Previously a gallery, hosted in Queens Arcade Shopping Centre in Cardiff city centre, AC is now project based and runs programmes with civic spaces and partner organisations within the public realm. In the last year we have worked across Wales, as well as on small-scale international projects. Our core focus is working with people and communities who would otherwise likely have less access to contemporary art.

The staff team consists of two co-directors, Clare Charles and George Manson, with project support from coordinator Zeta Tusié. For Twilight Barking we worked with Gail Howard as lead artist but also for additional project support. The team is freelance and part time.

ArcadeCampfa is project funded through Arts Council Wales, which we re-apply for yearly. We receive no core funding, but apply to other trusts and foundations as well as to the Lottery for support. Alongside AC, we co-run



Image courtesy of ArcadeCampfa.

Yellow Back Books, an artist bookshop and reading room, and Biscuits Press, an affordable Risograph print project, also based in Cardiff.

Twilight Barking was funded through the Arts Council of Wales and levelling up funds from Cardiff Council.

## OUR WORK

**Twilight Barking** is the second phase of our Brief History of Healing project, working with inpatients at Hafan y Coed adult mental health unit which began in 2019. Initiated by Gail Howard, Brief History of Healing was aiming to give a platform to patient voice, and to present this in public settings.

Through working with therapy dogs and practical art making, the project explores and celebrates the human-animal bond, and the ways in which animals, and dogs in particular, can promote wellbeing and alleviate boredom and isolation on the wards.

For the initial pilot we ran weekly arts sessions, focusing on a visiting therapy dog, making art for/with/about them. We worked with professional artists using creative writing, textiles, collage, drawing and painting, and ceramics. Artists included Clare Charles, Dog Ear (Emma Edmondson and Lu Williams),

Gail Howard, Joshua Jones, Marek Líška, George Manson, Vivian Ross Smith, Dolly Sen and Anthony Shapland. We worked with Therapy Dogs Nationwide to contact the dog handlers, all of whom are voluntary.

The sessions were open to patients from all 11 wards, at varying stages of their treatment, including forensic, addictions and acute admissions wards. Partnering with the Activities Team meant that their staff were able to signpost and share information each week with all wards. There were between five and ten patients per session, alongside support workers and staff. Twilight Barking continues to run at Hafan y Coed monthly.

The project culminated in an exhibition at Turner House Gallery in Penarth, which featured work from the patients, staff and professional artists. Alongside the work in the gallery, a newspaper was produced, featuring creative writing and drawing, which was available in the show as well as on the wards and in the unit.

## OUR IMPACT

Many people who attended sessions talked about the positive impact that both the dogs and the creative activity had on them. Common feedback included that they had found their anxiety and agitation were reduced, they were more able to focus, and that the session was a really welcome break in the week.

Staff reported that when the patients returned to the wards there was a positive impact on their mood: that it was noticeably more positive, and less agitated (particularly on forensics).

One thing that really surprised us was how impactful the dogs were on both patients and staff. Their presence created a sort of intimacy in the room, and a warm and welcoming space which people felt safe within. It allowed the patients to arrive with no expectations on them beyond saying hello to the dog, so they could settle in and then decide if they would like to take part in the creative activity.

### STAR STORY...



J is a patient who was admitted before the project started and visited the art room every week. To start with, this was just to see the dogs. She was anxious and didn't communicate verbally with us but always stayed for a cup of tea and to spend time with the dog. By the middle to end stage of the project, she was engaging in the creative activity, chatting and visibly less anxious. She began to talk more with us, and it emerged that she has two dogs herself and missed them terribly. The Twilight Barking sessions had helped her to cope with this, and one of her final artworks was a Fuzzy Felt version of her dogs which was then exhibited at Turner House for the final exhibition.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

We would like to develop the original research question with Professor Wendy Keay-Bright, the project evaluator, and we hope to secure funding for a further phase of the project through this. We would like to further investigate the role of the dogs, and the positive impact this has on patients and staff, as well as looking at the impact of the creative workshops in partnership with the dogs.

This would allow us to develop a more focused approach in terms of the artists we work with and to create a more sustained and longer-term intervention. We're currently running monthly sessions with a visiting dog in the art room as volunteers.





# Art Angel

BY DEREK RAMSAY

Derek is Chair of Art Angel.



Image courtesy of Art Angel.

## WHO WE ARE

We have worked in **Dundee** and the surrounding areas for 30 years to support people who experience emotional and mental distress to get better and stay well through access to expressive arts. All the founding members were patients in Dundee's version of the Victorian Psychiatric hospital and experienced first-hand a policy of containment, very little of which involved people taking decisions for themselves; instead their

treatment was something done to them. Here, all decisions are taken as a result of viewing someone as a person rather than as a collection of problems. From this arises honesty and respect. If you're going to get better in a sustained manner, then such qualities are essential – people need to be themselves.

At time of writing we have one permanent member of staff with 20 freelance workers, trained as specialists in our human version of mental illness.



## OUR WORK

We work with people with mental health problems who live in and around Dundee; people from the age of 16 upwards. 60% are women and there is a concentration of people in the 35 – 55 age range. Over the last 18 years we have worked hard at developing relevant support for young people. We now offer places to 50 young people per week. Most of our referrals come through our connections with the NHS. We do, however, maintain and encourage self-referral. People need to come to us in the way which suits them best.

We are non-clinical, so do not request information about diagnosis. This has always been key to people feeling safe here.

Our aim is to support people to take good decisions about their lives themselves. If they are to do this, then they need to take them at their own pace; hence our determination to offer support as long as people need it.

Everyone has a history; we want them to be positive histories and their own, so that they can be themselves.

We have seen that for those who can engage, active participation in creativity can be key – key to remaining alive; key to being members of forward looking, vibrant communities; to being regarded as assets with specialist insight instead of burdens.

The current gender imbalance in the men to women ratio in Art Angel hasn't always been the case; go back 30-35 years and you will see the reverse. Through our grant from the Baring Foundation, we are trying to redress this imbalance or at the very least, to understand it better.

## STAR STORY...



Mike, 48, suffered mental health difficulties most of his life, with long spells in hospital. However, once the Victorian Hospital closed he became isolated; dreadfully depressed and hopeless. One thing he clung onto were the days of the camera club as part of Occupational Therapy. Art Angel has what may be one of the last working darkrooms in Dundee. We mentioned this in our publicity for our men's project, as well as the possibility of focussing on the city's industrial past.

We have offered, so far, 18 workshops. Mike has missed one. He was so keen that he applied to replace a lapsed bus pass entitlement (successfully) and is considering the same process for a rail pass. He has agreed access to his house for the upgrading of his electricity metre, which had become a somewhat hostile process. And he has discovered rubbings and mapping. And the city art gallery.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

We have been in existence for over thirty years. We plan to stay open and alive in a form which responds to the needs of those who come here – whatever form that may take.



# Arts Care Gofal Celf

BY RACHEL MURPHY

Rachel is Project Coordinator at Arts Care Gofal Celf.



Reciting creative writing on location at Pentre Ifan, during an ACGC group writing trip. Photo courtesy of Rachel Murphy.

## WHO WE ARE

Arts Care Gofal Celf (ACGC) is an arts organisation based at The National Botanic Gardens of Wales, but working all over **West Wales**. We are one of the Arts Council of Wales's multi-year funded organisations and have over 35 years' experience of organising, delivering and developing projects and workshops of a high quality to people of all ages, backgrounds and lifestyles. We are a small team of just five staff who are mostly office based and we have a team of approximately 80 professional freelance artists

on our register who we call upon to deliver a diverse range of creative sessions from visual arts and crafts to dance, yoga, music, drama, creative writing and more.

## OUR WORK

ACGC has an extensive history of work in the mental health field having been established by partners in both the health and arts sectors in 1986. Over the years ACGC has offered creative opportunities both in in-patient services and in the wider community.



Image courtesy of Arts Care Gofal Celf.

Projects have included one-off activities, regular programmes, intensive projects leading to exhibitions of participants' work, outdoor arts sessions, online opportunities and more.

Our current and long-standing mental health programme, 'Creative Communities', offers regular creative workshops facilitated by professional artists at locations across Carmarthenshire. These workshops are funded by Hywel Dda Health Board and therefore free for any adult who is recovering from mental ill-health. A timetable of workshops offering varied artforms is circulated to our mailing list and to local organisations, as well as shared via social media to reach people who may benefit from taking part. The project targets adults, so participants can range from 18 to those in their 80s and beyond, reaching around 130 people in any one year. Participants can self-refer and attend independently; others can be referred by and supported via other mental health

## STAR STORY...



“I started attending ACGC sessions in 2019, left isolated after an abusive relationship. I was broken, with severe depression, anxiety and agoraphobia. Gradually, I was able to lift my head and begin speaking to people. I would just lose myself in the art process and relax.

I began socialising outside of the classes. I started volunteering and was offered a part-time job. This was all down to ACGC sessions.

Then we went into lockdown. I was living alone and seriously isolated. Thankfully ACGC started running their arts, crafts and writing sessions online. I developed a passion for writing and started processing some of the abuse I'd experienced and let it go. I don't think I would have survived lockdown if it hadn't been for those sessions.

By 2023, I struggled with a decline in my physical health due to psoriatic arthritis. I turned my spare room into a crafting room, this acted as a distraction.

ACGC continues to stop my isolation thanks to the sessions and crafts I have learnt. My mood is always lighter after with a smile on my face.

I cannot thank ACGC enough for helping me not only heal, but thrive. ”

**Participant**

organisations, family members and support workers. While the programme offers a multi arts programme, often including creative writing, visual arts and craft, music and so on, participants can take part in specific areas of interest or sign up to the whole programme, offering flexibility to suit individual needs.

“I wouldn't still be here without ACGC. ”

**Participant**



Our work in the mental health field is well supported. Recent projects focussing on mental health in-patient wards was a great success, with staff championing a need for it to continue. Participants have raised funds and donated to ACGC to support the work we do. One volunteer valued our mental health programme to the extent that we were nominated to receive half his estate in his will. Another participant has run a marathon to raise funds in recognition of her thanks.

Participants have consistently reported that our Creative Communities project has supported their mental health and wellbeing, describing increased self-esteem, confidence and motivation. Sessions have provided access to new skills and potential hobbies, a welcome distraction from thoughts and worries, a reason to leave the house, social opportunities and connections, all promoting recovery.

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“ Everyone was so focused and the feedback was heartwarming, with some relaying how ‘lifted’ they felt afterwards and that ‘it was just what I needed’. Thank you so much for the fab work you do in the community. We truly appreciate all you offer our service users. ”

**Staff at the recent workshops with the Early Intervention in Psychosis team**

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

ACGC plan to continue their work in the communities in Carmarthenshire via the Creative Communities project. We would love to see this opportunity extend these sessions to the three counties of West Wales to include Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

We currently have a creative writing project where people are enjoying regular workshops online, being inspired to write short plays and work that will be showcased on stage later this year.

We plan to offer a more intensive project over the coming months allowing participants to gain more in-depth skills in an artform with the potential to exhibit their achievements to the wider public, always an exhilarating experience for all involved.

We are also actively exploring financial support to continue developing our work with patients on mental health in-patient wards, thus supporting individuals at all points along their mental health journey, from ward to community.



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# Arts Care Northern Ireland

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BY BARRY MACAULAY

Barry is CEO of Arts Care.



Arts Care Lagan Valley Hospital project, see page 29. Image courtesy of Arts Care.

## WHO WE ARE

Arts Care is **Northern Ireland's** leading arts, health, and wellbeing charity. Established in 1991 by the Northern Ireland Department of Health, Arts Care transforms health and social care environments through the power of creative engagement. Our mission is to improve personal health and wellbeing through the arts.

At the heart of Arts Care's work are its flagship initiatives, such as the Artists-in-Residence Programme, Clown Doctors, and bespoke

community projects like the Here & Now Older People's Festival and the Twilight Zone Project for looked after children and young people.

Arts Care is uniquely positioned as a trusted partner to the health and social care system, providing participatory arts experiences that foster emotional resilience, improve mental health, and transform clinical settings into vibrant, welcoming spaces.

Arts Care is based in Belfast and delivers throughout Northern Ireland, employing 13 core payroll staff and a pool of around 30 freelance artists and Clown Doctors.

## OUR WORK

Arts Care delivers into a range of mental health settings throughout Northern Ireland in all five Health and Social Care Trusts. This includes acute mental health settings, residential settings, long stay wards, secure units, dementia wards and residential units, addiction services as well as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. These services are delivered through two programmes:

1. Artists-in-Residence: deployment of highly skilled artists commissioned by the Health and Social Care statutory sector;
2. Arts Care Social Enterprise: large and small arts projects that sit outside the main commissioned HSC programme.

Across the two programmes we offer the following products/services in mental health settings:

- artist-led workshops: engaging patients and staff in creative activities such as visual art, music and dance, tailored to their needs and abilities;
- environmental transformations: redesigning healthcare spaces with murals, installations, and art exhibits to improve the atmosphere;
- education and training services: equipping healthcare professionals with the confidence and skills to incorporate creativity into their care practices;
- staff wellbeing services: arts-based workshops improve morale, provide emotional support, and foster team cohesion to teams of carers and mental health professionals.

## OUR IMPACT

Data from Arts Care's impact review (2022-23) highlighted that:

- there were 20,333 direct engagements through the Artist-in-Residence Programme.
- 6,348 compliments were received from attendees, with zero complaints or adverse incidents...
- 1,503 healthcare staff engaged in workshops, demonstrating the reach and effectiveness of Arts Care programmes.



Arts Care Lagan Valley Hospital project, see right.  
Image courtesy of Arts Care.

“I feel so much better after the session. It has lifted my mood and given me a great boost to my wellbeing.”

**Service user**

“This training has revitalised me and made me feel valued. It's helped me see how arts can make me a better carer.”

**Healthcare professional**

We are commissioned by the five HSC Trusts, each of which has an Arts in Health Lead who allocates work to the appropriate service or facility, including the range of mental health facilities across the country.

Through delivery of its wide range of creative activities, Arts Care creates direct, positive impact for the individuals who participate in those activities, as well as significant indirect benefits for the wider community including families, carers, health and care staff and the general public.



There are two key participant groups who are direct beneficiaries of Arts Care creative activities:

1. patients and service users
2. health and social care professionals

Both experience the same mental health and wellbeing benefits, namely:

- decreased levels of stress, fear and anxiety. This is particularly noticeable for children and young people in hospital settings;
- improved confidence and self-esteem;
- improved mood and emotional health;
- increased creative thinking, concentration and motivation;
- improved motivation and enjoyment in work that reduces staff burnout and helps create a great place to work and be cared for.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

We have introduced an exciting new product into our portfolio. Crankie Theatre is a unique art form that blends storytelling and live theatre performance through the visual creation of a handcrafted 'box' with illustrated scrolls on spools that are 'cranked' to bring movement to the scrolls while the story is told. They can be accompanied by live song, music, poetry or storytelling narrative.

During the performance, the continuous scrolling will capture the attention of a diverse audience, engaging them in the storyline regardless of language, age or background.

Arts Care utilises Crankie Theatre as a participatory project with community groups working with our artists to devise, make and perform the Crankie over a programme of eight sessions.

We are also piloting it as a performance project where our musicians and artists will perform Crankie Theatre in care homes and use it as a tool for eliciting reminiscence, engagement and storytelling from the residents, including those people with dementia.

## STAR STORY...



Over seven sessions patients from Ward 12 took part in etching and gel plate print-making workshops. Over the course of the sessions there were a number of core attendees who were in-patients for the duration of the project, while others engaged on short-term basis depending on the duration of their stay on the ward. During each session participants made artwork, which they could keep and also pieces that contributed to group artworks to be displayed on the Ward. At the end of the project two artworks had been created by participants for display on the Ward.

Outcomes from this project included:

- enhancing the environment: the staff and patients commented on positive impact the pieces created by the participants during the Arts Care sessions, bringing colour and visual interest, which had been absent before, to communal areas.
- something to look forward to: a number of long-term in-patients commented that the days on the Ward can be repetitive and long and that having something creative to look forward to helped break the monotony.
- pride in achievement: on a weekly basis participants expressed pride in being able to create something, to follow instructions, and be in a supportive group setting.

**Ruth Osborne, Visual Artist, Lagan Valley Hospital.**



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# Bethlem Gallery

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BY SOPHIE LEIGHTON

Sophie is Director of the Bethlem Gallery.



Film still of Mr X, Bethlem Gallery Artist. From the film *Something Glamorous, Something Awkward* (2025) (Director: Leanne Dimant), Image courtesy of Bethlem Gallery.

## WHO WE ARE

Bethlem Gallery is a visual arts organisation in **south-east London**. We work with artists to programme creative activities, projects and commissions. An independent charity, we are based at Bethlem Royal Hospital, Beckenham, which is part of South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. Working across South London and the UK, we support the professional development and socially engaged practice of the artists we work with.

Many of the artists have experienced mental health services. Our annual turnover is about £500,000 and we have 12 members of staff.

We bridge communities, aiming to make art an everyday practice and mental health an everyday conversation. As well as working in our gallery and studio space at Bethlem Royal Hospital, we work online and also programme exhibitions at the Long Gallery at Maudsley Hospital and the ORTUS conferencing centre, and commission new public artworks.



Live Lounge at the Bethlem Gallery, image courtesy of Bethlem Gallery.

## OUR WORK

We support artists on specific projects, events, exhibitions and commissions, and also run public workshops. We have drop-in events for artists as well as supporting two artist collectives.

The people we work with vary in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, mental health condition, and art practice. What is common to the people we work with is a consistent art practice and – often – experience of mental health services. The NHS Trust we work independently within provides the widest range of mental health services in the UK, and our artists reflect this. At the moment we don't have a referral process – it is word of mouth and relational.

We work with around 40 artists on a weekly basis and have a network of around 200. We are lucky at the moment to be able to work long-term with artists, so as well as meeting new artists regularly, we have been working with some artists since the 1990s.

Key projects we are working on with artists in 2025 include Robyn Smith's forthcoming immersive exhibition about David Bowie, a BFI-funded documentary about artist Mr X, a research project with artist Amber Roper

## STAR STORY...



“In 2024, May – July, I curated Bethlem Live Lounge, an immersive exhibition transforming the gallery into a platform, a stage for people to come and be together, collaborate, make music, spoken word. It was an open space for experimental music. The premise of it was that it was an art exhibition with nothing in it – a relaxing space for people to collaborate, chat. The sofas were important.

Some people took a few times before they wrote a poem or sang a song. Lots of it was so spontaneous – we put a stage in there – two pallets. This stage became the gallery itself. It had a microphone, speakers and an audience. We had lots of events and an outdoor festival. We developed and produced a vinyl LP. It was really important for building a special community that has continued to meet – a group of artists who have come together and now meet up and perform regularly: the Bethlem Performance Collective. Artists often work better in groups, movements. It was great to have a space to come together. It gave us a bridge to other spaces where we now perform and exhibit.

Some people performed who had never performed before. They said it was life changing. Writing poetry and spoken word at home leads into performance – and this exhibition and programme supported over 50 people to develop their practice. The show gave people confidence and a safe space in which to experiment and perform. It was a learning curve for me, for the gallery team, as well as people taking part.”

**Artist and Curator, Mark McGowan,  
AKA The Artist Taxi Driver.**

and Kings College London about family mental health, a programme exploring the concept of collections to celebrate the launch of our new art collection, and a summer music and art festival in the Bethlem Royal Hospital grounds.





Jackets by Jan Arden, image courtesy of Bethlem Gallery.

“Bethlem Gallery will always be like home to me. The studio is a space for artists, on any given day you will find other artists in there making their work, it’s a place for cross pollination of ideas - a community, always open and curious.”

**Bethlem Artist, 2025**

## OUR IMPACT

We work with artists in many ways, primarily to develop an art practice and to put on a public programme. This has a range of tangible benefits, including providing peer support opportunities for artistic practice as well as mental health, developing new skills, enabling

an identity of artist rather than patient (or visitor, or clinician), raising profile, tackling stigma, and providing a space to talk about issues relating to mental health.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

There is always something happening at the Gallery – we are currently excited about upcoming workshops and exhibitions, a collaboration with Fountain House Gallery in New York, installing art commissions at the brand-new Pears Maudsley Centre for Children and Young People, our 2025 writer-in-residence, Anita Goveas, and putting our new art collection out on loan across the hospital and in community settings.



[www.bethlemgallery.com](http://www.bethlemgallery.com)

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# Chilli Studios

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**BY BOB MALPIEDI**

**Bob is Studio Manager at Chilli Studios.**



Image courtesy of Simon Veit-Wilson / Chilli Studios.

## WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2004, Chilli Studios is a charity in **Newcastle-upon-Tyne**, dedicated to improving mental wellbeing through creative expression. Since 2006, we have provided a welcoming, supportive space for individuals facing mental health challenges across Newcastle and Gateshead. Our mission is to empower people to explore their creativity, build confidence, and foster connections in a safe and inclusive environment.

Our annual budget is now approximately £130,000, funded primarily through grants, with additional income from sales, outreach work, and member fees. Following recent funding challenges, we restructured our organisation, reducing costs by almost half while maintaining our core services.

Our team consists of four part-time staff members and a strong network of volunteers, peer facilitators, and freelance artists. Members play an active role in shaping our

work, ensuring that Chilli Studios remains a community-driven space where creativity and wellbeing go hand in hand.

## OUR WORK

At Chilli Studios, we support adults facing complex mental health challenges, often compounded by issues such as poverty, homelessness, disability, and social isolation. We focus on potential rather than limitations, creating a space where individuals feel valued, empowered, and free to express themselves.

Each year, we engage around 300 members, with a daily attendance of approximately 60 people. The majority are aged 25-55, with 48% identifying as male, 46% female, and 6% non-binary or other genders. Many of our members have long-term mental health conditions, often related to trauma-based issues.

We operate an open referral system, accepting referrals from social care teams, mental health services, GPs, social prescribers, and self-referrals. We ensure accessibility by offering low-cost membership fees, signposting to welfare support, and providing a welcoming, stigma-free environment.

Our members take part in a diverse range of creative workshops, including painting, ceramics, photography, printmaking, music, and creative writing. Sessions are designed to promote self-expression, skill development, and wellbeing. Many progress through our Peer-Sharing Initiative, where they develop skills and confidence by leading workshops. Those who wish to take on more responsibility can become Therapeutic Enablers, earning above the living wage while supporting others.

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“I didn't know where to start. I felt like I no longer existed beyond my diagnoses and my feelings of inadequacy. But Chilli Studios gave me the confidence to move forward.”

**Mark, Participant (see box, right)**

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Beyond creative workshops, we provide social connection, structure, and a sense of belonging – essential elements for mental wellbeing. We foster an environment where staff, volunteers, and members interact without labels, united by their shared passion for creativity.

Image courtesy of Simon Veit-Wilson / Chilli Studios.





## OUR IMPACT

The impact of Chilli Studios extends far beyond the art created within our space. For many members, we provide stability, routine, and a sense of purpose at a time when their lives may feel chaotic or isolating. Studies show that creativity can significantly improve mental health, and our members regularly report feeling more confident, socially connected, and mentally resilient as a result of their involvement.

Through regular qualitative and quantitative evaluation, we measure improvements in many areas, from self-esteem and emotional wellbeing to social interaction and reduced reliance on clinical interventions. In our last survey, with 90 members responding, 85% reported a maximum score on the question regarding the positive impact attending Chilli had on their mental health.

Our work directly reduces pressure on mental health services, offering a proactive, preventative approach that enables people to manage their wellbeing before reaching crisis point. Our peer-led programmes further empower individuals by giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility, helping them rebuild their confidence and aspirations.

Ultimately, Chilli Studios is a lifeline for many. We are more than just an art space – we are a community that fosters creativity, connection, and hope, proving that artistic expression can be transformative for mental wellbeing.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Despite recent funding challenges, Chilli Studios is entering an exciting new chapter. We have restructured our organisation to be more sustainable, placing a greater emphasis on peer-led projects and community collaboration.

One key focus is expanding our Therapeutic Enabler programme, which provides paid opportunities for members to take on leadership roles. This not only strengthens our service but also supports individuals in gaining employment skills and boosting their confidence.

## STAR STORY...



One of our members, Mark, first came to Chilli Studios after experiencing a stroke, which left them struggling with anxiety and a loss of identity. Previously active and independent, Mark found it difficult to take the first step towards recovery.

At Chilli, Mark discovered a passion for ceramics, printmaking, and creative writing. Through our workshops, they built skills, confidence, and a renewed sense of self. They went on to participate in collaborations with Northern Print, Slam Fresh, and local artists, even travelling solo to perform poetry at an event in York.

Mark's journey is just one example of how creative expression can be a catalyst for recovery and personal growth. What began as a small step into our space became a transformative experience, helping them reconnect with their confidence, identity, and passion for life.

For many like Mark, Chilli Studios is more than just a creative hub, it's a place where people rediscover their strength, build friendships, and redefine their future.

We are also developing new partnerships, including with universities, local artists, and mental health organisations, to explore innovative ways of using creativity to support mental wellbeing.

Additionally, we are increasing our outreach work, bringing creative opportunities to more isolated individuals who may not yet feel able to attend our studio.

With a stronger foundation and a renewed sense of purpose, we look forward to continuing to empower individuals through creativity, connection and community.



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# Designs in Mind

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BY CHARLOTTE PHILLIPS

Charlotte is Fundraising Officer at Designs in Mind.



Image courtesy of Designs in Mind.

## WHO WE ARE

Designs in Mind is a studio in **Oswestry, Shropshire** where adults living with mental health challenges collaborate on ambitious art and design projects. We aim to help people live full, meaningful lives by building confidence, skills and community through participatory arts workshops.

Through creating innovative public art installations, ambitious design collaborations, and high-quality retail collections we are raising aspirations beyond our Studio.

Founded over 30 years ago by Jo Davis within an NHS Day Centre, we have grown to support over 100 adults with a diverse portfolio of projects. Our core programme, funded by an NHS Contract, includes 10-week new referral courses and weekly workshops, supporting adults for an average of three years.

We also offer outreach workshops in rural communities and for specific demographics (LGBTQ+, perinatal mental health), funded by trusts and foundations, and income from our commercial activities including public art commissions, design collaborations, and retail collections.

## STAR STORY...



In 2024, we were commissioned to create new artwork for the Redwoods Centre, Shrewsbury, a mental health treatment facility. Through collaborative workshops with patients of Redwoods, and Members of Designs in Mind, collages were refined into digital compositions, scaled up, and screen-printed by our Members and volunteers to create five striking eight-foot tall, screen-printed panels (see picture overleaf).

This project introduced exciting opportunities for independent working and volunteering for Members. Members supported workshops at the Redwoods Centre, worked independently in the Studio to screenprint the panels, and volunteered to help install them.

## OUR WORK

We support 106 adults with mental health diagnoses, aged between 18 and 75. 74% identify as women, 24% as men, and 2% as non-binary. Most referrals come via mental health partners including GPs, social prescribers, and mental health teams. To encourage preventative support, we are increasing awareness of self-referral pathways. We support people living with various mental health diagnoses, including psychosis, acute anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and borderline personality disorder.

Our Listen and Connect Team promotes our services locally through posters, leaflets, and attending Community Connector meetings. They also arrange visits from social prescribers to our Studio.

Before joining our weekly Studio workshop programme, New Referrals attend a 10-week course. This course introduces art skills in smaller groups to ease social anxiety and foster peer support among those with shared experiences.

The course covers artistic processes like lino printing, screen printing, drawing, collage, embroidery, and ceramics. After completing the course, participants can join our regular weekly

art workshops and community peer-led support groups, providing a sense of progression and the option for further support.

Our weekly Workshop Programme is where our 'Members' (those who have progressed from the New Referrals Course) work together on a range of public art installations, design collaborations, and retail collection designs.

Keeping our programme ambitious and innovative helps Members to build confidence and transferable skills for success beyond our Studio. The visibility of our work is important – we are not just working to improve the wellbeing of our service users but to engender a sense of ambition to anyone living with a mental health challenge who engages with our work or story.

Members typically access our support for an average of three years. We offer internal training and volunteering opportunities to boost the ambition of long-term members, helping them develop skills for education, employment, or external volunteering opportunities.

## OUR IMPACT

Our programme of participatory arts workshops and listening support helps Members and New Referrals to learn non-clinical creative coping mechanisms in the form of self-directed/exploratory/experimental art activities. This supports people to maintain and improve their wellbeing in the long term, both whilst attending the Studio, but also at home.

Many people when first attending tell us that they can't do things e.g. can't draw, can't talk in a group, can't walk into the Studio on their own etc. For many attending for the first time, it is often the only time in the week they leave the house.

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“I've only done small-scale screenprinting before, so working on such a large canvas with so many colours has been a challenge! When I started, I was afraid of making a mistake every time I laid the ink down! Over time, I've become a lot more confident with being more flexible and understanding how to solve any problems on the fly.”

**Participant (see box left)**

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Screen-printed panels for the Redwoods Centre, Shrewsbury; image courtesy of Designs in Mind.

Through providing a safe and encouraging space for people to try new things, our Members are building resilience and learning that mistakes are a part of the process. This resilience and confidence impacts lives beyond the studio – we see people taking steps to live full and meaningful lives by meeting friends and family, volunteering elsewhere, and returning to employment and education.

Our 2024 Member Survey revealed that 89% of Members reported increased wellbeing as a result of attending Designs in Mind.

In 2024 we also prevented 15 mental health crises and supported 12 members to move on to employment or other opportunities.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Whilst often considered an affluent county, Shropshire has pockets of poverty and health inequalities. We aim to expand our impact beyond Oswestry through outreach workshops

in 2025, targeting community hubs like libraries, hospital foyers, and parish halls. Our mission is to tackle health inequalities, access barriers, and rural isolation for those facing mental health challenges.

We are always seeking new opportunities to showcase Members' work on a larger scale to inspire more people.

As part of the Vibrant Vyrnwy initiative at RSPB Lake Vyrnwy, we are developing a Nature Prescriptions Calendar to provide rurally isolated individuals with seasonal, accessible prompts for engaging with nature.

Designed by our Members through papercutting, collage, and illustration, the calendar will be distributed through GP surgeries and support groups.

This resource will promote nature engagement by suggesting local sites to explore, boosting confidence and appreciation for the environment.



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# Double Elephant Print Workshop

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BY EMMA MOLONY

Emma is Project Manager at Double Elephant.



Image courtesy of Double Elephant Print Workshop.

## WHO WE ARE

Double Elephant Print Workshop was established in 1997 as an open access printmaking studio (etching, lino, collagraph, screenprint, woodcut, wood engraving, letterpress). We are a CIC based in **Exeter** on the lower ground floor of Exeter Phoenix arts centre, but we operate across the Southwest.

We offer memberships, studio access, courses and workshops and an active outreach workshop with schools, community

groups, museums, prisons, hospitals and festivals – taking printmaking to marginalised communities.

Approximately 40% of our income is generated from courses and membership and we depend on project-based grants to fund the remainder of our work.

All our team work flexibly as self-employed tutors, managers, technicians, administrators. No-one is salaried. This enables us to adapt to our funding situation.



## OUR WORK

Ensuring that printmaking is accessible to people with mental health issues has been part of Double Elephant's ethos since the beginning.

We pioneered a Print on Prescription service that enabled people living with mental health issues to join a weekly printmaking session and move towards independent and subsidised use of the studio. This scheme ran for 10 years before funding cuts meant we had to pause the project.

We also take our portable press into psychiatric units, hospitals, supported housing, day support sessions and via a "Conversation Station" public mobile print studio. This means we can take accessible printmaking processes to people who otherwise would not be able to access us or the unique and immediate benefits of engaging with print.

The referral process for Print on Prescription (PoP) was either via a GP, service provider or participants could self-refer. Our services were also bought in by care providers and other organisations.

Participants on PoP were 18yrs + but the demographic of participants was broad. We had participants aged 18-60, men and women, and a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

During the early years of the project we had supervision and support from Insider Art (art therapists who provided consultation and good practice on facilitating creative workshops with vulnerable adults). This was very useful.

## OUR IMPACT

The impact has without fail been positive. Printmaking is a unique combination of craft and fine art and participants can either focus on the process of creating (inking, carving, rolling, turning a press, selecting paper etc) or on the artwork itself. They can also choose a variety of methods that suit different skill sets (e.g. pattern-based, nature-based, photographic, repeat pattern, detailed and realistic line work (drypoint), etching, collagraph – collage and material process etc.) This means that there is always a process that a participant can succeed in and this will often allay any apprehension about creativity.

Image courtesy of Double Elephant Print Workshop.





Being part of a collective studio is also key. All users of Double Elephant – whether course participants, members, tutors or PoP participants have to work in collaboration (sharing materials, equipment, a studio space, assisting each other and learning together). The social cohesion of working in a shared studio environment is important, although participant privacy is entirely possible too.

The long-term impact from our work has always been in alliance with other initiatives. Coming to PoP gave participants the confidence to attend other classes. It provided structure and routine; it boosted skills and confidence. Frequently, participants continued to practise printmaking (without a press) at home or join other classes. Two previous participants felt confident enough to then take up Art Foundation courses and pursue careers in art and design.

The most rewarding stories were seeing how individuals grew in confidence and skill during their time printmaking with us. They might start via an introductory session on a ward or in supported housing, and then self-refer to PoP and join us in the studio at weekly sessions.

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“ I didn't expect  
to come to hospital have one of the  
best days of my life here. ”

**Participant**

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One participant took materials home to make his plates and would arrive at the sessions ready to make the best use of the time possible. He tried every process available and worked so hard on his work – really pursuing themes and ideas. He then made full use of the option to become a member at a subsidised rate and became an independent user of the studio and joined our membership, playing an active role in the organisation and becoming an independent printmaker artist.

On another occasion in a psychiatric unit where we were delivering a drop-in monoprint session with adults dealing with acute mental ill health, one participant was very absorbed by the process and delighted to be able to use natural plants in the process.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

We are keen to find funding to allow us to develop our Print on Prescription project to a three-year programme that also enables us to monitor, document and evaluate the success and create a model of good practice that other printmaking studios could use.

We have really enjoyed collaborating with National Landscapes and conservation partners to deliver workshops outdoors and in green spaces so we are keen to find ways to offer PoP in collaboration with Nature on Prescription schemes.



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# Everybody Arts

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BY LAUREN IREDALE

Lauren is Creative Director of Everybody Arts.



Artist, Stevie-Leigh Sanderson, views the artwork of a participant, created during a creative wellbeing workshop in the context of her New Creatives exhibition, My Evolution, at Everybody Arts. Photo © Matt Radcliffe Photography.

## WHO WE ARE

Everybody Arts is an arts and education charity that uses art to transform people's lives for the better. We're located in an ex-industrial textile mill in **Halifax, West Yorkshire**, with our art school, gallery and workshops covering three floors of the oldest section of the mill dating back to 1830.

We foster a genuinely inclusive and accessible approach to the arts, having been at the forefront of creativity and wellbeing work in Calderdale since 2010.

Our time, space and resources are dedicated to supporting artistic development and community imagination, enabling people to exercise their creativity for greater wellbeing. We value empathy, joy and collaboration, ensuring people can explore their full potential, discover new perspectives, and develop resilience through our projects.

We have played a key role in shaping vital cross-sector partnerships and pathways between Culture, Health and Education

for the benefit of underserved communities. We deliver this work via a wide range of artist-led activities.

We have developed strong creative health partnerships with funding partners like Creative Minds and South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust as well as newer relationships with the Pilgrim Trust, the Baring Foundation and Calderdale's Integrated Care Board.

We have a small team (eight trustees and five FTE staff team members) and an incredible team of freelance artists, who work hard to foster a genuinely inclusive and accessible approach to the arts.

Our organisation's board, leadership and workforce are made up of people with lived experiences that resonate with those of our communities. We are a female artist-led team who cultivate a culture of creativity and care among colleagues and communities, working together in a way that builds on shared values, celebrates diversity and is supportive of varying needs.

Genuine co-production is at the heart of our organisational practice to ensure programming is responsive to the needs and interests of the communities we serve. We foster strategic and delivery partnerships with organisations who can help us to strengthen our offer for existing communities and expand our work into those who are harder to reach.

Bespoke offers and services within programmes and projects are an important way to ensure that our organisation reflects the communities we work with.

## OUR WORK

We were established in 2008 (as The Artworks) as an independent art school teaching a range of foundational courses. It was on one of these courses, 'So you think you can't draw', that a participant, on sick leave from their health sector job, shared how learning to draw had helped them feel well enough to return to work. Together we started to explore the impacts of art on health and wellbeing.

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“Over the years I have come to learn the power of drawing and the surprising effect it can have: on morale, judgement, mental health and our general wellbeing. Many people are not aware of this, but Everybody Arts wonderfully does, and is brilliant at putting the knowledge into action for the benefit of everybody. It's a privilege to be associated with such an energetic and inspiring institution.”

**Sir Quentin Blake CBE,  
Patron of Everybody Arts, 2017**

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We began designing and delivering creative health projects and programmes in 2010 and over the past 15 years we've delivered more than 30 projects engaging thousands of people directly and indirectly, and learning a lot along the way.

We have led strategic cross-sector partnerships (Thriving Communities), created resources (Wellbeing at the Weekend, CC4US,<sup>14</sup> Create & Bloom),<sup>15</sup> established networks (Creativity for Wellbeing network), delivered training programmes (New Creatives,<sup>16</sup> Creative Care)<sup>17</sup> and provided thousands of hours of direct delivery.

These projects are part of our Artworks for Wellbeing programme, which in 2017 earned us the patronage of Sir Quentin Blake.

We have funded this work through revenue generating activity, private donations, self and grant funded delivery. Local cross-sector partnerships, maintaining stakeholder and beneficiary relationships, coproduction and feedback are vital to the success of this work.

This work could not have taken place without a number of strong delivery and funding partnerships. First and foremost of these is, Creative Minds,<sup>18</sup> who have trusted and supported our work year on year and the many freelancers we have collaborated with over the years.

<sup>14</sup> [www.everybodyarts.org.uk/cc4us-drawing-for-wellbeing-1](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk/cc4us-drawing-for-wellbeing-1)

<sup>15</sup> [www.everybodyarts.org.uk/bloom](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk/bloom)

<sup>16</sup> [www.everybodyarts.org.uk/new-creatives](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk/new-creatives)

<sup>17</sup> [www.everybodyarts.org.uk/creative-care](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk/creative-care)

<sup>18</sup> [www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/creative-minds/home](http://www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/creative-minds/home)





A participant handles materials during Stevie-Leigh Sanderson's creative wellbeing workshop at Everybody Arts. Photo © Matt Radcliffe Photography.

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“When I lose myself in doing a drawing it frees my mind from depression and psychotic thoughts of self-harm.”

**Participant**

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We have worked through a number of shifts in the funding landscape, changes to attitude and perception, as well as evidence requirements for creative health.

Our current work includes Creative Care<sup>19</sup> a unique project aimed at increasing the range, quantity and quality of creative activities available for in-patient service users to improve their mental health, delivered partnership with Creative Minds and South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SWYPFT).

Since its launch in June 2023, 24 experienced Creative Practitioners, with expertise spanning drawing, painting, screen printing, dance and movement, photography, and music, have been

providing group activities as well as 1:1 support across 17 acute wards in South West Yorkshire, with over 8,000 service users engagements in nearly 4,000 sessions, and counting.

Alongside this, we have developed the idea of creative care plans, worked with existing staff to increase skills and confidence, and helped work with the discharge process to connect people with creative activities in their community after their in-patient stay.

The project is constantly evolving with new projects added on.

We have also started a project to engage 500 male in-patient mental health service users and enhanced support for practitioners into the programme, funded through the Baring Foundation.

We have commissioned the development and build of a series of Ambient Music Boards for every hospital within the trust, and The Pilgrim Trust have funded us to develop a creative health training and network programme for young women transitioning from CAMHS to adult mental health services over the next three years.

## OUR IMPACT

As the creative health landscape has expanded and strengthened, the impact of our work has not changed.

We know that by providing people with lived experience of mental ill-health opportunities to engage with high quality arts provision, marked improvements in participants' mental health and wellbeing can be achieved. We have seen it first hand and our participants have told us in their own words.

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“Thank you to ‘Art for Wellbeing’ at Everybody Arts for my creative experience. I’m now rebuilding my life after a very severe mental breakdown. Being creative has helped me a lot towards healing my mind.”

**Participant**

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<sup>19</sup> [www.everybodyarts.org.uk/creative-care](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk/creative-care)

Each person has their own story of success to tell, with benefits ranging from being able to leave the house, organising and taking pleasure in life events, volunteering, returning to work, starting a new career path, returning to and starting formal education at FE, graduate and post-graduate level. Our work has been credited on more than one occasion with saving a person's life.

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“In conclusion without Everybody Arts I would be a lot more 'screwed up' and possibly no longer living and would be missing the opportunity available to me that gives me the most happiness in my life.”

**Participant**

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the next three years, our new programme, Bloom,<sup>20</sup> will offer six-month programmes to young women that are moving from child to adult social and health services in Calderdale.

Young women in Calderdale face significant mental health challenges, with a growing number of girls and young women supported by Calderdale's Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Delivered in partnership with Creative Minds and South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Bloom will offer training and mentorship to help young women build a career in the creative health sector while supporting their wellbeing along the way.

In total, Bloom is expected to support over 300 women over the three years through the traineeship programme, Bloom Network and other engagement activities.



[www.everybodyarts.org.uk](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk)

<sup>20</sup> [www.everybodyarts.org.uk/bloom](http://www.everybodyarts.org.uk/bloom)





HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW.

HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW.

Art by Yinka Ilori,  
Springfield Hospital.  
Photographer Damian  
Griffiths; courtesy of  
Hospital Rooms.



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# Hospital Rooms

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BY TIM A SHAW

Tim is Co-Founder / Artistic Director of Hospital Rooms.



Sutapa Biswas, 'My Gathered Star' stencilling workshop (2024) Photo © Hospital Rooms. Photo: Kim Szalavicz.

## WHO WE ARE

We started Hospital Rooms nine years ago after visiting a friend who was an in-patient in a mental health unit. The ward they were in was stark, cold and dehumanising. We started Hospital Rooms to collaborate with artists and mental health service users and bring creativity, intellectual stimulation, beauty and hope to these often hidden and forgotten places.

Hospital Rooms is now an arts and mental health charity that believes all people in mental health hospitals should have the freedom to

experience extraordinary art. Since 2016 we have completed 26 ambitious projects in NHS mental health units and hospitals across the country, from Cornwall to Southampton, Exeter to Birmingham, London to Norwich. In 2020 we started the Hospital Rooms Digital Art School with an online programme and free art materials that reaches every mental health trust in the country. Hospital Rooms has its offices in Bow in East London and we have around 22 staff on payroll. Our turnover for 2023-24 was £1.3m and will increase in 2024-25.



Michelle Williams-Gamaker, Springfield Hospital.  
Photographer Damian Griffiths; courtesy Hospital Rooms.

## OUR WORK

Hospital Rooms works with people who are inpatients in NHS mental health units, and people who have often been detained under the Mental Health Act. We work in psychiatric intensive care units, forensic units, CAMHS, mother and baby/perinatal units, units for older people, acute units and rehabilitation units. We have worked with patients of all ages. The people who participate in the Hospital Rooms Digital Art School could be from any of these units and are from all ages: CAMHS (up to 18), adult (18-65) and over 65. The people using these services face a severe inequality of opportunity to engage with or be inspired by the arts. The physical environments in mental health units are inadequate and are not conducive to recovery.<sup>21</sup> We started by approaching NHS trusts but now have an application process where we invite applications from trusts every six to 12 months.

## OUR IMPACT

To give one project as an example: our project at Hellesdon Hospital in Norwich with Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT). We have commissioned 15 artists to transform the new-build Rivers Centre buildings and

led 70 art workshops which have informed the artworks being made. In the 53 sessions we led in 2023-24 we had 372 participants take part in the workshops which included sessions in printmaking, collaging and writing with artists including Turner Prize nominees Ghislaine Leung, Michael Landy and Mark Titchner. Participants rated these workshops high (9 out of 10) in relation to broadening their imagination and opening their minds to new possibilities.

“The artwork will be a key part of our culture changes and most importantly have a positive impact on people’s experience of mental health hospital.”

**Dr Sophie Bagge, Lived Experience Lead  
at Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust**

We are installing some of our most ambitious artworks to date in the project at Hellesdon Hospital, from an 80sqm exterior mural by Mark Titchner, to a 3.5m high sculpture by Heather Phillipson. The trust is under a lot of pressure and we hope the project will be transformative for the new wards, the people using and working in the services, and for the trust. As a first, we also collaborated closely with a Lived Experience Advisory Group to curate an exhibition that celebrates and examines the project at Hellesdon Hospital, which was held at The Fitzrovia Chapel in London and will travel to Norwich.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

We will be starting new projects soon, reaching new areas of the country, including Yorkshire, Bristol, Birmingham and Essex. We will be expanding our reach with the Digital Art School, sending more art materials to more mental health sites and delivering more staff training with an aim that anyone in an NHS in-patient mental health unit can take part in our programme if they want to.



[www.hospital-rooms.com](http://www.hospital-rooms.com)

<sup>21</sup> For example: [www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/mental-health-hospitals-are-re-traumatising-patients](http://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/mental-health-hospitals-are-re-traumatising-patients).

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# Inside Out Cymru

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BY BECCA MAY COLLINS

Becca is Project Manager at Inside Out Cymru.



Image by Kate Wickens, courtesy of Inside Out Cymru.

## WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2012, Inside Out Cymru is an arts and mental health charity delivering co-produced arts and wellbeing initiatives for adults across **South East Wales**.

In partnership with local authorities, health boards, social prescribers, other third-sector organisations and the community, we provide safe and supportive environments that encourage creativity for resilience, confidence and expression. We deliver projects in clinical, residential and community settings. Our

board of trustees and ongoing community consultation guide our delivery with identified needs.

Our 2023-24 turnover of £77k allowed us to connect with over 150 individuals across 11 projects, totalling 1,600 engagements. This was achieved alongside 17 partners and 10 different funders. We worked with 15 professional freelance artists and two freelance project managers. In 2024-25, these numbers have increased again, after working with new partners and funders.





Image by Kate Wickens, courtesy of Inside Out Cymru.

“ This class is crucial for ...  
my mental health. I've had feelings of  
suicide in recent times and my appointment  
for art class has been my reason to carry  
on that day. It is my safe space to feel  
supported and loved for who I am. ”

**Participant**

## OUR WORK

Our focus is supporting wellbeing and mental health through the arts. 73% of our delivery in 2024-25 was visual arts, with professional artists delivering crafts, ceramics, painting and printmaking provision across Gwent.

Of our participants:

- 86% self-identify as female, 14% identify as male;
- 41% are aged over 65;
- 89% identified as white, 11% identified as black (African);

- 65% self-identified as disabled with the largest proportion identifying the nature of their disability as 'mental ill health', including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder and schizophrenia.

Our participants find us in a variety of ways as each project has its own objective. Generally, we receive 'introductions' from:

- Community Connectors or Wellbeing Links Advisors in local authorities;
- Community Adult Mental Health teams and occupational therapists;
- Health Board programmes;
- Third sector partners such as Alzheimer's UK, Parkinson's UK or MIND Cymru;
- Job centres.

While some projects are closed to self-referrals, e.g. those for in-patients, we accept self-referrals to our general community sessions. Most of these participants find us by word of mouth.

Our referral process is simple, flexible and adaptable. Our Project Managers only take information that is essential to the running of the project. Inclusivity is important to us, so we are flexible in how we receive this information. Understanding the varying needs of each participant helps Inside Out Cymru engage with the people our services are for.

Inside Out Cymru is currently delivering several projects for people with mental health problems across Gwent, including:

- art to support the wellbeing of dads in Blaenau Gwent, in partnership with Blaenau Gwent Flying Start family support teams, funded by the Baring Foundation. This project continues until 2027.
- Create: Community Art Champions in Torfaen, in partnership with Building Resilient Communities, funded by The National Lottery.
- several 'Art for Wellness' community arts sessions across Gwent, funded by GAVO (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations), Nature Wellbeing and Caerphilly Arts Development, among others.

## OUR IMPACT

Around 86% of Inside Out Cymru participants agreed that taking part in the arts sessions supported their positive wellbeing by being 'enjoyable', 'safe' and motivating ('something to look forward to'). 91% of participants reported that they 'definitely felt less isolated' as a result of attending our regular community sessions.

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“When the [session] was explained, the patient was able to forget about their worries and engaged for the full session.”

**Social worker**

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Participants often reference the way the activity helps them feel engaged but relaxed, express themselves and feel more confident and resilient.

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“[Art] relieves my stress because I get to work with my hands.”

“Art means a lot to me – it's my self-expression. I like that I can tell people about me through my art.”

**Participants**

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

Inside Out Cymru is currently working with stakeholders to create longer-term partnerships with health boards, local authority and third-sector partners. Co-production and responsiveness is important to our approach, so we are continuing to look for dynamic partnerships.

## STAR STORY...



Living with anxiety and depression related to her neurodivergence, Jocelyn's social worker first introduced her to Inside Out Cymru seven years ago. Jocelyn is creative and studied art at school. An art group in the theatre felt like an exciting and achievable step for her.

“Without the group and making things, quite frankly, I'd be dead. I need the activity. I like getting advice from [Artist] and from other participants. They're like me... We get on and have things in common... We understand each other. We can rely on each other.”

Jocelyn attended the sessions regularly, enjoying getting to know others, learning new skills and finding her artistic voice.

“I'm just not one of those people who are able to work... I felt lost and worthless, like I didn't know where I fit in. The art group... helped me learn that I do have something to offer and that I can do something if I really want, and that I matter.”

Over time, Jocelyn has gained enough confidence to set up her own art group. Jocelyn collects 'subs' to cover materials and books a table for five of them to work on a shared craft project. Currently, the group are making costumes for an upcoming community event.

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“I've never made anything from clay before, it was lovely to learn a new skill. It gives me more confidence, the knowledge that I can do new things.”

**Participant**

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# Space2

BY PAUL BARKER

Paul is Co-Director – Programmes and Partnerships – at Space2.



A Space2 art workshop; photo by Kevin Hickson.

## WHO WE ARE

Space2 is an award-winning arts and social change charity of 20+ years, working with a focus on east and north-east Leeds and the Gipton neighbourhood in particular, some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country.

We have an extensive track record of creative health work including a public health contract as one of the founding partners of [Orion Consortium](#),<sup>22</sup> using Asset Based Community Development approaches.

We work with artists, environmentalists and pastoral support workers to co-produce weekly sessions to address local needs and desires, for example, poets to support local people to 'clear out their closets' to support wellbeing and personal development. Other projects include seasonal wellbeing walks, peer support development through informal art classes, heritage projects discovering and sharing local stories from East Leeds communities and the co-design of local community events, gardens and creative wellbeing spaces.

<sup>22</sup> [space2.org.uk/about-us/orion-partnership](https://space2.org.uk/about-us/orion-partnership)





A Space2 sewing workshop; photo by Coralie Datta.

## OUR WORK

Our mental health work has historically focused on young people, for example leading a city-wide campaign with lived experienced young people to combat mental health stigma and influencing the city's strategy for young people. We were the Time to Change hub lead partner for young people's work and co-created a game and associated resources for schools PSHCE delivery. We have also toured two one-woman shows for schools: Suitcase (raising mental health awareness) and Fix This (dealing with self-harm), with associated teacher Continued Professional Development and resource packs.

We rarely recruit participants on the basis of a mental health diagnosis, and we may not know if a participant is living with mental health problems unless they disclose it. However, we are very much aware that there is a significant overlap between economic deprivation and mental health problems, which means a much higher than average proportion of people living in the communities in which we work and accessing our groups are likely to be experiencing mental health issues. Although there is no formal referral process into our activities, many people are signposted to us via local social prescribers.

## STAR STORY...



In 2020, J was diagnosed with early onset arthritis and began to experience anxiety and depression when the condition prevented them from doing the things they had previously enjoyed. They joined our Picturing Wellbeing course – a six-week participatory photography course during which participants explored the Five Ways to Wellbeing together and took photos inspired by each of the 'Ways' in turn.

J said they really enjoyed the fact that they were encouraged to be creative and take photos outside of the weekly group sessions, and felt that the process of using an actual camera rather than their phone prompted them to slow down and take more notice of their surroundings and feelings. Participating in the group also gave J new perspectives on what each of the Five Ways to Wellbeing meant in the context of their individual health and physical ability, and led them onto joining new groups and activities including Space2's core visual arts group and a local lawn bowling club.

J is now a regular volunteer supporting Space2's Young People's Art Club and has joined Space2's Board of Trustees.

Most of our current work is with adults, mainly driven by the challenging funding landscape for children and young people's work at the moment. The majority of our current participant cohort are women (around 75%).

## OUR IMPACT

Much of the impact of our work with people with mental health problems is about opening space and increasing possibility. People with mental health problems will often initially access a short course with a specific focus (e.g. an introduction to lino printing) and then, as they build a sense of belonging with the 'community of artists' that we work with, they feel encouraged to participate in other activities, events and opportunities. This could be creating work for or curating an

exhibition, volunteering to support a group, or even performing in one of our large-scale performances. This process is dependent on the skills of our staff and freelance artists in building trust and safety.

An external evaluation of our anti-stigma work with children and young people found that it had a significant improvement on ability to talk about mental health issues, confidence to seek help, and confidence to help others.

### WHAT NEXT?

We are currently in first year of our 'Men Through the Lens' project funded by the Baring Foundation, which aims to use participatory photography techniques to increase the engagement of men with mental health

problems in our programmes of activity. This has already given us some great learning about new ways of working to engage men and affirmed our belief in participatory photography as an effective tool for introducing men in particular to creativity and the arts.

Another priority for us at the moment is to increase the ethnic diversity of our participant cohort to be more representative of the shifting demographics in our home neighbourhood of Gipton. This is one of the aims of our Common Threads project, which is currently bringing people together to learn and share textile techniques, drawing on the diversity of textile skills and creativity within the different communities living in the neighbourhood.



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# Studio Upstairs

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**BY ZLATINKA HRISTOVA**

Zlatinka is Managing Director of Studio Upstairs



Studio Upstairs exhibition in South London. Image courtesy of Studio Upstairs.

## WHO WE ARE

Studio Upstairs, established in London in 1988, is an arts and health charity dedicated to providing long-term, holistic support to individuals experiencing enduring mental and emotional difficulties through creative arts practice. Our vision is a world where everyone can transform their lives through a creative community.

We operate studios in London and Bristol, serving these regions by offering studio space, materials, and comprehensive support to our members. Our core focus is fostering personal recovery and wellbeing within a nurturing community.

Our current strategic priorities are: CREATE, emphasising meaningful engagement at the intersection of arts, education, and social care; BELONG, building community and combating isolation; and GROW, raising national awareness and expanding our reach to support personal growth and challenge stigmas about neurodiversity.

Our team, comprised of art therapists, artists, and administrative personnel, facilitates our members' creative journeys. We are supported by clinical supervisors, volunteers, students on training placements, and visiting artists. Our annual budget is approximately £300,000.





Book by A Mead, exhibition in Hackney, London. Image courtesy of Studio Upstairs.

## OUR WORK

Studio Upstairs provides a creative sanctuary for individuals experiencing enduring mental health challenges. Our studios offer a safe, supportive environment for self-expression through diverse arts practices, including painting, drawing and sculpture. Participants work independently within weekly groups, guided by experienced art therapists who are also practising artists.

Our core aims are to: foster long-term stability and improved wellbeing; support autonomy and creative identity development; and challenge stigma surrounding mental distress, enabling individuals to transcend societal labels.

We offer specialist visual arts provision for adults aged 18 and over with complex needs, including multiple disabilities. Our participant demographic encompasses a broad spectrum of mental health diagnoses, related addiction issues, learning difficulties, and physical health challenges. Studio Upstairs prioritises individual potential over limitations.

Each session, tailored to the unique needs of approximately 12 participants per group, employs a personalised approach that encourages creative choice. Groups are gender-balanced, with the majority of participants aged between 35 and 70.

Referrals are accepted through self-referral, Adult Social Care, and NHS professionals. This ensures accessibility for individuals seeking our specialised support.

## OUR IMPACT

For many, Studio Upstairs is more than a charity: it's a lifeline, a family. It empowers individuals to build self-esteem and find purpose, often where they've felt unsupported elsewhere. The impact is tangible: 90% of our members report reduced stress, fewer crises, and a decreased need for medication or mental health services.

Internal and external evaluations consistently demonstrate our success in fostering health, education, and social inclusion. But the true impact lies in our members' voices, highlighting the support, creative process, and community that helped them maintain stability and avoid crisis.

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“I thought I was beyond saving until I found Studio Upstairs.”

“It's a place where I felt understood and welcomed. They've managed to engage me in a way no one else could.”

“[A] lifeline during difficult periods.”

### Participants

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These stories, coupled with our data, paint a clear picture: Studio Upstairs doesn't just offer art; it offers transformation.



'Don't get on the worry train', Croydon Station Art Trail. Image courtesy of Studio Upstairs.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

In our fourth decade, Studio Upstairs aims to build our network of sustainable, local studios, ensuring creative support is accessible to all. We recognise that dismantling mental health stigma requires broader engagement. Therefore, we plan to expand collaborations with diverse communities and organisations, strengthening our support network.

We will also enhance our public programme, creating more exhibitions and collaborative projects. These initiatives will showcase our

### STAR STORY...



South Croydon station, once a blur of hurried commuters, now breathes with colour and compassion. Twenty-three artworks, born from the hearts of Studio Upstairs artists, line the waiting rooms, platforms, and stairways, transforming the space into an 'Open Your Art' trail.

Govia Thameslink Railway, seeking to uplift passengers, especially during these challenging times, invited the charity to infuse the station with messages of mental wellbeing. The artists, each a member of Studio Upstairs, responded with a vibrant tapestry of expressions: bold posters, intimate reflections, even a steel-cut rendering of Mary Gauthier's 'Mercy Now', its rust mirroring the passage of time and healing. One piece, a playful nod to icons, another a poignant reflection on isolation during a commute.

These were not just decorations; they were lifelines. As Whitney Desporte, a station staff member, shared:

**“Now, more than ever, we all need to be good neighbours.”**

The art trail, a testament to connection, stands as a quiet promise: we're with you.

members' talent, challenge societal perceptions of mental health, and celebrate resilience. By providing platforms for creative expression, we aim to foster understanding and build stronger community connections.



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# The Line

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**BY LORNA POWELL AND EREN KOC**

Lorna is Engagement Producer (Public Programme)  
and Eren is Development and Research Assistant at The Line.



Wellbeing Walk to Pudding Mill allotments; image courtesy of The Line.

## WHO WE ARE

The Line is East London's public art trail connecting Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and The O2, following the waterways and the line of the Greenwich Meridian. Our mission is to connect communities and inspire individuals through a dynamic outdoor exhibition programme where everyone can explore art, nature and heritage for free.

Co-founded in 2015 by Megan Piper and the late regeneration expert Clive Dutton OBE, The Line was established to democratise access to art. Our three-mile route spans three boroughs: Newham, Tower Hamlets and Greenwich. We are a registered charity with an annual

turnover of £1.3m, a team of 11 staff members, complemented by seasonal youth guides and facilitators.

Our work provides opportunities for local young people and community groups who face structural inequalities affecting health and wellbeing, and who have limited access to local green and blue spaces. We focus on collaborative engagement projects that support wellbeing and learning and provide opportunities for young people to develop skills and improve employability. We believe in the transformative impact of art and nature and are committed to challenging barriers to participation.



## OUR WORK

The Line first piloted social prescribed wellbeing walks in 2021 as a response to both the increase in footfall on the route during Covid and the heightened impact that the pandemic had on local people. These guided walks for small groups take a gentle pace, led by participant needs. They offer participants a unique opportunity to experience art outside traditional gallery settings while connecting with others and exploring nature in one of the most densely populated areas in the country. (Only 13.1% of Newham is made up of green space, despite its size and high population density; this leaves the borough having one of the least publicly accessible spaces per person compared to other London boroughs. There is only 16% tree cover in Newham, which is the second lowest in London.)<sup>23</sup>

The walks are free and accessible to anyone experiencing stress, anxiety, social isolation, or mild to moderate mental health challenges. Participants either self-refer or have been referred by their local GP or social prescribing link worker via the JOY app, a tool for clinicians in Newham to identify local support options for their patients.

In 2023, we saw a 95% increase in demand for our weekly Wellbeing Walks. In 2024, we delivered 50 walks and have welcomed nearly 600 participants across the three-year period. We now have a group of regular attendees who represent diverse demographics across different age groups and backgrounds.

“[I like] the variety each week of people coming along. The conversation of what’s around, noticing things overlooked on previous weeks, or noticing something new. The friendly, all included, atmosphere.”

**Participant**

## STAR STORY...



One participant who stands out is Katerina, who joined our walks in January 2024 after being referred by a social prescribing link worker following the loss of her partner. She has become a regular, forming long-lasting friendships within the group, which has colloquially been named “hug club”, a sign of the depth of care and friendship present within the community.

“I like the companionship. Relating to everybody that comes and being in the moment. And I’m not doing this enough in life. I’m locked into the past a lot, but on this day, when we meet here, I feel I am generally in the moment.”

Each session combines gentle walking with guided nature-based creative activities, led by an experienced mindfulness practitioner and co-facilitated by a former Youth Guide. Activities, designed according to participants’ needs and interests, might include mindful observation, nature-inspired drawing or poetry.

We work with social prescribing networks to reach those who might benefit most. Participants find us through these referrals, our website, social media, and word of mouth. There is no formal assessment process – anyone who feels they would benefit is welcome, promoting an inclusive, non-stigmatising approach to mental health support that focuses on creativity, connection and community rather than clinical labels.

## OUR IMPACT

Our main host borough of Newham has an estimated 23.9% prevalence of common mental health disorders amongst residents.<sup>24</sup>

A recent academic study of our Wellbeing Walks reported a marked reduction in negative emotions and a tangible impact on participants’

<sup>23</sup> *Get involved in Shaping Newham’s future together*, Newham Council. Available at: [www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/3821/local-plan-issues-and-options-our-green-spaces-and-water-spaces](http://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/3821/local-plan-issues-and-options-our-green-spaces-and-water-spaces).

<sup>24</sup> *Newham: Population, demographics and health and wellbeing of Newham residents*, East London NHS Foundation Trust, see: [www.elft.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/newham\\_elft\\_population\\_profile\\_pack\\_-\\_copy.pdf](http://www.elft.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/newham_elft_population_profile_pack_-_copy.pdf).



The Line project with local refugee organisation, Praxis; image courtesy of The Line.

wellbeing through three key outcomes: social connectivity, increased physical activity, and meaningful interactions with art and nature.

Internal evaluations show that 94% of attendees reported a sustained positive impact on their wellbeing, while 100% stated the walks motivated them to spend more time outdoors and connect with local green spaces. Additionally, 86% felt the walks helped address their social isolation.

Participants consistently report that the walks help them discover hidden areas of natural beauty in their urban surroundings, fostering a deeper connection to place and community. The combination of art and nature provides multiple entry points, allowing participants to connect through shared experiences rather than focusing on mental health challenges.

The regularity of the walks provides stability helping to form a supportive community and building a sense of belonging. Following participant feedback, we have introduced bimonthly visits to local arts, nature and culture venues, including London Museum Docklands and Rosetta Arts. Having a responsive approach to programming builds trust showing that participants are deeply valued.

“It’s really good to get out in the fresh air and feel the wind on your face. I love looking at the trees and birds and feel that green spaces are crucial to my wellbeing.”

**Participant**

## WHAT’S NEXT?

Building on the success of our Wellbeing Walks, we are broadening the programme for 2025 (our 10th anniversary) and beyond. We’re establishing a formal partnership with the University of East London and their PhD researcher, Alisa Oleva, to develop practice-based research into walking as a creative wellbeing intervention. This collaboration will deepen our understanding of the mechanisms that make the walks effective and help us develop a long-term academic evidence base that can be shared with other organisations.

We’re also expanding our delivery to include creative wellbeing walks for a number of specific groups, including refugees and migrants (building on a successful pilot with Praxis in 2024), people living with early-stage dementia and their companions, in partnership with local South Asian charity, SubCo Trust, and a pilot programme of walks for new mums in collaboration with Vital Arts and Barts NHS Health trust. This expansion will help us reach more diverse audiences who could benefit from our unique combination of art, nature, and social connection.



# Tonic Arts & Green Health

BY BECKY BRAZIL

Becky is Tonic Arts & Green Health Manager at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital



Mural at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital; image courtesy of Tonic Arts.

## WHO WE ARE

Tonic Arts is NHS Lothian Charity's award-winning Arts in Health and Wellbeing programme for staff, patients and visitors in **Edinburgh & the Lothians**. In partnership with the NHS, specialist arts organisations and cross-sector partners, Tonic Arts programmes include: art and design commissions, art collection provision, temporary exhibitions, artist residencies (including Filmmakers in Residence), participatory arts activities and performances.

The Royal Edinburgh Hospital (REH) is the leading psychiatric hospital for Edinburgh & the Lothians. Situated in the Morningside area of the city, there are a number of in-patient

units including six general adult acute wards, an intensive psychiatric care unit, four older people's wards and three rehabilitation wards. Its specialist on-site services include: the care of patients over the age of 65 with functional and organic illnesses such as dementia, specialist services for young people, forensic patients, those with learning disabilities, an eating disorders unit and patients with acquired brain injuries. There are also several out-patient services.

## OUR WORK

The Arts and Green Health Manager works collaboratively across the Royal Edinburgh Hospital site with the hospital



community – patients, staff, visitors and third sector – on many different projects. Specifically, the manager works in collaboration with Artlink, Tonic Exhibitions Manager and the Tonic Collection.

Project ideas come from a range of different sources: from patients and staff, different working groups, talking to the hospital community and understanding what it is that they want. Projects range from: arts and creative workshops, to art commissions and installations, to exhibiting patient artwork, complementing our participatory events with external arts organisations such as the Edinburgh International Festival & Scottish Opera.

Tonic Arts also do a lot of collaborative projects using art and colour to improve the ageing hospital environment. Recently we worked with the hospital community on an arts archive project, 'REH: Our Story', telling the 200-year history of the hospital, through a visual display exhibited in the REH Dining Room. We also have an 'Art Box', where we host a rolling hospital community art exhibition – this is very popular in the hospital and we would like to use it in other sites across NHS Lothian. Tonic Arts have also been running a Filmmaking in Residence programme across the hospital.

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“I just wanted to say what an amazing job you've done on the dining room and it has been commented on most favourably, so thanks again. ”

**Staff member, on the 'Our Story' project**

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The community across the REH comprises all ages, genders, acute, rehab, older and dementia patients, including out-patients, staff, volunteers and family members. There is a thriving third sector presence onsite, with whom we also collaborate.

The role is embedded in the hospital site, so that it is easily and visibly accessible and also feeds into various working groups across the site, which help shape and develop projects.

## STAR STORY...



We recently completed a trial surface artwork and mural project, which has been very successful. In fact, it has been so well received that we've been asked by the hospital community to roll it out across the site as a wider project. We worked with a very talented local artist Natasha Russell and developed a collaborative programme to enhance two areas of the hospital. Natasha ran various workshops with patients and staff across the site, looking at shape and colour, with a botanical theme. The different groups then developed shapes, colour and artworks for the two chosen areas of the site. Once the designs had been agreed, the surface artworks were then painted by Natasha with the hospital community. This allowed the hospital community to not only have fun and be creative, but to impact the built environment. The work has been very well received.

“As you are going to hospital you see the beautiful images. It gives you hope and encouragement. ”

**Hospital patient**

“Seeing something done for the hospital environment is good, something visually appealing and stimulating is positive and optimistic! ”

**Family member**

We have made two short films about our work: Colour For The Corridor and Exhibitions & Participatory Arts.<sup>25</sup>

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“It isn't just patients round some tables, talking to each other and painting. The painting gives them something to focus on – they want to come and do some good art, but they also want to participate in the group and help other people and be helped in that process. ”

**REH patient**

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Murals on the site of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital; images courtesy of Tonic Arts.

## OUR IMPACT

In our strategy Tonic Arts sets out its main aim as 'Creatively enhancing environments and enriching experiences across NHS Lothian'.

We evaluate most of our projects to measure our impact and we can confidently say that the work undertaken has a very positive impact on those with mental health conditions. As well as in-patients, we also work with former patients in a volunteer capacity to help prevent re-admissions.

“ I love taking part in the art workshops, it keeps me going, I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't here. ”

**Out-patient arts volunteer**

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Following feedback from the hospital community, we're working to expand the Surface Artwork Project and roll it out across the hospital; in both interior areas, such as wards and other exterior areas. This will be a collaborative, participatory project, which will also help bring visual cohesion to the REH site.

We are seeking additional funding to embed artists in residence on a longer-term basis, on more wards and other areas of the hospital, as well as continuing our programme of exhibitions, collection displays, Artlink workshops, the Summer Fling festival and our staff engagement project, which engages staff experiencing mental health problems themselves with our collection.







Painting a mural at the Royal  
Edinburgh Hospital; image  
courtesy of Tonic Arts.



## Some reflections

This is not an academic study but, like our previous reports, an attempt to highlight interesting practice and the breadth and depth of one aspect of creative mental health, primarily through case studies. It comes at the work through the perspective of arts organisations and a funder. However it does strike us that there are at least some interesting patterns and issues that begin to emerge from this material.

### STARTING POINTS

These are very varied.

A number of these organisations arose in some way from the NHS. Arts Care (see page 27) in Northern Ireland started as a unit in the Department of Health before spinning out as a charity. (It is very hard to imagine that happening in the English Department of Health.) Designs in Mind (see page 36) began life in an NHS Day Centre. Portugal Prints, not featured here but in a recent blog,<sup>26</sup> was founded by an occupational therapist. Art Angel (see page 22) began when a group of patients wished to carry on making art after their hospital closed. Personal experience is usually a key motivation, as when the founders of Hospital Rooms (see page 47) were dismayed by the hospital environment confronting a friend.

Some organisations have been around for decades. ACAVA has its roots in the 1970s (see page 16 though its reported project was a response to the Grenfell Tragedy in 2017); Studio Upstairs was founded in 1988 (see page 55), and Arts Care NI (see page 27), Art Angel (see page 22) and Designs in Mind (see page 36) have all been around since the 1990s. The youngest organisation in this report is Hospital Rooms (see page 47), which has grown rapidly since 2017.

### TYPOLGY

The following is only a rough typology of types of organisations providing visual arts opportunities to people with mental health problems. (Examples in brackets are not included as case studies in this report.)

#### **Specialist arts and health/creative mental health organisations:**

Art Angel; Arts Care NI; Bethlem Gallery; Designs in Mind; Hospital Rooms; Inside Out Cymru; Studio Upstairs; Tonic Arts.

#### **Participatory arts organisations with a strand of work for people with mental health problems:**

It can be hard to draw a line between these and more generalist art organisations: however, ArcadeCampfa; Everybody Arts; and Space2.

#### **Other types of arts organisations:**

ACAVA, Double Elephant Print Workshop; The Line; as well as The Art House Sheffield, see overleaf, and many of the museums in our Creatively Minded in the Museum report.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Other (non-arts) organisations:**

Although less likely to be participatory, other options exist, such as activities run by a hospital, possibly aligned to Occupational Therapy and / or a more educational approach, such as the very large number of classes run by Core Arts in Hackney, London.

### FINANCIAL MODELS

There is an unusually wide range of sources of income described in these case studies. It is important to recognise though that these may well not be transferable to other arts organisations which are more reliant on traditional arts funders such as arts councils and foundations. As a starting point, it is

<sup>26</sup> [baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/portugal-prints-closes-after-nearly-50-years](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/portugal-prints-closes-after-nearly-50-years)

<sup>27</sup> *Creatively Minded at the Museum*, Baring Foundation, 2022.



An exhibition visitor viewing Stevie-Leigh Sanderson's artwork as part of her New Creatives exhibition, *My Evolution*, at Everybody Arts. Photo © Matt Radcliffe Photography.

important to note that all the opportunities described here for people with mental health opportunities are free to them at the point of access, so need subsidy by one means or another. There is a strong consensus among arts organisations that it is important to retain targeted services that are free of charge.

Hospital Rooms (see page 47) is probably unique in creative mental health in having a major partnership with a commercial art gallery, Hauser and Wirth. This has been centrally important to their development. Over three years, the partnership raised more than £1 million, largely through annual auctions. They also raise money through limited-edition prints donated by sought-after artists. This has then put Hospital Rooms in a position to leverage considerable funding of £200,000 per collaboration from each of the four hospital trusts they are currently working with to match the investment they are generating themselves. It should be noted that this is the culmination of years of fundraising and was not possible in the early years of their work.

Not featured here and on a more modest scale but equally interesting, The Art House Sheffield runs arts classes at commercial rates which have then been able to subsidise other work,

for instance with people with mental health problems. Double Elephant Print Workshop (see page 39) tells us that 40% of their income comes from membership and course fees.

Designs in Mind (see page 36) has focused on the applied arts and with that the possibility of commercial income from the work of participants. Their premises in Oswestry includes a shop as well as online sales through their website. The Baring Foundation is supporting a temporary marketing post to help build this income stream. Several organisations have been commissioned to produce public art works, such as the 23 murals by Studio Upstairs for Govia Railways (see page 55). Not covered in this report is the use of crafts in this context but The Recover Team in Welwyn Garden City is a great example of this, upcycling furniture in an artistic way and supporting people with many challenges including mental ill-health.

Several organisations gain a substantial part of their income from NHS charities, such as Tonic Arts (see page 61) and the Bethlem Gallery (see page 30).

## SCALE AND REACH

Most creative mental health operates on a model of workshops with ten to 15 people. This is similar for performance arts as well as the visual arts, although the number of participants engaging in singing and choirs may be higher. This approach has the advantage of building strong personal relations, trust and confidence. Its disadvantage is that it is relatively expensive. Chilli Studios (see page 33) has 600 people a year attending with a budget of £130,000. In the Creative Minds project funded by the Baring Foundation (see page 42), Everybody Arts is delivering one-to-one sessions alongside group sessions with a target of 500 participants.

With the exception of Arts Care NI and Hospital Rooms, all this work is very local to a town or nearby region. This has the advantage of building community and makes travel easier for those who may not like leaving the familiarity of the local area, but it also means there are 'deserts' where there are no opportunities.

By far the most extensive initiative is the Digital Art School<sup>28</sup> run by Hospital Rooms. In addition to over 100+ bite-sized video tutorials,

Designing a mural for the Royal Edinburgh Hospital; image courtesy of Tonic Arts / Artlink.



Hospital Rooms offers a supply of free arts materials to every psychiatric ward in England. There are roughly 100,000 people admitted as patients and only a small percentage of these might wish to use Digital Art School during their admission.

## PARTICIPANTS

Almost all the work described here is for adults, though some work with children and young people is described in our other reports.<sup>29</sup>

There is a very broad range of participants among these case studies and the broader sector. Hospital Rooms, Bethlem Gallery, one of Everybody Arts' programmes, and Tonic Arts all primarily focus on in-patients with psychiatric problems. These conditions will be quite severe to warrant being on a ward but will be very varied. Unusually, Arts Care Gofal Celf (see page 24) has a project working with the specific diagnosis of early psychosis. Portraits of Recovery and the British Ceramics Biennial (though not case studies here) both work with people in recovery from addictions. Most of the other projects are largely working in the community, either with outpatients, via social prescription or self-referral. In these cases participants usually have a mild to moderate clinical diagnosis or have self-diagnosed. The Line in East London (see page 58) is an example of referrals through social prescription.

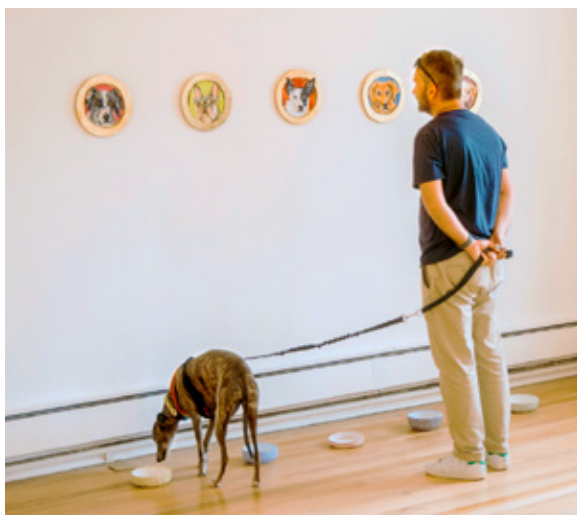
The Baring Foundation has recently had a round of funding for projects engaging men and ACAVA got there before us with 'tinkering sessions' (see page 16). Arts 2 Heal in Blackburn, as well as being highly ethnically diverse, has focussed to some extent on engaging men. Everybody Arts also has a programme called Bloom targeting young women (see page 42).

Of course all life is intersectional and Chilli Studios (see page 33) points out that their participants will sometimes have experiences of homelessness, prison and loneliness, for example.

<sup>28</sup> [hospital-rooms.com/digital-art-school](https://hospital-rooms.com/digital-art-school)

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *Creatively Minded and Young*, Baring Foundation, 2020.





Twilight Barking exhibition; image courtesy of ArcadeCampfa.

## ART FORMS AND THE ART

The most likely art forms used are drawing, painting, collage and printmaking. A smaller number will include sculpture (such as *Radiate Arts in Chester*, for example). Many studios have kilns and offer pottery. The *British Ceramics Biennial* in Stoke-on-Trent has run a specialist group commissioned by the local drug and alcohol rehabilitation service for many years. They are currently researching the use of ceramics by other arts organisations in mental health funded by the Baring Foundation.

A number of projects include photography as one aspect of their offer rather than as an exclusive service. The prime exception is *Belfast Exposed*, with its long running courses on *therapeutic photography*. They have extended this by holding two major international conferences on trauma and photography, supported by the Baring Foundation. The Robert Gordon University in Scotland also offers a post graduate course on therapeutic photography.

Although not represented here to any great extent, the use of textiles has a rich history in creative mental health as shown by the work of *Significant Seams* in the West of England. Sewing has made a major contribution in works of protest and story-telling including from asylums. During the First World War, Ernest

Thesiger pioneered its use for soldiers suffering from 'shell shock' or PTSD and that led in part to the establishment of Occupational Therapy as a profession.<sup>30</sup>

The range of art that is produced by these organisations is striking and memorable. A number have produced murals or other forms of public art and used this for funding (see for example, *Studio Upstairs* and *Govia Railway*, page 55). The core activity of *Hospital Rooms* is public art, often murals in hospital settings. *Tonic Arts* also produces public art in its hospital sites as a major part of its work and describes in its case study a recent mural project (see page 61).

*ArcadeCampfa* (see page 19) combined art and therapy dogs to create the 'Twilight Barking' project. Among many projects *Bethlem Gallery* is producing an immersive exhibition about the work of David Bowie.

In most case studies active creativity is the main activity of a project. This is reversed in *The Line* (see page 58) which is essentially focused on art appreciation in the outdoors but may also include sketching for instance.

## AND NOT JUST VISUAL ART

The organisations here provide such a broad range of experiences and support for their participants. At *Space2* in Leeds poets are helping people clear their closets and the charity also offers wellbeing walks (see page 52). It is interesting to note that *Tonic Arts* in Scotland has a combined role for Arts and Green Health. They run a wonderful annual carnival-like event, the *Snail Trail*, where staff and patients create costumes to parade around the *Royal Edinburgh Hospital*. Walks are the main element of engagement for *The Line* (and they recorded a 95% increase in demand for these in 2023), but they have added to this a regular social programme of visits for instance to local museums and galleries. Public art, as with performance art discussed in our report, *Creatively Minded at the Theatre*,<sup>31</sup> can be an important way to challenge mental health stigma.

<sup>30</sup> For more on this, see *The Therapeutic Stitch*, David Cutler, 2022. Available at: [baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/the-therapeutic-stitch](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/the-therapeutic-stitch).

<sup>31</sup> *Creatively Minded at the Theatre*, Baring Foundation, 2024. Available at: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-at-the-theatre](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-at-the-theatre).



Silverwork and Wax Carving with Chloe Morgan, Skill Up, ACAVA Maxilla Men's Shed. Photo by ACAVA Shoots.

Of course a key but more intangible thing offered by all these projects is what Studio Upstairs calls 'sanctuary'. Participants know that artists and facilitators understand their situation and that this is something that they share with other participants. It is also a safe place in that they know that they are there simply to express themselves, have fun and find some peace of mind.

### **MORE NETWORKING: NEEDED OR NOT?**

There are now networks for arts and health in general in all four home nations of the UK; however these are cross art form. There doesn't seem to be anything specific for the visual arts. It doesn't appear that there is much exchange between the organisations in our case studies or listed in our A-Z (page 71). We have funded a small number of networking opportunities in the visual arts in the last few years which have been well received.

### **CONCLUSION**

Visual art is one of the most widespread and active art forms in engaging people with mental health problems. It is used in many ways and in many places by many different types of organisation. Most are small, with rare examples of larger ones such as Core Arts and Hospital Rooms, and very local. They have a range of fundraising approaches but most survive the vicissitudes of the arts sector on small budgets. They all show great commitment to the often vulnerable people they engage and give an opportunity for expression, community, joy and meaning. Many people call them 'my lifeline'.





Collaborative drawing  
made at the Queer  
Anthems workshop  
at Bethlem Gallery.  
Image courtesy of  
Bethlem Gallery.



# Directory & map

## VISUAL ARTS OFFERS TO PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

This list includes arts organisations which we know are focusing fully or mainly on the visual arts and have a recent or regular offer.

We know it won't be comprehensive and we are very sorry if we missed you. Please do email us on [baring.foundation@ing.com](mailto:baring.foundation@ing.com) and we will include you in our next full *Creatively Minded Directory*.

### A-Z

**Dark red = either focus on, or have a significant stream of work focused on, children and young people.**

42nd Street/The Horsfall  
 64 Million Artists  
 Arc (Arts for Recovery in the Community)  
 ArcadeCampfa  
 Art4Space  
 Art and Soul  
 Art Angel  
 Art Branches  
 Artcore  
 The Art House (Sheffield)  
 The Art House (Wakefield)  
 Art in Healthcare  
 Artlift  
 Artlink Central  
 Artlink Edinburgh  
 Art Refuge  
 Arts 2 Heal  
 Arts4Wellbeing  
 Arts and Minds  
 Arts Care NI  
 Arts Care Gofal Celf  
 Arts Network (SELAN)  
 Artspace  
 Arty Folks  
 B Arts  
 Beaney House of Art and Knowledge

Belfast Exposed  
 Bethlem Museum of the Mind  
 Bethlem Gallery  
 Breakdown Bolton  
 Breathe Creative  
 British Ceramics Biennial  
 Cathja  
 Chilli Studios  
 Comics Youth  
 Creative Alternatives  
 Creative Health Camden  
 Creative Minds  
 Creative Recovery  
 Creative Response  
 creativeshift CIC  
 Darts  
 De La Warr Pavilion  
 Designs in Mind  
 Double Elephant Print Workshop  
 Dulwich Picture Gallery  
 Electric Medway  
 Esc films  
 Everybody Arts  
 Fabrica  
 Foundling Museum  
 Glasgow Museums  
 Glenside Hospital Museum  
 Hampshire Cultural Trust  
 Hive Bradford  
 The Holburne Museum  
 Hoot Creative Arts  
 Hospital Rooms  
 Independent Arts  
 Inside Out Community  
 Inside Out Cymru  
 Jack Drum Arts  
 Koestler Arts  
 The Lightbox  
 Lyth Arts  
 The Line  
 Maryhill Integration Network

Mental Health Museum, Wakefield  
 MK Arts for Health  
 National Portrait Gallery Scotland  
 North Tyneside Art Studio  
 Open Arts  
 Outside In  
 Paintings in Hospitals  
 Portraits of Recovery  
 Project Ability  
 Radiate Arts  
 The Recover Team  
 RT Projects  
 Salisbury Museum  
**Soft Touch Arts**  
 Significant Seams  
 Space2  
 START Inspiring Minds  
 Studio Upstairs  
 Tate St. Ives  
 Tonic Arts  
 Towner Eastbourne  
 Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums  
 University of Edinburgh (Prescribe Culture)  
 Waythrough (formerly Richmond Fellowship):  
   Art Matters  
 Whale Arts  
 The Whitworth Gallery

## BY LOCATION

**Number = counties on the map overleaf.**

## ENGLAND

### 01 London

ACAVA  
 Art4Space  
 Art and Soul  
 Arts Network (SELAN)  
**Bethlem Gallery**  
 Bethlem Museum of the Mind  
 Cathja  
 Creative Health Camden  
**Dulwich Picture Gallery**  
**Foundling Museum**  
 Studio Upstairs  
 The Line

### East Midlands

### 02 Derbyshire

Artcore, Derby

## West Midlands

### 03 Staffordshire

B Arts, Stoke-on-Trent  
 British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent

### 04 Leicestershire

**Soft Touch Arts, Leicester**

### 05 Shropshire

Designs in Mind, Oswestry

### 06 Warwickshire

Arty Folks, Coventry

## North East

### 07 County Durham

Jack Drum Arts, Crook  
 RT Projects, Durham

### 08 Tyne and Wear

Chilli Studios, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
 North Tyneside Art Studio  
 Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

## North West

### 09 Cheshire

Radiate Arts, Chester

### 10 Greater Manchester

42nd Street, Manchester  
 Arc (Arts for Recovery in the Community),  
   Stockport  
 Breakdown Bolton  
 Portraits of Recovery, Manchester  
 START Inspiring Minds, Salford  
 The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester

### 11 Lancashire

Arts 2 Heal, Blackburn

### 12 Liverpool & Merseyside

**Comics Youth**  
 Creative Alternatives, St Helen's

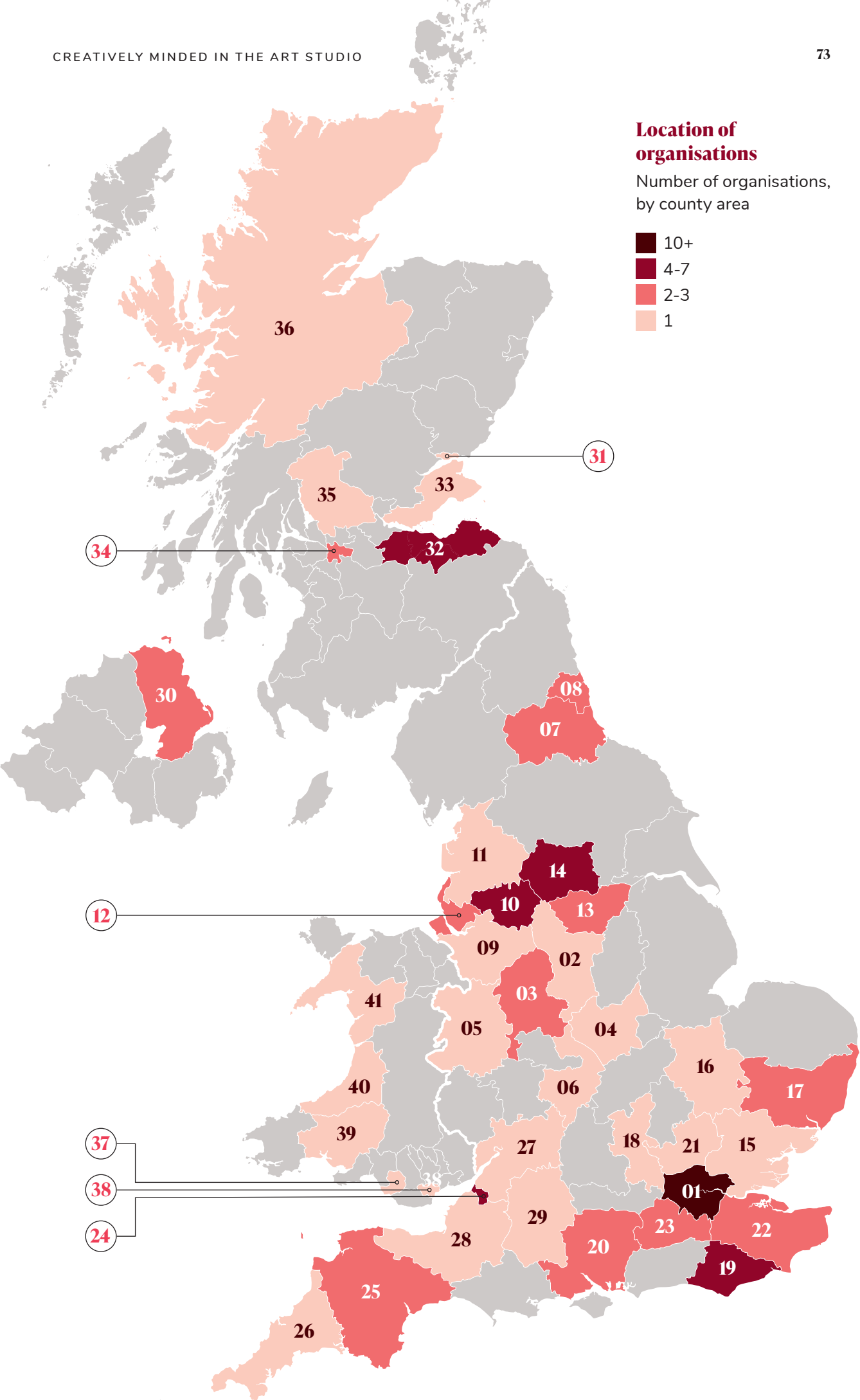
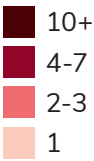
## Yorkshire & Humber

### 13 South Yorkshire

Creative Recovery, Barnsley  
 Darts, Doncaster  
 The Art House, Sheffield

**Location of organisations**

Number of organisations, by county area





## 14 West Yorkshire

Creative Minds, Wakefield  
 Everybody Arts, Halifax  
 Hive Bradford  
 Hoot Creative Arts, Kirklees  
 Mental Health Museum, Wakefield  
 Space2, Leeds  
 The Art House, Wakefield

## East of England

### 15 Essex

Open Arts, Southend-on-Sea

### 16 Cambridgeshire

Arts and Minds, Cambridge

### 17 Suffolk

Art Branches  
 Inside Out Community, Ipswich

## South East

### 18 Buckinghamshire

MK Arts for Health

### 19 East Sussex

Artspace, Brighton  
 De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea  
 Fabrica, Brighton  
 Towner Eastbourne

### 20 Hampshire

Hampshire Cultural Trust  
 Independent Arts, Isle of Wight

### 21 Hertfordshire

The Recover Team, Welwyn

### 22 Kent

Art Refuge  
 Beaney House of Art and Knowledge,  
 Canterbury  
 Electric Medway

### 23 Surrey

Creative Response, Farnham  
 The Lightbox, Woking  
 Waythrough (formerly Richmond Fellowship):  
 Art Matters

## South West

### 24 Bristol

Art Refuge  
 creativeshift  
 Glenside Hospital Museum  
 Studio Upstairs

### 25 Devon

Double Elephant Print Workshop, Exeter  
 Significant Seams

### 26 Cornwall

Tate St. Ives

### 27 Gloucestershire

Artlift

### 28 Somerset

The Holburne Museum, Bath

### 29 Wiltshire

Salisbury Museum

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### 30 Belfast and Antrim

Arts Care NI  
 Belfast Exposed  
 Esc films

## SCOTLAND

### 31 Dundee

Art Angel

### 32 Edinburgh & Lothians

Artlink Edinburgh  
 National Portrait Gallery Scotland  
 Tonic Arts  
 University of Edinburgh, Prescribe  
 Whale Arts

### 33 Fife

Fife Cultural Trust

### 34 Glasgow

Glasgow Museums  
 Maryhill Integration Network  
 Project Ability

**35 Stirling**

Artlink Central

**36 Highlands & Islands**

Lyth Arts, Wick

**WALES****37 Bridgend**

Breathe Creative

**38 Cardiff**

ArcadeCampfa

**39 Carmarthenshire**

Arts Care Gofal Celf

**40 Ceredigion**

Arts4Wellbeing

**41 Gwent**

Inside Out Cymru

**NATIONAL, MULTI-COUNTRY  
OR DIGITAL**

Art in Healthcare (Scotland)

64 Million Artists

Hospital Rooms (England)

Koestler Arts

Outside In

Paintings in Hospitals (England)

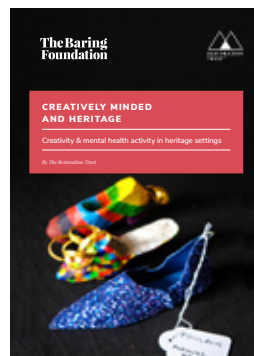
# Selected Baring Foundation resources



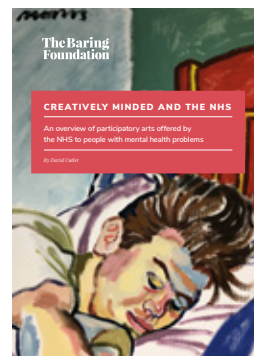
**Creatively minded**  
**David Cutler**  
2020



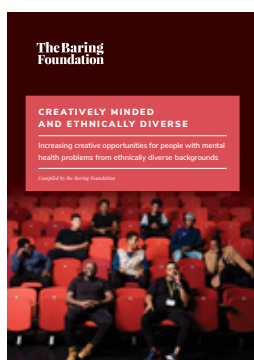
**Creatively minded and young**  
**Harriet Lowe**  
2020



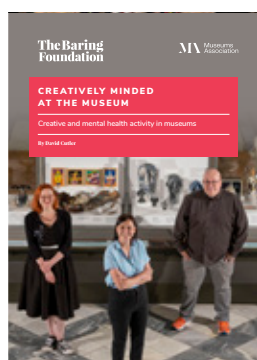
**Creatively minded and heritage**  
**The Restoration Trust**  
2021



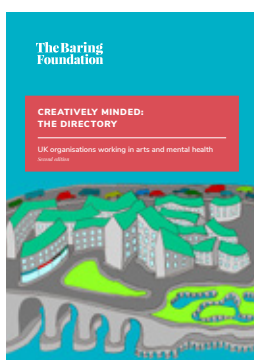
**Creatively minded and the NHS**  
**David Cutler**  
2021



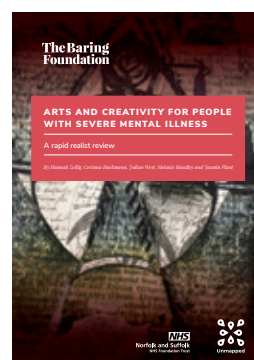
**Creatively minded and ethnically diverse**  
**Compiled by The Baring Foundation**  
2021



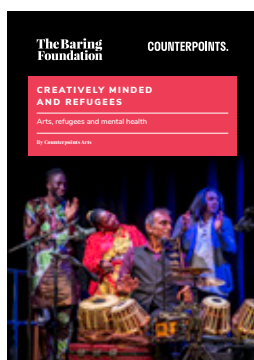
**Creatively minded at the museum**  
**David Cutler**  
2022



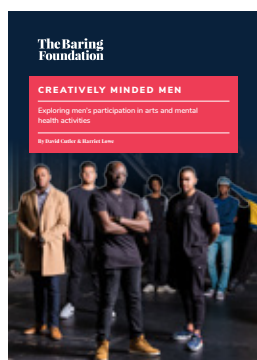
**Creatively minded: the directory**  
**The Baring Foundation**  
2022



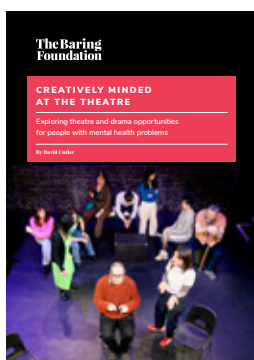
**Arts and creativity for people with severe mental illness**  
**H. Zeilig, C. Hackmann, J. West, M. Handley & J. Plant**  
2022



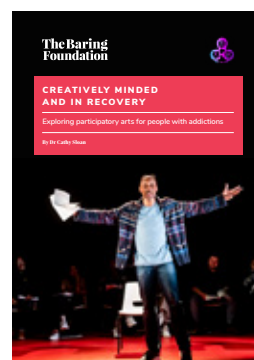
**Creatively minded and refugees**  
**Counterpoints Arts**  
2023



**Creatively minded men**  
**David Cutler**  
2024



**Creatively minded at the theatre**  
**David Cutler**  
2024



**Creatively minded and in recovery**  
**Dr Cathy Sloan**  
2024

All resources can be found on our website  
[www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)











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