

## CREATIVELY MINDED AT THE MUSEUM

Creative and mental health activity in museums

By David Cutler



## CREATIVELY MINDED AT THE MUSEUM: CREATIVE AND MENTAL HEALTH ACTIVITY IN MUSEUMS

### **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 Museums Association**

The Museums Association (MA) is a campaigning membership organisation representing and supporting museums and people who work with them throughout the UK. Our network includes 10,000 individual members working in all types of roles, from directors to trainees, and we represent 1,500 institutional members ranging from small volunteer-run local museums to large national institutions. Founded in 1889, the MA was the world's first professional body for museums. We lead thinking in UK museums with initiatives such as Empowering Collections and Museums Change Lives, and we provide £1.4m per year of funding for museums to work with their communities via our Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and other grants. For more information about the MA, see our website: [www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org).

### **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* and *Creatively Minded and the NHS*.

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Alistair Brown, Policy Officer at the Museums Association, commented on the draft report. This report was edited by Harriet Lowe, the Communications and Research Officer for the Baring Foundation and designed by Alex Valy.

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# Foreword

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BY DOLLY SEN

As a child I loved museums. School trips to local places like the Horniman Museum captivated me totally. The world opened up in those encounters. At aged 14, I had my first psychotic episode and I lost the next decade or so to isolation and mental distress. My world closed down.

I am an insatiably curious person, even at my lowest or my most psychotic. If there is something to be curious about, it will be the thing to propel me forward on his arduous road of life. This didn't extend to visiting museums when I was unwell. I had lost confidence and I felt too different to go into them. I entered the adult world carrying the common perception that museums have dead things curated by posh people that don't talk to the lives of ordinary folk, or those of us who have been pushed away from ordinary.

In my thirties my health improved enough for me to take on work. I had meetings in and around Euston, where the Wellcome Collection is based, for years. I knew the Wellcome Collection was free to enter, but I never crossed its threshold. The building is imposing, there were security guards searching people's bags, and the people entering were white and middle class. It didn't seem a place for someone like me to visit. It was only one day, when I saw a group of people of mixed ethnicities enter that I felt brave enough to enter. I slowly began to frequent other museums after that.

In medical museums, I found myself many a time trying to connect with meaningless and untouched exhibits relating to mental health and being told that this was my heritage, my history. When I learnt to think more critically, I observed that some collections devalue people by following historical and contemporary structures of inequality, making them tiny and helpless, without the right to their stories.

Instead of labelling and interpreting my life once I am gone, come to meet me, get to know me and people like me, let's meet in the middle. Let's dispense with the 'do not touch' sign and let's try and get hold of the essence of beauty, humanity and what brings us together. The tears of those in asylums are long dry and story-less now. The tears shed today need their stories heard.

My own work has been in a few museums, including The Beaney in Canterbury, Kent (see page 24), which has made good connections to local mental health services. People from the local inpatient psychiatric unit came to visit 'A Place of Safety', an exhibition I was part of. Jemma Channing, its curator, emailed me the following about this visit. "One hears voices and loved your film 'Inside' [a film about the subjective experience of hearing voices]. She was telling staff it was exactly what she felt like, so all the staff sat down and watched it." Minds curious about other minds. Hearts opened up to other hearts.

I applied to a disability arts funding charity UNLIMITED to work on a combined arts project Birdsong from Inobservable Worlds, exploring and challenging the narrative in the Wellcome Collection archives, knowing that only 10% of it is written by survivors, making them minor characters in their own history. I was lucky enough to be awarded a grant to do this.

The Wellcome Collection is inhabiting a tricky time at the moment. It has to deal with its colonial past and its institutional racism and ableism, amongst other things, and it is trying to remedy that. I have unfortunately met with its ableism. I really welcomed the difficult conversations between myself and the people at Wellcome. Having these conversations helped me to understand the restrictions the staff themselves have to work under. One



subject was how outdated and stigmatising language in archives has a negative impact on disability representation and identity. But museums and libraries have to abide by an international cataloguing system and so the problem is bigger than them, and is often at odds with their own values.

Spaces can be ableist and I felt very uncomfortable in the clinical coldness of their Materials Room while I was going through their archives. There were no other faces that looked like me and I was scared to do anything in a silence that polices and oppresses. They took on my suggestion to have posters of different kinds of people up on the walls, and to recruit more workers from different communities to work there. You need to see yourself reflected and more welcomed. It is hard to fight things on your own.

I am so grateful to read this report from the Baring Foundation on where museums are with their work with people with mental health problems. Now I don't feel like I am on my own. I am heartened by the commitment and obvious passion these museums have for working with people with mental health difficulties, and how some have tried to tackle social inequality that drives up rates of mental ill health. A few case studies touch upon the breaking down of hierarchies: the Mental Health Museum donated craft kits to foodbanks during the pandemic, the Foundling Museum offers paid museum traineeships for care-leavers. This employment model can of course be extended to people with mental health problems. I know of a wonderful initiative, called Curating for Change, which creates placements and career paths for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people to lead in museums, and why it isn't a common practice already needs some discussion. Many things need to be discussed and I am glad the Baring Foundation has set the table for conversations to begin.

All the museums mentioned are at different stages in their projects with people with mental health difficulties. Many acknowledge that work in this area is underdeveloped. Let's hope it develops in the right direction and doesn't

follow the rocky road of power imbalance that many older museums are in. I want institutions to know the difference between helping and nurturing, and the authority and influence they have that people with mental health problems don't have. I want the subject of mental health to be looked at more politically than medically. I could fill museum programmes for years on subjects not explored around mental health, and so could many other people who have had lived experience of it. Who is listening to us? I would love to see museums offering curator positions around exhibitions on mental health to people who have had first-hand experience of it. Are these just dreams? A delusion of grandeur?

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“ I could fill museum programmes for years on subjects not explored around mental health, and so could many other people who have had lived experience of it. ”

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This is not to say there is not great practice. There is loads of it mentioned in the following case studies, and I hope you will be uplifted and inspired by it as I have been. Museums can do more than hold power and collect dust. It can be life. This report is a greenhouse cultivating that life. The green shoots of it are beautiful.

WH Auden's poem 'Object' talks of museum objects as holders of grief and wonder. Every kind of person will bring their own interpretation to artefacts. People who have experienced mental distress know so much about grief and wonder, and some will have stories that will bring you to your knees. Museums need to hear as many stories as they can. The stories attributed to objects give them life, but they also help give a community its culture and heritage, and maybe its healing. We don't want our stories in private collections of our own pained hearts. We want to tell our stories; we want to set something free. Thank you, Baring Foundation, for opening the door to this possibility.

**Dolly Sen is a London-born writer, filmmaker, artist, performer and activist. She is a disabled, working class queer, interested in disability and the madness given to us by the world. She currently resides in Great Yarmouth. She/They.**

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Introducing Art Extraordinary to communities all over Glasgow with the first-ever fine art handling kit 'Art Outside of the Box', curated by people in HMP Barlinnie.  
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# Summary

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This report was written to highlight targeted work by museums to engage people with mental health problems, especially using participatory arts. Although there have been a number of significant reports on museums, health and wellbeing more generally, there appears to be no other report solely focusing on work with people with mental health problems.

The Introduction, after describing purpose and definitions, looks at the broad context for this work and its scale, as well as important underpinning principles such as support for staff, safeguarding, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and challenging mental health stigma.

The heart of the report is 16 self-reported case studies. These are divided into three 'specialist museums' created from psychiatric roots, as well as a varied selection of 'non-specialist' museums, including national art collections and local more generalist museums.

Finally, acknowledging that this is a small selection of case studies, some general lessons are drawn. Any type of museum can undertake this work. The key to success is creating a good relationship with local mental health charities and the NHS. There are a wide variety of ways to engage participants from weekly workshops to paid training opportunities. These are rarely run by dedicated staff but by staff with other responsibilities in Learning and Engagement. Work usually takes place on site in the museum or in a community venue and only rarely on hospital wards. It is concluded overall that targeted work on mental health by museums is a relatively less developed area of museum practice.

In the same way that inclusive museums need to 'Family Friendly' or 'Age Friendly', they should be also mental health aware, and this should include targeted work with people with mental health problems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There needs to be explicit recognition by individual institutions and infrastructure bodies with an interest in the museum sector that this is an important area which is currently under-developed.
2. Valuing the lived experience and leadership of people with mental health problems, both staff and community members, is essential to developing work in this area.
3. Museums should proactively reach out to the local NHS and voluntary sector bodies such as Mind to consider areas for collaboration. Targeted provision should be included in discussions.
4. As a minimum, museums should ensure that relevant activities and displays are available for Mental Health Awareness Week (in May) and World Mental Health Day (10 October).
5. Museums should consider training for staff such as Mental Health First Aid Training or Trauma Informed Practice, especially for Learning and Engagement staff.
6. More showcasing events in the sector such as those run by the Holburne Museum in Bath to share good practice and increase visibility are needed along with more online guidance tools.
7. A museum should take a leadership position in this area in the way that the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York did for work with people living with dementia.
8. Museum funders should make clear the relevance of their funding for this work or offer dedicated funding pots. Wherever possible this should be long term funding.



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# Introduction

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This section sets the scene for the case studies. After stating the purpose of the report and how it was compiled, it gives some context including a short history of the field, relevant research and the general development of the work, before looking at some fundamental principles including the support for the mental health of staff, ethical considerations including safeguarding and a duty of care, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

## WHY WE WROTE THIS REPORT

The Baring Foundation and the Museums Association have joined forces as we believe that museums should provide learning and creative opportunities for everyone in society and that includes people with mental health problems. The Baring Foundation has focused on this field for its arts funding since 2020 and the Museums Association campaign Museums Change Lives is the standard bearer for this approach.

Although there has been an increasing recognition of the role of museums in health and wellbeing generally, we were unaware of reports looking more specifically at work with people with mental health problems and felt this was a gap which needed to be filled. It is a sister publication to reports from the Baring Foundation such as *Creatively Minded and Heritage*<sup>1</sup> by the Restoration Trust which took the same approach to the heritage field and covered archives but gave less attention to museums.

## WHO IS THE REPORT FOR?

We hope that this report will be of particular interest to Museum Directors, Learning & Engagement department staff and funders. We also hope that it will be of interest to people

living with mental health problems and the organisations serving them in the charitable sector and the NHS.

## 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 other people may prefer many other terms such 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 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 best known and the much more frequent Common Mental Disorders, especially anxiety and depression. Addictions to drugs and alcohol are included as mental health problems. Also included are conditions such as eating disorders and the poorly defined Personality Disorders.

### Museums

In this report museums are public institutions with collections which they conserve and use as the basis of research and for display purposes. They are often grouped into five categories: general; natural history and natural science; science and technology; and arts and history. The boundaries of what constitutes a museum continue to evolve and be questioned.

<sup>1</sup> *Creatively Minded and Heritage*, The Restoration Trust, 2021.

## Objects

Museums take care of collections of objects. Objects have a special history in health and in psychiatry more specifically.

Looking back, it is interesting to remark that the value of attractive objects in recovery is something that Florence Nightingale strongly believed in as described in her Notes<sup>2</sup> published in 1859.

Much later in the 1950s, a major school of thought was developed by Clare and Donald Winnicott around child psychology, which included the concept of Transitional Objects.<sup>3</sup> Examples of these include blankets and stuffed toys that offer comfort and security to young children and ease their anxiety at physical separation from their mothers.

Object handling is often a part of community engagement practice by museums, including as part of creative workshops. Case studies provided by The Beaney in Canterbury and Glenside Hospital Museum in Bristol for this report include examples of object loan and handling. It has been argued that touch can be therapeutic and give an additional connection which can be meaningful. There has been extensive research into this subject especially by Professor Helen Chatterjee.<sup>4</sup>

## Participatory arts

Participatory arts, sometimes called community arts, are the main funding interest of the Baring Foundation. It takes place when a trained, usually professional artist, shares their skills with a member of the public without that training. The process is often one of co-production. This report does not focus on museums as places for the use of qualified Creative Arts Therapists, but more can be read about this in a research paper from the USA.<sup>5</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

Like a number of other reports by the Baring Foundation, this report is primarily based on a small selection of self-reported case studies, combined with a number of conversations and visits and some desk research. It was decided not to conduct a survey, acknowledging the pressures on museum staff and the likelihood of a low response rate which would be hard to interpret. It is by no means a systematic or exhaustive account and any inferences drawn can only be tentative.

Museums were approached if they were known to be running suitable projects currently or in the recent past. These case studies were selected by the authors to give a range of museums, both specialist and non-specialist, across the UK, and with different types of governance, local authority or university led or independent. Some of the case studies include evidence from independent evaluations.

## CONTEXT

### Some history

There are three interconnecting aspects to this history. Firstly, there are the changing societal attitudes to mental health over centuries which recently has led to a welcome increase in visibility and public discussion. Secondly, alongside this, has been the evolution of psychiatry including of mental health hospitals. Lastly, and most importantly in this context, has been the journey of museums and museology to a more democratic, inclusive and human rights-based approach while continuing to value curation and scholarship. The Museums Association traces its own work on this issue back to the late 1990s in its report *The Case for Inclusive Museums*.<sup>6</sup> A statement of the principles underpinning this approach can be found in the Museums Association's *Manifesto for Learning and Engagement*.<sup>7</sup>

- 2 More about Notes on Nursing can be found here: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notes\\_on\\_Nursing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notes_on_Nursing).
- 3 More about Clare and Donald Winnicott can be found here: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Winnicott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Winnicott).
- 4 *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling*, Ed. Professor Helen Chatterjee, Routledge: 2008.
- 5 Ioannides, E. (2016). Museums as Therapeutic Environments and the Contribution of Art Therapy. *Museum International*. 68. 98-109. 10.1111/muse.12125.
- 6 Valuing diversity: the case for inclusive museums, Museums Association, 2016. Available at: [archive-media.museumsassociation.org/27072016-diversity-report.pdf](https://archive-media.museumsassociation.org/27072016-diversity-report.pdf).
- 7 A manifesto for museum learning and engagement, Museums Association. Available at: [www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/learning-and-engagement/manifesto/#](https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/learning-and-engagement/manifesto/#).

## The Prinzhorn Collection

By 1919 when Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933) went to work at the Psychiatric Department of the University of Heidelberg, in addition to being a doctor, he also had a PhD in art history, was an accomplished trained singer and a combat veteran from World War One. His superior in the Department, Dr Willmans, had already begun a small collection of art work 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.

It is not possible to say when museums in the UK first started to become interested in working with people with mental health problems as a distinct group. It may have been part of a broader approach to inclusion and social justice which has been evident over at least the last thirty years (and in the case of participatory arts since at least the 1960s<sup>9</sup>). Silverman describes a collaborative project at Indiana University in 1997 called MATA: Museums as Therapeutic Agents<sup>10</sup>.

Certainly, there were a number of projects in the 2000s. Pallant House provided the incubator for what has become a major actor in this field, Outside In. This became an independent charity in 2006 which, though not confined to working with people with mental health problems, sees this as a major part of their mission. They have collaborated with Glenside, Glasgow Museums and the Mental Health Museum in the case studies featured here. In 2007, the Holburne Museum in Bath began what would become its Pathways to Wellbeing project.

<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> *A restless art: how participation won and why it matters*, François Matarasso, 2019. Available at: [arestlessart.com/the-book/download-a-digital-copy](http://arestlessart.com/the-book/download-a-digital-copy).

<sup>10</sup> *The social work of museums*, Lois H Silverman, Routledge: 2009.



Care in the Community and deinstitutionalisation from the 1960s has meant that many psychiatric hospitals were vacated. Among other things this has meant that some have become museums in their own right both here, in the case of the Glenside Hospital Museum (page 14) and the Museum of Mental Health (page 18), and abroad (see page 11).

Although not a case study in this report, it is worth stating the imaginative role played in the development of the field by the Wellcome Collection. Part of one of the world's largest grant-making charities whose funding includes mental health research, the Wellcome Collection is based on the enormous collection of artefacts from around the world relating to the history of medicine amassed by its founder, Sir Henry Solomon Wellcome. The Collection (and Library) was opened in 2007 with new galleries in 2015. Early on, the Collection staged a number of high-profile exhibitions related to mental health, one by the artist Bobby Baker, 'Diary drawings, mental illness and me', and 'Bedlam – the asylum and beyond'. The new galleries included the Being Human gallery which commissioned artists to respond to medical and health issues and has hosted work by artists Dolly Sen and the Vacuum Cleaner, both of whom see experiencing mental health problems as part of their practice. Dolly Sen has gone on to use this experience to respond to the Wellcome Archives in relation to its psychiatric records. Lastly, though related, the parent Wellcome Trust is running a major international programme in six cities looking at mental health called 'Mindscapes'.

An impression gained by the author is that there have been a number of efforts over the years to take a strategic view of the role of museums for people with mental health problems, but these have tended to come and go. In 2008, as a result of the National Social Inclusion Plan initiated by a report by the Social Exclusion Unit (both long gone), a training resource for museums was developed called Open to All. In 2010, the then think tank, Culture Unlimited published *Museums of the Mind*. Helpful research and publications came about in the following decade from the National

Alliance for Museums, Health & Wellbeing which was merged into the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

## Research

On a broad conceptual front, in 2009 Silverman in *The Social Work of Museums*,<sup>11</sup> laid out five ways in which museums can contribute to good health:

1. promoting relaxation;
2. immediate interventions on physiology, emotions or both;
3. introspection that is good for mental health;
4. fostering health education;
5. advocating for public health.

In some ways *The Museum as a Space for Social Care* by Nuala Morse in 2021 is the heir to Silverman.<sup>12</sup> This is not specific to work with people with mental health problems and largely considers the work of community engagement teams with Tyne and Wear Museums as the case study. It looks at the care of objects and the care of people.

The evidence base for the positive effects of creativity on the lives of people with mental health problems is rapidly developing and a summary review has been published by the World Health Organization<sup>13</sup>. In their 2013 report, Chatterjee and Noble summarised the benefits from museums for mental health as:

- positive social experiences, leading to reduced social isolation;
- opportunities for learning and acquiring news skills;
- calming experiences, leading to decreased anxiety;
- increased positive emotions, such as optimism, hope, and enjoyment;
- increased self-esteem and sense of identity;
- increased inspiration and opportunities for meaning making;
- positive distraction from clinical environments, including hospitals and care homes;
- increased communication between families, carers and health professionals.<sup>14</sup>

**11** *The social work of museums*, Lois H Silverman, Routledge: 2009.

**12** *The museum as a space of social care*, Nuala Morse, Routledge: 2020.

**13** *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*, Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn, World Health Organization: 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK553773/>.

**14** *Museums, Health and Well-Being*, Helen Chatterjee and Guy Noble, Routledge: 2013.

## THE SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT

How much targeted work by museums with people with mental health problems is happening and is it decreasing or increasing?

This report certainly can't quantify that and there appears to be no recent research that does so. We felt that 16 case studies was a good number to give some exciting examples. We didn't approach all the museums that we knew were operating in this area; however, we couldn't think of large numbers that were. Although we were not able to include a case study from Northern Ireland in this collection, we know that there is relevant work there, including by the Reimagine, Remake, Replay coalition.<sup>15</sup> While our impression is that there is a greater recognition of the role of museums in wellbeing and as places of tranquillity (among other things), it does not feel as if this is happening to the same extent when engaging people with distinct mental health problems.

Research in this area has usually been on a broader front than people with mental health problems. A particularly useful report was published in 2016 based on a survey conducted the previous year for what was the then National Alliance for Museums, Health & Wellbeing. (This has since become part of the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance with a broader membership.) Called *A Preliminary Report*<sup>16</sup>, the authors surveyed museums in the UK alongside other research. 261 museums replied out of roughly 2,000. These museums reported on 603 relevant projects. Working with people with mental health 'issues' was surprisingly popular as the third most frequent project category after older people and dementia. The authors identified 107 projects. However, although only impressionistic, it is noticeable that almost all the projects mentioned in the text do not appear to be running now. Their second report in 2018, *Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing*,<sup>17</sup> had a case study approach with only a few examples of work with people with mental health problems. It is impossible to be sure, but at least possible, that the number of projects may have declined in the last six years.

In contrast to museums, research by the Baring Foundation and by the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance on arts organisations suggests that there are far more either solely working with people with mental health problems, or who have a significant focus in this area. Our report, *Creatively Minded: The Directory*,<sup>18</sup> lists 320 – of which very few are museums – and this is certainly an underestimate.

## VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

In many ways the values and principles relevant to this work are the same as work with other communities: to offer people agency, respect and relevance.

### Good mental health support for museum staff

A holistic and authentic approach to mental health towards community members will need to be responsive and supportive to the mental health of all staff working in a museum. Museums like so many organisations, have come under increased pressure through cuts and austerity, followed by the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Good mental health is therefore coming under greater strain not less. There are many aspects to an appropriate response to this. Although a focus on prevention and wellbeing, such as mindfulness, the use of the outdoors and yoga, is welcome, it is also important to recognise that some staff may have experience of severe or enduring mental health conditions and to make reasonable adjustments for this and ensure a non-stigmatising workplace.

### Safeguarding

All museums will have well developed safeguarding policies which should be relevant for people with mental health problems but it might be advisable to further check these with a relevant body, for instance, when working with an NHS partner.

<sup>15</sup> See: [reimagineremakereplay.org/showcase/head-and-heart](https://reimagineremakereplay.org/showcase/head-and-heart).

<sup>16</sup> *Museums for Health and Wellbeing. A Preliminary Report*, National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing, Lackoi, K., Patsou, M., and Chatterjee, H.J. et al. 2016. Available at: [museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com](https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com).

<sup>17</sup> *Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing: A Second Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing*, Desmarais, S., Bedford, L. and Chatterjee, H.J., 2018. Available at: [www.museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com](https://www.museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com).

<sup>18</sup> *Creatively Minded: the Directory* (2nd edition), The Baring Foundation, 2022.

## Overseas

Bethlem Museum of the Mind (see page 21) is the repository of the records and artefacts of the oldest continuing psychiatric institution in the world, once called Bedlam and founded in 1247. But it is by far from the only one. In the late 18th, and for much of the 19th century, there was a wave of building asylums across continental Europe and in the emerging USA. The thinking of the time was that the aesthetic of the buildings and grounds should be tranquil and attractive and that this helped recovery in the absence of other interventions. These museums typically mix a history of psychiatry with a strong emphasis on the patient's experience and creative responses.

Lapinlahti is an especially lovely example from the early 19th century, set in a park in Helsinki. It continued to be used until the early 21st century before being converted into a 'wellness centre' run by civil society and renamed Lapinlahden Lähde. It has many facets including creative classes for people with mental health problems and a small museum.<sup>19</sup> In Haarlem in the Netherlands, the newly renamed Museum of the Mind won the European Museum of the Year award in 2022

after its redevelopment. It is based in a medieval building called the Dolhuys which was a plague and leper hospital as well as an asylum. In addition, the Museum has a second site in the prestigious Hermitage Museum in Amsterdam which exhibits 'Outsider Art'.

The Museum Ovartaci is based near Aarhus in Denmark and uses the archives and collections of a psychiatric hospital in Risskov. (The Museum of the Mind borrowed an idea from Ovartaci which they report in their case study on page 21). The museum is named after an artist (birth name Louis Marcussen) who lived in the hospital from 1929 to 1985.<sup>20</sup>

In Ghent in Belgium the Dr Guislain Museum began with the reforming project of the pioneering psychiatrist after whom the Museum is named. It is the oldest psychiatric hospital in the country dating back to 1857. It includes an international collection of 'Outsider Art' or 'Art Brut'.<sup>21</sup>

Examples outside Europe include: the Glore Psychiatric Museum in Missouri;<sup>22</sup> the Hamilton Museum of Mental Health Care in Canada;<sup>23</sup> and Heathcote Museum and Gallery near Perth, Australia.<sup>24</sup>

## Equality, diversity and inclusion

Museums are increasingly concerned to show that they are civic actors, available for the whole community and actively considering how to remove any barriers to achieving this. This goes beyond getting the public through the doors in literal access terms but also raises fundamental questions of who is represented and how in collections. Most museums would acknowledge that they have only begun this journey and there is an immense amount to do to dispel an image of unwelcoming organisations that only cater for an elite. There has been a longstanding commitment to consider this for instance in the light of welcoming people with physical

disabilities and more recently People of Colour and LGBT+ communities. The debate about the representation of the slave trade and its many implications is just part of this.

Talking to people with lived experience of mental health problems is part of that journey. The elements of this are familiar: listening to people with mental health problems in order to be guided by them and making programmes and activities both in a targeted way and through broader inclusion. However, this process feels an early stage in many museums or even yet to start in an explicit way.

There are an enormous range of people with mental health problems as shown in these case studies which include young people and adults,

<sup>19</sup> See: [lapinlahdenlahde.fi/en](http://lapinlahdenlahde.fi/en).

<sup>20</sup> See: [www.ovartaci.dk](http://www.ovartaci.dk).

<sup>21</sup> See: [www.museumdrguislain.be](http://www.museumdrguislain.be).

<sup>22</sup> See: [www.stjosephmuseum.org/glore-psychiatric-museum](http://www.stjosephmuseum.org/glore-psychiatric-museum).

<sup>23</sup> See: [www.stjoes.ca/about/our-locations/west-5th/hamilton-museum-of-mental-health-care](http://www.stjoes.ca/about/our-locations/west-5th/hamilton-museum-of-mental-health-care).

<sup>24</sup> See: [www.goolugatup-heathcote.com.au](http://www.goolugatup-heathcote.com.au).



people with undiagnosed conditions, people with 'mild' conditions perhaps referred through GPs and local voluntary organisations, and people with severe and enduring conditions, some of whom could be living for a period on a hospital ward. Mental health conditions are to be considered as disabilities in law and as protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010. Experiencing mental health problems is normal and affects a very large number of people.

Everyone has many aspects to their identity – intersectionality – and these will continue to evolve and have greater salience at different moments. As we will see in these case studies, for some people a targeted approach and the opportunity to learn and be creative with people with similar experiences can be deeply significant. It can offer a highly valued form of communal support. Other people with mental health problems won't see this as necessary and will simply want to be treated with dignity in the same way as any other member of the public when visiting a museum.

### **Valuing lived experience and understanding power inequalities**

Deeply enmeshed in EDI is the attitude of museums to the value of lived experience and their understanding of power dynamics. Museums are hierarchical organisations which understandably value scholarship.

The concept of knowledge equity<sup>25</sup> can be useful; simply put, this asserts that there are at least three types of knowledge: professional (including scholarship and scientific inquiry); practice based such as that acquired by being an artist; and the knowledge that comes from lived experience, such as being a member of a specific community. As regards museums and mental health, all these types of knowledge have a role to play, but traditionally scholarship has tended either to dominate or be exclusively valued.

### **De-stigmatising mental health**

In a parallel fashion to how museums can seek to be anti-racist institutions and challenge misogyny, museums have many ways in which they can seek to de-stigmatise mental health problems. This includes their approach to their staff as well as to their communities and the stances they take in public. A simple way of doing this is to take part in annual events such as Mental Health Awareness Week (annually in May) and World Mental Health Day (10 October). But in the same way that Black History Month is valuable but needs to be part of ongoing approach, so destigmatising mental problems mustn't be seen as confined to short bursts of activity. Advice on this can be found from the host organisation, the Mental Health Foundation.<sup>26</sup> It is helpful for museums to state that they are employing a social model of mental health and an asset based approach to any community, including people with mental health problems.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, [knowledgeequity.org](http://knowledgeequity.org).

<sup>26</sup> [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/mental-health-awareness-week](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/mental-health-awareness-week)



# Case studies

SPECIALIST MENTAL HEALTH MUSEUMS



'The Leaves of the Tree for the Healing of Nations'.  
Photo courtesy of Bethlem  
Museum of the Mind.



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# Glenside Hospital Museum

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BY STELLA MAN

## OVERVIEW

At Glenside Hospital Museum, Bristol, where the floor tiles were scrubbed by the artist Sir Stanley Spencer in 1915, we invite visitors to discover stories from three individual establishments: Glenside Psychiatric Hospital 1861-1994, Stoke Park Colony of Learning Disability Hospitals 1909-2000, and Beaufort War Hospital 1915-1919.

Situated in the beautiful pennant stone church, built in 1881 for the patients of Bristol's pauper asylum, the museum is in a unique position to use heritage to support wellbeing. Set within the walled and landscaped grounds of the purpose-built hospital, the church originated to house a therapeutic community where patients were engaged in meaningful occupation as part of their treatment. A rare example of the intention behind the new Victorian asylums, the church was designed to give hope by including stained glass and carvings illustrating positive bible stories, from the raising of Lazarus to the birth of Jesus.

The museum, an independent charity, opened in 1994. Our priority is to provide opportunities for people to reflect upon mental health and learning disabilities care. We draw attention to personal wellbeing through the safe and stimulating environment of the museum, featuring objects, photographs, drawings and information collected from the former hospitals, and via our online media. As a museum we work with people who provide their time freely, and the challenge when working with those who have many commitments and/or poor health is that deadlines need to be flexible and ambitions elastic. Our volunteering programme engages people of all abilities; the compelling displays are a result of diverse and collective talent.

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“What an interesting and informative time I had visiting your museum. The museum makes people aware of our history and the journey to the 21st century. My favourite part was learning about the purpose of the straight jacket and reasoning behind it.”

**Access to West of England Disability Services**

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Visitor feedback has been analysed since 2010 giving us a clear understanding of our audiences and helping us prioritise the way this distinctive collection is used. Some 60,000 people a year visit us online and come to the museum. An evaluator using the UCL Museum and Wellbeing toolkit concluded that *“the Museum positively impacts the well-being of their visitors whilst challenging them to interact with a mental health collection.”* The measure asked participants to rate wellbeing feelings before and after their visit: ‘inspired’ increased by 23%, ‘engaged’ up 16%, ‘motivated’ up 4.5%, and ‘contentment’ up 3.5%.

Our handling collection has been designed to engage people in conversation about mental health care by focusing on an object's history, purpose and why it has positive intent. It can be adapted for use with any group (10-50 people), from people with dementia, students at school or university to professional health practitioners. It is a popular workshop attracting many repeat bookings, currently at 1,000 participants a year and growing.

The Looking to the Light  
exhibition at Glenside Hospital  
Museum. Photo © Carly Wong.





“The best staff-meeting we’ve ever had, the workshop made us rethink our work.”

**Critical Support Team Avon and Somerset Mental Health Partnership**

## PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

One wellbeing project ‘Captured on Paper’ was created to increase participatory engagement by using our collection of 83 sensitive, documentary pencil, pen and ink drawings of patients’ lives in the 1950s Bristol Mental Hospital, by patient and artist Denis Reed, to engage people in drawing and conversation about mental health care. This was supported by the Museum Association/ Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and Bristol City Council, to develop our community outreach drawing and handling collection workshop programme to attract new and diverse audiences. Many visitors to Glenside Hospital Museum have been affected by mental illness themselves or within their family.

This project saw more visitors come to the museum and visitors affected by mental illness increased from 48% in 2017-18 to 68% in 2018-19.

More recently, Glenside Hospital Museum is one of three UK museums that has partnered with Outside In, a national charity that aims to provide a platform for artists who face significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance or isolation, to offer artists the opportunity to explore our collections. Six ‘New Dialogues’ Exploring Collections courses were run by Glenside, Glasgow Museums (see page 14), and the Mental Health Museum, Wakefield (see page 18), enabled by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, John Ellerman Foundation and The Art Fund. The 30 artists’ responses were wonderfully varied.

Marc Steene, Outside In’s founder and director, said: *“The premise has always been to enable artists with lived experiences to be seen as integral to any research or conversation associated with collections of artwork produced in hospital and health settings.”*



**Drawing the collection at Glenside Hospital Museum. Photo © Stella Man.**



**‘Looking to the Light’ by artist Steven Edgar. Photo courtesy of Glenside Hospital Museum.**

*I have been moved by the courage and bravery of all the artists that have been involved in this work, they are the experts in this field and their research and responses are equal to and often more meaningful than any academic or medical interpretation.”*

Ten talented artists were recruited to explore the Glenside psychiatric hospital collection. Many aspects of the museum – from a padded room to use of mosquitoes in treatments – caught the imaginations of Jackie Bennett, Steve Burden, Steven Edgar, George Harding, Jasmine Janiurek, Anna Rathbone, Ally Schooler, Alison Wills, Natasha Harrison and Damien Moran.

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“The New Dialogues project enabled me to unpick what art means to me including its connection to life. It encouraged us to take the plunge and grow in confidence, to believe in our own creative processes and get creating.”

**Natasha Harrison, artist**

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The theme for the final exhibition in the Museum, ‘Looking to the Light’, was inspired by a photograph taken of Charles West, a patient in 1897, and the stained-glass windows depicting healing, which to this day bathe the museum in coloured light.

### WHAT NEXT?

As we approach our 40th anniversary in 2024, we plan to launch a new initiative ‘Protect Our Wellbeing’ (‘poW!’) designed to support further understanding of self-care and neuroscience, alongside increased ownership of this unique community and national asset by our volunteers and visitors.

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# Mental Health Museum

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BY JANE STOCKDALE, SALLY-ANNE EVANS & PHIL WALTERS

## OVERVIEW

The Mental Health Museum (MHM) is a free-to-visit, forward-looking museum that holds a collection of unique and compelling artefacts that tell the story of mental health care from the 1800s up to the present day. The collection, which is largely built around artefactual material from the West Riding Asylums, continues to grow with our contemporary collecting policy and expanding oral history archive. The museum is based at the Fieldhead Hospital in Wakefield. Run by the South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, the site provides a range of mental health, learning disability and community services as well as medium and low secure inpatient forensic services.

Engaging with people, building links to our communities and opening up discussions around mental health is at the heart of the museum's work. The museum is a co-produced space. Working together with people who access services, carers, friends and family, staff and visitors, the museum explores mental health histories and contemporary experiences while challenging beliefs and perspectives. We are passionate about how getting involved in interpreting our past can help us build understanding and wellbeing.

We have worked hard to transform how we work alongside marginalised groups during the Covid-19 pandemic. This has included working remotely to co-curate exhibitions and content with our community and service user led groups. We have distributed over 2,500 children's wellbeing craft packs to foodbanks across the district, encouraging discussions about feelings and mental health in families living on or below the poverty line. Our Green Year initiative has planned fun activities to help

us explore and engage with the natural world to aid our wellbeing. This has include recruiting a community of 100 'grow-alongers' sharing together the journey from seed to plant.

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“ I went into our back yard on the Saturday afternoon feeling tired and not much interested in anything...Spending an hour sorting out pots and mulch lifted my spirits considerably. ”

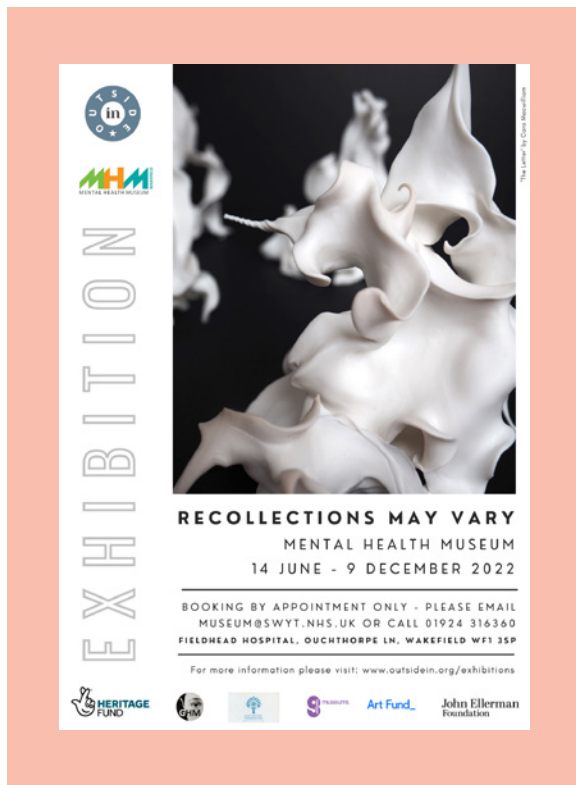
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Our wellbeing offer reinforces the principle of the museum being a safe and supportive space that belongs to the Fieldhead community and its visitors. We have continued to build and develop the museum's wellbeing offer for the Fieldhead community with Citizens Advice now holding fortnightly surgeries in the Museum to provide expert advice to service users, staff and carers.

## 'NEW DIALOGUES' WITH OUTSIDE IN

A major focus of the museum's work over the past two years has been a series of Exploring Collections and Curating programmes delivered alongside partners Outside In and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Outside In is an award-winning charity that provides opportunities and training to artists facing significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstances or social isolation. Across the two-year period we opened up our collections to twelve incredible local artists who each went on to explore, research and respond to objects in the museum's collections.





**Poster for the *Recollections May Vary* exhibition.  
Photo courtesy of the Mental Health Museum.**

The New Dialogues programme involved two collections courses and one curating course. The first course started in February 2021 in the middle of a national Covid-19 lockdown. Over a series of themed presentations, workshops and research activities, each artist was invited to explore the collection by pursuing research paths that would ultimately inform an artistic response to their findings.

As part of these discussions we explored some of the artistic works created by patients of the West Riding Asylum, including Mary Frances Heaton's samplers. We looked at delicate lacework, anonymous stream of consciousness writing and beautifully crafted woodwork made in the asylum workshops. We explored more difficult and challenging items from our collection and reflected on their meaning and how they related to the challenges of mental health today. We discussed identity, surveillance, control, restraint, power, freedom and ideas around recovery in rich and wide-ranging discussions.

Following the presentations and workshops each artist was mentored by the course facilitator and Museum Curator to research their own areas of interest and start responding

artistically to the objects and themes discussed. The artworks made in response to the artist's personal journey through the programme, their research and our objects are fundamental to the programme. These artworks became part of an online exhibition launched in February 2022, *Another Space Within*, and the final pieces are currently displayed throughout the museum space until December 2022 under the title *Recollections May Vary*.

The programme and its delivery had to be flexible and responsive. The first course was delivered entirely online. Both the second collection and the curating course were a hybrid offsite/online delivery as museum access remained restricted due to its location on a working hospital site. Through online presentations and off-site workshops involving objects we were able to introduce some of the museum's story, but it was not possible to experience the museum space in person. The physical distance between the artists and our collections sometimes made it difficult to place objects in a historical or chronological context. Exploring ideas around site-specific responses was also challenging. How would the artistic and creative responses work within the physical space and the existing museum narrative?

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“ Identity, contrast and control  
are ever present in my work...  
That sentence in itself is an epiphany,  
I didn't know I was, I am, an artist. ”

**Doll, Artist**

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This frequent and often unanticipated evolution of the programme's delivery, content and scope did, however, make for a much more dynamic and responsive programme in which the artists had the space and freedom to direct content, as well as contribute and respond to objects and material we had not originally intended to use. This organic, fluid development of the conversations and references from our collection brought lots of additional interest, enjoyment and understanding for the programme participants, course facilitators and museum staff.

Throughout the delivery of the project artists were encouraged to reflect on the experience and following the launch of the exhibition, artists and the project team were invited to work alongside an evaluator to give more detailed feedback on the project. Artists reflected on new skills and a sense of community that had been established. The responsibilities of interpreting stories from the past were considered and the wealth of interpretations that brought a richness to museum displays. The transformative effect of this journey was reflected upon:

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“ Finding ways to sensitively honour the histories and explore my own lived experience through reflection. My practice has developed and it's helped me recognise that as an automatic artist my process can translate just as well to research projects. This has been surprising and enlightening. I hope our work here touches visitors and that our care shines strongly through the work. Hopefully, we have lit up the depth and richness of the West Riding Asylums via a myriad of creative expression. ”

**Cara Macwilliam, Artist**

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## WHAT NEXT?

The impact of this project on our work and our understanding of the museum's collection cannot be underestimated. Raising the profile of historic creative works made by patients at the former West Riding asylums was of course beneficial to the museum and our work to make our collections more accessible. However, the discussions and personal insights into our objects from the artists has been revolutionary in its impact on the museum team, both personally and professionally. The new conversations, observations, insights and challenges to existing narratives brought by the artists over the course of the programme have completely changed the ways in which we will work with our collection going forward. We hope to continue working with the artists to further extend our interpretation and outreach through audience development activities, and continue our partnership with Outside In which has brought new and exciting insight into our working practices.

# Bethlem Museum of the Mind

BY COLIN GALE



Submissions to 'The Leaves of the Tree for the Healing of Nations'. Photo courtesy of Bethlem Museum of the Mind.

## OVERVIEW

Bethlem Museum of the Mind records the experiences, and celebrates the achievements, of people with mental health problems. It is situated within the grounds of Bethlem Royal Hospital (the original 'Bedlam'), a working psychiatric hospital with a continuous history that stretches back 775 years. Mental health service users, and those with experience of mental distress, have always been an extremely important set of stakeholders to the Museum. Reaching out to this demographic became more difficult, but also more critically important, during the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic seemed to highlight mental health as a concern for everyone, rather than as a niche issue limited to those with a psychiatric diagnosis.

## THE LEAVES OF THE TREE FOR THE HEALING OF NATIONS

Successive lockdowns posed the same challenges for Bethlem Museum of the Mind as they did for the cultural and heritage sector as a whole. There was a period of months at the start of 2021 during which museums and other venues were not permitted to open to the public as England moved through steps 1, 2 and 3 of its route out of lockdown. In these months, the Museum issued an open call to its audiences to contribute their reflections on their experience of Covid-19. Twitter-length submissions were received online, written onto non-medical grade facemasks, and placed onto a tree installed within the Museum for the purpose. Each week, video instalments featuring new submissions were uploaded onto YouTube and shared via the Museum's website



and social media channels. A permanent record of the project is available on the museum's YouTube channel.<sup>27</sup>

The tree was practically bare at the commencement of the project in February 2021, and over the course of the following weeks and months gradually became festooned with facemasks bearing poignant messages, as well as with leaves. The conclusion of the project coincided with the arrival of spring, and the end of the coronavirus lockdown in England. The tree remained on display in the museum for the first six weeks of its re-opening to the public, as an invitation to reflect on and rescript the experience of the pandemic and the social restrictions ushered in as a result. It felt like an appropriate three-dimensional acknowledgment of that shared experience, as we began to return to more traditional, in-person museum interactions.

Inspiration for the project came from another mental health museum – Museum Ovarfati in Aarhus, Denmark – where a similar project, simply called 'The Pandemic Tree', was launched in late 2020. 'The Leaves of the Tree for the Healing of the Nations' attracted 44 participants, some of whom self-identified as mental health service users, and all of whom had been impacted by coronavirus and/or the social restrictions that followed in its wake. The video updates attracted 4,100 views within three months of being uploaded. Project outcomes were evaluated for us by our Danish colleagues, who found that the reason a majority of respondents gave for participating was their interest in issues of wellbeing tackled by the Museum, with one person saying:

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*“I recently lost a loved one ... and I felt it was a chance to convey feelings which may touch others.”*

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At the heart of the project were, of course, the written submissions we received:

*“I’m a student. Housemates and I have all been suffering from mental illness without enough treatment, but we’ve taken care of each other.”*

*“People make me sick. I am severely agoraphobic. Lockdown has been an unusual experience. I have felt less isolated, knowing that others are doing the same as I am.”*

*“Lockdown has meant being in control of my limited interactions with the rest of the world. It has been a time when society has confirmed that it’s scary to be outside my home and in the company of others. I haven’t had to make excuses or dread seeing people. Zoom has given me the chance to plan and enter a distanced social life.”*

*“COVID has given me a different mindset. I now appreciate that everything is not linear and that the emotions that we experience can change from day to day. Stopping and reflecting on what matters most to me has helped me a lot.”*

'The Leaves of the Tree for the Healing of the Nations' was the last in a series of online projects undertaken by Bethlem Museum of the Mind during a year or more of lockdown. It did not constitute a therapeutic intervention in any formal sense, but it certainly attracted profound reflection and self-disclosures. Here at the Museum, we regard this as a more meaningful achievement than any measurable increase in the Museum's profile that may have resulted from the project. Focusing on communities with significant investment in issues of mental health was nothing new for the Museum, but reaching out online and via social media to do so was part of the digital pivot made necessary by circumstances. A key learning point for us was that putting out an online call to contribute to a topic like this was a good way to reach people without a mental health diagnosis but who consider themselves to have a problem, and are willing to make disclosures on the basis of anonymity and on their own terms. This is something we want to do again in the future.

In fact, everything involved in our digital pivot was part of our learning, but so was the value (in terms of wellbeing) placed by visitors on the face-to-face, flesh-and-blood encounters that we were unable to begin delivering until the very close of the project.

Colin Gale is Director at Bethlem Museum of the Mind. [museumofthemind.org.uk](http://museumofthemind.org.uk)

<sup>27</sup> [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfyYL5ahcfl0KOSm-AqEQUywcxfK6Pnsp](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfyYL5ahcfl0KOSm-AqEQUywcxfK6Pnsp)



# Case studies

## NON SPECIALIST MUSEUMS

*People Make Museums* exhibition: a sculpture on display in the Garden Café at the Holburne Museum, 2022. Photo courtesy of the Holburne Museum.





# The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge

BY JEMMA CHANNING



Display at 'A Place of Safety' exhibition at The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge. Photo © Jemma Channing.

## OVERVIEW

The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge is a museum, gallery and library in the heart of historic Canterbury, Kent. Since reopening in 2012 the museum has embedded health and wellbeing across its activities.

The museum uses the varied collection as a part of a diverse Health and Wellbeing programme that encourages everyone to get involved. With a carefully designed programme and working in partnership with health and social care organisations to design accessible, relevant and enjoyable activities, the museum

is able to support everyone to engage with culture and experience the positive impact it can have on wellbeing.

The museum has worked with people with mental health conditions historically, working with community organisations to deliver events and exhibitions which support people with mental health conditions to engage whilst also shining a light on the issues affecting mental illness for our wider visitor population.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we were able to innovate our offer to engage people in their homes in an effort to reduce loneliness, which we know can have a severe negative impact on wellbeing. Additionally, we were



aware that ward based mental health patients would be experiencing additional difficulties, unable to leave the ward for trips or have visitors due to the Covid-19 restrictions, in addition to existing restrictions on their activities.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

During the lockdowns we worked with Kent and Medway Partnership NHS Trust, our local NHS mental health service, through their psychology teams, to loan object handling boxes to the wards. The boxes were changed regularly and staff were provided with information and activities. During the lockdowns there were 1,800 engagements across six wards over 12 months. Feedback from patients and staff was positive, with patients reporting that they enjoyed the opportunity to take part in activities they wouldn't normally do and with staff reporting that patients who usually weren't engaged with ward activities were participating in loan box sessions. Patients enjoyed sessions so much that they started asking for specific loan boxes covering different periods of history and reported they looked forward to the sessions.

We then decided to put on an exhibition about mental health in light of the current issues facing the community around us, and nationally. The exhibition 'A Place of Safety' looked at how mental illness had been conceptualised and treated, with a particular focus on asylums as a place of safety, and what this meant in practice.

It was important from the outset that the exhibition had input from mental health service users as well as curators and mental health professionals. All of the contemporary art in the exhibition was by artists with lived experience of a range of mental health conditions including depression, anxiety and psychosis.

With the place of treatment the focus of the exhibition, we also wanted to ensure that people currently in hospital were able to participate and share their views, and approached Kent and Medway Partnership NHS Trust to build on our existing partnership to enable patients to participate in the exhibition.



**Artwork by Kate Richardson.**  
Photo courtesy The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge.

Patients had facilitated sessions on the ward using images of artworks from the collection alongside objects from the museum's collections from St Augustine hospital, previously the county asylum, which closed in 1993. Using these artefacts, the patients had a facilitated discussion and object handling session, followed by a creative activity which explored what a place of safety meant to them. Providing cultural engagement away from the museum for people who would not be able to visit made it more accessible, and gave the patients an opportunity to talk about their experiences, especially as many patients and staff remembered the old St Augustine hospital. Both staff and patients took part in the workshops.

Patients were initially supported to write poetry, but many of the patients continued their sessions self directed, producing paintings, drawings and lanterns for the exhibition. These works were displayed in the exhibition alongside works by Louis Wain, Richard Dadd, Dolly Sen and Liz Atkin.

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“To be here today, and see my work ... it feels so special.”

“I am overwhelmed to be honest with you, it's wonderful.”

“It feels nice to be part of something.”

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During the process, we met with the project manager overseeing the design of a new mental health ward in the region. We were able to gather feedback from patients and staff and cascade this to the team responsible for the ward build.

Working in partnership with staff from Kent and Medway Museums Partnership, patients from every participating ward were supported to visit the exhibition with staff to see their work and spend some time in the museum. Feedback from patients and staff was overwhelmingly positive.

Participation in the object handling sessions was documented by psychology staff using quantitative data and thematic analysis who found that:

**90%** of ward patients engaged with the ward based activity

**88%** of patients felt that it gave them an opportunity to connect with other patients and staff on the ward

**96%** of patients reported that they felt positive about their work being exhibited in The Beaney

**92%** of patients reported that engaging with object handling and creative activities was a positive experience.

## WHAT NEXT?

We will be continuing our partnership with the Trust to build on the positive outcomes already achieved. Patients and staff both identified a lack of services to bridge the gap between discharge from the ward and resettling at home. The museum is now working with the Trust's service improvement team to look at how services can be developed which support patients post-discharge by providing activities at the museum which support their recovery and integration into the community.

Additionally, we will be focusing on widening participation for different service user groups including undertaking projects with the Neuropsychology and Early Intervention in Psychosis teams.

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# Dulwich Picture Gallery: Together through Art

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BY JANE FINDLAY, KELLY ROBINSON AND ALEX BOWIE



Together Through Art workshop. Photo © Dulwich Picture Gallery.

## OVERVIEW

We are an ambitious gallery, creating meaningful and inclusive encounters with art. Our vision is to be an inspirational cultural destination for everyone, unlocking fresh perspectives through the art of the past and present. We remain true to our founders' innovation in presenting art 'for the inspection of the publick' through our ground-breaking programme of exhibitions, co-produced displays, contemporary commissions and creative activities. We aim to be an active agent for positive change, creating healthier and happier communities by embedding creativity in people's lives. Collaboration is reflected

across all our activities. Rooted in our locality, we work together with grassroots community, arts and VCSE groups and networks, schools and higher education setting partners in Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham. Together, we platform diverse voices, evolving dynamically with the needs of our communities. Our key areas of focus are relevance, employability and health and wellbeing.

Our Health and Wellbeing work is delivered by working collaboratively with health partners to use the arts and creativity to support increased outcomes within the areas of mental health, social isolation, and long-term health conditions and promoting collaborative and



community-based approaches. It has been developed through partnerships, working with the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) Recovery College and the Tessa Jowell Health Centre. The programmes include co-production working with people with lived experience of accessing services for their mental health, social prescription using the arts as a tool for wellbeing and new artwork commissions which enhance the healing environment.

We were aware that access to the arts can be a valuable tool to support people with mental health. By working in a partnership model with local health partners, we have been able to develop programmes and projects that respond to the local need and additionally provide new ways for us to use the Gallery, its collection, exhibitions and grounds as a resource to be used to support health and wellbeing.

## TOGETHER THROUGH ART

The Together through Art (TTA) programme at Dulwich Picture Gallery supports young people with lived experience of mental health difficulties and aims to reduce the stigma which surrounds mental health.

Working in partnership with the South London and Maudsley (SLaM) Mental Health Trust Recovery College, the Gallery piloted a paid training and development programme for five local young people aged 18-25 who have lived experience of accessing child or adult mental health services. The project aimed to equip the participants with tools and experiences to share how they had used creativity in their lives to support their wellbeing to help children and young people in our priority boroughs.

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“ I want to further develop my established connection between art and mental health. As an artist and someone who has experienced challenges with my own mental wellbeing, I think that it is important for me to gain as much information as possible to create spaces where healing can be possible through creativity. ”

**Participant**

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Each participant took part in a paid six-month paid training and development programme delivered by the Gallery and the SLaM Recovery College to become Creative Peer Facilitators (CPFs). Working alongside the Gallery’s artist team, CPFs used the co-production model to co-design and co-deliver bespoke creativity and wellbeing workshops for children and young people in Primary and Secondary Schools in our priority boroughs. The workshops used artworks in the Gallery’s collection as a starting point to explore creative resilience, mindfulness and cultural capital with the students.

One of the main challenges of the project was the coordination of all of the creative delivery teams to match the availability of the school groups. We worked with over 500 children and young people and ensuring that there was space for them in our art studio for the creative workshops was quite a juggle. It was crucial to ensure that the CPFs were also supported throughout this process.

For the Gallery one of the biggest assets for the project was the experiences, ideas and enthusiasm that the CPFs brought to the project and the wider Gallery. Their ability to talk openly about the difficulties they had had with their mental health was refreshing and key to the success of the project.

For many of the schools we worked with it was the first time they had taken part in a project with Dulwich Picture Gallery. Increased levels of anxiety and poor mental health among students post lockdown was one of the key reasons schools wanted to take part. One teacher said she wanted to gain *“a greater understanding of how to plan and facilitate arts based approaches to wellbeing and mental health”*. Their comments on the workshops included that they were *“accessible for all and well resourced”* and that children were able to *“broaden their emotional literacy”*. Teachers also commented that being involved in the project had raised cultural capital across the school and highlighted the diversity of ways our collection can be used. They have also taken inspiration from the mindfulness sessions in the project to use similar methods in school.

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“For me personally, the opportunity to use my lived experience at work has been hugely refreshing and quite unique. To be able to teach others about the ways art can benefit mental well-being has helped me personally gain insight and understanding into mentally difficult times and find purpose in my professional and personal work going forward.”

**Creative Peer Facilitator**

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For all CPFs the project had a positive impact on their confidence devising and delivering creative sessions. Notably, they all continue to be creative facilitators for the Gallery and other organisations. The connections built with the artists they were paired with continues to provide strong support when engaging in future work.

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“Being surrounded by so many talented, organised and skilled people has been a wonderful chance in seeing how multiple teams come together to create something like this and that despite the pandemic, a career in the arts is not unobtainable or non-existent – quite the opposite.”

**Creative Peer Facilitator**

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## WHAT NEXT?

The project has enabled the Gallery to build new and stronger relationships with the local creative community. We have secured funding from Southwark Council to deliver wellbeing workshops for local children in Year 6 to support their transition to secondary school. We will use the learning from TTA to inform what these workshops look like and will work with the TTA team of CPFs and artists to devise and deliver it.

We hope to run another TTA project in the year to come, following this model, taking learning and comments from the participants this year. We hope to explore new artforms such as drama and dance, as this project focused on visual art.

## Dylan Thomas Centre

JO FURBER



'Literature and Trauma' workshop participants with Eric Ngalle Charles. Photo courtesy of Swansea Council/Dylan Thomas Centre.

### OVERVIEW

Swansea's Dylan Thomas Centre houses a permanent exhibition on Thomas, 'Love the Words', and runs a programme of literature, learning and engagement activities. Part of Swansea Council's Cultural Services, it is an international hub for Dylan Thomas studies and for local visitors, tourists, and education groups of all ages.

Thomas' work is the starting point for an exploration of literature, creativity, and identity, with much of our work devoted to supporting others to express themselves. We run a busy programme of creative writing workshops for children, family engagement activities on and off site, and partnership projects with local, national and international organisations.

We have a long-term commitment to working with displaced people. In 1999 the UK Government announced that asylum seekers would be 'dispersed' to Swansea. Swansea Asylum Seekers Support Group (SASS) formed to help support displaced people, promote equality and diversity, develop community cohesion, provide training for displaced people and advance education amongst the general public about issues relating to asylum. Swansea Council and the Dylan Thomas Centre in particular have worked closely with SASS on partnership projects, alongside other organisations such as African Community Centre and City of Sanctuary. Since the early 2000s we have been hosting launches for anthologies of creative writing written by refugees, asylum seekers and local people, and for the last five years running creative writing workshops for these communities.



Links between creative writing and wellbeing are well established, and regular discussions with those seeking sanctuary and the services providing support to them have articulated that there is an audience for a stimulating and supportive creative outlet. Working in partnership with other organisations ensures that participants' needs are met; for example counselling is available through the African Community Centre, while City of Sanctuary have provided staff training. The format of our ongoing creative writing workshops is practical and flexible, and informed by consultation and feedback with attendees.

## LITERATURE AND TRAUMA WORKSHOPS

Our 'Literature and Trauma' workshops are led by the acclaimed Cameroonian writer Eric Ngalle Charles, an experienced tutor specialising in delivering writing workshops that specifically consider the trauma of the refugee experience. He has co-edited and published several poetry anthologies by refugees, migrants and indigenous artists with Hafan Books, the publishing arm of SASS. Eric's own experiences of seeking sanctuary in Wales inform his approach, and his ability to speak seven languages make him uniquely well placed to communicate with participants. Workshops take place in blocks of six to eight sessions, around three times a year. Participants come when they are able, and by the nature of the community, new people arrive and others leave. The workshops are designed to be engaging and relaxed, so people can come and go during the course of the session according to other commitments.

To make the workshops as accessible as possible, we cover the costs of an all-day bus ticket and provide refreshments and children's activities. Individuals with small children have few options for childcare to attend a writing class, which makes our existing Learning Space the perfect venue: a classroom can be set up for the participants whilst the children play in the designated 'nook' beside it. This has two brilliant outcomes: those who might otherwise be unable to attend the workshop instead feel welcome and assured that their children will be entertained in a rich educational environment, and in this way we are already welcoming entire families into the Dylan Thomas Centre



**'Literature and Trauma' workshop participants. Photo courtesy of Swansea Council/Dylan Thomas Centre.**

and delivering upon our underlying family friendly ethos. This not only encourages repeat visits to the exhibition and participation in our family learning sessions, but also signposts families to the different events that we provide across Swansea Council's Cultural Services – events that they may have felt were not accessible to them, or that perhaps they may not have known were available (and often free). As such, the writing sessions increase engagement, community cohesion, encourage friendships and a greater sense of belonging.

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“ You can see how the various participants have grown in confidence, good communications and social skills, the opportunity for networking means an offer of hope, their continuous attendance and listening to others share their stories acts as both an inspiration and motivation. The idea of meeting with others in almost a similar situation offers a sort of escapism. More importantly, the clients develop their own voices and their own unique ways of telling their stories. ”

**Eric Ngalle Charles**

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We were delighted for Eric and the participants when this project won the 2020 Museums Change Lives Best Small Museum Project for its social impact. The award has been the catalyst for greater awareness of the project, and we have been able to share our experiences of developing it so other organisations can tailor it to their own contexts. Eric and I have spoken about it at the 2021 Migration Museum

South-West and Wales conference, and at the 2022 International Council of Museums conference. It has also been included as a good practice case study for the international Agenda 21 Pilot Cities programme and by Wales' Future Generations Commissioner.

### WHAT NEXT?

Future plans include developing further partnerships to increase opportunities for participants, for example with CADW we are organising a visit to and creative writing sessions at Laugharne Castle in the town where Dylan Thomas also lived. Through our Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project, we are also developing a programme of family learning and literature-based activities to run at the SASS drop-ins, and we are hoping to create an anthology of participants' work inspired by the next series of 'Literature and Trauma' workshops.

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“As a friend, or as a family now, we just try to encourage people to come to this project to share their story if they want. I like to tell people what we've been through. We have lots of problems in our life, but still we are here now. We have a chance to speak in front of people. Before that I was nervous. But Eric always told me, 'It is only you who can tell your own story to other people'.”

**Saba, workshop participant**

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# The Foundling Museum: Tracing our Tales

BY LUCY ANDERSON AND CARO HOWELL MBE



Tracing our Tales trainees at the Foundling Museum. Photo © Louis Mealing.

## OVERVIEW

The mission of London's Foundling Museum is to transform lives through creative action, especially the lives of young people leaving care, disadvantaged children and struggling families.

We tell the story of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity, established in 1739 to care for babies at risk of abandonment. It was also the UK's first public art gallery, thanks to artists including Hogarth, Gainsborough and Handel, who donated their work. Today our exhibitions, projects and learning programmes

bring our remarkable history to life and reveal its continuing relevance to audiences of all ages.

Our child-focused story provides a special opportunity to engage younger audiences, especially those with care experience. In 2017 we established Tracing Our Tales, the first paid museum traineeship for care-leavers aged 18-26 which runs for five months at a time.

Children enter the care system for a variety of reasons, with abuse and neglect a common factor. Being taken into care is often traumatic and most care-experienced young people who



work with us have diagnosed mental health conditions (PTSD, anxiety, and depression) and complex needs.

The success of Tracing Our Tales and its sustained impact on participants' self-esteem and self-confidence has encouraged us to expand our artist-led approach into other areas. We have recently established a new partnership with Mind Camden, who refer their members to our eight-week creative projects, which are inspired by the museum's collection. We have also collaborated with Maudsley Hospital's Eating Disorder Outpatient Service, working with patients on a project that explored each patient's unique experiences, histories and emotions.

All our community inclusion work is led by professional artists, from nursery workshops to social prescribing projects for adults with poor mental health. This is particularly important for our work with care-experienced young adults, as artists are powerful role-models for self-determination and self-belief, providing support and encouragement that is accessible, non-judgemental and focussed on strengths, not deficits.

## TRACING OUR TALES

The museum's Tracing Our Tales (TOT) Traineeship is the only museum-run programme of its kind and has been running for five years. The project is led by Emma Middleton, our Curator; Artists Projects. Since 2021, thanks to funding from the Baring Foundation, we doubled our training provision and the traineeship now runs twice a year. A visual art course with artist Albert Potrony runs across spring and summer and a creative writing course with writer Belinda Zhawi runs through autumn and winter.

The paid traineeship is an opportunity for young people to develop a variety of creative and life skills, and gain experience devising and delivering family workshops within the museum. The training validates their lived experience and has relevance to their lives. Participants are recruited through the close working relationships Emma has developed with organisations that provide additional resources and support to young people leaving care. We recruit 10-15 young people per course, with 1-2 graduates returning as champions each year to encourage and

motivate participants. Small numbers enable us to provide sustained support, creating real and lasting change in the lives of the trainees.

The young people who participate often remark that it is rare to meet other people with a similar background to them, and that the museum offers a sense of shared ancestry. This helps to create peer networks that are a further source of support. If one participant is experiencing a challenging period, there is usually another in the group who has experienced something similar and can offer advice. Within sessions, decisions are often made collectively, which further strengthens the group.

Trainees experience a combination of mental health issues that often result in very poor self-esteem and self-confidence. The workshop facilitators instil self-belief by ensuring trainees' agency and autonomy is respected; they are included in decision making and encouraged to contribute to activity planning. Activities are carefully balanced, pushing trainees beyond their comfort zones but in ways that are manageable and encouraging.

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“ The traineeship gave me the confidence to develop my art skills and believe in my creative ability. It was the only source of joy that I had whilst in lockdown. It gave me purpose and enabled me to focus on finding beauty and potential in the little things. ”

**Sherri Dunbar, 2021 traineeship course champion and recently-appointed Foundling Museum Trustee**

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As part of their course, trainees are offered paid opportunities to assist on family workshops. After graduating, they can continue to run workshops, further building their skills and confidence. Several graduates have gone on to higher education and employment, including civil service internships and work at other museums and galleries, including the British Museum and Dulwich Picture Gallery.

The traineeship is independently evaluated through observation and interviews, collecting information on attendance, demographics and following up with current and previous

participants and their case workers, to assess long-term impact. In the most recent evaluation, 100% of trainees would recommend the traineeship to other care-experienced young adults and 67% said they had gained a new sense of self-belief and self-confidence.

Participants also reported improved mental health. One trainee, prior to her participation in the traineeship, had such severe social anxiety that she found it difficult to leave the house on a regular basis. She said:

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“I’ve made friends, got out of the house every week on time, my opinions are valued, it’s helped cope with my fear of rejection, basically it’s been amazing, and made me feel confident.”

**Trainee**

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Every year, trainees exhibit their work in the museum’s Introductory Gallery, which gives them visibility and voice, and enables them to take ownership of their stories within the context of the museum. The traineeship gives visitors fresh perspectives and brings relevance to the Foundling Hospital’s 300-year-old story.

## WHAT NEXT?

Tracing Our Tales is central to our community inclusion work. Its success has instigated a number of new projects, including a pilot project with teenagers living in supported housing.

The traineeship continues to grow and expand, to encompass additional projects. We are developing an online portal for care leavers, which will share aspects of the traineeship and support paths into creative industries, and John Lyons Charity are funding a year-long fellowship for a care leaver. We have begun a new project with graduate trainees, who are co-curating our Spring 2023 exhibition, combining the museum’s collection, loans from the National Gallery and new commissions.

# Glasgow Museums: Art Extraordinary

BY CLAIRE COIA



**That's Extraordinary!** display case curated by Project Ability, 2018. Photo ©CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection.

## OVERVIEW

Glasgow Museums cares for over 1.4 million objects, with fewer than 2% on public display at any one time. The remaining 98% of the collection is stored at Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (GMRC), a world-class publicly accessible museum storage facility with 17 climate-controlled 'pods'. GMRC is a busy hub with over 100 staff members working to care for and make this vast collection accessible. Not everyone, however, is able to visit museums in person. The Open Museum is the outreach arm of Glasgow Museums. We take the collections out of storage and into the heart of Glasgow's communities, to people who can't, won't or don't access museum venues.

What are objects but extensions of ourselves, of who we are, who we aspire to be and how we make sense of our world? This case study explores how people who are experts by experience are often better placed than a museum curator to interpret specific collections.

“We need exposure to our own lives and stories and to other people's lives and stories to build our empathy and compassion. Curiosity, creativity and art allows us to experience and contemplate being human.”

**Community Curator**



## ABOUT 'ART EXTRAORDINARY'

From pen sketches to plasticine portraits, *Art Extraordinary* is a unique collection of Scottish based 'Outsider Art'. Most of the artists who feature in this collection are people who had no formal art training, were marginalised, and whose mental health was cared for in and out of hospitals. The collection was donated to Glasgow Museums in 2012 by Scotland's first art therapist, Joyce Laing, a pioneer in the field of art and mental health. Throughout her career she collected over 1,000 works of art, collected in hospital or prison spaces or gifted by the people that she mentored or befriended. Chance conversations with taxi drivers and hospital staff, and rummaging in skips and hospital grounds became a breadcrumb trail as she discovered the most astonishing art in the most unlikely of places. All these things mean that the stories of the collection are largely unknown. How can a museum curator interpret a collection with a rich but sometimes unknowable history?

Scottish History Curator Dr Tony Lewis introduced me to Dr Cheryl McGeachan from the University of Glasgow, who explores geographies of mental (ill)health. This partnership has catalysed over a decade of collaboration with a range of dynamic organisations and passionate individuals. Together, we have worked to create platforms to share expertise, skills, and knowledge. Our first step was to consider how the collection could be used in a contemporary context, exploring the themes of art and mental health. To interpret the collection in an informed and ethical way, we needed to work with the experts: people with lived experience of mental ill health and healthcare providers.

Our project took the collection beyond the walls of the museum. Time, space and contexts change, and we wanted to find the stories which resonate with people today. What universal conversations do these artworks provoke? How can an odd-looking kettle-spaceship or an embroidered hospital pillowcase communicate emotions and experiences? These early conversations led to our first major project – a year-long exhibition of Art Extraordinary and events programme in Pollok Civic Realm, on the south side of Glasgow.

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“ Our ethos for collaboration is embedded within working with communities and individuals to explore the collection. We are passionate about using the collection to understand more about the lived experiences of mental (ill)health and confinement, and the power of creativity to create spaces for care, understanding, and social justice. We are indebted to Joyce Laing and her inspirational attempts to harness and showcase the power of creative practice and the importance of listening and learning from the margins. ”

**Dr Cheryl McGeachan**

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The exhibition was curated by people who access the Leverndale Hospital Recreational Therapy Unit and artists from Project Ability. We also worked with people in HMP Barlinnie to curate our first handling kit to contain fine art, enabling the collection to be accessed by people in their own communities. Each group learned basic curatorial and research skills, from object handling and preventive conservation to archival research and writing exhibition text. In return, we gained new insights into the artworks from a lived experience of mental (ill)health and how they can be used to enable discussion of often 'difficult' themes.

### Outsider Art?

We found that the term 'Outsider Art' fuelled debate as we hosted group discussions, seminars and events. Many ideas constitute the notion of the 'outsider artist'. This term can be problematic because it reinforces a boundary between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', imposing rules on who gets to belong where. This artificial boundary also provokes questions regarding the motives for the collection and display of 'outsider art' by 'insiders', a line of questioning especially pertinent given that Glasgow Museums is now responsible for the collection.

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“ Art collected in these circumstances would previously have been called outsider art or *art brut* due to their connections with art made outside of mainstream culture. Joyce found these labels inappropriate and preferred the more positive term Art Extraordinary. She chose this term because when she would show people the art they would often react by saying ‘That’s extraordinary!’ ”

**Project Ability exhibition text, 2018**

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### Museum milestones

Our collaborations have also led to a wide-ranging public programme of events, academic papers, updated collection information, as well as talks and tours of the collection in storage. The first permanent exhibition of Art Extraordinary launched in July 2022, the first permanent display to be community-curated in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow.

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“ The exhibition is a milestone. It has taken a decade to get here: from accessioning the collection to now. Mental health art and care’s importance have finally been formally recognised in this prestigious public space. The case is in the building’s east wing – an area called Expression. The case shows people expressing themselves through art and words to represent mental health as an issue for visitors to consider and discuss with friends, family and of course, staff. ”

**Dr Tony Lewis**

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The project has grown far beyond our expectations, and far beyond the museum walls. Artists from Leverndale were inspired to create their own artistic responses for exhibition at the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival in 2019. Project Ability was successful in securing National Lottery Heritage Funding to expand their research of ‘Outsider Art’ UK-wide, resulting in their independent exhibition *Extraordinary Responses* in their gallery space in January 2020. A few months later, the entire nation went into lockdown. It took a pandemic to explore alternative ways of engaging and working with each other – pathways made popular because the privileged majority could not leave their homes. We, for example, developed ‘Art Extraordinary’ postcard packs online with community groups during lockdown and posted them out to hospitals, prisons and people in isolation.

The hopes of getting back to ‘normal’ aren’t shared by everyone. Our current online project, exploring Art Extraordinary in partnership with award-winning charity Outside In, is a call to maintain a hybrid model of online and physical engagement. Our Zoom-based courses resulted in a digital exhibition in January 2022, and the temporary exhibition *Unlocking the Extraordinary* will be displayed at both Kelvingrove Museum and the Project Ability gallery in August 2022. By putting the power of curation into the hands of the experts, new ways of engaging with the collection have emerged. And with over 1,000 artworks in this treasure trove, who knows what stories are waiting to be told.

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# Holburne Museum: Pathways to Wellbeing

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BY LOUISE CAMPION



**Museums Inspire! Creativity and wellbeing group for University of Bath students, 2021, at the Holburne Museum. Photo courtesy of the Holburne Museum.**

## OVERVIEW

The Holburne is a small, independent museum with a national reputation. Founded in 1882 as Bath's first art museum, it houses the collection of Sir William Holburne (1793-1874). An award-winning extension by architect Eric Parry in 2011 created beautiful new spaces for additional galleries and a garden café. As well as displaying portrait miniatures, Renaissance bronzes, ceramics, silver, and embroidery the museum is renowned for its eighteenth-century British portraits. A new vision to bring contemporary art to the region

has resulted in an increasingly varied exhibition programme including international artists. The museum attracts over 90,000 visitors a year, with 1,000 Members and 300 volunteers. The Grade 1 listed building is important in the history of Georgian Bath, being the entry-point through which the Sydney Pleasure Gardens were accessed.

The Holburne's long-standing commitment to supporting mental health and wellbeing is articulated in its vision statement of 2019: *Our vision is to make the Holburne an open, welcoming, inspiring, and empowering space*



*for everyone. At the heart of this vision is the powerful relationship of art, creativity, and social and personal wellbeing.*

Since 2007, when the Holburne's learning team first began to work with the homeless community in the surrounding public park, the power of creativity to promote mental health has been recognised and embraced by museum staff, volunteers and trustees and is embodied in our strapline 'Changing Lives Through Art'. Now, with 15 years' experience facilitating and managing our expanding Pathways to Wellbeing programme of supported creative activities, the Holburne has developed and embedded an ethos of care. A recent Independent Evaluation of the Pathways to Wellbeing Programme describes this as having 'created a culture shift within the museum'.<sup>28</sup>

## PATHWAYS TO WELLBEING

Pathways to Wellbeing is a museum-based community engagement programme, led by the Holburne Museum, managed and administrated by a two-person team. It supports people with lived experience of mental health issues and social isolation to engage with local heritage and creative art activities, delivering measurable improvements in mental health and wellbeing. In partnership with other Bath Museums, we aim to open local heritage, visual art and creative opportunities to underrepresented people who might not usually visit museums or be able to access paid-for art courses, specialist teaching, mentoring and supportive groups. A range of regular groups run throughout the year providing free access to inspiring exhibitions and collections, professional socially engaged artists, museum mentors and high-quality arts materials and equipment.

The programme's aim is to provide safe, non-judgmental spaces where people can find inspiration from our sites and historical collections and lose themselves in playful creativity in the company of others who have a shared understanding of mental health

challenges. We don't provide art therapy, but we do recognise the therapeutic value of creativity.

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“ I've found art (and the group) has helped as a form of distraction and as something relaxing when I am stressed; it has also taught me useful art skills so that I can apply these to do art in my own time when my mental health isn't great. ”

**Participant from 'Museums Inspire'<sup>29</sup> group, 2021**

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Over the last three years (2019-22) over 900 people have engaged with our creative activities. We have delivered 280 face-to-face sessions and, whilst lockdown restrictions were in place, we switched to online creative sessions and created 36 collection-inspired, downloadable activities as a way of keeping the museum 'open'. Working remotely with a small group of young people, we also co-produced 580 Create@Home 'lockdown' art boxes with accompanying activity booklets and distributed these to young people through local schools, support organisations and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Teams.

Feedback from participants is positive, reporting activities help combat loneliness, provide distraction and enjoyment, and reduce anxiety. 73% of participants who completed our feedback surveys and had attended a group for six weeks or more, said that attending 'had positively affected their wellbeing and quality of life' scoring 5-6 (on a 1-6 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree with the statement). High attendance rates also indicate that people value and feel they benefit from engaging.

<sup>28</sup> *Museums of the future: Caring for communities as well as collections*, Independent Evaluation, Mary Ryan, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> 'Museums Inspire' was an initiative commissioned by the University of Bath for students being supported by their Welfare Services.



**Discover Museums course – Mentees and Museum Mentors at celebration evening, Holburne Museum 2022. Photo courtesy of the Holburne Museum.**

“I’m not the person I was 12 weeks ago when I started. I feel different. I got completely engaged with the process and art making and it makes me forget my anxiety. I feel like a changed person. Everyone is so accepting in the group, there’s no pressure - just support. ”

**Participant, Fresh Art@ project,<sup>30</sup> 2022**

The programme has evolved to offer progression pathways which provide opportunities for people to move towards greater independence, from supported group to peer led group and from mentored support to joining the volunteering community. We work with people on a long-term basis believing change happens slowly and that developing trust and relationships takes time. Participants regularly maintain engagement for over a year as they progress through the different groups.

As a non-commissioned service, Pathways has become an established part of the mental health support infrastructure within Bath & North East Somerset and receives referrals from social prescribers, mental health workers and regional support organisations who sign-post people to our groups. People can also refer themselves to the programme. We work with many partners to ensure that people can access our programme, including Bath Mind, Creativity Works, Mentoring Plus and Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health NHS Partnership Trust.

What began as a ‘service’ has become a creative community of people, breaking down many of the traditional hierarchies between museum staff, lead artists and volunteers. An example of this is the Holburne’s ‘People Make Museums’ exhibition (2022) in which sculptures created by group participants, professional artists and museum volunteers were shown side by side. These works captured the fleeting conversations, sudden revelations, unspoken thoughts, sensations, and feelings evoked by museum spaces and objects. The exhibits shared stories, memories, and ways of seeing that celebrated, challenged, and reinvigorated our collection.

As museums and art galleries increasingly reconsider their purpose, social function and relevance, this exhibition aimed to highlight how museums can be spaces of care – not only for historical objects but for people and their ideas and creativity.

### WHAT NEXT?

We want to continue to offer these unique opportunities not only because we know they support mental health, recovery and reduce social isolation but because they enrich our museums by bringing new voices and a diversity of people to our sites. This changes the culture, the conversations and even our own understanding of what museums are and can be.

**Louise Campion, Pathways to Wellbeing Manager and Learning & Engagement Lead, Holburne Museum, Bath**  
[www.holburne.org/learning/community-engagement/pathways-to-wellbeing](http://www.holburne.org/learning/community-engagement/pathways-to-wellbeing)

<sup>30</sup> Fresh Art@ is a partnership between Bath Museums Partnership, Creativity Works, Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Trust and Bath Mind.

# Leeds Museums and Galleries: Open Minds

BY ESTHER AMIS-HUGHES



The Open Minds exhibition by Leeds Museums and Galleries youth volunteers, The Preservative Party.

## OVERVIEW

Leeds Museums and Galleries is a local authority-run service in the north of England. Its nine sites are diverse in both nature and geographical spread. They include an art gallery, a municipal museum, two country houses, two industrial sites, a Cistercian monastery, a social history museum and an open access store. Community and youth engagement work happens across all of the sites, although this case study will focus on the Open Minds project by our young volunteers (the Preservative Party) at Leeds City Museum.

The work of the community team has taken on a strong wellbeing strand in recent years, focussed on recognising and promoting the positive outcomes of engaging with a museum or gallery. We run two gardening groups in

partnership with Hyde Park Source, who take referrals through social prescribing, and we also run mindfulness sessions, walks and a mindfulness festival at Kirkstall Abbey. The Open Minds project of this case study was a bit different because it wanted to look at mental health, its history and current perceptions, in a way that we acknowledged may not be quite as positive.

## OPEN MINDS

In 2019, during a planning session, a member of the Preservative Party, the museum's group of young volunteers, shared an experience where a negative attitude towards mental health had affected them. They advocated passionately and strongly that a display about this would go some way to break taboos and encourage open conversations.



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“Great to see so much on mental health in one of the areas...we even spotted some Andy's Man Club leaflets in one of the displays! Fantastic place!”

**Social media post from visitor**

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The group had a lot of discussions about how to make the display challenging and honest, whilst avoiding triggers. They also curated it very personally, choosing issues they could relate to. Some of the group wanted to distance themselves from the emotional weight of planning a display around objects and themes relating to modern day mental health issues, so they threw themselves into archival research about local asylums and mental health history. Others wanted to focus on mental health in the armed and emergency services (which became a case about trauma), body image and the relationship between mental health and gender and sexuality. The group felt strongly that language and talking should be a theme – but this was difficult to curate as a visual for the audience, so they created a display where the language of mental health was explored through definitions which were attached as labels to medicine bottles.

Two months before the display was due to open, the UK entered the first national lockdown and all projects were halted. This had a huge impact on the emotional wellbeing of the group, and they began producing social media posts suggesting things that helped their own mental health (pets, books, podcasts, baking etc). They also wrote two animations, one about body image and one about isolation, which they recorded the audio for and shared via WhatsApp.

The main challenge of this project was lockdown, and the inherent irony of working on a project about mental health, that no one would see, when everyone's mental wellbeing was suffering. But prior to lockdown I had become concerned that the intensity of the subject matter was taking its toll on the group. They had invested very heavily in the project, and believed they were giving a voice to people they found in the archives who were

locked up in asylums. This began to feel like a responsibility as well as a privilege. I had arranged for the group to have some mental health training at the start of the project, but when we do projects like this in the future we will build more support in.

Originally the group were hoping to work with support groups themselves, in order to bring a range of community voices into the display. Just before lockdown we managed to get out to meet a group at a local Recovery College, and we had dates scheduled in for other relevant groups. It is a regret of both staff and the young volunteers that this didn't happen. In the end the engagement with groups happened through me and other professionals, rather than conversations between the young volunteers and other people affected by mental health. The group used its social media accounts to consult on certain issues (such as whether the body image case should have a mirror) and worked tirelessly to gather contact details and websites of support groups which they made into a large 'Where to Go' support panel.

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“I think having some purpose during lockdown helped our mental health and hopefully the exhibition and social media activity and films can help others with theirs too. We want to reduce stigma by starting conversations about mental health.”

**Feedback from the Preservative Party**

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## WHAT NEXT?

I think this project gave the Preservative Party a freedom to curate challenging displays about things that deeply matter to them. Their next display will be about overlooked voices in history, and they intend to incorporate some of the voices they were unable to get into Open Minds. It has also made all of us more aware of the emotional toil these projects can have on volunteers as well as staff. We are determined to build in space and time to process difficult topics safely in future projects.

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# The Lightbox, Woking

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BY HEATHER THOMAS



Open Mind tour at The Lightbox, Woking. Photo © The Lightbox.

## OVERVIEW

The Lightbox, Woking is one of the most exciting museums and galleries in the South East of England. A programme of temporary exhibitions alongside The Ingram Collection and the Heritage collection provide a rich context for audience engagement. Our diverse cultural programme brings world-class artists alongside artists living and working in the region and includes talks and tours, social events, and arts and crafts workshops for all ages. The Lightbox has an established Art and Wellbeing programme that provides opportunities for those that would otherwise

not be able to access arts and heritage services to take part in creative and therapeutic workshops.

Woking is a fast-growing community with a young population (21.6%, compared to 19.2% for England). We are the most diverse borough in Surrey with 10% of the population unable to speak English, a significant Pakistani community and the largest Syrian Refugee resettlement in the South East. Fifty-eight per cent of Woking residents are concerned about their mental health, 11% higher than the average in Surrey, and 40% of our older population suffer income deprivation.

Our philosophy embodies the notion that art has the power to make you feel good, which is why we are passionate about providing art for everyone. The Art and Wellbeing programme provides free community workshops for those living with dementia and their care givers, those affected by mental health issues, those in local care homes and hospices and other groups including the York Road Project homeless shelter and LinkAble.

We have a long history of working in collaboration with people with mental health problems, creating artistic and learning opportunities for our individual visitors or local mental health organisations. Whether we are looking at the art on display or the objects in the museum, the focus has always been on how connecting and learning can help to create a sense of calm and improved wellbeing.

We have worked on various projects with numerous partners since our conception and opening our doors in 2007, including working with the York Road Project since 2012 to deliver creative workshops for their clients who are experiencing homelessness and working with young carers to support them to improve their wellbeing through creativity.

## OPEN MIND TOURS

One of our current projects is Open Mind where we work with Catalyst (previously Mind in our area) to provide relaxed monthly tours of our current exhibitions. Each month we look at different artworks and discuss the artists' lives in an interactive tour that is used as a way to foster inclusion and participation. We have built up a strong partnership with Catalyst and its staff and volunteers which has enabled the participants to feel supported by us whenever they choose to visit. The participants are able to learn more about artists and their local heritage through their visits with us, which in turn helps them to take notice, connect with others and learn something new. The participants are also able to visit us at any time, alongside the tours, so any challenges they may be facing do not stop them from coming, which has really helped them to feel they are connected to us.

Evaluation is a constant evolving part of what we do for all our programmes and we speak to participants regularly where we can using various evaluation models. These have also evolved over the years, according to participants needs, and whilst they may not feel very happy on the day they complete the evaluation, our results show they do feel better when reflecting on the activities. We have a monthly retention rate of 80% of repeat participants to the Open Mind tours and others attend as and when they are able. The participants often see a small improvement (10%-30%) in their overall wellbeing on the day of the sessions; however, we often have mixed results, which is not unexpected when considering mental health issues are often complex.

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“ The Open Mind sessions really bring people out of their shells. They're happy, vibrant, community events, and they're healthy. Art brings people together, and just sparks something inside them... Conversation is never lacking on these trips. Once you get them going, they just don't stop! The art triggers something – reality, awareness – and they're provoked. ”

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## WHAT NEXT?

We have a strong established track record through our arts and wellbeing programme and this is a priority for us going forward. The future includes: securing funding to sustain a period of development and build on the work we have done; and continuing to work with more organisations to create more opportunities for creative expression for individuals or groups. Assisting people who are looking for an outlet to enable them to live healthily and happily for the most part is at the core of what we would like to do going forward.



# National Galleries of Scotland: Rowan Alba CARDS arts

BY SIOBHAN MCCONNACHIE

## OVERVIEW

The National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) cares for, develops, researches, and displays Scotland's national collection of Scottish and international art. The Galleries are in Edinburgh, and through a varied programme in gallery, online and in the community, we aim to engage with the broadest possible public. We are passionate about art and its power to move, to inspire, and to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds. The collection that we look after is extraordinary in its quality and breadth and we regard it as a national resource which should be available for everyone to use for their own purposes and in their own way.

We know from participants the wellbeing benefits of taking part in our learning programme; these vary but it is clear that many visitors feel better after engaging with our programmes. This has led us to focus more on the role we can play in supporting people's health and wellbeing through our programmes and through our wider visitor offer. Wellbeing is a strategic priority for NGS and in the Learning and Engagement department we consider health and wellbeing across all our programmes: this can be embedding the five ways to wellbeing (connect, take notice, give, stay active, learn) into the activities or working with healthcare providers.

## ROWAN ALBA CARD ARTS PROGRAMME

Since 2013 NGS has been working with the homelessness charity Rowan Alba. The nature of our work with Rowan Alba has changed over the years, growing from a single project that

introduced photography as a documentary tool to regular monthly artist led sessions exploring different art forms, working with Rowan Alba's volunteer befriending service 'CARDS' – Community Alcohol Related Damage Service – which provides emotional health and social networks to around 100 clients with lived experience of alcohol related harm.

Since the start of the pandemic, Rowan Alba report that their clients have seen a further deterioration of their mental wellbeing and none are accessing mental health support.



**Man in a bottle by Gavin.**  
Photo courtesy of National Galleries of Scotland.

Prior to their involvement in the NGS programme, most clients had not visited the gallery or had stopped visiting when their health deteriorated. During the lockdown, the artist sessions went online and the artist Sam Rutherford led a series of Zoom sessions for the group continuing the exploration of art forms started in-gallery. The online sessions were an opportunity for the group to stay connected and share the artworks they had created. When restrictions eased the sessions began again in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Each session begins with the service users and volunteers meeting in the same learning room. They then visit an exhibition before coming back to the learning room for a practical art session. A simple lunch is provided, and any leftovers can be taken home.

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“ I had to look around when the guy opened the door for me when I managed up the steps. I thought someone was behind me. He smiled at me and he said goodbye too. I had a chat with him when I went outside for a smoke. Nice guy. Knows a lot. I'd go back maybe even on my own. Helps if you know someone. ”

**Participant**

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The benefits of the programme to the participants are varied and far reaching: it is a reason to get up and out the house; it is sociable; the activities are open-ended; the approach is non-judgemental; it is mentally stimulating; it feels safe; and there is food provided. The location of the Portrait Gallery is also important – its central location requires the participants to leave their neighbourhood, get on a bus and come into the city centre. This is not something they normally do; these are places often seen as being for others – tourists or more affluent people. Visiting the city centre and the gallery gives back a sense of belonging to the city in which they live.

The environment of the Gallery was felt by Rowan Alba to be beneficial and the following were identified as factors that made it a positive environment for the CARDS group to meet: free to enter; easy to travel to by bus; indoors; pathways easy to navigate with



**Landscape by Constantine.**  
Photo courtesy of National Galleries of Scotland.

large lift and wheelchair access; clean, easily accessible toilets; no time constraints; always an option to break out into another space – opposite to negative, intense clinical settings; visual cues for conversations; feeling in control of where you go and when; can be used as a meeting place for volunteers and staff; an uplifting beautiful place to meet; a place where clients can share their knowledge; stools to have a rest when needed; a place that is full of people but is quiet inside.

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“ To be somewhere, where there are many people around, and not have to interact with them, I didn't think such places existed. ”

**Participant**

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There are challenges when working with people struggling with alcohol dependency and related health issues, such as understanding that people might not turn up so creating a non-judgemental environment where they are always welcome next time. Having a regular monthly programme helps with that. Managing behaviours by individuals who have been drinking alcohol in a way that is respectful to them and the rest of the group is important and is down to the skills and experience of those running the session.

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“It’s brilliant to get involved in the project during lockdown and a great way to get people out there and focus on places to take pictures. I’m not one to be shut in, and photography has taken over as my main hobby. It’s a great incentive to make special trips.”

**Participant**

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Nurturing the service users’ creativity and allowing them to explore and take ownership of it is an important aspect of our work with Rowan Alba and one way we support a legacy for this is by delivering a monthly programme for the volunteers, building their skills.

## WHAT NEXT?

We are proud to be a part of the CARDS project; it is a privilege to support people in the self-management of their health. We intend to continue this work and will look for opportunities to bring the group into the development of our public offer as well as embedding the learnings across the galleries.



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# The Salisbury Museum: Well-City Salisbury

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BY AMY HAMMETT AND EMMA GASCOIGNE



Participants on The English Venice Course exploring museum objects and responding to them creatively using ink wash and bleach techniques. Photo courtesy of Salisbury Museum/Well-City Salisbury.

## OVERVIEW

The Salisbury Museum is located opposite the city's glorious cathedral in South Wiltshire. We have wonderful archaeological collections containing prehistoric material, including from Stonehenge; the Pitt Rivers' Wessex collection; and a fine medieval collection including finds from Old Sarum, Clarendon Palace and the city itself.

We have recently embarked on a National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project, Past Forward: Salisbury Museum for Future Generations, which will deliver new

permanent galleries, a flexible learning and events venue along with new activities and community outreach.

Since becoming part of the Wessex Museum Partnership in 2018 we have increased our community work, enabled by the recruitment of a Community Curator whose role is to focus on engaging audiences who have not previously been involved with the museum, including those from under-represented audiences, such as people with a mental health need.

An increased awareness of the ability of arts and heritage to positively impact on mental health and wellbeing and the growing engagement of museums with social prescribing prompted The Salisbury Museum to become part of Well-City Salisbury, a National Lottery Community Fund supported three-year project.

### ABOUT WELL-CITY SALISBURY

The museum is one of four project partners, along with ArtCare at Salisbury District Hospital, Wessex Archaeology and Wiltshire Creative. The project launched a year ago in July 2021 and supports people with mental health needs in our community through creative courses and other opportunities. The project is about connection – to the arts, to heritage, to the landscape, to our community and to each other.

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“I enjoyed looking in detail at the finds in the museum and surmising to whom they might have belonged and how they were lost.”

**Participant**

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Working with local artists and creative practitioners, each partner delivers two eight-week courses throughout the year which are designed to create moments of learning, discovery and curiosity. Numbers are kept relatively low, 12 people maximum per course, to ensure each individual receives the support they need and to foster a sense of belonging. People can be referred onto a course by their primary care provider, third sector organisation or other referring partners or they can sign up for a course as a self-referral.

The museum's first course, *The English Venice*, explored mixed media art using the museum's collection of objects found in Salisbury's medieval drains as inspiration for creativity – much more exciting than it potentially sounds! Participants on this course were encouraged to look at the objects in different ways, and to respond artistically through a variety of media such as ink, clay, graphite, and bleaching techniques.



**Participants of The English Venice course creating mixed media compositions based on plaster casts they created inspired by objects in the collection. Photo courtesy of Salisbury Museum/Well-City Salisbury.**

Participants formed friendships that transitioned beyond course sessions and, off the back of their participation in the course, became involved with other groups and activities at the museum as well as around the city.

Our second course, *Creative Writing for Wellbeing*, had a different theme every two weeks and included a range of activities to inspire and increase creative writing skills, particularly in description through close examination of the museum's objects. In one of our sessions, we went on a behind-the-scenes tour of the museum, which inspired us in writing a spooky story.

New challenges arose with each course and every week we discussed this as a team and problem solved together. One challenge we faced was fluctuating participant numbers due to participants' life circumstances, often associated with their mental health needs. This meant we had to adapt our sessions on a weekly basis for the participants who were able to attend, revising our plans as we delivered.

We did not fully anticipate the extra workload of identifying and researching objects from the collections to support sessions and the number of requests for further information that participants would have. Another unexpected consumption of our time was through supporting participants outside of sessions.

One of the biggest challenges was maintaining emotional boundaries. It was difficult and sad saying goodbye to participants when a course finished. Managing our own wellbeing after disclosures from participants or mental health incidents was also sometimes hard. External clinical supervision for our project team helped with this and we would absolutely recommend this to others interested in or currently doing this type of work.

However, the impact these courses have had on participants is significant and makes the work to overcome these challenges worthwhile. Below is a sample of what participants have told us taking part in a Well-City Salisbury course has meant for them:

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““ The art classes were life changing. ””

““ I feel this creative writing course has given something back into my everyday life and has filled a gap that otherwise would have been really quite empty. ””

““ This group has been inspirational for me and I feel very safe here [...] I'm feeling more positive and managing stress and anxiety a little better now. ””

**Participant**

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We are working with researchers from The Manchester Centre for Public History and Heritage at Manchester Metropolitan University to evaluate the project. Our first year of evaluation has been an interesting journey as we try to balance capturing more quantitative data about participants' wellbeing while ensuring this process does not have a negative impact on them. In the end, we decided to focus less on using wellbeing scales and to empower participants to define their own wellbeing goals. We are looking forward to reviewing the results of our first year in the near future.

### WHAT NEXT?

As we move into Years 2 and 3 of our funding, we will be introducing progression pathways for participants who would like to explore engaging with the project in ways other than through taking creative courses. These pathways will include short and long-term mentored volunteering opportunities with the project partners, personal projects – for example, researching an object in the museum's collections and creatively responding to it – or delivering a short presentation about it – and the opportunity to join our Participant Steering Group.



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# Towner Eastbourne: Arts in Mind

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BY CLARE DOBSON AND ESTHER COLLINS

## OVERVIEW

Awarded Art Fund's Museum of the Year 2020, Towner Eastbourne has been collecting and exhibiting contemporary art for nearly 100 years. It presents a dynamic programme of exhibitions, acquisitions and commissions by some of the most exciting and diverse artists working at all stages of their careers for as many as 175,000 visitors each year. Towner Collection comprises 5,000 works broadly themed around landscape and environment including related contemporary themes such as climate change, migration, land use and environment.

Towner has always had a strong track record for its learning and engagement work with individuals and groups. Supporting health and wellbeing has also always been a priority, with long-standing regular gallery-based groups including Arts in Mind, a weekly group for those living with mental health conditions (see below). Towner has increasingly become a vital service supplementing those offered by the local authority to support those most in need. In 2019, a pilot art therapy project delivered therapeutic sessions for children in six Eastbourne primary schools living with a range of complex emotional and behavioural issues. While undoubtedly meeting a vital need, we felt it was unsustainable for Towner to continue providing such specialist support without a professional therapeutic partner and that our focus should be on supporting individuals to manage mental health through developing their contemporary making practice. This commitment also helps us to advocate for diverse artists and practice being represented in the gallery programme.

The pandemic hiatus galvanised our ambitions for a place-based approach to learning and engagement by directly connecting with communities most in need, including those living with mental health conditions. Throughout the pandemic we provided 2,500 creative kits of activities and materials to 540 households, including vulnerable adults and young people living with varied mental health conditions. A new five-year engagement strategy, *Making Together*, is beginning to deliver a public programme of participatory practice focused on creative process both inside and most importantly, outside the gallery. A programme of activities will provide entry points or projects for people of all ages, including those with mental health conditions, at all stages of their artistic practice.

## ABOUT ARTS IN MIND

Since 2009, Towner has been supporting the creative practice of a group within the community that live with mental health conditions. Originally created following a grant from the Healthy Eastbourne Board, Arts in Mind was delivered with the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (Mental Wellbeing Team) GP referral scheme. In 2015, we partnered with Brightview, Sussex Oakleaf which manages referrals from a range of agencies including the Sussex Partnership. Arts in Mind has evolved into an established group of artists and makers that meets weekly at the gallery for facilitated sessions. The core group of around 15 participants has remained stable throughout the past 12 years.



Work by Towner Eastbourne Arts in Mind participant Stephen Cogger. Photo © Mandy Wax.

In 2018, the group was encouraged to have more ownership over their programme and became a self-running 'collective' without support from staff. It was soon recognised that this was not helpful to either the participants or to Towner, and later that year an art therapist was recruited to support the group. This art therapist who also has her own practice, worked with the group for four years and to her credit managed to hold threads of connection between members throughout the pandemic.

We were amazed and impressed by the resilience of members during the pandemic with a good number regularly meeting on Zoom. The continuity of gathering enabled members to manage their mental health and enjoy the positive impacts on their wellbeing.

Once restrictions allowed, they participated in specific projects. During Autumn 2020, the group took part in *Pause*, an eight-week project with artist Lucy Steggals as part of the Saving Berwick Church project. During the project, the group explored the landscape and setting around the building, its connection to contemporary art and the murals inside the building by members of the Bloomsbury set. They learned new techniques including frottage, marbling and stop-frame animation, incorporating new materials such as graphite and dried flowers with resulting artworks being installed in the church. In Autumn 2021 they worked for six weeks at Eastbourne Studio Pottery and had a brilliant time learning new techniques in shaping and glazing ceramics.





Work by Towner Eastbourne Arts in Mind participant, Janet Mazumdar. Photo © Mandy Wax.

Sessions are generally based around members developing their visual art practice. Each week we introduce a reference, making material or technique as a prompt to try something new. Often we make connections with the exhibition programme. Members generally work in 2D through drawing or painting. Processes have included mono printing, lino printing and collage. For the *Pause* project participants worked individually and collaboratively, bringing their own personality and practice to a jointly-authored animation.

The first time we were able to meet again in person every member on the register turned up. For this initial six months post-lockdown Arts in Mind worked together in a much bigger

space than usual to allow for social distancing. This completely changed how they made work and what they made, for instance making human-scale paintings of themselves that they could return to each week. This is the first time we have supported members to work on their own longer-term projects.

Over the years participants have taken part in the Open Studio programme through the workshop/studio at Towner, taken part in Artist Open Houses, joined Towner's gallery assistants as volunteers and in the case of one member studied art at degree level.

We have recently recruited two new artists to support the group. One role will have a more curatorial focus to shape how we



work as part of a nationwide conversation around evolving practice with adults with mental health conditions. As research lead at Bethlem Gallery, they will also support Towner to provide safe structures and procedures, incorporating knowledge and expertise from other organisations into how we develop our programmes. The other lead artist will have a stronger focus on materials, especially natural materials found on the South Downs close to the gallery, to strengthen connection with contemporary making practice with the aim of participants developing new work together which is visible, relevant and meaningful.

Over the years the project has been evaluated formally, as well as informal feedback gathered from participants. With our re-launch of the group in September 2022 we will incorporate feedback into each session, as a review of activity each week. We will also work with the group and artists to incorporate elements of the Most Significant Change evaluation method over the course of the next two-year period. Additionally, the group will work towards a public sharing (installation or exhibition) as a tool for reflection and critique both of work made together and what it felt like to be part of that experience.

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“I am a bit less stuck emotionally. I have been able to deal with my relapse through my art. It is inspiring to have professional work around me. It gives what I am doing here a seriousness and gravity that it would not have elsewhere.”

**Group participant**

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## WHAT NEXT?

While many communities within Eastbourne are relatively well off, Eastbourne is ranked 312 out of 360 in the UK Prosperity Index, putting it close to the lowest decile in the country. We have also become increasingly aware of a sharp rise in mental health conditions, particularly among young people, as a direct result of pandemic.

We want to be better able to respond to the rise in need for support as we cope with life post pandemic and face future challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis and climate change. With the commissioning of the two lead artists, we plan to increase the number of Arts in Mind members and support them to work towards a public outcome or event. We also plan to establish a new project with young people to support positive mental health through exploring our relationship with 'landscape' which might include our internal, emotional landscape, the domestic environment and that of our locale on the South Downs. These new projects will be developed over the next few years as Towner prepares to open a second arts and culture site at Black Robin Farm on the Downland above the town. This 19th century dairy farm will be developed to provide inclusive creative engagement activities for communities and visitors, as well as artist commissioning opportunities.

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# Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums

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BY CLARA SHIELD

## OVERVIEW

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) is a regional museum, art gallery and archives service. We manage nine museums and galleries across Tyneside and the Archives for Tyne and Wear, holding collections of international importance in archives, art, science and technology, archaeology, military and social history, fashion and natural sciences.

We specialise in working with the people and communities of Tyneside – connecting creativity, health and wellbeing. For over 20 years we have developed inspiring programmes that recognise the positive health impacts of cultural participation, working in partnership with health and care professionals, local authorities, universities, charities and support services. Our programmes are based on robust research identifying areas of need in our region. We care about the health and economic inequalities in the North East and, by fusing creativity with health and wellbeing, we aim to create a healthier, happier and more equal society.

Our Wellbeing Programme focuses on improving mental health and was created in response to public health data that showed that the North East has higher levels of mental health problems compared to the rest of England (Public Health England, 2018). We work in lots of different spaces and with a variety of needs, from those in clinical settings, to connecting with people through community support services or providing activities for visitors to our museums and galleries.

## PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS: ST NICHOLAS HOSPITAL

St Nicholas Hospital is a 12-hectare site in Newcastle upon Tyne and forms part of Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear (CNTW) NHS Foundation Trust. The whole site provides a range of clinical services including Adult Forensic Medium and Low Secure; Adult Urgent Care & Rehabilitation, Children and Young People & Medium Secure and Older People & Specialist Long Term Care.

### Programme 1:

#### Bamburgh Clinic Creative Project, September 2019

The Bamburgh Clinic is a Medium Secure Unit (MSU) that provides treatment for men who have a mental illness or personality disorder and who may have come into conflict with the law and/or are thought to be a risk to others or themselves.

Network Programme lead Michael McHugh delivered a regular focused programme of work there over 12 weekly sessions with four to six men attending each week. The Arts Project Manager at Bamburgh Clinic and Northgate wanted a focus on making, bringing museum collections into the unit for display, and seeding a long-term relationship that would be new, challenging and innovative.

The programme commenced in September 2019 and continued up until the end of early winter the same year. One thing that became apparent very quickly was that the group changed from week to week. External pressures would often dictate who attended: patients return to prison; clinical treatment

programmes and patient schedules change very quickly; and there can be incidents that mean patients from different wards cannot be in the same room. As a result, each session had to work independently and stand alone. The sessions had to both be accessible for people who had not attended previously and provide continuity for regular attendees.

The Arts Project Manager said: *“The project brought people from all four wards together, it opened up discussion and debate. People have been able to have their own ideas and make individual contributions. It is very beneficial to morale within the Clinic to have outside professionals work with the service and especially when that relationship is nurtured over time and allowed to develop... The project opened our eyes to the imaginative scope of what a museum can offer. We learnt a great deal about contemporary museum approaches and how much these processes can contribute to wellbeing and how the museum values and mission statement chime so well with those of our own organisation. We found like minds and creative thinkers to support our work with patients. [The project] helped us try and build a cultural life for the Clinic in which everyone could have some level of engagement and create meaning. Patients benefit a lot from seeing their work writ large, of being able to make an intervention. The project was ground-breaking, and we hope it can be documented and shared with arts and health professions in the future.”*

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“The project opened our eyes to the imaginative scope of what a museum can offer [...] Patients benefit a lot from seeing their work writ large, of being able to make an intervention. The project was ground-breaking, and we hope it can be documented and shared with arts and health professions in the future.”

**Arts Project Manager**

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## **Programme 2:**

### **‘Bede Ward Heritage Project’, March 2022**

The Bede Ward is an acute admission ward for men over 18 years who are experiencing a relapse or crisis in their mental wellbeing and require assessment and treatment in hospital.

The Bede Ward Heritage Project was devised and delivered as part of our Wellbeing Programme by Clara Shield responding to a request from the Lead Occupational Therapist. Object handling sessions using a variety of our collections and a creative art output led by the patients formed part of the brief. Eight weekly sessions were delivered, with a visit to our Discovery Museum. Between five and eight men attended each week.

Working alongside the ward occupational therapy activities team and a local street artist, the patients explored what heritage meant to them and their identity, thinking about the local areas where they grew up and live. The sessions were then tailored to the interests of the group and focussed on engineering, the development of the shipyards, mining, local industry and employment. The patients then worked with the artist to create a mural on the wall of the ward that encapsulated these objects and conversations. The mural featured a miner’s lamp as the central focus and was titled ‘Ray of light, beacon of hope’ as participants felt the ward offers them that as part of their recovery.

TWAM are also installing a display cabinet which will enable the staff to work with patients moving forwards, skilling them in curating their own object collections which will enable activities and discussions for the patients, supporting their recovery whilst on the ward.

The Lead Occupational Therapist said: *“The joint work that we carried out with Clara was so beneficial to both patients and staff. The sessions were well attended and even some patients who rarely attend groups got involved and enjoyed these. There were two patients in particular who really benefited from this input. One was a patient who was generally quiet or at times disruptive and rarely participated. He really shone in these sessions due to his knowledge and interest in history. ...*



*His confidence grew each week and he looked forward to attending. ... The other patient had engaged in OT sessions but his interest in history was never identified .... He attended all sessions and became Clara's assistant... To see his confidence grow ... was just so rewarding. He smiled from start to end of these sessions and so enjoyed watching the mural come together, often standing talking to the artist about it.*

*As a ward this project has been invaluable, not only seeing the process in action but having a beautiful mural to look at and discuss with patients. .... We brought patients to the museum last week and for some this was the first time they had visited any museum. We will be continuing to work with Clara and the Discovery Museum on our display cabinets and foresee our lovely working partnership continuing."*

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“ The joint work that we carried out with Clara was so beneficial to both patients and staff [...] As a ward this project has been invaluable, not only seeing the process in action but having a beautiful mural to look at and discuss with patients. .... We brought patients to the museum last week and for some this was the first time they had visited any museum. ”

**Lead Occupational Therapist**

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## WHAT NEXT?

We have already been asked to return and are currently delivering a further project on the Willow View Ward which is a mixed male/female ward for patients 18+ with serious mental illness and complex needs who require intensive rehabilitation. This project has followed the same model as the previous programmes, learning from each and implementing adjustment and improvements based on the feedback from staff and patients and our own observations.

Some of these adjustments include: being flexible to the needs and interests of the group; planning only one week ahead; responding to requests for objects and collections to ensure patients contributions are valued and heard; and being prepared for the participants' behaviour to be changeable depending on the ward dynamics, their personal mental health needs and any unexpected events on the ward.

The patients on these wards are often discharged after approximately 12 weeks so any programmes with a final 'output' need to be planned and delivered within that time frame so that patients can participate in the full programme as much as is possible.

# University of Edinburgh: Prescribe Culture on Campus:

BY RUTHANNE BAXTER

## OVERVIEW

Prescribe Culture is the University of Edinburgh's award-winning, heritage-based, non-clinical support for mental health, social care and wellbeing.

Prescribe Culture was founded in 2018 by the University's Library and University Collections Civic Engagement Manager, Ruthanne Baxter (Prescribe Culture Lead), and is supported by a steering group that includes representation from local Community Link Workers, a Care Home Manager, the University's GPs, Counselling Service, Student Wellbeing service and Student Union.

Today it supports student and community members of all ages, and internationally, through a hybrid programme offering. The current resources available include two online and two in-person options. Take 30 Together Virtual (T30TV) is self-referral and open to anyone over 18 affected by sense of loneliness and isolation. Unlock & Revive is a self-referral online social prescribing programme for those living with dementia and other brain-related conditions, Programme 6 is a series of six weekly sessions delivered in-person, on-site to small group (max. 8); this programme is by referral only and currently only available to the university community in Edinburgh.

This case study will focus on the work and impact of Prescribe Culture on Campus, which in addition to the Prescribe Culture programming for mental health support and interventions for staff and students, is also active in research, teaching and learning, the curriculum transformation and university partnerships and consultancy, internationally.

Over four hundred years ago, scholar, writer and clergyman, Robert Burton, wrote in his 1621 publication 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', *'How many scholars have neglected worldly affairs and their health own health, to gain knowledge?'* In 2022, the post-pandemic pressures and demands on the university community are significant, with the university



Soap carving at a Prescribe Culture Programme 6 session. Photo © Hannah Ayre.

counselling service and disability services seeing demand on their staff and resources up on last year. Prescribe Culture is increasingly being viewed by our colleagues in health and wellbeing, student support and HR as a valid referral option for those staff and students whose needs are appropriate to the protective and early intervention programmes available from Library and University Collections.

In addition to the close collaboration Prescribe Culture has with internal colleagues from the University health and wellbeing services, partnerships with many of the heritage and cultural organisations across Edinburgh and globally are essential for delivery of a diverse and effective 'prescription'.

The Take 30 Together Virtual (T30TV) programme has the tagline 'escape, explore and e-socialise with the world of heritage'. This programme simply couldn't happen without support from heritage friends across the globe. Our T30TV members have enjoyed regular 'visits' to the Sydney Living Museums, Australia and Robben Island, South Africa, to name just two.

More locally, in addition to the University of Edinburgh's museums and U-Create Studio offer, this year's Prescribe Culture Summer Programme 6 prescriptions included Programme 6 @ The Botanics. Laura Gallagher, Community Engagement Officer, and her team at the Botanical Cottage enthusiastically and generously agreed to undertake the Programme 6 training and develop and deliver the series of six 90-minute sessions bringing heritage stories alive and utilising the well-known benefits of being in nature.

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“ It gave me calming activities, a much more productive and helpful way to distract myself and relax than I had before. It is a useful addition to other forms of support. ”

**Programme 6 evaluation**

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Evaluation of Programme 6 finds that all respondents agree Prescribe Culture benefits their mental health; they would highly recommend to other students with mental ill health; they view it as something of value that should be made available at all universities; and they all agreed it has opened their minds to using heritage engagement as a self-care management option in the future.

Many of the students accessing Programme 6 are on medication and/or accessing CBT or other talking therapy for their mental health.

Facilitated by weekly online engagement with heritage stories, the T30TV members have, themselves, created a wonderful 'safe space' and a fun, supportive community of like-minded, intergenerational individuals, online. T30TV feedback includes:

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“ From my very first T30TV session I have thoroughly enjoyed every session and it is so nice to meet and connect with people of all ages who bring such a sense of warmth and acceptance with them. A complete change from routine. T30TV is simply brilliant and I tell lots of others about it! ”

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Prescribe Culture is highly valued by the University's health and wellbeing partners. The Prescribe Culture Lead was invited to sit on the Student Mental Health Research Group at the Edinburgh Future's Institute, is a co-lead on the THRIVE Network and was invited to speak at the University Health Association's 2022 Conference. In the past academic year, the Prescribe Culture Lead has delivered tutorials on social prescribing through heritage and culture to the first-year undergraduate medical students and is working closely with the Senior Lecturer in Critical Public Health to extend this work next year.



Prescribe Culture has had an international reach. The Prescribe Culture Lead is working with Academic Psychiatrist, Professor Anne Duffy, at Queen's University, Canada. Having co-authored a student mental health literacy course in 2020 with modules focused on the role of heritage, culture, nature and exercise as wellbeing protective and management approaches or non-clinical mental health prescriptions, the project is now working on the digital care pathway programmes, of which Prescribe Culture's T30TV is one option. In Portugal, the Prescribe Culture Lead is providing consultancy to the National Museum of Natural History and Sciences, University of Lisbon and to the NOVA University, Lisbon, which are seeking to implement the Prescribe Culture model for their campus and local community.

## WHAT NEXT?

Next steps for Prescribe Culture on Campus include developing heritage health placements for health and social care students and finalising collaborative research funding applications to develop robust evidence for the positive impact of heritage engagement for those living with psychosocial challenges and mental ill health.

## Some observations

As pointed out in the Introduction, the case studies here, rich as they are, and our limited desk research, are a long way from a comprehensive consideration of how museums are targeting work to people with mental health problems. But here are some patterns and themes that we feel might be discerned.

### THE KEY TO SUCCESS: LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERS

Perhaps the key aspect of a targeted approach to engaging people with mental health problems is through effective partnership. The two most obvious approaches are through the NHS and its mental health services and through the voluntary sector, in particular through the charity, Mind (in England and Wales).

We discovered a number of partnerships with Mind: for instance, The Lightbox in Woking (page 44) and the Ashmolean in Oxford have both had partnerships. Mind is not the only possible mental health partner, however: the National Galleries of Scotland have partnered with Rowan Alba to work with people recovering from alcohol dependency (page 46).

Partnerships with the NHS are naturally numerous, such as The Beaney with Kent and Medway Partnership NHS Trust and Dulwich Picture Gallery with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and the new Tessa Jowell Health Centre. Associated hospital charities can be useful such as ArtCare in Salisbury. Recovery Colleges are also good partners and Dulwich Picture Gallery provides arts classes to their local Recovery College.

Although not explicitly stated, our impression from these case studies is that these relationships were often initiated by the museum.

### Social prescribing and museums

Some museums were early adopters of social prescribing and there was specific research on the benefits of this in a 2014-2017 study run by UCL.<sup>31</sup> Although social prescribing has been given a huge boost by the Government in England through universal provision of link workers and the formation of the National Academy for Social Prescribing and the Thriving Communities Fund with Arts Council England, museums do not seem to have been in the forefront of this change. There certainly are extremely good examples with an emphasis on people with mental health problems, such as Dulwich Picture Gallery,<sup>32</sup> but this does not seem widespread. Another important and distinctive exception is the Culture on Prescription scheme in Edinburgh for university students and community members (see page 59).

### TYPES OF MUSEUM

England is fortunate by international standards in having a strong representation of museums with a specialist interest in mental health, represented by three case studies in this report (pages 14–22). The history of psychiatry is profoundly troubled as described in many academic studies, most recently *Desperate Remedies* by Andrew Scull.<sup>33</sup> Therefore these museums need to take account of this through their relationship with people who have experienced mental health services.

Otherwise, our unsystematic collection of case studies really proves that any museum can undertake this work. There are examples

<sup>31</sup> For more on the Museums on Prescription study, see [www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/museums-on-prescription](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/museums-on-prescription).

<sup>32</sup> See: [www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/learning/health-wellbeing/dulwich-picture-gallery-plus](http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/learning/health-wellbeing/dulwich-picture-gallery-plus).

<sup>33</sup> 'Desperate Remedies by Andrew Scull review – mind games', *The Guardian*, 5 April 2022. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/books/2022/apr/09/desperate-remedies-by-andrew-scully-review-mind-games](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/apr/09/desperate-remedies-by-andrew-scully-review-mind-games).

of museums with world renowned collections and local museums which are deeply rooted in their community.

Beyond our case studies, there are examples of local museums which, either as a permanent aspect of their work or for temporary exhibitions, display work relating to local asylums or mental health hospitals which will have closed. Such exhibitions have an important role to play in de-stigmatising mental health problems. In a parallel development, there has also been an increasing interest in the heritage sector in the use of psychiatric records as objects. There are compelling examples of the creative responses to these records using participatory arts, such as the Restoration Trust's Change Minds project.<sup>34</sup>

Any museum can choose to engage with people with mental health problems – it is a question of attitude and interest.



**Together Through Art workshop.**  
Photo © Dulwich Picture Gallery.

## WHO TO ENGAGE: THE TARGETED APPROACH

These case studies demonstrate a range of approaches by museums when considering the specific groups of people that they are aiming to help via a project or programme on mental health. For some the target group is informed by their collaboration with other local partners – typically a charity or the NHS. The Beane and Dulwich Picture Gallery have both worked with their local NHS Trust to identify local service users who might benefit from a museum-led project. Some organisations take an approach based on specific local mental health concerns – such as the National Galleries of Scotland's work with clients who have experience of alcohol related harms; while others take a more national approach to reaching out to target groups, generally by using online communication – such as The Museum of the Mind. Some museums use existing programmes with community groups to explore issues of mental health, such as Leeds Museums and Galleries' work with their youth volunteers.

## HOW TO ENGAGE

There was a lot of diversity among the case studies, although not in the art forms used which tended to be visual arts and creative writing. Weekly creative workshops or object handling sessions were frequently used, often supported by freelance artists.

Dedicated posts for this work were rarely mentioned; however, two people are employed to manage the Holburne's Pathways to Wellbeing programme. It seems that most initiatives are a strand of the work of the Learning and Engagement department, which means staff are not specialists in mental health but rather have more general experience of engaging different groups. Some freelance artists might be more specialised, however.

Training was not discussed much in the case studies. However, we are aware of a number of ways in which museums have identified training for staff engaging in this work. One example is through the use of Mental Health First Aid training as well as different types of training on trauma-informed practice. Another important question is how people leading

**34** See: [restorationtrust.org.uk/change-minds](http://restorationtrust.org.uk/change-minds).





**Mouse made in the late 1800s, before cartoons. We do not know who made it, it is a mystery mouse. Simply made of scrap materials, it makes us happy and must have been a comfort to someone years ago. Leverdale exhibition text, 2018. Photo © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection.**

work, including creative workshops, can be supported in what is sometimes called ‘the emotional labour’ of this work. This can be called ‘affective’ support around emotions and feelings. Salisbury Museum offered external clinical supervision to their project team (see page 49). Nicola Naismith has written extensively on this topic.<sup>35</sup>

The use of paid traineeships was especially impressive with Creative Peer Facilitators recruited at Dulwich Picture Gallery and similar posts at the Foundling Museum.

Exhibitions are central to the life of museums and the case studies emphasised the role of co-creation, for example, in curating ‘A Place of Safety’ at The Beaney or ‘People Make Museums’ at the Holburne. Glasgow Museums in particular discuss in their case study the important topic of citizen or community curation. Participants in the ‘Art Extraordinary’ project were recognised as experts by experience and supported with training in curation skills which led to the first permanent display at Kelvingrove Museum undertaken in this way by any community.

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“ The use of paid traineeships was especially impressive with Creative Peer Facilitators recruited at Dulwich Picture Gallery and similar posts at the Foundling Museum. ”

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Leeds Museums and Galleries has a group of young volunteers (‘The Preservative Party!’) who created a new exhibition in lockdown. The Holburne has progression pathways that lead to volunteering opportunities.

Engagement can focus on objects or themes specifically related to mental health but it can involve any subject matter as with any other regular or ongoing creative workshop or gallery visit. Many of the case studies here took the former approach and reflect on the insights this inevitably brings.

The timing of this report has meant that quite a lot of the work referred to in the case studies has happened during various degrees of lockdown and hence a much greater use

<sup>35</sup> [www.nicolanaismith.co.uk/research-writing/practising-well-conversations-support-menu](http://www.nicolanaismith.co.uk/research-writing/practising-well-conversations-support-menu)

of digital engagement methods than was typically the case in the past. Some of the organisations featured here also took to the post, with 2,500 wellbeing packs distributed through foodbanks by the Mental Health Museum and 580 artpacks to young people by the Holburne. The 'Leaves of the Tree for the Healing of Nations' initiative was a project run by the Bethlem Museum of the Mind (an idea borrowed from the Museum Ovarfati in Denmark). Twitter length submissions on the experience of lockdown were written on face masks and attached to a tree like leaves in the spring.

### WHERE TO ENGAGE

The work featured in these case studies has mainly taken place in the museum itself, in a community venue or, more rarely, on a hospital ward. (As highlighted above, Covid-19 lockdowns sometimes meant work was disrupted. Edinburgh University's Prescribe Culture programme puts a strong emphasis on remote or virtual offers, which could then be highly international, involving institutions in Canada and Australia.)

Dulwich Picture Gallery brought school students into their community studio in large numbers and paired them with paid trainees (see page 30). Arts in Mind creative workshops have been taking place at the Towner in Eastbourne since 2009 (see page 52).

By contrast, Glasgow Museums has for many years run its famous Open Museum taking work to where the community is. It took the same approach with its Art Extraordinary collection of over 1,000 objects of so-called Outsider Art collected by Scotland's pioneering arts therapist, Joyce Laing. These projects were co-curated, including by local hospital patients, and exhibitions staged at Pollock Civic Realm, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, and at a specialist arts charity, Project Ability (see page 36).

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), in addition to their longstanding work with people recovering from addictions, have taken creative workshops out to two units at St Nicholas psychiatric hospital (see page 56).

### CHANGING THE CULTURE OF MUSEUMS

In all the case studies there is a common recognition that museums can be beneficial places for our health in general. This has many aspects which has been explored in the research cited earlier and in Camic and Chatterjee (2013)<sup>36</sup>. The museums featured here have then chosen to do something additional and more targeted towards engaging people with mental health problems.

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“ An especially interesting question is whether this targeted work helps change the overall culture of museums when it comes to mental health problems. ”

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An especially interesting question is whether this targeted work helps change the overall culture of museums when it comes to mental health problems. Is this a reflexive practice with larger benefits to the ethos of the institution? Certainly, this was the conclusion of the independent evaluation of the longstanding Pathways to Wellbeing work at the Holburne in Bath (see page 39).

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“ We want to continue to offer these unique opportunities not only because we know they support mental health, recovery and reduce social isolation but because they enrich our museums by bringing new voices and a diversity of people to our sites. This changes the culture, the conversations and even our own understanding of what museums are and can be. ”

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**Louise Campion, The Holburne, Bath**

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**36** 'Museums and art galleries as partners for public health interventions'. Camic PM, Chatterjee HJ. *Perspect Public Health*. 2013 Jan;133(1):66-71. doi: 10.1177/1757913912468523. PMID: 23308010.

## Conclusion: an area for development

Museums have been working hard on becoming more democratic, inclusive institutions. This has meant, among other things, a focus on access in all its forms. Museums have displayed a lot of interest in their role in contributing to health and wellbeing.

However, when it comes to applying these principles to people living with mental health problems there has been much less consistent and concerted effort, than for say working with people living with dementia. The reasons for this are not apparent and there are many more people with mental health problems than people living with dementia. Arguably, there has been a tendency towards ‘projectitis’ where concentrated work to engage people with mental health problems has not outlasted short

term funding or the passion of an individual staff member. All funders struggle with insufficient resources to go round but this is a further argument in favour of longer term or core resourcing in this area.

In essence, there are many similarities with, for instance being an ‘Age Friendly’ or ‘Family Friendly’ museum, approaches that are familiar to all museums. Perhaps it might be described as being ‘Mental Health Aware’ or ‘Mental Health Friendly’ as a museum. This entails a framework that both considers mental health in the round for staff and the community, but also makes some targeted provision for people with mental health problems who would find that helpful.

### People living with dementia and museums: a contrast

It is not surprising that that 2016 *Preliminary Report by the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing*<sup>37</sup> (see also page 10) found projects working with older people and with people living with dementia to be the most numerous. In fact, it is rare nowadays to find museums that are not making attempts to become ‘dementia friendly’.

The Baring Foundation supported for five years from 2012 an Age Friendly Museums Network led by the British Museum which had a considerable focus on people living with dementia. It is moving to observe that institutions that are devoted in part to the act of remembering through objects should be so dedicated to serving people who are often having memory problems.

Why does work with people living with dementia seem ubiquitous but targeted work with people living with mental health problems something of a rarity? Could part of the answer be the concerted approach by the Meet Me at MOMA model?<sup>38</sup> This access programme at New York’s Museum of Modern Art for people living with dementia began in 2007 and had a deliberate and well-funded dissemination programme that was emulated around the world. Is this a model for what should happen with people living with mental health problems?

The answer isn’t clear but dementia as a disease has been increasing in visibility and political and cultural priority in the last decade. And that is despite the fact that there are four specialist museums for psychiatry<sup>39</sup> or therapy and none for older age or dementia.

<sup>37</sup> *Museums for Health and Wellbeing. A Preliminary Report*, National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing, Lackoi, K., Patsou, M., and Chatterjee, H.J. et al, 2016. Available at: [museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com](http://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com).

<sup>38</sup> For the history of the Meet Me at MoMA project, see: [www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/resources/#history](http://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/resources/#history).

<sup>39</sup> The Freud Museum in London is another specialist mental health museum.



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## Recommendations

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### 01

There needs to be explicit recognition by individual institutions and infrastructure bodies with an interest in the museum sector that this is an important area which is currently under-developed.

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### 02

Valuing the lived experience and leadership of people with mental health problems, both staff and community members, is essential to developing work in this area.

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### 03

Museums should proactively reach out to the local NHS and voluntary sector bodies such as Mind to consider areas for collaboration. Targeted provision should be included in discussions.

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### 04

As a minimum, museums should ensure that relevant activities and displays are available for Mental Health Awareness Week (in May) and World Mental Health Day (10 October).

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### 05

Museums should consider training for staff such as Mental Health First Aid Training or Trauma Informed Practice, especially for Learning and Engagement staff.

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### 06

More showcasing events in the sector such as those run by the Holburne Museum in Bath to share good practice and increase visibility are needed along with more online guidance tools.

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### 07

A museum should take a leadership position in this area in the way that the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York did for work with people living with dementia.

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### 08

Museum funders should make clear the relevance of their funding for this work or offer dedicated funding pots. Wherever possible this should be long term funding.

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## Afterword

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### CHRIS STEPHENS, DIRECTOR, THE HOLBURNE



**The Holburne's Creative Community: group participants, artists, volunteers and museum staff outside the People Make Museums exhibition, 2022. Photo courtesy of the Holburne Museum**

When, five years ago, I moved from a national gallery to an independent, regional museum, the most profound of many revelations was the importance and impact of the Holburne's community work. The museum had adopted the slogan 'Changing Lives Through Art' which seemed to me little more than rhetoric until I learnt from conversations with individual participants in our Pathways to Wellbeing programme how their lives had been fundamentally turned around through their engagement with the Museum and the development of their own creativity. In 2003, the Holburne had taken over the Victorian Gardener's Lodge in the municipal park that adjoins our site and raised the money

to convert it into a modest learning centre. The seeds of Pathways were sown with the Gardener's Lodge Art Group which grew from working with people who were, sometimes literally, sleeping rough on our doorstep. That work progressed naturally to working with adults with lived experience of mental health issues and then on to the network of groups, developed in partnership with other organisations, that make up Pathways.

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“ Without the attention of a viewer, an exhibit is just an inanimate object; but when someone is curious and brings to bear on it all of their knowledge, emotion, and life’s experience it comes alive in a unique way. ”

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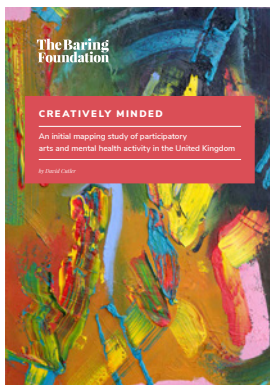
I was surprised to realise that this was not a philanthropic service that the Museum provided but a process of exchange of benefit to all parties. At the heart of Pathways is the participants’ engagement with and creative responses to the Museum and its collection. In these engagements the collection, and the Museum, come alive. Without the attention of a viewer, an exhibit is just an inanimate object; but when someone is curious and brings to bear on it all of their knowledge, emotion, and life’s experience it comes alive in a unique way. In that way, we all learn from each encounter. In a small organisation the participants in programmes like Pathways become part of the close family of the institution alongside the staff, trustees and friends. More than that, how the Museum knows itself is fundamentally affected by such involvement. It is for that reason that we have decided to place the ethos of Pathways to Wellbeing at the very heart of our organisation, to use the concept of the Museum as a caring space as the touchstone that inspires and influences all that we do.

It is so inspiring to read here about similar programmes at other museums. As new definitions of the museum are debated, the idea that it is a place for wellbeing and positive social interaction seems increasingly and widely to be established. Yet one of the greatest challenges facing the sector in this regard is that the work that is increasingly at the heart of what museums do is still treated by others as an adjunct. Even though the work we do is recognised as part of an ecosystem of social and mental health support, it continues to be funded in a short-term way. As programmes develop, individuals and organisations are enriched through learning and development but so much is lost, or cannot be fully capitalised upon, because we lurch from one short-term funding stream to the next. Even where funding is renewed or extended, frequently funders want to see new activities, different outcomes or beneficiaries. As museums move from being repositories of objects to places of social exchange and benefit, the core funding for the former seems only to diminish while the funding for the latter remains doggedly short-term-ist. Surely, if we are to fully realise the potential of what has been developed over the last years - including the national social prescribing initiative which promotes the positive health benefits of arts, creativity and cultural engagement - the funding of the sector needs to move to a more secure, long-term footing to unleash the benefits that museums can offer individuals and their communities.



# Selected Baring Foundation resources on arts and mental health

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



**Creatively Minded**  
David Cutler



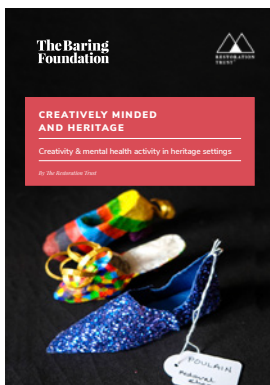
**Creatively Minded and Young**  
Harriet Lowe



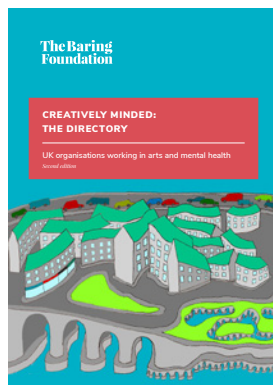
**Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse**  
Compiled by  
The Baring Foundation



**Creatively Minded and the NHS**  
David Cutler



**Creatively Minded and Heritage**  
The Restoration Trust



**Creatively Minded: the Directory**  
The Baring Foundation



**Arts and creativity for people with severe mental illness**  
Hannah Zeilig, Corinna Hackmann, Julian West, Melanie Handley and Jasmin Plant









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