

## **ARTS & MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMME 2020–2025**

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Most Significant Change Stories:  
Evaluation report, July 2025

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**By Mark Robinson with Imogen Blood and Lorna Easterbrook**

## Introduction

This document shares all the Most Significant Change stories shared as part of the evaluation of the Baring Foundation's Arts programme (Art and Mental Health) 2020-2024, conducted by Thinking Practice in the first half of 2025.

Invitations were made to a selection of grantees designed to include projects across all four nations of the UK, different scales, art forms and areas of practice, and the different funding rounds. Story sharers were then interviewed by a member of the evaluation team, who then developed a draft story which was then worked on with the story sharer until they approved it for sharing. The stories are clustered around the themes of the Observations and Insights sections of the [main evaluation report](#). Each story is, however, rich with other detail and implications that have informed our final framing of the themes of this report.

The main report can be found online at:

[www.baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/arts-programme-external-evaluation-2025](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/arts-programme-external-evaluation-2025)

## Most Significant Change story sharers

Click on a name to find  
their story!

Banu Adam	Arts 2 Heal
Harris Albar	Tamasha
Dr Tracy Breathnach	WAWHN
Sam Broadbent	Company Chameleon
Angela Daniel	Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust
Emma Drew	Robin Hood Health
Andrew Eaton-Lewis	Mental Health Foundation Scotland
Alex Evans	Kazzum Arts
Joy Hart	Hive Bradford
Suzanne Gorman	Maya Productions
Sandra Griffiths	The Red Earth Collective
Victoria Hume	Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance
Hannah Jenkins	Community Music Wales
Cara McAleese	Maya Productions
Rachel Nelken	Raw Material Music And Media
Rachael Perrin	Soundcastle
Dierdre Robb	Belfast Exposed
Clara Shield	North East Museums
Valerie Synmoie	Tamasha
Simone Spray	42nd Street
Matt Steinberg	Outside Edge Theatre Company
Andy Watson	Geese Theatre

## 1. Strong progress in supporting activity and the people in the field

### CONNECT, COLLABORATE AND CREATE

**Sandra Griffiths, Director, The Red Earth Collective**

The Red Earth Collective received £12,000 core funding in 2020. In 2024 they were granted £10,000 to produce good practice guidelines for artists working in medium secure care environments.

We've been funded by Baring a few times, most recently through their *Creatively Minded Men* strand which is funding *Build It*. This project started towards the end of last year. Its focus is on supporting global majority men over the age of 25 to be more involved in creative activities. We're working with existing groups, starting by taking taster sessions – things like drumming and spoken word – to places where men are already meeting. For example, some Men's Ministries, run by different churches, run men's groups that support specific health conditions e.g. diabetes or stroke. We'll work with the men, and those running those groups, finding out what the men would like to do, and then offer them some weekly or monthly creative sessions, depending how often the group meets. Or we might work with them to do something like develop a performance, if that's what they decide to do.

Later this year *Build It* will involve our partner in this project, The MAC<sup>1</sup>. Taking creativity to where the men are means we can build those relationships and then begin to invite those taking part to come to particular MAC events. MAC's space is currently one underutilised by global majority men - but we're not yet at that part of this work. It takes time to build those relationships, and *Build It* runs for 2 years but we're always thinking about working with existing groups as a sustainability issue - what the groups might be able to do creatively, or access, or fund or apply for funding, after the project has ended.

The funding that we've had from Baring has led us to develop all sorts of work. We've trained and supported global majority artists, for example, growing a network of people who are confident about working in mental health spaces, whether with Red Earth Collective or with other organisations. Many African and Caribbean artists and other global majority artists who are interested in working in creative mental

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<sup>1</sup> Midland Arts Centre, in Birmingham - <https://macbirmingham.co.uk/>

health have their own lived mental health experiences. They want to share how their creativity has supported their mental health and enabled them to stimulate service users' creativity to re-imagine a world that is full of hopes, dreams, and possibilities. Working together across shared life experiences enables powerful conversations to take place about culture, racism and an identity beyond a service user's mental ill health.

Baring's funding has also enabled us to really think about the time in-between sessions as well as what happens in arts sessions. Should we be in touch in between sessions? There's a sense of responsibility, in that time between sessions, towards developing the creative practice of those taking part outside of sessions.

The responsibility also extends to offering support to address mental health challenges and life concerns that a service user may share during a session. Checking out at the end of each session with service users, and signposting to services, are vital. However, alongside this we may during a debrief between the artist facilitator and our Project Co-ordinator, decide to make a follow-up call with a service user if they live in the community or a staff member if the service user resides in a mental health facility

Co-production in mental health units is multi-layered. There's co-production between the artists and the service users and how we make what the service users want to do happen. And there's co-production with other clinicians e.g. art therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists etc, to map the creativity that's already going on in units and its impact on service users.

The change that Baring's funding has supported that really stands out for me comes out of our work with artists and mental health service users in secure care. When you have a mental health difficulty and are separated from the world in a secure setting, your mental illness can completely define you and overwhelm your sense of who you are. Based on our experiences, it was clear that many service users often grapple with feelings of 'otherness' which limits their view of what they could do, and which makes them feel disconnected from 'normal' life, communities and interactions.

People in secure care are seen through the lens of risk. We acknowledge the importance of safeguarding and risk management conversations leading up to the

work. As artists and art producers we don't know people's diagnoses. We see them as people first. There's something about creativity that shifts that lens through the work that gets created that goes from managing that person's risk to understanding what happened for them. Clinicians become more curious about who that person is, what they can do, what they might do, and what they're interested in.

And when clinicians and service users do an activity together, that's a further shift. For example, on a men's unit where service users chose to make bracelets, when the clinicians got stuck it was service users who showed them what to do next. When 'who helps who' shifts like that it really helps staff to see the person in front of them and to be able to acknowledge that person's strengths and assets. That's especially important for black men in those settings.

We really value all the chances to talk about this work with Baring, with David. We really appreciate the level of interest and curiosity about the work, and the chance for us to say – this is missing, or that would work; and Baring's response being based on us coming up with ways we can do something about it. We have secured funding from Baring to develop some guidelines for artists working in secure care settings – to be launched this year.

We go along to the annual events. It would be good to find out more about the work that's being funded, to showcase the work, and find out who the grantees are. Maybe opportunities to connect around a 'practice' issue two or three times a year would be good. Arts organisations' sustainability is always important. We know Baring won't fund any of us forever, so it would be good to have some conversations about that and be able to talk about the conversations we need to have about funding with local commissioners and with national funders. That's especially important for small organisations like us that want to build upon the impact of our work.

## WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

### Clara Shield, North East Museums

North East Museums were granted £20,000 in 2023 and developed a series of activities and [\*Practising Mindful Practice\*](#), a new podcast resource for heritage professionals.

The partnership between North East Museums and Cumbria Northumberland Tyne & Wear NHS Trust has been really beneficial for patients in acute and rehab settings, and an awful lot of knowledge has been shared between museums and hospital staff that leads to positive changes for patients. But maybe the most important and potentially long-lasting impact has been on us and our own mental health, for the people working on the project.

From the museums end of things, workers are not usually prepared by our experiences and training for working on wards in hospitals. Although we work alongside the health care staff and mental health specialists who have that clinical background, I remember feeling uncomfortable when I first saw a patient in distress or having a crisis. That can have a big impact on you, but as a result of this project I now feel that I know more about how to read a situation in the moment – and it's allowed me to sleep rather than be kept awake by the work.

One key thing in the project that helped with that was having a reciprocal agreement, within a Memorandum of Understanding between NEM and CNTW, that I could have clinical supervision from trained staff. This gave me a space where I could be honest and open about the experiences on the project, talking to other professionals about how to manage yourself, and how to manage the things working in a mental health setting almost inevitably brings up.

Grief came up for me, as I had not long lost my mother, but it might be different things for different people. Versions of everyone you know in your life could be in these wards, so it's pretty inevitable it will have an emotional impact at some point. Now we have people to go to when triggered. We have changed our approach to risk in similar projects – not just physical risks but emotional ones. We also build in clinical supervision opportunities.

I've also been able to use the skills and insights I've gained from the project and the podcast series in my other work – I work two days a week with NEMs and two days running an organisation for young women, which is not in a clinical setting but where mental health can often come up. The podcast has built on visits to other projects with my co-presenter colleague Zoe, and we've learnt from others how best to be in this kind of work. The idea of a buffer zone we got from Daniel Regan has been especially useful to me.

It's clear now what I should expect from the organisation, who can do this work, and who might not – I don't think it's for everyone. We have a staff well-being group that has helped share learning – and generate profile for the work – across venues and teams. The great thing is we've been able to see how we can embed skills across the workforce without diminishing the skills in the community team.

I've been in the Communities Team eight or nine years now and nothing has felt like this. I've felt really valued and have passed that on to others through the podcasts and talks I've done. I've really felt that this might be the place where I need to be. Hearing my voice through this project has allowed me to own it for maybe the first time in my career. That puts me in a better position but also the organisation. NEMs has new commitments with five themes – one of which is well-being, which is positive.

Supporting communities and their mental health through access to arts and museums and preparing the staff at NEM has had the most significant impact for me, it's had a really positive knock-on effect.

### **PROMOTING MENTAL WELLBEING THROUGH CREATIVITY IN BLACKBURN'S SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES**

**Banu Adam, Arts 2 Heal**

*Arts 2 Heal received £29,689 to deliver art workshops and train community champions, promoting mental health awareness and support within South Asian communities in Blackburn, Lancashire.*

The project has yielded remarkable results. Many South Asian women, some of whom had never before engaged in artistic expression, discovered the joy of creative activities. This newfound engagement supported significant growth in their



confidence, not only artistically but also in numerous other aspects of their personal lives. One of the most profound impacts has been a shift in community perceptions regarding the value of art and its positive influence on mental wellbeing.

Traditionally, South Asian families have often prioritised academic subjects like maths, science, and economics, with a pattern of discouraging their children from pursuing artistic paths. This emphasis on "practical" careers, coupled with the less visible presence of art in the curriculum of many local Islamic schools, has created a barrier to creative exploration. Furthermore, deep-seated taboos surrounding mental health, often lacking even basic vocabulary (e.g., for depression, stress, or anxiety), have hindered open conversations and access to support. Individuals often turn to Muslim scholars for what they perceive as spiritual disturbances, with limited awareness of other mental health support services and self-help resources. The stigma associated with mental health issues, including self-harm, further complicates early intervention and prevention efforts. Tragically, Arts 2 Heal has encountered cases, particularly in women experiencing severe mental health crises, sometimes leading to hospitalisation, without ever having previously discussed their struggles.

However, after nearly a decade of dedicated work, Arts 2 Heal is witnessing encouraging signs of intergenerational change. Parents are now bringing their children to our centre for art support related to GCSE coursework, demonstrating a growing recognition of art's value. One young woman with a learning disability, previously withdrawn and at risk of dropping out of college, has recently found a renewed sense of purpose through volunteering at Arts 2 Heal. Young people are confiding in staff about mental health struggles, and their parents are actively supporting and seeking ways for arts and creativity to provide alternative expression and coping mechanisms. The Community Champions, trained by Arts 2 Heal, have shared community experiences highlighting the impact of engaging children and grandchildren in creative activities at home. Many report stronger family connections beyond traditional routines. Where family time was previously centred on shared meals and television, it now includes creative pursuits. Grandparents and grandchildren collaborate on art projects, sparking conversations and laughter, strengthening bonds, and creating lasting memories. This shift from passive consumption to active participation enriches family dynamics, encouraging intergenerational learning and shared pride through creative experiences. The resulting artwork symbolises these strengthened connections.

A tangible testament to the positive shift within the South Asian community's perception of art and its value for mental wellbeing is the growing enrolment across all Arts 2 Heal workshops. We've seen a significant increase in participation from both South Asian men and women, demonstrating a growing embrace of creative expression as a means of personal growth and mental wellbeing. This increased engagement signals a promising change in attitudes, with community members actively seeking out and valuing the therapeutic benefits of art.

The Baring Foundation's flexible grant has been instrumental in facilitating this positive change. Their approach, allowing Arts 2 Heal to explore diverse art forms and adapt the project organically based on community feedback and focus groups, has been invaluable. The foundation's accessible advice and focus on a specific target group – South Asian individuals with a focus on mental health and creativity – have been particularly beneficial. The funding has supported extensive community engagement, including pop-up workshops in various settings, and has enabled the charity to navigate challenges effectively.

Arts 2 Heal has recently expanded into significantly larger premises, still within the same community, creating a welcoming and neutral space. The centre's activities often bring together individuals from both white and South Asian backgrounds, promoting peer support and information sharing related to mental health resources.

Building on this success, the Baring Foundation awarded Arts 2 Heal a further £41,524 over two years in 2024. This new grant, as part of their Creatively Minded Men programme, will allow the charity to specifically address the needs of under-represented South Asian men.

## 2. Diversifying the field

### **STRONG FOUNDATIONS, NEW PATHWAYS**

**Suzanne Gorman**, Artistic Director, Maya Productions; **Cara McAleese**, Creative Producer for Dynamic Flights, with Maya Productions.

*Maya Productions received £60,000 in 2022 for a three-year partnership with South Yorkshire Housing Association, working with residents with long-term mental health needs to create their own art.*

Baring were the main funders of our project *Dynamic Flights*. We worked in two South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) schemes with adults living with severe mental ill health who are supported by the NHS through the Care Programme Approach, in 2023 and 2024. We co-developed ideas with participants through workshops which lead to the creation of a new piece of theatre. We were very lucky to then get Arts Council England funding, and the completed show – also called *Dynamic Flights* – starts rehearsals at the beginning of March (2025). We've a tour planned in Sheffield and Doncaster, including performances for participants, the Housing Association, creative mental health groups, and for students at Sheffield Hallam University.

We worked with a small group of participants in weekly workshops at each scheme. After the initial set of workshops in Year 1 (summer 2023) and following feedback about engagement and this becoming more difficult, we decided with Baring's agreement to condense the next phases of workshops. The project ran for 2 years rather than the originally planned 3 years; the same total number of remaining workshops all delivered in Year 2 (one set in the summer, and one in the autumn of 2024). Some of the original participants from Year 1 had moved out of the schemes before the second year, and SYHA reported that their commissioners had reported that they were seeing higher health needs in the people referred into schemes. There were other difficulties with engaging with high numbers of participants including fewer staff, unfilled vacancies, and a key contact in SYHA left.

The most significant change was the number of global majority artists we worked with on the project. The starting point for the project was Cara knowing about Baring Foundation's funding round aimed at addressing the lack of practitioners from global majority backgrounds in Arts and Creative Health and being aware of the lack of diversity in the artists' pool in South Yorkshire. One of Maya's key missions is to support the arts and cultural sector to be more inclusive. They employ a predominantly global majority team of industry professionals in their work. Their reach, in call outs, is a very different, much broader and wider, network of global majority artists compared with predominantly white arts organisations. *Dynamic Flights* was also a chance for Maya to work for the first time in mental health arts (creative health), so there were many layers of arts development in this project.

We've now worked with, trained, supported, and developed 18-20 global majority artists, many of whom hadn't worked in this Arts and Mental Health field before this project. Artists received mental health training (and, in the second year, clinical supervision). They've gained a range of professional experiences.

The work also supported those artists to develop their practice. For example, one of the changes in the project was our being able to employ an extra artist, a Trainee Artist (for Year 1) who, in Year 2, moved on to become an artist facilitator and is now our costume and set designer for the upcoming *Dynamic Flights* performances. Our sound artist, who co-created original sounds and music with participants in workshops, has used that work as the basis for composing the music for *Dynamic Flights*, and is taking on those professional responsibilities for the show.

It's tricky in mental health arts work if funders focus on the numbers of people taking part because that's not straightforward when people are seriously ill. Although this wasn't an issue with Baring, it could be with other funders. It raises questions about future funding in this field.

Baring was good to work with. If we found something needed to change or there was a problem we came up with solutions before we approached them, and that seemed to work really well. We had helpful, robust, discussions when we needed about what to change, why, and how. There was an in-person network event in 2023, which was really good, and a meeting on Zoom for our cohort of grantees at the beginning. We'd have liked a bit more of that kind of networking – maybe an event in 2024; or possibly using the website or blogs so projects could share common barriers or other experiences with their grant cohort? We'd have liked to know more about how everyone was getting on.

It was striking that this project needed Cara's pre-existing knowledge (and earlier experiences) of Baring as a funder. None of the artists we supported had heard of Baring, and neither Maya (nor Suzanne) have worked on projects where Baring has been a funder before. We wonder how grassroots organisations get to know about funding – not just from Baring, but across all grant giving foundations? At Maya, and in South Yorkshire, we're more involved with community, voluntary sector, and local government networks that share this sort of information, and it may be Baring isn't connected to these. Or might networks with e-newsletters such as the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance include details from Baring, as part of their sharing

information about opportunities? It would be good to find ways of making sure these sorts of funding rounds and chances are known to a really wide range of artists and arts organisations, especially small scale and grassroots, where there often isn't the time or personnel to be able to research from scratch.

## **PLANTING SEEDS OF CREATIVITY AND CONFIDENCE**

### **Hannah Jenkins, Community Music Wales**

*Community Music Wales (CMW) were granted £40,000 over 18 months from Baring Foundation's open round in 2024 for their Tŷ Celf (Art House) project. This will create a democratised space in the South Wales Valleys, in which men facing mental health challenges are trained to lead their peers in music-based activities, events and performance.*

CMW has been working in partnership with groups and charities in the mental health space for many years. During this project, we have formed a new relationship with [Brawd](#) (meaning 'brother' in Welsh), which was set up by and for men with mental health challenges at the start of the pandemic in response to high rates of male suicide and PTSD amongst veterans. Many of the men in the Brawd group have musical interests and, when we met them – at around the same time we visited Kukunori in Finland as part of a Welsh Government funded project to explore cultural models in other parts of Europe – they felt like a great fit for this model. Baring's funding round came at just the right moment and aligned perfectly with us wanting to do something focused on men's mental health.

Over the past few months, our staff have been meeting regularly with the group of about 20 men from Brawd to really understand their skills, strengths, interests, confidence levels and the training and support they will need to lead peer activities.

It's still early days, but the most significant change is the shift to democratising our delivery by applying the Kukunori model. Over the last 30 years, CMW has fine-tuned a model in which we identify a partner in the health or care sector, consult with them and their service users to develop a programme of musical activities, which our freelance music tutors then deliver to high standards of quality. We've worked hard to professionalise community music – we provide extensive training to our tutors on managing groups, safeguarding, ethics, diversity and inclusion. We don't assume that just because you can play Stairway to Heaven on the guitar, you

can go out and deliver a safe and successful session to a group of young people with ADHD.

The Kukunori model is a radical departure for us as an organisation. It's very exciting, but also quite nervy handing over the delivery to people who we know have their own mental health vulnerabilities. It's crucial we get the right balance – we need to loosen up the delivery without loosening up the ethics. A key part of the model is about the benefits which taking people out of their comfort zones and really pushing the boundaries can have. But we also need to make sure that both peer tutors and learners feel safe and empowered and that everyone comes out of the sessions feeling really positive, which is why we have invested so much time and resource in planning and training.

Our work on the project so far has felt much more like a partnership of equals and much less like a hierarchy in which our paid tutors are the experts and the participants are recipients of learning. This has shifted how we view 'participants' and the language we use – we have changed to calling them 'artists', 'musicians' and 'artist learners' – that fits with the ethos of empowering people to see and nurture their own talents and those of their peers.

We don't know exactly how this will work out – we expect there will be all sorts of unexpected outcomes. We're going to do a lot of reflection with our staff and tutors, as well as with Brawd along the way. It's really helped that Baring is very willing to discuss changes and learning – they aren't rigid like many other funders, and this has allowed us the space to run a very developmental project. Because they've taken the time to really understand what we are doing, they have been able to link us up to other organisations who might have learning to share. A networking event is being planned in September, which should be good timing for us – hopefully we will be ready then to think about how we might replicate and scale up this model across Wales and maybe the rest of the UK.

I think there is real potential for this model in a time of reduced budgets, where arts are the first thing to go and community arts practitioners often end up parachuting in to deliver a project with short term funding, which then comes to an end. With this model the hope is that the peer music tutors will, with our support, go off and set up their own groups, or 'seed pods' – we will be doing some light-touch follow-

up to see how this develops. With this project, we are nurturing the grass roots of creativity..... we're seeding it, but hopefully trees will then grow...

### **CREATING A SAFE MEN-ONLY GROUP THAT RESPONDS TO YOUNG MIGRANTS' NEEDS**

**Alex Evans, Kazzum Arts**

*Kazzum Arts is a participatory arts organisation based in East London. They received £43,100 from Baring Foundation's Creatively Minded Men programme in 2024 to deliver 12 months of arts-based groupwork to support the mental health of young migrant and refugee men aged 21-30.*

We have always worked with mixed gender groups of young people – if anything, our stance has been feminist: we've felt that a women's space has been needed the most. However, we had become increasingly aware of the particular pressures facing young men in our work with migrants, and the higher risks they face in relation to their mental health as a result.

There is so much hatred and animosity towards this group in the media and in communities; the immigration system deliberately punishes and traumatises them. At 18, many lose contact with services which have been there during adolescence, they might get their immigration status and may lose particular types of benefit as a result, bringing different financial pressures. During this key transition, there is a gap in service provision, especially for those over 21. In our experience, migrant men in this age group tend to keep their heads down, they are in survival mode, so they don't express themselves for fear of being misinterpreted. In previous programmes, when conversations about mental health have started, we noticed they stopped when a woman walked in.

We were attracted to the *Creatively Minded Men* funding because it felt very specific – the funding pot responded directly to the needs we had been identifying. We didn't need to bend or stretch to fit it, but likewise we couldn't just copy and paste from another application, we needed to really develop our model. It felt like an important opportunity to synthesise what we had learned and really listen and respond to what our male participants were telling us they needed to support their mental wellbeing. It felt both strategic and spontaneous at the same time. We had never done a male-only space before, so this felt innovative for us.

We set up a co-production forum, inviting young men who we hoped would join the new group, and some from our other programmes. This meets quarterly and has met twice so far to steer the group's development. For example, the forum suggested that the group meet bi-weekly (as this would provide time in between sessions to respond to welfare issues or meet individuals for coffee) and they were very keen that there should be hot food, so we bought an air fryer.

We have taken a slower, more responsive approach to growing this group and – half a dozen sessions in – this seems to be working well. Stations with different creative activities in the space provide opportunities for 'soft rolling art' – then we facilitate a structured debate, usually bouncing off a personal issue raised by whoever arrives first. We explore this quite organically using a creative medium – recently we used Lego to make the different things a person might need and think about how they inter-connect.

As a result of this way of working, there is a deep sense of ownership of the group by the men. To establish trust, we have needed to show that we are really listening – to the tiny things, the day-to-day realities and feelings.

The group is bonding around their inter-sectional shared identities – many participants are struggling with their identity as young men, and how this intersects with their culture, religion and sexual identity – so to address these topics from a position of safety, whereby trust is built and maintained, is particularly important and supports participants to share common ground and understand differences.

The participants value spending quality time with other men with whom they have much in common and have started to refer to each other as 'friends'. That's a major step, that sense of belonging.

### **3. Building confidence**

#### **THE CONFIDENCE TO JUMP**

**Deirdre Robb, Belfast Exposed**

*Belfast Exposed received a grant of £30,000 in 2023 to hold a conference on therapeutic photography*



When I came to Belfast Exposed, I noticed that the work that was happening supporting mental health was really good but wasn't strategised. During COVID, I opted not to furlough staff. We kept working with people to support their mental health – we have a great, skilled team that do that work – while we wrote a strategy associated with mental health. Mental health is a massive issue in Northern Ireland as one legacy from the Troubles. You're 25% more likely to have a mental health issue than the rest of the UK, and 39% of the population have been impacted by the Troubles. So it matters massively, even to young people who may not have experienced the Troubles but feel the impact and legacy.

Coming towards the end of that work, David was talking to us and asked what we were doing, and he couldn't believe it. He told us "Nobody else is doing this across the whole of UK. I don't know if they're doing it elsewhere, but they're not really doing it in the UK." But he also pointed out something we'd been realising across our work: our problem was visibility. We were doing fantastic stuff, but not enough people knew about it. David had seen our work and suggested a conference. I hadn't dreamt of that. I was hoping I would get money out of him to do some programming to be quite frank with you!

The whole idea behind the conference was sharing our knowledge of what photography can do that's a different approach to the typical medical interventions. I went big on the conference, because I went exhibitions, I went conference, pulling other arts organisations into it and so on. It was hugely successful, hugely successful, and we had a lot of international delegates that we were not expecting. So the word of mouth had spread out correctly. Judy Weiser, who is going to be our keynote speaker at a second conference, and arguably invented phototherapy, said she felt we were doing something really rather special over here.

It really built up our network on a global level, which is now changing the dynamic for us. We had people attending like the Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland and then six months later, she was talking about us on TV. And this year, the health minister is going to attend.

It got us talking with the Health Trust, with our Arts Council, with our city council, with our practitioners, artists and people with lived experience coming to see what this was all about. That confidence and spreading that word about us really changed our energy and our flow and actually doing the thing working as a team. There was

no other way but to work as a team. There was a lot of team building in it, but everybody gathered all and as I said, it was so successful and had such good knock-on effects that we're actually doing it again this year, only without funding.

The two things that we started off with were 'you're not visible enough' and 'you need to share.' Both those objectives were achieved. I suppose, if you're saying to me, what difference did it make? It gave us confidence, and it gives us a lot of confidence that we are useful for people and relevant to funders, which is bringing in new money. We're involved with the Northern Health Trust who find £15,000 a year for us to do programming for them. You know, most health trusts won't invest that in any one single organisation, but they're doing that. We've really built up that relationship. The conference and the confidence it gave helped us do that.

## **REPRESENTATION MATTERS**

**Rachel Nelken, Raw Material Music and Media**

*Raw Material were granted £21,000 in 2021 to support a new programme of creative courses for those experiencing mental ill health and ethnically diverse artists' professional development.*

We were very aware of Baring, having been identified by the Foundation as a case study for their report 'Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse' before we received funding in 2021. What's most significant about what resulted from our grant is not so much what we did – though that was impactful in itself – but the networks, projects and potential that have followed.

With Raw Sounds+, we were able to offer development and training to the ethnically diverse artists who lead our sessions, alongside new music-making activities for our community members. It was the only grant that we received that year which allowed us to ringfence money for artist development. We decided to use a model we called 'Direct Your Own Development', loosely modelled on Arts Council England's Develop Your Creative Practice scheme, every practitioner having their own budget to design their own bespoke support as well as sessions on particular topics. It was really successful in supporting artists who are often excluded by systemic racism, brought us into health networks, and helped create more profile for Raw Material. That was really important post-Covid and following us re-opening our purpose-built creative centre in Brixton and renewing the outreach work our artists were delivering in acute mental health wards in Lambeth

hospitals. Raw Sounds+ reconfirmed that this can be difficult, triggering work for artists – and for our team.

Out of that scheme came The Artists' Represent Recovery Network, another professional development programme that brought us into even closer contact with arts and health networks addressing the needs of ethnically diverse artists working in the field of arts and health or aspiring to. This project continues now, managed by London Arts and Health, with Raw Material and the Arts & Health Hub as delivery partners.

Artists who have participated, I myself and members of the consortium have spoken at conferences and written about the model, and that's been picked up by other organisations, which we are really happy about. There are now four similar programmes across England that we know about. Sharing spreads the good practice that emerges from developmental phases. I'd like to see more funding for developmental phases, and then for expanding the work.

Recently we became one of 24 consortiums in South London exploring new approaches to support young people's mental health with funding from the Maudsley Charity. They set up a scheme called 'Building Brighter Futures' to address the mental health crisis around young people's mental health. We are part of a small consortium with two NHS teams: NHS EPEC (Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities) and NHS Discover. We're bringing together music, arts and per-led youth and family health approaches. We also have Kings College as a research partner, and London Arts and Health, who we worked with on the Artists Represent Recovery Network leading strategic planning. Together we will explore what a combination of our services could look like and then look to scale up the programme over 3 years. This is on a different scale to anything we've done before.

For Raw Material now, health is a strategic opportunity to develop the longer-term sustainability of the work we do. Our ACE NPO funding is 35% of our income, but I would say 60% of our work focuses on arts and wellbeing. We say our work is 'therapeutic without being Therapy'. We are first and foremost a creative organisation, and work in partnership with many other organisations and agencies both within and outside of the sector. We are passionate about opening up the fields we work in, ensuring representation of people facing systemic racism have the same opportunities as others in the rapidly growing creative health movement.

## UNEARTHING CONFIDENCE – AND MORE QUESTIONS

**Valerie Synmoie and Harris Albar, Tamasha**

*Tamasha were given £45,732 in 2022 for a programme of training for global majority artists*

The Creative Well-Being Lab was a partnership with Creative Health Camden and the medical humanities team at King's College London to train 10 global majority artists to apply their practice into creative well-being, focussing on mental health. It's really increased confidence amongst artists who often face barriers getting into a health sector where global majority people are under-represented as professionals but over-represented as service users.

The cohort were people with different practices: actors, directors, writers, dancers, nurses, all also at various stages of their careers. Some had done some facilitation, some were completely new to the idea of creative well-being. The need was apparent from the 100 applications we got for 10 places. Lots of global majority artists have to be quite multidisciplinary. They face the same struggles that every other global majority artist is facing, such as difficulties getting into spaces, difficulty describing their practice, difficulty getting people to see value in their practice.

We looked at key practical skills like facilitation, budgeting, evaluation, alongside more community-centred approaches. We invited global majority facilitators to talk about their work navigating predominantly white spaces. Each artist had an industry mentor, which was really crucial. They also got to shadow Creative Health Camden activity. Now they've each developing their own project, and we're supporting them through piloting it and hopefully taking it further.

The changes we've seen within the cohort are the most significant things. It's sometimes just confidence really, but that comes from the skills workshops, the industry mentoring, the placements and so on – the partners' ability to put together a coherent and useful programme.

One of our participants is an NHS mental health nurse. When she applied to us, she described herself as being mental health nurse first, before she was an artist. Now she's building her artistic practice so she can use her skills in social prescribing models of activities rather than just clinical ones. She's now got the confidence to acknowledge herself as an artist and someone who can sit between the bridge of

creative well-being. She's already running sessions with Creative Health Camden and their groups.

For Tamasha, in terms of a Developing Artist programme particularly, this was something quite new, where we were working with people not as conventional writers, directors, producers, but as multidisciplinary creatives in creative health settings. It's been a positive part of a longer-term evolution for Tamasha, which has seen the company grow from being a touring theatre company into a creative producing and development organisation, of which our Developing Artists programme is now a core strand.

Staff involvement in the sessions has led to us thinking about and really valuing what well-being looks like for artists and what it looks like for us as an arts organisation. What does well-being for the team look like? What does it mean to be taking care of yourself as an artist or as a facilitator? How can we ensure that the artists feel confident, enabled, supported, and able to kind of diversify their practice in a way that really, really works?

It's been positive but it really feels like just a start. Everyone – artists and team – seems to have more confidence and determination. That is exciting. But when we think long-term, there's still so much more that could be done. It's almost as if we've unearthed these things and now need to repeat the process and practice more. That's something we've talked about in terms of next NPO, but how do we resource it meanwhile, and make it work within our budget?

## 4. Enabling growth towards sustainability

### **FROM A PATCHWORK TO A SEAMLESS THREAD: LIVING OUR VALUES INSIDE AND OUT**

**Rachael Perrin, Soundcastle**

*Soundcastle received a core grant of £12,000 in 2020.*

In 2020 it was nine years or so since the four founders had set up Soundcastle. It was a real moment of shifting what we did at Soundcastle, and for us looking at how we then best supported our freelance team as we got programmes online and engaged with many, many people across the county with complicated mental health

challenges and no access to instruments, and very limited access to data or technology. It was a really complicated time.

The money Baring gave didn't just specifically go into that programme work, but also went into the thinking behind it, which was really essential. It was a real shift for us in terms of how we navigated the programs, as well as everything that was happening behind the scenes. It's certainly confidence building when someone gives you core funding, when they see the core is worth investing in. We know the programmes are valuable, and it feels less surprising when people support them, because we can see that. I think having that vote of confidence mattered a lot, and then we were able to invest a lot in the team, get the Board of Trustees established and stabilised, so we could then grow.

We became a charity around this time, which was a huge thing for us because for the previous nine years, we'd been a not-for-profit organization, and we'd been quite strong about not becoming a charity. I think the real feeling behind that was that we wanted the work that we did to be really equitable. We wanted to work in parallel with communities. We had a very passionate, maybe idealistic, stance on what charity might represent.

But 2020 and this core support from Baring really shifted that for us, because we did a lot of thinking, a lot of reflection, got a lot of advice, and found a way to become a charity that didn't shift our principles and values around creative delivery. Now, I can't imagine not being a charity, and it's completely rooted in what we do, and obviously our governance and our structure, but also how we fundraise, how we look at partnerships, how we're developing. The organisation has grown massively since we got the grant from Baring – from an annual turnover of £53,000 to around £350,000, that includes multi-year funding, grants from the likes of Arts Council England, Youth Music and trusts and foundations.

That growth has also impacted so much how we can support our team. Previously everyone was freelance, and then lockdown came, and we had to really think about how to support them. Now we have an entirely payroll staff team of 16, which we're really proud of, and we work really hard to maintain that with a small core team. We do have brilliant freelancers but anyone that's with us regularly, long term, is now on payroll. That was really a result of that thinking we did around that time of how to embed a core culture where people are in and they opt in and they train with us,

develop with us. We embed the practice. We embed in communities. We become known figures within communities. And there's security for musicians and creatives there that it's so hard to find in a part time creative role. Security is really hard. So that became a real focus for us as well.

It was much more patchwork in 2020. It didn't feel consistent and safe, in a way. And I know that nothing is safe in the arts or in business, but definitely now it feels like we all know that everyone's got a job for a period of time ahead, and that's a really big thing. That's a completely other way of thinking about the organisation, the community members and the practice. It means we can engage for the long-term. Some of our mental health recovery group in West Sussex have been with us for eight years, but there have been gaps which is a real shame. But now there aren't gaps anymore. That feels massive in terms of the delivery and the promise and the relationship. For so many people our groups are a hugely integral, structural part of their life.

We might have hoped Baring would be in the mix in that long term. They feel like a funder we should work with but that's not grown in the way we thought it might at one point. I think it might be because we're already doing the things they want to encourage in others. We audited our programmes to look at gender when we saw Baring's work around men, and found we already had a good balance, without specifically structuring programmes for men. Funding often requires novelty, doesn't it? But we'd really like to demonstrate what's working.

Overall though the most significant change for us is that the infrastructure has gone from being project by project funded to being more stable. I guess it's not the most beautiful, creative conversation – the art form practice is definitely developing too - but thinking about it looking back five years, how the organization has shifted is the biggest and really exciting change.

#### **SPACE TO REAFFIRM**

**Joy Hart, Hive Bradford**

*Hive is a community arts and health project in Bradford. It was awarded £8,000 towards core costs in 2020.*

Hive is a community arts space in Bradford, focusing on arts and mental health, that's been in operation for over 40 years. A core costs grant of £8,000 in 2020 was

crucial for our sustainability, a relatively small but important step. Amongst other things it's meant we could secure additional funding for a £3 million refurbishment of our building.

In 2020 we had the challenges everyone had when Covid hit. That we were able to get some core funding from Baring was amazing, because it gives you that freedom to do stuff. Because, with project funding, it's great because obviously you're there to deliver projects, but you can sometimes outstretch yourself, when you need actual core funding to keep going. And to do that, you have to do 50 projects, yeah, with a 10% core funding attachment, and it's like, well, you know, how do we do that?

We also had issues with our building that after things reopened we were able to tackle because we'd had the chance to review and reaffirm what we were about. That helped us get money from Shipley Town Fund and Bradford 2025. Sometimes you're like a headless chicken, wondering if you are still doing what you mean to, but because we'd had some time to think we knew what we were about. Sorting the building, which is an old school and had lots of cracks and quite a bit of subsidence – we didn't know whether it was going to stay up for the next five or ten years – was massive.

It means we can sustain our services, arts, equipment, as well as courses and volunteering. It's a more sustained approach, because people can stay as long as they want, and there are lots of different opportunities to get involved. So it's never like we do a project and then just disappear. The refurb has future proofed us and future proofed the building, because, yes, it's got solar panels. It's all insulated. It's not going to fall down, and neither are we.

I think one other thing we have done is kind of reshape the team. When I first started here we had about 10 people working on different projects; we had two lottery projects running at the same time, which is unheard of now. It seemed like a natural thing to shrink a little bit when we were doing the refurb. When we had projects come to an end, we didn't think, Oh, well, let's try and keep those posts.

At the moment, we are down to four of us, but, we've got a project starting, so we'll be employing someone for that. We now have more targeted projects, such as working with male unaccompanied refugees in hotels. And we're also working in libraries with people furthest from employment and hoping to get some Bradford



2025 funding to do some work with Linfield Mount, which is the psychiatric hospital in Bradford.

Overall now I'd say grant gave us some freedom to reflect and reaffirm our direction, which has been really beneficial. Right now it feels okay. I mean, there's, obviously, there's always situations where one thing's fine and then another thing feels like it's not as strong as it should be. But actually, it feels very hopeful.

## 5. Modelling trust and flexibility as a funder

### **CREATIVE HEALTH IS GOOD FOR YOUR SYSTEM HEALTH**

**Emma Drew, Robin Hood Health Foundation**

*Robin Hood Health Foundation has been providing creative health services to people with ongoing health concerns in Brighton & Hove for over a decade. They received £75,000 over 3 years from Baring Foundation in 2022 to roll out their HERA (Healing, Expressive and Recovery Arts) Connect Project to 5 new primary care locations.*

In this project, we have acted as a development agency – taking our creative practitioners into new areas, inspiring local practitioners about what's possible, then supporting colleagues on the ground to develop their own programmes. It's been a slow process; often one step forwards and two back, with occasional break-through moments. However, we are now in the third year of BF funding, and we have arrangements in place with partners in Reigate & Banstead (focusing on Redhill and Horley), Dartford/ Gravesham, and Crawley. The model has evolved differently in each area, and they are at varying levels of maturity: there has been 2 years' worth of continuous delivery now in Reigate and Banstead with good numbers; in Crawley, we just held our first event yesterday.

The most important thing is that we see so many examples of transformative change for the individuals taking part. Patients are coming back and saying how much they value these projects – that they feel more connected, better able to manage their symptoms, happier. We projected quotes from participants on a big screen at our recent sell-out conference on creative health in Brighton and it felt very

powerful. No one can claim this isn't happening. One person described her personal journey at this event and has been invited to join a research roundtable in Italy!

We know that creativity is good for your mental health; now we are trying to demonstrate it is good for your system health.

We've learned a lot from trying to engage systems in other areas. Some structures are very slow; identifying professional champions and building relationships with them is what makes the difference. Arts people are always quick to come on board, but finding a committed GP to champion the work can be more difficult; we've had that in Reigate, but we still need to find a GP in Crawley (which was partly why we did the event, although we have already had many positive discussions with local partners). Local authorities typically understand the value of this work, but they rarely have money to act. The NHS does need to step up in this context.

We learned that the NHS is more likely to bite if you offer them something related to staff wellbeing. The mental health transformation programme and the development of neighbourhood mental health teams offers some potential opportunities – we have been included in a couple of bids in Brighton & Hove and West Sussex. We need to show where we can add value and link this to strategies or challenges the NHS faces: for example, there is a new Major Conditions Strategy, and we can engage and support people on waiting lists; there is a lack of mental health trauma specialists in the health system, but we can create a healing space for asylum seekers and others who are unable to access trauma treatment.

There are many challenges to implementing creative health in the NHS. Workforce churn is considerable – we have had many key people leaving their posts, throwing us back to square one to try and find another champion. The structures are complex and frequently changing – this might cause a hiatus in commissioning, or a restructure. In one area, the social prescribers – who we hoped would generate referrals and broker relationships – were suddenly all made redundant.

Clinicians often support what we are trying to do, but the performance management culture and systems in the NHS act as a barrier. Services are commissioned for individual conditions from a medical model perspective; the GP contract rewards tick boxes and numbers, rather than long-term quality; the CQC prioritises infection control over creating environments which promote mental health. Embedding

creative health requires bold leadership – it can be done, but only by those who can hold the long-term vision and are willing and able to bend or change the rules.

It's been a white-knuckle ride, but I feel we are at a tipping point now. For example, our champion in Dartford has been able to get creative health onto the curriculum in the medical school and engage early career clinicians, which lays the foundation for long-term system change.

Baring Foundation's commitment to this field has been a beacon of rationality and proportion. They helped us reflect on our bid, challenged our thinking, helped us re-focus on how we would get buy-in from NHS partners and the long-term impact if we did. Then they treated us as adults and let the project evolve. They have provided the equipment and the machinery – not just in the form of funding, but also building confidence, legitimacy, tools and evidence, accelerating ACE to act on its own strategy. Whenever something good is happening, they are always there...

#### **PRESCRIPTION FOR EVERYONE BEING OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE**

**Simone Spray, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street**

*42<sup>nd</sup> Street were granted £40,000 in 2023 towards a national symposium on the power of creativity in the lives of young people with mental health problems.*

We'd sat awkwardly for Baring I think because we are not a pure arts organisation which is what they've tended to support. So we weren't eligible for funding for our programmes but explored with David growing the local symposiums we'd done previously into a National one.

From that has come a real national platform that we feel really confident in. The symposiums we'd done before were really lovely and really inspiring, but they were talking to the converted. We wanted to bring people in who didn't believe in it quite so much. On the back of it, we have set up a regular Community of Practice attended by national people. We're planning another National Symposium soon. We don't have any money, so we're having to do it on a shoestring, but we're planning another two-day symposium. We now have 30, 40, 50 national partners who know what we're doing, who meet us regularly, and that's growing all the time. So we now have a national brand, I suppose, around some of this, and that's been really helpful.

Even though it's quite hard work and intensive, the symposium and the Community of Practice we've built since has given me confidence we're doing it in the right way, and we're not cutting any corners. It's given us a much wider base of people to talk to and learn from. The Community of Practice is amazing. We get 30 people every time, including the Head of Children, Young People & Perinatal Mental Health for NHS England. It hits the spot for a lot of people that nothing else really does.

We have a commissioner in Manchester, and he calls anything that isn't directly therapeutic work 'fluffy and nice to have', and he's so open about it, it makes us all laugh. Because we did the Symposium nationally, and because it had a bit more status, some of those people came to it and we made it really easy for people to hear the national arguments. That very commissioner came to our board meeting recently and said that fluffy stuff does seem to work. He did actually say that – so very slowly attitudes are changing. The funding and commissions need to come next of course.

I want to start to brand ourselves as a centre of excellence, rather than just kind of a little bit on the side of 42nd Street. That began with the confidence shown in us by Baring and Arts Council – although it's worth noting there were moments I think they thought we weren't doing it in what they thought was 'the right way', and we all had to hold our nerve a bit. Everyone involved in the Symposium was out of our comfort zones. It needed to reflect what we knew about working in a young person-led way, and that challenged some of the arts norms, I think. We employed young people. They were our interns; they were our creative producers. They are brilliant. The quality of the symposium, I think, spoke for itself. It was amazing.

I realised that we were doing something unusual, and that perhaps the reason that we weren't getting funding and support and all despite that is because it's quite difficult to get, it's quite out there for some people. And then the artwork that's produced can be quite hard to see. Some of the poems that young people write are quite hard to listen to. Some of the images that young people produce are quite difficult. I'm not sure how that lands with creative organisations that don't always speak young people's language and their language of mental health. Some of it's quite raw. It's not "bring a group together, do something that's joyous, celebrate". It's very personal and quite difficult. Our young people can be in really serious situations and not everyone's used to that.

I also noticed how the inequalities that impact our young people are so important when thinking about arts and mental health. We're working with kids that no one else would be working with. They don't go to the theatre; they don't have dance lessons. They're not those kids. They're the ones who give up art, who think they're rubbish at it, who come in here and go, I can't draw. They're out of their comfort zones in a big way. But by the time we finish with them, art and creativity is in their lives, and it's in for good, and that's really important. It's better than 12 weeks of therapy, because they can go away with their sketchbook or their poems or their new, refreshed look at the sky and use that in their lives beyond therapy. And I think that's important, that we're working with some of those people that really might not hit either mental health services or the creative industry. I see that even more clearly now than before we did the Symposium.

#### **EXPERIENCED EXPERTISE**

**Andrew Eaton-Lewis, Arts Programme Officer, Mental Health Foundation  
Scotland**

*MHF Scotland have had several grants towards projects relating to the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival, since 2020.*

The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival has been running for 18 years, and the Baring Foundation has been one of our funders since 2021. As we approach our 19<sup>th</sup> festival – and begin planning for our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year – we've just learned that we've been successful in securing multi-year funding from Creative Scotland for the first time, which is a great endorsement and a measure of how far our work has come. While the grant won't cover all festival costs it will give us the security to plan much further in advance than usual (we were previously funded year to year by Creative Scotland, alongside various other funders).

Ours is still the biggest festival of its kind in the world, although many more countries now offer something similar. The work we do has evolved a lot. Ten years ago there was a strong focus on stigma and how, if we all talked about mental health more, this could be reduced. Since then many more people – especially artists – have been focusing explicitly on mental health in their work but there can be consequences to doing this, for artists, audiences, and participants, so the arts world has needed to think creatively about how to support artists and others in this work, from working with wellbeing practitioners to setting clear boundaries when it comes

to working hours and consent, and understanding the complex impact of sharing mental health stories on artists' mental health.

I knew about Baring from a 2017 freelance commission by Luminate<sup>2</sup> to write a report on their creative ageing work in Scotland, funded by the Baring Foundation. When Baring's funding interests moved into mental health and the arts, I began corresponding with David Cutler more regularly, initially as a source of local knowledge in Scotland through my work for the Mental Health Foundation, for whom I've been working part-time since 2014. If David was in Scotland for work, we'd meet up and exchange work news over a coffee. It was a very informal, mutually beneficial relationship which gradually led to me applying to Baring for funding in 2020.

In 2023 I approached Baring to be the sole funder of *Performing Anxiety*, a project which formally launched at the last Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (October 2024). We had been talking to a lot of individual artists who were trying to figure out how to create work from their own mental health experiences while also looking after themselves. A lot of these artists had learned their own 'good practice' techniques through trial and error, but there was a lack of easily accessible practical guidance for anyone doing it for the first time.

*Performing Anxiety* is a series of resources aimed at performers who are sharing their own stories around mental health and for artists who are facilitating others to work autobiographically from their mental health experiences. It's built from the knowledge we've gained over the years, and from interviews and other contributions from artists across the UK who have significant professional experience in working this way and with this type of material, audiences, and participants. David suggested some artists to approach for contributions; others we already knew from working together on other projects.

We've produced a wide range of materials – short podcasts, longer recorded interviews with individual artists, a summary of practical guidance, and a much more in-depth printed guide. There are links to everything on the SMHAF website. We've also run online and in-person events. In May 2025 we're planning a *Performing*

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<sup>2</sup> Luminate are Scotland's creative ageing organisation. <https://luminatescotland.org/>

Anxiety session at the Northern Ireland Mental Health Arts Festival; in March we'll run an in-person workshop in Glasgow.

What this funding and Baring's other support has enabled us to do is to pull together and distil a lot of things we were explaining individually to artists and others about this kind of work. *Performing Anxiety* draws on artists' lived experiences of working with their own material – how it's affected their own mental health, what they've needed to do to support themselves and their work, and their advice on what to do, what to avoid, what to be aware of. The resource is a way of sharing this knowledge more widely. As a result we're more clearly and publicly able to say – this is our area of expertise, here's our material for you to draw on and use in your own work. Having this resource to share is important for the festival, for MHF's other arts work, for other arts organisations and artists. It's timely, with the current interest from Creative Scotland and the Scottish government in developing Scottish mental health arts strategies.

Developing materials for *Performing Anxiety* highlighted the importance of flexibility. Creativity itself means being flexible. You need to be able to adapt as projects and art works develop. But artists and facilitators working in mental health especially need flexibility in how they work. For example, someone might not be willing to have their story included one night so you might need someone else to read it, or it maybe there's a recorded version – or something completely different.

That degree and kind of flexibility is about honouring everyone's mental health. In this work that's also very much needed from the funder. In a mental health project there's always the risk you'll start with 35 participants and end up with 10, and that has to be okay with the funder. That comes down to trust. The funder needs to trust the project, participants and audiences have to trust the artists, and the artists have to trust the funder. It's a circle. It would defeat the point of working in mental health arts if a funder insisted that a project must not change. We'd be at risk of potentially putting people in harm's way if we forced them to do something. We need funders who understand that.

Baring were flexible and approachable. Our ideas for *Performing Anxiety* changed along the way. At the beginning the plan was to cover all art forms, but we quickly realised there are big differences in what's needed in music, or in visual arts. We asked Baring to agree to our focusing on performance, which they did. Baring may

question the changes – you have to be able to justify it, and they may suggest alternatives – but I have never felt that my creativity isn't valued or that I'm not trusted. And as a result of their funding and supporting this project we've now got all these *Performing Anxiety* materials to share.

## 6. A rapidly developing field still feels fragile and precarious

### UNLIKELY POSTER CHILD

**Matt Steinberg, Artistic Director / CEO, Outside Edge Theatre Company**

*Outside Edge received a core grant of £12,000 in 2020 and £10,000 in 2021 to further Diversity and Inclusion work across organisation and workforce to help reach wider, more diverse participants.*

Our relationship with Baring is really positive. At their core they're incredibly inquisitive. The start of our relationship arose out of an initial question, at a creative health event breakout meeting, about whether addiction fits within mental health. We're very clear that it does, but we've often come across funding possibilities for mental health and the arts where we tick every single box bar the exemption – addiction.

Baring funding our work with people who are addicted, in recovery from, or affected by, addiction, is a significant change. It's raised the profile of our work and literally given us a seat at the table, where we've been able to meet and make connections with other arts organisations and funders. Being included in Baring's 2024 report<sup>3</sup> on the arts and recovery and on the front cover of their first *Creatively Minded* report<sup>4</sup> (2020) has given us such visibility and a stamp of approval. It's a really important document that we can take to public health and other commissioners. It's given us a great sense of validation in our work.

It's also raised awareness about addiction and creativity, and that, together with our being funded by Baring more than once, means the way addiction is understood, and potentially funded, has changed. It's begun to open the field of mental health

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<sup>3</sup> Sloan, C (2024). *Creatively Minded and In Recovery*. London: Baring Foundation

<https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-in-recovery/>

<sup>4</sup> Cutler, D (2020). *Creatively Minded*. London: Baring Foundation

<https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded/>



and the arts to include addiction. In 2018, when I started working with Outside Edge, I would never have thought our working relationship with Baring would be so substantial and meaningful.

Our most recent grant has taken much longer than any of us expected to begin to put into place. This weekly drop-in drama group, *Muslim Heritage Tales*, started in January 2025 and will run until May. It's being delivered in partnership with Kayhaal Theatre Company and is open to any adult who is Muslim and affected by addiction. As with all our participants, we ask that people be abstinent on the day they attend.

These sessions look completely different to how we first thought of this. Baring have been very supportive throughout. Taking longer has meant that we've been able to embed the things we've learned along the way. We've built much stronger relationships and a much clearer sense of the organisations working in partnership.

We are really concerned about our own sustainability as a charity. This isn't only about income, although that is a serious factor. It's also that we are a very small team of 3. We all hold and deliver many different roles – everyone's doing 3 or 4 jobs at once, and we feel like we're firefighting with no time to breathe or for professional development. Our limited capacity to continue on in this manner makes our organisation vulnerable. The people we work with are vulnerable and have become more vulnerable as community and other support has been lost. Levels of need have risen. Demand has risen. Costs have risen. Our income has plateaued.

These last 5 or 6 years have gone so quickly, it feels like a much shorter time has passed. So much has happened in that time – Covid especially, and cost of living, but other factors too. Given that, a 10-year programme of funding doesn't feel very long. It doesn't feel like 10 years used to feel. Should extending the overall length of the programme be considered? Grassroots organisations are at a tipping point, but we can't easily see the way through to becoming a bigger organisation that could withstand more or for longer. We can't wait for too much longer. We need to re-examine what future sustainability, for grassroots organisations and our work, might look like.

## CONNECTIONS: THE BUILDING OF RELATIONSHIPS

**Andy Watson, Artistic Director, Geese Theatre**

*Geese Theatre were awarded £47,246 in 2024 for creative projects for men in prison PIPE units with personality disorder, to create and share their own performance.*

Geese Theatre's work is entirely focused on arts in criminal and social justice. In the 1990s, which is when I first joined the company, we'd try to build relationships with prisons and develop projects in partnership with prison staff which would be suitable for their regime. But the key for us is always about partnerships.

Over the last few years we have seen a move to a commissioning model, which is inherently much more transactional. But good quality arts projects are not transactional, they are relational. You can't just 'buy' in the arts to 'do a job' if you want to create meaningful work. Our work is nuanced and layered: it's deep and meaningful. It is not about providing 'entertainment' or giving a group of prisoners something to simply occupy their time. The transactional commissioning model runs counter to the way in which we want to work as it diminishes the process, and we are increasingly trying to find alternative models.

Last summer we were one of 32 arts organisations announced as being funded by Baring as part of their *Creatively Minded Men* strand of work. Our funding is for two years but because our schedules are booked several months ahead, the first of the projects has just been completed: a one-week creative programme in the PIPE (Psychologically Informed Planned Environments) Unit at HMP Gartree, in Leicestershire. Over the two years we'll provide a number of one-day taster sessions and six one-week intensive programmes in a number of PIPE units across the country, including return visits to the PIPE at Gartree.

PIPE units are part of Offender Personality Disorder pathway, an initiative jointly funded by the MoJ and the NHS. They're for men with Personality Disorder difficulties, often with long sentences and often for people seen to be at high risk. Gartree's PIPE is a Progression Unit, so the guys have usually done a significant amount of self-reflection, therapy or treatment programmes which have enabled them to begin the process of understanding themselves. These units are jointly led

by psychologists and prison staff and are built on a relational approach, which is something we feel we strongly aligns with our work.

One of the key challenges with working in prisons is convincing the gatekeepers of the value of the work. Even in somewhere like Gartree, where we have a very strong relationship, the arts can be seen as a “nice-to-have” as opposed to an essential. The stand-out change that the funding from Baring brings is it opens the doors, gives us access to the residents who want to take part, and provides an opportunity for the gatekeepers to see the value of the work without them having to carry the financial risk. Of course, we acknowledge that there are many other costs to a prison when hosting an arts project, including staffing and resourcing costs in addition to the disruption of their regime. But this funding gives us the chance to build relationships with these units, initially for this two-year period, but ideally the relationships will last much longer as we demonstrate the value of our work and hopefully become integral to their approach.

Each of the six projects will inevitably be different as we will be working in different institutions, with different participants, supported by different staff. Our work is built on responsivity – allowing the direction of the project to take shape in response to the particular needs or themes that participants want to explore. The work is deliberately intensive: one week with sessions every day, morning and afternoon, working with approximately ten men and two members of staff. Whilst each project will culminate in some sort of performance, presentation or sharing, our focus is primarily on the process that is happening to get to that point. The performance never defines the work, but sharing it with more of the men, and with other staff, also creates a difference in the Units. The essence of what we do is the building of connections, of relationships. It's in the minutiae, in the group, with the guys. It's in the value of building a relationship between Geese and the prison. Theatre is uniquely brilliant for that.

There is significant research into the impact that projects like ours can have on the participants, but in addition we are interested in what else happens as a consequence of these projects taking place in these settings: changes in the atmosphere in the community environment; changes that occur for men who did not participate but knew the project was happening; changes in the way staff and residents, staff and staff, and residents and residents relate to one another. Our

sense is that our work builds scaffolding – provides a structure, and when we leave, we leave that scaffolding in place.

Our experience with Baring has been brilliant because we feel like we have a relationship, not just with a funding body but with the people who manage the funding body, with David, with Harriet. It's transparent. Of all the funders in this sector Baring are one of the most approachable. They actively seek out dialogue – that's not always the case. Sometimes with funders we feel like we constantly have to justify ourselves. With Baring it feels they trust we're doing the work. The less time we have to justify the work, the more we can actually do the work. Another thing that might seem small, but isn't, is that Baring never asks us to do anything for them without offering to pay for it. It's a meaningful gesture. It's valuing people's time.

There are some other projects that Baring are funding in our geographical area (West Midlands), and although we've all had an email exchange and said we should meet up, it hasn't happened yet. That might be something Baring could support. And also chances to share where there are crossovers with other projects – for example, Women in Theatre who are working in Approved Premises. We're all really busy, so if a funder can support, even if only by making the links, that can really help.

These specialist PIPE Units are closed spaces, full of people who have been removed from society for a very long time. But that doesn't mean that they can't also be creative spaces. The funding from Baring means we can look beyond the current commissioning portals and deliver work that both supports, and is supported by the prison, that is aligned with what the prison is attempting to achieve, and that complements our own processes. We are very grateful to Baring for enabling the opening of these gates.

## 7. Potential priorities: settings, locations or people?

### MOVED BY MOVEMENT

**Sam Broadbent, Learning & Participation Manager, Company Chameleon**

*Company Chameleon were awarded £59,000 in 2022 for the Movement for Mind project, targeting young people experiencing mental health difficulties across ten schools in Greater Manchester.*

We're about halfway through our funding period. We've just finished working in our fourth school and we're on target to work with 10 schools, one from each of the 10 Greater Manchester boroughs. We work with one school at a time, going in weekly for a regular 2-hour slot for 6 weeks, with up to 16 students.

As a company we've been working in this area of dance and mental health since 2016, after our Artistic Director Kevin was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and created the dance performance *Witness This*, about his own journey with his mental health and how it affected the people around him. Since then, we've taken *Witness This* into many schools. But this project means we're able to do something very different. Our starting point isn't about dance but about mental health, and we're co-working with the young people's mental health charity, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and the #Beewell project to do this.

#Beewell is a Manchester-based initiative that gathers a lot of data around mental health and young people. Schools take part through a survey. We've used this data to identify and target the schools with low levels of physical activity and high levels of negative affect and loneliness, so we know we can make an impact. This has helped us reach schools that we've not worked with before, in each of the Greater Manchester boroughs.

And we're then in contact with different staff. We're not starting with the teachers who are involved in dance, but with the Pupil Intervention Managers and the Safeguarding Leads, for example, who will also be present at each of the 6 weekly sessions. They identify the students who'll take part, who might be in any of the Years 7 to 11, but are at risk of or experiencing mental health difficulties.

We start in Week 1 with a performance of *Witness This*, and in Week 6 we give the students ownership on how to end the project. Some have invited back the dancers from *Witness This*, who've been really struck by their progression; others have made a presentation for trusted staff. We all see how the young people's confidence has grown, how they're caring for each other, how connected they feel to us. Post-project, we've been invited back to deliver follow-up workshops, or to watch their school Pride show.

All of this has involved two things. The first is that we've learned so much from our co-deliverers, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. The dance facilitators – two for each school – receive mental health training from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. A mental health practitioner from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is at every weekly school session, working alongside us, so we're learning in that way too. They look at different coping mechanisms, breathwork, meditation and, if anything's disclosed in the session, they can help with referrals to mental health services and in reporting back to the school. It's given us the confidence to know we're working in a sensitive way, and that our safeguarding skills and knowledge are really good. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street provide a debrief supervision session to the dance facilitators after each school, so our staff's mental health is also being looked after. And I can see how this training and upskilling of our staff is supporting our other young people – in our youth company for example. Our staff are so much better equipped to support the whole young person, not just their dance development. And 42<sup>nd</sup> Street have also learned. Usually they work 1:1, but this group work is giving them new skills and experiences.

The second thing is the way that Baring's flexibility and light touch and connections support this development. For example, we're able to take the time needed for training and reflection, and to set things up with each school. From Baring's website, we know who else is being funded, and we've contacted some of those dance projects (for example, Rambert) and made our own new networks – as well as the new school networks we're developing. And both are on top of the network of national creative health organisations – wider than dance – that Baring has also given us.

All this learning and networking means we're now at the forefront of conversations about creative health in Manchester and its funding. We're 'in the mix' of all those strategies. We'd really like to tag Baring in on our socials on all of this - but they're not on everything I don't think! – especially as this work is garnering other attention.

For example, we've been commissioned to deliver this same approach with a school in Munich, this October (2025). It's all reaffirming the power of dance but approaching it with mental health at the forefront, and the way our learning and confidence has grown as a result is giving our work a new depth and expansiveness that really stands out for me.

## 8. Partnerships, collaborations and frameworks as leverage points

### PLACING THE WORK OF THE SECTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF WIDER STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

#### Victoria Hume, Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance

*The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance was commissioned by Baring Foundation (value £20K) in 2020 to conduct research and produce a report on sustainable practice in arts and mental health activity. BF made a further small grant of £5K in 2023 to support the creation of an online catalogue of training courses on creativity and health.*

We have done quite a lot of research over the years – given our reach, we can look and engage across the whole sector. We had an aim to build a more rigorous evidence base about the sector, given that it is fragmented, precarious and hard to put parameters around. We had the opportunity to carry out a large survey and a more in-depth piece of qualitative work within the BF commission. The findings of this research firmed up a lot of things we knew about the arts and mental health sector (but hadn't previously been able to quantify) – for example, that 40% of our survey of practitioners began this work on the basis on their own lived experience, and that formal training routes are close to non-existent. It also threw up some unexpected qualitative findings, for example, about how practitioners who are focused on survival, and fuelled by personal passion and lived experience often identify very personally with their practice. Many have been misused by systems, and this can make it hard to connect with any power structure – whether this is partners, funders or even the evidence base – that replicates this dynamic.

Both the findings and the process of the research itself laid the foundations for the [Creative Health Quality Framework](#), which we went on to develop with Arts Council

England funding. They did this in several ways. Firstly, we spent a lot of time planning and testing how best to engage the sector qualitatively and democratically during the BF research – there was enough funding in the commission for us to be able to pay participants for their contributions, for example. Secondly, it opened a conversation about the strengths and potential vulnerabilities of the sector's workforce that arise from lived experience, and what this means for future sector support. For me though, I think the most significant impact has been in relation to equality, diversity and social justice.

In the past, there was perhaps a tendency to assume that, because everyone in the creative health sector is trying to do a good thing, we don't need to think too much about structural inequality. When stories about creativity and mental health broke into the media, they tended to focus on large institutions, and individual success stories – this was very de-contextualised and the resulting picture tended to leave out the politics implicit in working with more disenfranchised groups, or people living in more complex situations.

When we carried out the research, it wasn't long after Black Lives Matters, so people were reflecting on 'complicity', and our survey provided evidence about how the sector isn't as diverse as it should be, and how precarious funding is one of the drivers of that. BF's very overt statement about inequality and social justice helped – we knew the funder would support our trying to place the work of the sector in this wider structural context. Alongside this, there has been a shift within the NHS, from a sole focus on acute settings and the medical model to more consideration of community inclusion and the psycho-social model. The report was part of the process of speaking to all that much more confidently and saying that creative health has to be part of the conversation about inequalities, and lived experience needs to lead the work we do. But if we want that to happen, we have to think seriously about how the work is structured and funded – it needs active intervention, driven by evidence.

Being commissioned is extremely helpful for us – BF had identified a strategic need for this work and, through conversations with us, we agreed how we would deliver it. That BF also designed, published and disseminated the report gave it credibility and reach. It validated our ability to articulate a position about the state of the sector, and within this, meant we could make much more definite statements about equality and diversity.



There have been two direct offshoots from this work. Firstly the Framework, which has recently been [evaluated](#). Practitioners have been keen to engage with it; it has promoted confidence and shared language, building the sense of a community of practice. There is much more to do to engage NHS commissioners and clinicians, but the framework at least reassures commissioners that the sector has thought about quality, safeguarding and ethics.

Then there is the online training hub that BF has funded more recently – intended to be a central point for the sector to find training offers. This has only been partially successful, in that most of those who have told us about their training offer are operating commercially, and we have struggled to engage larger organisations who don't feel obliged to join the conversation and smaller ones who don't have the capacity to do so. However, this process has ultimately been helpful – we've learned a lot about the training market and about how to engage through our website. As a result, Arts Council England have just given us a grant to help us review our whole website.

## 9. How best to make knowledge and practice visible

### EVIDENCE FOR CHANGE

**Angela Daniel, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust**

**Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT)** hosts [Greater Manchester i-THRIVE](#), which works with NHS providers, Local Authority, Education Settings and VCSE organisations across 10 local authority areas to improve mental health outcomes for children and young people. I-THRIVE includes an [Arts, Culture and Mental Health Programme](#). Baring Foundation provided £20.4K to this partnership in 2022 towards the cost of arts projects with young people.

We know that in CAMHS, whilst we may have evidence-based interventions, not everyone gets better. Our mission is to bring greater choice into the mental health offer, diversifying the skillsets within CAMHS and encouraging partnerships with local arts and VCSE organisations. Every part of the system has a role to play in young people's mental health, and we are very aware that there is unequal access to arts and culture for young people across the Greater Manchester authorities.

Before we received the BF funding, we had worked with a group of academics, clinicians, VCSE and arts organisations to develop [a GM Youth Mental Health Arts & Culture Evaluation framework](#). Great work was happening in this space, but the impact wasn't being measured – or not consistently and in ways which resonated with NHS commissioners. This is key to securing longer-term funding: you need to evidence what you are doing, what makes it work and what doesn't. The tool combines national metrics, demographic, process and experience data and creative and/or unexpected outcomes. You need some NHS-recognised metrics, but it's also important to pick up the little personal changes which you just can't measure with a chart.

We had piloted the tool and the model in 3 projects, then the funding from BF gave us the opportunity (with the VRU top-up) to roll this out to 6 new sites across Greater Manchester. Local partnerships bid for £7.5K each and their Service Level Agreements with us required them to evaluate their activity using the tool. The majority of the projects returned full evaluation data however, there were some gaps, especially in the quantitative data, from two of the projects.

The projects were all very different – we gave the partnerships freedom to choose their target cohort and art form; for example, one involved 12-18 year olds open to CAMHS in a theatre and spoken word project; one worked with young people in an inpatient setting to co-create videos and music of their journeys; another used a story-telling and visual art approach called the Tree of Life. Project reports are published [here](#).

There was lots of learning for the partnerships about how to implement this type of work – not everything worked out as planned: recruiting young people took longer than expected (especially when activities were scheduled during the run-up to GCSEs!); some of the projects were more successful at building young people's ownership of the project than others; all would probably have benefitted from more sessions together. However, what was clear from the data collected with the tool is that, despite the challenges and the diversity of approach, each led to positive impacts for individuals.

There are some great examples of impact for those taking part. There is feedback from a CAMHS practitioner about how the arts project helped a young person to open up in their parallel therapy sessions. There was the young person with their

hood up at the start who ended up being filmed doing performance poetry on a stage. An unexpected outcome of the schools-based project with children of a parent with a life limiting condition is that the parents met in a side room and ended up forming their own peer support group: this has been a great example of a preventative intervention for their children. The CAMHS practitioners involved have experienced the impact of art firsthand and are keen to do more, and the arts practitioners have developed skills in working with this group.

It seems that the basic ingredients that make this model work are a group of people, an arts intervention, and a link with CAMHS.

The most significant change from this project for me is the testing and application of the evaluation framework, because this gives us the foundation on which we are now building a more robust evidence base about creative interventions for young people's mental health. I know that some of the partnerships have been able to use to the evaluation data they collected to make the case for ongoing commissioning – across CAMHS in GM we have gone on to commission [Arts for the Blues](#) off the back of this work. Our longer-term strategic vision is to keep on developing the tool, collecting the data and sharing it with decision-makers. Big changes take time...

## 10. The power and limits of the relational

### **CIRCLES OF WELLBEING**

**Dr Tracy Breathnach, Programme Manager/ Rheolwr y Rhaglen, WAHWN**

*WAHWN was awarded £44,770 in 2023 towards mental health and well-being support for arts organisations and artists*

Originally, *How Ya Doing* was a one-year pilot project, in 2021-2022, for freelance artists to access emotional and mental well-being support post Covid. It was funded by the Arts Council of Wales.

Then Baring Foundation invited us to submit a bid for funding, and this led to a further 2-year *How Ya Doing* project, which began in 2023. We're about three-quarters of the way through that now. The final delivery phase ends in March, and then we'll be into the evaluation.

I've been doing funding applications and managing funded projects for 20 years and this work with Baring is the easiest I've known. Everything with Baring is simple, straightforward. We've had so much space to try things and shift things. There's no wasted time. David's so honest and makes clear what's important, so we don't have to blow everything up to make it sound good. Having direct access to David and Harriet makes such a difference, as does knowing we're part of something much bigger. Once this current project is finished, we hope to share what we've learned through one of Baring's blog posts or an event.

This second *How Ya Doing* project further developed the pilot phase. We realised in the pilot, and through its evaluation, the ongoing need for freelance artists to access reflective practice, and we continued with that, offering 1:1 sessions in Welsh and group sessions in English. We also wanted to train people to become reflective practitioners so the work could be sustained. We've trained 13 facilitators so far and they're beginning to practice, supporting and networking with each other in different ways. For example, two of the facilitators, who work for different organisations, are offering reflective sessions for each other's organisation. But this project also gave us the chance to think more broadly about the real culture shift needed for artists working with mental health challenges and how, at Board and other senior levels, you need this integrated across an organisation so that, instead of 'well-being' being seen as one person's responsibility, it's at the heart of how everything is done. So we ran a course for organisations – *Strategies for Wellbeing* – as well as providing some 1:1 mentoring sessions, exploring how this might develop strategically.

The sector is really precarious in terms of funding. We're trying to support people and organisations within that reality. And the mental health service itself is in crisis. Mental health staff are often on very low rates of pay. Everyone's competing for tiny pots of money. Artists are always on short term contracts; freelancers are constantly juggling several jobs. All of that is in itself very challenging. But organisations can address artists' well-being strategically through things like good rates of pay, artists knowing when they will be paid, paying for time to prepare for sessions and for meetings, and through safeguarding.

We also need to do the same for middle managers who are putting this in place for their staff but are themselves exhausted. And we need to be clear that if you're doing well-being well, it doesn't mean everyone is well all the time! We're seeing the penny beginning to drop in all sorts of organisations in the arts sector who were

already doing some of this work but hadn't been thinking about it strategically. There are lots of ways of approaching this: you need to be clear where you're starting from, where you want to head, what resources you have.

For me, the most significant change is the reflective practice, for practitioners to be valued enough – to value ourselves – to have time and space to think about ourselves in these ways, and our work. Everything is a rush for freelance artists: you're working on several contracts at once, but each contract is focused only on you coming in and delivering – and that delivery is fast, focused, and full. There's no payment for thinking, considering, pausing. Artists are paid for the hours delivered. There's no monetary value in reflection or rest time, and no chance to let things settle. We've seen how this reflective practice gives 'permission' to artists to slow down, to get some space and distance from the things they're doing as practitioners, from the experiences they have with those taking part. This work is relational to other people. If we're too close up to other people and organisations too much of the time, we're not just carrying those fragmented experiences with us into the next place, they also affect us as people and as artists.

Reflective practice isn't about solving a problem but about slowing down and listening. It's also the grassroots end of this strategic change. We know the value of the reflective experience from the feedback of those we've worked with. It's helped artists to feel valued, value themselves, and be more confident. If artists start saying things like – I need preparation time for my work, you need to pay me on time, maybe we'll start looking at ways to pay artists better to deliver less. Maybe we'll be paying for fewer sessions in total because there's paid time for preparation, for meetings, for artists to develop responses to these experiences. The work that's delivered may be better for that, and we're looking after everyone's well-being in the process. Change is multi-layered. We're all connected by the same threads, from grassroots to Board level, from Board level back to grassroots. It's relational. It's circular.