

The Value of the Creative Arts for People with mental illness or learning disabilities

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Abstract

The creative arts are recognised as having a beneficial effect on people with mental illness or learning disabilities. They aid self-expression, communication, increase self esteem and confidence, as well as enhancing skills. However, research in this area is patchy and inconsistent which has contributed to lack of core funding for creative arts activities.

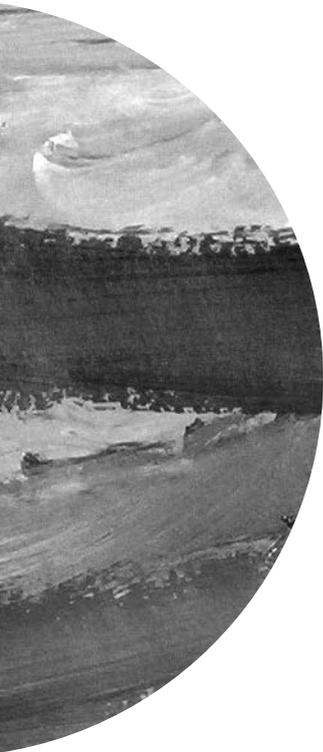
The Inspire Project, a creativity and mental health project in a community health Trust, ran as a pilot project for eighteen months. Artists in residence successfully set up and ran a range of workshops in visual arts, photography and music engaging with over two hundred service users across a wide range of mental health and learning disability services. The level of user satisfaction with the project was high. There was also evidence that the workshop groups led to increased self-esteem and confidence amongst the participants. Exhibitions of the artwork that was produced were particularly highly valued and were critical in terms of linking with community arts facilities and bringing the art to a wider audience. This is an important medium for promoting positive messages about mental health.

Key words: creative arts; mental illness; learning disabilities;

Introduction

The use of therapies such as art therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, in the treatment of those with mental health problems or learning disabilities, is not new. Liebmann (2000), and Lambe and Hogg (2000), provide several examples of these services. History reflects that art in particular was frequently used as a tool in the determination of an individual's cognitive state (see Freud and Jung). The notion of art as a therapeutic tool arose during the Second World War when injured hospitalised members of the armed forces were given paints as a creative occupation to pass time. It was shown to actively benefit patients in their mental healing (Liebmann 2000). Art therapy as a discipline began to grow from this point and has been found in many different settings including mental hospitals, prisons, residential homes, and day centres.

Art therapy or creative activity is not limited to art and may describe a diverse range of activities including sculpture, ceramics, drama, music, and dance. However, there has been some debate about the use of terminology such as 'art therapy' and whether the preference should be for the more generic terms of 'arts activities' and 'creative arts'. This is because art therapy is generally used to describe an activity that revolves around the personal processes and experience involved through making art and is seen by some as a derivative of more traditional therapies (Liebmann 2000). Arts activity and creative arts are terms used to cover a wide range of activities that may be offered for a variety of social, occupational or therapeutic reasons. The line dividing therapy from activity may blur depending on the benefit and value to the service user. The introduction of the concept 'creative arts' rather than a narrower focus on art therapy was critical in working with people with learning disabilities. In this field the inclusion of therapeutic activities such as music, drama, dance, pottery, introduces experiences that involve touch, light, sound, texture, in addition to colour, and allow participation and enjoyment at different levels.



One of the most frequent uses of art therapy and the creative arts has been in the mental health field, originally in hospital settings but increasingly in the community. The purposes and/or benefits of using art therapy or creative arts in this field are many and include aiding self-expression, allowing people to express and explore their feelings in either a verbal or non-verbal way, or as an aid to communication. In addition, creative arts are recognised as having a beneficial effect in promoting an individual's mental, physical, and social well being (Taylor and Healy 2001) and in reducing social exclusion (Crofts and Crayton 2001). The Secretary of State for Health appeared to reinforce these views when, speaking at a conference in February 2001, he said that he thought the arts could play an important role in promoting health lifestyles and also in enhancing the engagement between services and the community (Centre for Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine 2001).

However, the research evidence to support these claims has generally been in short supply. Two initiatives have sought to address this, the 'Mosaic Project' (Crofts and Crayton 2001), and the setting up of a Centre for Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine in the University of Durham. Both are concerned with demonstrating how the creative arts can play an effective and valuable role in health services and assisting in the development of best practice.

The Inspire project

Building on the success of these projects, Wakefield and Pontefract Community Trust in West Yorkshire agreed to host an eighteen month pilot creativity and mental health project from October 2002. The project, a partnership with a voluntary arts organisation, was funded by Trust endowment funds, and employing three artists in residence.

The aims of the project were to:

- develop artistic and creative activity within mental health and learning disability services across the South West Yorkshire area.
- enable people with mental health problems and learning disabilities to take part in creative activity and lead more fulfilling lives.
- reduce the social exclusion of those with mental health problems and learning disabilities by increasing their participation in creative activity and linking them with mainstream/community arts facilities.
- develop creative, social and life skills through creative activity that will lead to enhanced skills for employment.
- challenge the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems and learning disabilities through creative activity.
- challenge the stigma and discrimination faced by those with mental health problems and learning disabilities by promoting the Inspire project and its achievements in the community.
- aid the recovery of those with mental health problems.

The artists in residence (visual arts, photography, and music) were asked to develop creative arts groups within a range of services across the Trust area to enable as many different groups of people to participate as possible. Two of the artists in residence also mentored a small number of service user artists during their residence. Between October 2002 and January 2005 the artists in residence had worked with:

- Older adults with dementia
- Learning disability services – in patient services
– a community home
- Acute in-patient units
- Forensic services - in-patient unit
- Day treatment services
- Rehabilitation services
- Community Mental Health Team
- Drop-in service
- Assertive outreach services

¹The project started in the Wakefield district of the Wakefield and Pontefract Community Trust. A new Trust, South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust was formed in April 2002.

Evaluating arts projects

The difficulties of evaluating an arts project and arts activity became apparent from the outset. The artists were keen to ensure that the evaluation methodology did not constrain the creative activity so this limited the type of data that could be collected. The use of video to record sessions, or observation methods, or the use of measures or scales at the beginning and end of sessions, for example, was felt to be too intrusive. Further limitations were imposed by a lack of resources for the evaluation. At the beginning of the project there was also a lack of awareness of different stakeholder expectations of an evaluation. One of the objectives of the project was to ultimately attract mainstream funding in order to continue creative activity. At the end of the pilot project when attempts to secure further funding were made, it was clear that commissioners required 'hard' evidence rather than the softer data often secured by such evaluations.

A review of the literature suggested that the problems encountered in the Inspire project were not unique and that the evaluation of arts projects has generally been inconsistent. To a large extent, this has been due to uncertainty over the most appropriate methodology to apply (Critical Measures 2001, Bridgwood 2002). Traditional health service research techniques, such as randomised control trials, are essentially based on scientific principles and are not viewed as appropriate for arts based projects (Critical Measures 2001). Demonstrating the effectiveness of a creativity project is more likely to focus on the process and outcomes and utilise ethnographic and reflective techniques (Crofts and Crayton 2001, Critical Measures 2001). Moreover, there are important considerations to take into account when developing measurable outcomes. In addition to attempting to quantify aspects of 'art' that may not be immediately tangible, it is important to develop a means of involving the participant in the evaluation process. Simply undertaking a qualitative evaluation of the project participant's creative activity will not work, as the intrusive nature of having a non participant researcher may prove destructive of the creative processes (Critical Measures 2001, Crofts and Crayton 2001, Bridgwood 2002). It would also be contrary to the aim of many projects, which is to promote social inclusion through capacity building. It is therefore crucial to have clear and agreed processes and measures of evaluation at the outset of the project. Where creative arts projects are aimed at reducing social exclusion, there are additional factors to take into account such as the definition of 'social exclusion' and 'social inclusion' and the development of measures that can identify changes to exclusion (Bridgwood 2002).

The report of a workshop held in July 2001 provides a review of the various methods that have been, or are currently being, utilised in evaluating creative arts projects (Critical Measures 2001). These included process evaluation, use of structured interviews and questionnaires, reflection, and self-evaluation. This illustrated the wide range of methods being used and the lack of any consensus or consistency across the area of creative arts. The issue is picked up in two Arts Council reviews (Jermyn 2001, Reeves 2002), which identify several reasons for the lack of rigorous evaluation. These include:

- lack of agreement on who should be involved,
- lack of resources or skills,
- lack of understanding and the perception that evaluation was only a peripheral task,
- reliance on self reporting;
- lack of methodology or poorly identified methodology;
- lack of a common framework;
- failure to acknowledge the complex issues involved in evaluating the social impact of arts projects;

A review by the Health Development Agency (2000) into the impact of community based arts projects on health and well being concluded that it was 'impossible to give precise details of improved health' as few projects had used instruments to measure this. Although several projects reported increased well being, self esteem, and

motivation of participants, some of the evidence was anecdotal. An interim report from a scientific trial at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital states that two thirds of participants in the project had lower stress levels and improved mood as a result of live performances.

The following is a broad overview of an evaluation of one creative arts project. It is illustrated by some case examples. Aspects of the evaluation were not as rigorous as advocated by Jermyn (2001) and Reeves (2002) due to the reliance on self reporting to evaluate both the artist and service user participant perspectives for the majority of the groups.

The evaluation

The artists worked with 17 groups and more than 250 service users and many more participated in exhibitions and open events. A further 50 staff participated in the project. The number of sessions per group varied from one (a one day workshop/outing) to seventeen. Attendance at the sessions was generally high with group sizes varying from two, where there were high support needs, to eleven. Activities varied according to the type of creative activity but were led by the needs and interests of the participants. The visual artist and photographer, for example, took local history and memories as their themes when working with the groups of older adults. Work with people with learning disabilities focused on the use of colour, texture and different materials in order to stimulate and engage the participants whose concentration levels were low. In 2004 the residents of the learning disability in patient unit were preparing for a move to a home in the community and this provided the photographer and visual arts artist with the opportunity to work with the patients to capture those memories and prepare for the move by choosing colours and textures for their new home. Activities for the other art and photography groups made use of community facilities such as art galleries and a sculpture park. The music groups used activities such as basic rhythm, improvisation, drumming and singing, with all the groups writing and performing their own compositions.

The work that was produced was exhibited in eight exhibitions directly related to the project but individual artists and the music groups also had the opportunity to exhibit their work at other events.

Visual arts residence – group for older adults

The artist took a flexible approach to the creative activity of the participants and, rather than impose a fixed art form, spent the first two sessions talking to them. The creative activity was generated through a 'conversation' initiated by the artist. This helped to develop a theme for the artwork that was to be produced and to make it meaningful for the participants. A discussion about ballroom dancing provoked remarks about 'happy days', which generated the idea of linking the artwork, in the form of collages, to the theme 'happy memories'. The artist was able to identify the participant's interests from their memories about their lives. The three main participants went on to create collages based on their memories and interests i.e. ballroom dancing, woodwork, and local history.

Although the artist made many of the choices about the composition of the artwork (partly because of the time frame), the participants contributed their own ideas and choices in the placement of collage pieces. The artists approach was to gain the trust and confidence of the participants and to allow them to work at their own pace. As such she allowed individuals to develop their creativity rather than try to create a group ethos. This approach can restrict the numbers who can participate where there are high support needs (as with this group) but allows the individual room to develop. Participants came together as a group at the beginning and end of each session. Despite time constraints,

the group produced forty pieces of artwork described by one observer as being of very high quality and beautiful.

"Happy days are here again." (service user participant)

This group was evaluated by an independent artist/evaluator.

The value of creative arts projects

The intended outcomes of the Inspire project were that:

- Participants would value the opportunity to take part in creative activity and would develop creative, social and life skills;
- There would be a reduction in the social exclusion of those with mental health problems and learning disabilities;
- It would aid the recovery of those with mental health problems;
- Participants would be linked with mainstream/community arts facilities;
- It would challenge the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems and learning disabilities through exhibitions of the projects work and links with community facilities.

The diverse nature of the Inspire project meant that a methodology using multiple methods was necessary in order to capture data at all points of the project. There were also specific issues in relation to two of the groups of participants as they were unable to give verbal feedback. The evaluation comprised the following elements:

- Participant evaluation through verbal feedback to the artist and written questionnaires
- Artist evaluation through written feedback, an artist diary, and interview
- Staff evaluation through verbal feedback and service user progress evaluation forms
- Evaluation of the exhibitions of art works through verbal feedback, focus groups, and interviews

For the groups where verbal communication was an issue the methodology involved:

- Participant observation
- Creative evaluation activities
- Staff evaluation through formal and informal interviews and service user progress evaluation forms
- Artist evaluation through written feedback and an artist diary

Staff members who were participants in the sessions were asked to complete participant evaluation forms. They were also asked to complete participant progress forms at the mid point and end point of the sessions. This was to enable us to measure any changes in the participant's levels of self esteem and confidence.

The level of feedback and data from the artists was generally high as all the artists completed session by session feedback forms and diaries and took part in an interview/feedback session. Participant feedback varied according to the group but 53% of those asked to complete evaluation forms did so. Four groups were evaluated using different means due to communication issues. Staff feedback differed according to the groups and the consistency of staff attendance. Shift patterns, sickness, and availability affected staff attendance.

The appointment of an external evaluator for the learning disability and older adults groups in the first residence, presented the project team with particular issues. On reflection, there was a lack of clarity and understanding over exactly what was to be observed during the evaluation of the sessions. Although bringing specific expertise

of evaluation, the evaluator was also an artist and this led to unintended scrutiny of the artist's work as well as the participants and the creative activity. In addition, the evaluator commented on the artist's success, or lack of it, in creating a group dynamic. This was felt to be unrealistic in the particular groups being observed.

Dissemination of the results of the project was also critical and the project team produced information in different formats including a report, conference presentations, and two books comprising of art work that had been produced (Inspire: a diary; Inspire Journey 2004). A full report of the evaluation of the Inspire Project is available from South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust (Minogue, Trusler, 2004)

User satisfaction

Feedback from all the creative arts groups was overwhelmingly positive and the project achieved a high level of satisfaction amongst the participants. The Inspire pilot project has been successful in working across a range of diverse groups and included more than 250 service user participants. Three other participants also took part in the mentoring project or exhibited in the end of residence exhibitions as individual artists. Many others attended the exhibitions or took part in the final event. There is also evidence that the creative arts groups led to increased confidence and self esteem for many of the participants. This was particularly notable in sessions for people with learning disabilities where the artist and staff observed increased levels of eye contact, smiling and gestures. Participants also progressed to making choices about their activities and the materials they used and were able to progress to using materials such as glue to construct sculptures and collages, and cameras to take photographs. For four of the groups, where communication was an issue, simply taking part was an achievement but the people with learning disabilities also demonstrated increased skills, confidence, and interaction with others. Retaining the participant's interest and motivation to take part was a measure of the artist's skills and staff support both for the participants and the artist. Producing high quality artwork was an added bonus.

Photography residence – Day Treatment Services

This group of seven people met for twelve sessions. The photography activities consisted of the use of digital and Polaroid cameras, use of texture and form, making montages and mounting photographs for exhibition. The group also mounted its own local exhibition.

Participants felt that they had taken many positive things from the sessions and these included increased confidence, increased focus in life, and being able to "look at things in a different way". Various things surprised those who took part, for example, the friendliness and warmth of the group, being able to take photographs and make collages. A quote from one member of the groups provides an example of this:

"Firstly I did not realise what an important tool photography can be as an aid to artistic impression and secondly it was very interesting to see how all the people in the group approached a common theme in such creative and disparate ways". (service user participant)

Staff specifically commented on the good attendance record of the participants, their interest and enthusiasm, and the fact that all of them had continued with the project work in their own time. The staff evaluation also recorded the changes in mood and behaviour that had taken place. The general observation was that the group had found the sessions uplifting and "all went out of the room laughing and brighter in mood and more relaxed". Group dynamics were seen as very supportive and non-judgemental allowing the group to engage in joint decision making. Individual changes that were

recorded included the following:

- Improved listening skills, more open mindedness and increased tolerance of others;
- Increased interaction;
- Increased ability to express own opinions;
- Increased confidence;
- Supportive of others;
- Ability to express oneself.

Increases in self esteem and confidence were recorded for all members of the group. It was particularly noted that the exhibition of the work that had been completed had been a major confidence boost.

Staff made some constructive criticisms relating to the need for the artist to be fully aware of Trust policies and procedures particularly in terms of health and safety. They were also critical of the exhibition location and site. However, the overall view was clear, that it had been a positive and successful project. This is summed up by the following extract from comments by members of staff:

'Thank you, thank you, thank you!! For choosing the clients from Baghill House DTS to work with Corinne. The project has been immensely successful and achieved above and beyond what I thought it would achieve ----.'
(Staff member)

This group was able to record some particularly positive outcomes from their involvement in the project. At the end of the project they planned and organised their own exhibition at a local library. Many members of the group had also been enthused to continue and had decided to form their own photography group. They planned to apply for funding to help them set up the group. A member of staff reported that she intended to continue running photography groups in day services in the future and had already identified future participants.

Participants particularly valued the exhibitions of their work as this reinforced the value of the artwork they had produced and placed it in the public arena. It also provided an opportunity to link with mainstream arts activity through visiting galleries or arts centres and meeting other artists. Participants also reported that they had gained new skills through their participation in the groups although some valued the opportunity for social interaction equally highly.

The main criticism made by participants was about the fact that the groups had to end. This was a particular issue for the groups that were only able to run for six or less sessions and had been recognised as a potential problem at the outset. Although the vision had been either to secure additional funding to continue the project, or for service areas to maintain some level of creative activity, this was only possible in one case due to lack of resources. An important lesson from the first residence was the need to obtain staff ownership of both the project and the evaluation. The first artist was responsible for setting up the residence and recruiting participants and staff. The lack of project management presence during this process appeared to have an impact on staff motivation and commitment to ensuring attendance at the sessions. This led to the closure of a group after just three weeks. These issues were largely overcome by holding staff briefings at the start of subsequent residences. Location was a problem for two of the groups. For one group this led to difficulties in concentration, and because of the special needs of the participants, meant that individuals had to work in different rooms. The other group operated despite the conditions and still enjoyed successful outcomes.

Feedback from the artists in residence, staff, and an external evaluator for two of the groups in the first residence, also indicates a high level of satisfaction with the project. After some initial reservations about the project, staff satisfaction was high with staff reporting that it had led to them increasing their expectations of service user's abilities, and that it had enhanced their relationships with service users. A

number also felt that they had gained new skills and learnt new ways of working. A small number of staff were motivated to continue the creative groups after the Inspire groups had finished.

Integration into mainstream arts activity

Securing the integration of participants into mainstream arts activity was not a particular focus during the first residence. Nonetheless, some significant achievements were recorded. Most notable was the success of one of the individual artists in making links with another project which led to her being offered further exhibitions of her work and which may lead to a publication. All the groups and individuals in each of the residences displayed work at art galleries in the Wakefield district, thereby linking with mainstream activity, and most of the groups visited the exhibitions. Groups also visited art galleries and parks during their sessions and based their subsequent work on the visits.

For at least three of the groups and one of the individual artists, visiting a venue such as an art gallery represented a huge step because of the problems they had to overcome to do so. The value of seeing their work displayed and the feedback from visitors to the exhibitions should not be underestimated. The feedback from participants underlines how important this recognition was. The Inspire project itself is based on a partnership between an NHS Trust and a voluntary arts organisation. A longer-term aim of the project was to obtain further funding to strengthen the partnership and to build other partnerships in the area.

“Being involved in the Inspire project has helped me to regain some confidence in my abilities and after the exhibition I felt that I valued my work more”.

Development of individual skills through the mentoring process

The artists who took part in the mentoring project were already skilled in their field. The artist in residence’s role was to develop their creative potential rather than their artistic skills. The feedback demonstrated that the artists played a key role in facilitating them to exhibit their work and in increasing confidence and self esteem. This resulted in further opportunities for development for the artists and crucially the chance to share their experience of creativity and mental health with a broader audience.

“Creative people who allow the creativity to come out will achieve self-acceptance, boost in confidence, feel proud etc., positivity. New scope for life. They can be as adventurous as they like. There is no limit to how adventurous they can be! Trial and error is allowed call it playtime”.

Value for money

The total expenditure on the Inspire project and the eight exhibitions of work was less than £41,000. This represents a cost per participant of approximately £165, less than £20 per session. Although it was not possible to quantify the value of the Inspire project in terms of the part it played in participants ability to manage their illness, it does suggest that the creative arts can present a relatively low cost but high value activity for a substantial number of service users. It was also not possible to quantify the value of promoting positive messages about mental health through the exhibitions of work, media coverage of the project, and access to community arts facilities.

People with learning disabilities

Only a small number of people with learning disabilities were able to participate in both the visual arts and photography residences due to their need for one to one support. However, the value to the participants was high as reflected by the following quote from a member of staff:

"A appears to have more confidence than in the past. He was relaxed with new people working with him and would even take hold of the artists' hand and let her sit next to him. This is a big step forward for A because less than a year ago A had little confidence around new people. A is very alert during sessions and seems to have acquired more self-esteem as the weekly sessions have passed".

The visual artist used colour, texture, and different materials to try and stimulate the interest and activity of the participants. This proved to be successful, particularly for the participant with whom she worked one to one. Participants made collages from paper and sculptures by stacking cards, wooden squares, wooden rings, cork tiles and mirrors. They also made display boxes using different materials including glass and wooden beads, stones and photographs.

There is evidence that the participant's levels of skills increased during the project. From being unable to pick up materials one participant progressed to being able to take them from the table or artist and to spreading glue. A major event in the project was a visit by the participants, artist and staff, to a park. Being able to go outside their environment was a measure of the increased confidence they felt in their abilities and in trying new activities. Photographs from the trip were used to make a collage.

The second artist in residence, a photographer, was able to build on the work of the first artist. She used a significant transition point in the participant's lives as a theme for her work. This enabled them to make a visual record of this important development. Participants undertook a range of activities including using a Polaroid camera, mounting photographs onto card, and painting with their hands. One of the participants painted for the first time. Concentration also improved with one participant consistently being able to take part for periods of between 30 minutes and an hour. Attentiveness and engagement also increased leading to more confidence with the activities and also in becoming more comfortable with the artist.

Conclusions

The need to deliver cost effective and efficient services based on sound evidence can appear to be at odds with innovative and creative services such as creative arts activity. The creative arts can be regarded as a luxury rather than something that is part of core service delivery and it is difficult to attract mainstream funding. Inevitably, commissioners of services require hard evidence of the value of such initiatives and much of what is available is at the 'softer' end of the evidence spectrum. User satisfaction, enjoyment, and enhanced self-esteem whilst clearly of value do not translate into quantifiable improvements in mental health or a reduction in treatment costs. To measure those outcomes can be complex, costly and time consuming for under funded arts projects. There is also the concern that introducing more evaluation measures can lead to creative activity being stifled by the processes of data gathering. Unfortunately, the evidence base in the creative arts is still relatively sparse and inconsistent and it is clear that the academic base needs to be expanded. However, the evidence thus far suggests that creative activity can have health and personal benefits for participants. Such activity increases social interaction and promotes social inclusion. It also enhances employability skills and promotes recovery.

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Appendix

Outcomes – first residence

Participants:

- The project involved 80 users of Trust services.
- The participants supported the project; their feedback demonstrated that the overwhelming majority enjoyed the sessions and gained confidence and self esteem from their attendance, and from exhibiting their work. Motivation and concentration improved for two of the groups (Poplars and Shelley).

There was no negative feedback from the sessions.

- A great deal of creative potential was unlocked amongst service users where they or others had doubted their ability.
- A large volume of artwork was produced, most of which was exhibited at the 4 end of residence exhibitions.
- Participants regarded the exhibitions as an achievement. The fact that other artists and members of the public viewed their work demonstrated that their work was valued.
- Participants were able to link in with mainstream arts activity through visits to Galleries, the exhibitions, and undertaking outdoor activities or visits.

Staff involvement:

- At least 30 members of Trust staff participated in the project.
- Staff from 3 of the service areas where groups were held commented on their reservations at the start of the project. These centred on uncertainty about how the participants would react to creative activity. All became enthusiastic supporters of the project.
- Staff expectations of service users' abilities and skills were raised.
- Staff support was critical to the success of the project. They provided support where service users needed this, ensured participants were aware of the sessions or were facilitated to attend, and provided a venue. Where this support wasn't present the group broke down.

Artist:

- The artist was highly regarded by both participants and staff.
- The artists chosen methods of working suited the participant groups.
- The artist worked successfully with groups of participants who had difficulty in communication and supported them in developing a substantial amount of work for exhibition. Several pieces of this work were sold.

Exhibitions:

- The residence culminated in 4 successful exhibitions and a number of pieces of artwork were sold.
- The participants, the Trust, and the public valued the exhibitions.

Outcomes – second residence

Participants:

- 23 users of Trust services participated in the residence.
- The majority of participants enjoyed the sessions, gained new skills, and increased self esteem and confidence.
- The 2 groups with high support needs were able to participate in the photographic activity to varying degrees making decisions about choice of materials and the composition of their work. The engagement and motivation of the learning disabled participants had improved from the first residence and there was an increase in confidence and skills. The need for one to one support at all times meant that on occasion some members of the group were without an activity to engage in.
- Lack of equipment restricted participation in some group sessions.
- Participants produced high quality work; some of the participants reported being surprised by the quality of their work.
- One group planned and organised their own exhibition at a local library.

Staff involvement:

- 15 members of staff participated in the project.
- The majority of staff were highly supportive and were a key factor in its success.
- Staff viewed the project as a success and reported that participants had benefited from taking part gaining skills, self esteem and confidence.
- The emphasis on producing work for exhibition was an issue of staff within one group.
- At least one member of staff planned to continue running photography groups when the group ended.

Artist:

- The artist was highly regarded by both participants and staff.
- She worked with 2 groups with high support needs and difficulties in communication. She was able to engage their interest and motivation and enable them to produce a variety of work. Each group gained skills and increased self esteem and confidence.

Exhibitions:

- The participants valued the exhibitions.
- They were an important landmark in the group's development. Taking part in the preparations enhanced the group dynamic.
- The exhibitions were not well publicised and attendance suffered as a result.
- The venue for one of the exhibitions was not easily accessible by public transport or for those with a disability.

Mentoring Project Outcomes

- Increased sense of well being and confidence
- Work exhibited at Inspire exhibitions;
- Links with other artists and mainstream arts activity;
- One artist mounted several exhibitions across the UK and produced a publication;
- Additional experience contributed to one artist joining a voluntary organisation;

