

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Organisation: Open Art Box CIC
Region: East England

Introduction

Every week we deliver a box containing all the materials needed to complete a different themed art activity. In each pack we provide clear instructions and an example. The activity also includes images from a range of different artists' work, in that medium.

'The box is like a present, you get a 'can't-wait-to-see-what's-inside!' feeling when it arrives. I have really enjoyed the activities and seeing other people's art work too. My overall opinion? BRILLIANT! Thank you for all your hard work' (carer)

We initially planned 16 different activities ranging from things such as collage, clay, charcoal, book-making, mobiles, embroidery, etc. We continue to develop new activities, working with our participants and their feedback.



Prior to delivering a box, we will phone each participant to discuss the next activity. We sometimes make changes and tailor boxes for specific needs, for example one participant is a carer and also has Parkinson's. Therefore we talk him through the activity and discuss any part of it he might find physically difficult. We then, with him, discuss how we can suitably modify the activity or find an alternative way of doing it that he is happy with. We also have a participant living on her own with dementia. She is unable to read instructions, due to her dementia. We therefore are able to chat beforehand and reassure her that she can interpret the materials provided as freely as she wishes.

This regular phone support prior to delivering has been a vital part of what we have been able to offer, giving artistic advice and reassurance as well as providing a weekly routine and a friendly chat.

On delivery days participants have been able to display their work in windows, chat to us from their doorways and maintain an ongoing connection to us. Many of our participants do not have access to the internet, so this connection is especially important.

Image: Clay tile workshop – Pauline; Photo: Emma Adams

Funders: We set up the project with funding from Hertfordshire Community Foundation as well as individual donations via our Local Giving Appeal.

Who is it for?

Through the initial lockdown and beyond we have been providing weekly home art workshop packs to people living with dementia and their carers, who are isolating at home.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Our key aim in providing these packs is to help people stay well, motivated and purposeful, through an extremely challenging time. We are using these packs as an opportunity to enable and encourage creativity, support their wellbeing and make them feel valued.

Where is it happening?

We are providing boxes mainly to North Hertfordshire and Stevenage residence but have extended to one participant in St Albans.

Are you working in partnership?

Although this project has been set up by us independently, we have been working with Hertswise, which is a Hertfordshire Countywide project involving nine partners, including Age UK (Herts) and HILS to reach participants. We have also been working with the home care provider Right at Home (Letchworth, Hitchin and Stevenage) and providing for a number of their clients. We partnered up with The Red Shed CIC based in Stevenage to provide our art boxes to their clients and they provided garden packs to some of our participants in return.

How many people took/are taking part?

30

For how long has it been happening?

It began at the beginning of April 2020 and is ongoing (future funding pending)

What were/are the main outputs?

Initially we just focused on how we could support people to stay creative and positive during lockdown. As the project has progressed and the participants continue to produce and develop such incredible work, we now are working towards a chance to exhibit and celebrate their achievements, when it is safe and appropriate to do this.

Feedback:

Each week we provide a feedback sheet for our participants to fill in if they would like. They also sign a photo consent form if they are happy for us to share images of themselves and their work. We also receive verbal feedback when phoning and delivering.

A few comments...

"She has always been creative, but over the last few years, has found it increasingly harder to self-start projects. These boxes have been fantastic and we have been amazed by the work she has produced" Daughters to Pauline

"The box is like a present, you get a 'can't-wait-to-see-what's-inside!' feeling when it arrives. I have really enjoyed the activities and seeing other people's art work too. My overall opinion? BRILLIANT! Thank you for all your hard work." Lynne (carer)

“This was fun and both my parents enjoyed making their tiles. It interested my dad and he sat and stayed until he’d finished. He normally doesn’t finish in one sitting” Daughter to Jerry

“We find it amazing how many ways there are to display different techniques of art. Thoroughly enjoyed this activity and stretched us to think outside the norm. Thank you”
Margaret and Tony

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

This project was developed extremely quickly, due to the urgency of the situation. Therefore we have learnt a lot whilst actually in the process of doing it, but we now feel very proud of what it has achieved so far. We personally feel it is an extremely important, beneficial project to all our participants as well as for ourselves as artists and facilitators.

Through the lockdown, it offered a focus and diversion from the worry and strain of the health crisis and allowed us all to stay connected and creative. Our participants commented that it gave them something else to talk about with their loved ones other than the latest Covid-19 update. It is something that includes people without internet access and has given them time and freedom to explore art making in their own homes.

The challenges of it have been the lack of hands on support, particularly to those living on their own or with particular physical difficulties. We have felt frustrated at times that we cannot be there to set them up and get people started.

One carer feels it gives her more work because “it’s another thing to do”. Therefore we have tried to tailor activities for her and her husband that require less preparation and encouraged her not to focus on the outcome, but rather let her husband, who has dementia, to freely explore the materials in his own way.

The regular ongoing contact has allowed us to get a good understanding of each persons needs and preferences. It has been a joy to see the participants confidence grow and their creativity flourish.

Further information

www.openartbox.org.uk

Open Art Box CIC is an organisation delivering visual art workshops to people living with early-stage dementia and their carers. Usually working in partnership with museums and art galleries, we offer opportunities for participants, with the support of professional artists to explore and discover a wide range artistic mediums and styles. Our workshops are focused on collaboration and social interaction, building confidence through creativity and nurturing each persons individual creative voice. Open Art Box CIC has two employees.