

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

Project: Behind the Mask

Organisation: Creative Minds / Verd de Gris

Region: Yorkshire & Humber

“The Verd de Gris arts online sessions have been my lifeline during the pandemic.”

Introduction

Behind the Mask is a creative wellbeing programme that uses a tried and tested creative methodology to give local women the time and space over a 12-month period to talk openly about the factors that impact their on quality of life. For some, there may be cultural and / or societal pressures within their respective communities. For others, it may be the lack of educational / employment opportunities. Some group members struggle with a long-term health condition; some are full-time carers; some live with the long-term effects of the negative experience of school life. Most of these women live with depression and / or anxiety.



The weekly creative sessions combined various art forms including visual art, singing, creative writing and breath and movement exercises. Women were referred through local support organisations, including WomenCentre and local authority social services.

Behind the Mask has moved to virtual sessions during the coronavirus pandemic.

Image: Verd de Gris' art packs

Funders

Creative Minds (funded by SWYPFT) match funded the project with Verd de Gris's European Social Fund funding.

Who is it for?

This is a project aimed at women in the Calderdale area of West Yorkshire. Participants of the project are women struggling with long-term health conditions, full-time carers or those living with depression and / or anxiety.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

To foster improved self-confidence, reduce stress / negative feelings, build group dynamic, new friendships and peer support.

Where is it happening?

Calderdale, West Yorkshire

Are you working in partnership?

This is Creative Minds project delivered by Verd de Gris – a Calderdale-based art and health and community cohesion provider.

How many people took/are taking part?

40+

For how long has it been happening?

June 2020 – October 2020

What were/are the main outputs?

- A series of weekly, multi-art form, online sessions for women experiencing anxiety / stress through isolation (due to Covid-19)
- Peer support through WhatsApp and Zoom, alongside 1:2:1 support work for those who request it

Feedback:

Behind the Mask is the only place I have been where women from different backgrounds come together and learn such a lot from each other. Really – it has opened my eyes and made me realise that as an Asian women, I feel that Asian communities are already isolated – they need to be mixed in different culture – everybody’s problems are the same and we learn more when it is a mixed group.” (Sidra)

“Prior to the course, I rarely left my house. I was extremely isolated and lonely; this affected my health both mentally and physically. This course has given me a new lease of life, I have met wonderful women who I meet up with and I feel less isolated and alone. I am no longer fearful of leaving the house.” (Sam)

“The Verd de gris arts online sessions have been my lifeline during the pandemic. As a single mother isolating with two children, my days are spent trying to homeschool and also keep them entertained; whilst providing them with support and reassurance at this uncertain time. This lockdown has also been a great challenge to me, as I suffer from PTSD and the isolation has triggered feelings that are affecting my mental health more so than before. The sessions have been a god send in giving me time and space for me to relax, to express myself and to feel connected with others. Sharon delivers the sessions with compassion and pitches the mood perfectly. It feels like you are there with her, in that moment. I cannot express how much these sessions have helped my mental health, when I’m struggling I replay them and it helps bring me comfort and calm. My children join in too. Truly amazing project and I’m so grateful to have been able to access it during this pandemic.” (S.)

“Thanks for being in my living room this afternoon. I loved it! That made my heart cry for all the times I've been alone and had no one, but not anymore ... thank you. I 'm still crying now but I needed to. I do think you do the sessions good; I really liked the blessing at the end... did it with you. And I sang Puri Mama. Thank you” (S.)

I found the first couple of sessions very difficult and emotional as I work with Sharon in her live group work. Hard to see her and not be in a room with her and the other women we work with. But it still really helped me. But now I look forward to them, it’s something to look

forward to, instead of being low and in a dark place. The music and singing and writing, it's really been uplifting. You really lift my emotions and the writing really brings out my feelings which are better out than in. Just makes me happy for the rest of the day. I feel very lucky to have this. And the way you present the session it's as though I'm doing it with all of us, like before. Thank you for giving me that opportunity to still see you and do our session, even though it's not in person." (T.)

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The feedback we have received from participants has been overwhelming positive. The success of this project has seen participants join other Verd de Gris projects such as a new project called Fibre. An additional outcome of this work is that we try to develop other opportunities for local women - developing confidence and trust through the sessional work and then inviting them to take part in other creative project work and / or giving them platforms / active citizen opportunities to voice concerns directly to commissioners and policy-makers (see Public Health film Working Well as an example: www.verddegris.org/project/is-work-working/)

Further information

<http://www.verddegris.org/project/many-voices-behind-the-mask/>
www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/creative-minds/home

Creative Minds is an award-winning charity hosted by South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SWYPFT). We develop and fund creative activities to support people with their mental health, wellbeing and recovery. Our initiatives cover arts, leisure, recreation and sports/physical activity. We work closely with SWYPFT services and our Creative Minds partners in the community to develop projects which benefit our public and staff. Since its launch in 2011, Creative Minds has enabled over 500 projects, facilitated over 100 sports events and benefits over 6,500 people per year. We have around 130 Creative Minds partner organisations from across all our localities in Barnsley, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield.

Creative Minds is a linked charity hosted SWYPFT with 4 core workers, with the use of bank and sessional staff as required.