



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

Project: Creative Directions

Organisation: darts, Doncaster Community Arts

Region: Yorkshire & Humber

Introduction

From a series of telephone interviews to sustain contact with participants, establish individual needs and understand barriers and opportunities to access content remotely, we identified a real diversity of need.

For 45-50% of our group, getting online just wasn't an option. With this in mind we wanted to introduce the creation and delivery of physical creative packs...

Many were struggling, particularly those who live alone and most were experiencing increased anxiety as a result of lockdown or fear around the coronavirus pandemic. Around 45-50% of participants have no internet access or are not confident in using technology.

We have adapted our existing activity through structured videos online, creative stimulus in the form of visual arts and music activity packs and some live group work via Zoom. However, for 45-50% of our group getting online just wasn't an option.

With this in mind we wanted to introduce the creation and delivery of physical creative packs. We aim to create 6 new activity books which can be delivered each month between June and December 2020, to deliver door to door to our most vulnerable participants. Each box will include enough activities/challenges for the month, with materials to support this. Our staff will then return, bringing a new creative pack, and photographing participants (with permission) with completed artwork they wish to keep.

Creative writers who are currently involved are Ian McMillan (poet and broadcaster, Lydia Allison (darts Young Poet in Residence) and Gittika Buttoo (who has been working with us on the National Theatre's Public Acts programme). Eleven Design who are based in Sheffield have a number of illustrators who will collaborate with us on the books.

Funders

This work has been funded by an uplift in funding from The National Lottery Community Fund who fund our Creative Directions programme.

Who is it for?

We have been developing new ways to stay connected and creative with our participants who are part of our Creative Directions group which usually meet face to face every Wednesday at The Point. Creative Directions is a programme of creative activity for adults who experience mild to moderate mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and social phobia. We engage around 130 adults every year, most of whom are unemployed or on a low income.

20% of participants are aged over 70, 26% of them self-identify as having a learning disability, 25% of them have a physical disability and 42% of them have a long-standing illness or health condition. Many have more than one protected characteristic.

The approach is person focused and artists respond to the interests and needs of those in the room. Impacts are strong – most recently 88% of participants told us they had made new friends, 75% had been coping well with problems, 59% had been relying less on their doctor and 80% said that they had been feeling good about themselves as a result of attending Creative Directions.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

To find practical ways for people to stay connected, motivated and inspired whilst at home, (without internet access) so they focus on positive outcomes and can still feel a sense of achievement. To find a way to respond to the complex and highly individual needs of each participant as well as finding new ways for them to respond safely and work collaboratively with others. By keeping connected with people we can talk to them regularly about what things they need in place to feel confident and comfortable to come back to face to face sessions when they resume.

Where is it happening?

Doncaster

Are you working in partnership?

We have strong referring partnerships in place with RDASH NHS Foundation Trust and Doncaster's Social Prescribing Team. We run Doncaster's Arts and Health Board which has representation from RDASH, Public Health, SYHA (South Yorkshire Housing Association), Cast theatre and Doncaster Heritage. Our We Create: Mexborough project has made strong links with Primary Care Network and one of the Clinical Directors and is funded by Clinical Commissioning Group.

How many people took/are taking part?

We expect that around 100 people out of our regular 130 participants are to take part.

For how long has it been happening?

Design of the creative packs began in June with the first pack going out in July and running until the end of December 2020

What were/are the main outputs?

6 new creative books to be designed with at least 3 writers/poets and 3 illustrators. For our Participation Co-ordinator to deliver these creative books (with high quality pens/pencils) straight to people's home. We will deliver a minimum of 50 books each month for 6 months but expect this number to be higher.

Further information

<https://wearedarts.org.uk/creative-directions-at-home/>

darts is one of the country's largest participatory arts charities delivering around £1m of activity across the Doncaster borough every year. We support vulnerable adults and young people to improve health and wellbeing and reduce isolation, and work with schools and families to improve engagement in learning. darts employs 26 people.