

Museum of You
The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge
South East England

'I found the process of drawing and painting both cathartic and healing at the most difficult time of my life.'

Introduction



The aim of Museum of You was to produce a high-quality exhibition which captured the local experience of lockdown. The content of the exhibition call outs focused on MINDs 6 Ways to Wellbeing, with each call out released was an accompanying newsletter containing evidence based, accessible activities designed to improve Health & Wellbeing while at home. Alongside the open call, a targeted approach was employed to ensure that as many groups as possible would be able to participate and that the exhibition would truly reflect the demographic of the local community. By hosting this opportunity, more people will have access to the therapeutic value of the arts, particularly in what is acknowledged to be a very challenging time for people's physical and mental health.

Alongside the Museum of You we ran a "Creating Heritage Blog" from the day that the museum closed onwards. The blog was a digital record of life during record and contributions came from museum staff, volunteers, local school children, artists, health care professionals and staff from other arts organisations. A poet was commissioned to use the blog's contents as inspiration to write a poem, the content of which will be printed on to floor vinyls to act as

social distancing reminders. These floor vinyls are important interventions in the museum to manage people's anxiety by providing a more pleasant way of providing social distancing measures.

Image credit: "Lockdown Life" by Rebecca Douglas

Funders

Museum of You was funded through Arts Council England as part of our National Portfolio Organisation funding.

Who is it for?

With this project we aimed to be inclusive by creating a platform for all people regardless of their age, disability status, gender, relationship status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, belief, sex or sexual orientation. Alongside running an open call, we had a targeted approach to increase participation from specific groups. This included our regular groups at The Beaney which are attended by people who are vulnerable due to their conditions, many of whom were shielding as per government guidelines. Participants have a range of conditions including; a diagnosis of dementia, their carers, people at risk of social isolation, people who identified themselves as needing support with their mental health and people with a visual impairment. These participants were specifically invited to take part in creative activities and submit work, and a participant centred approach was developed with facilitators which reflected the needs of individuals in the groups. For example: those who were unable to participate online they were supported by telephone calls. Participants who did not have access to art materials were delivered supplies by group facilitators.

We also developed links with other service providers at Canterbury City Council, who work with vulnerable groups in the community. This enabled us to engage the project and exhibition with refugees and asylum seekers who had been placed in the local area, as well as an art group run for children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- To produce a high-quality exhibition of the local experience of lockdown whilst supporting the wellbeing of the general population.
- Combating loneliness by maintaining the relationship with our existing Health and Wellbeing participants who are already identified as at risk of loneliness and vulnerable due to their conditions.
- Supporting Mental + Physical health of the general population by providing accessible activities that support wellbeing as per MINDs "Six Ways to Wellbeing"
- Developing working relationships with other organisations in the area to support the wellbeing of members of the community who may not have previously engaged with The Beaney's Health & Wellbeing Programme.

Where is it happening?

The vast majority of people who participated and have submitted artwork are from Kent (>90%)

Are you working in partnership?

For this project we worked with a number of local authority services and community organisations. Including People United - A Kent based organisation which uses the arts to

foster kindness and empathy in communities. We also linked up with other services within Canterbury City Council which provide services to vulnerable people in the community including an arts club for young people from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and a service for refugees and asylum seekers placed in the district. We also worked with Canterbury Pride to promote the opportunity for the local LGBTQIA+ community.

How many people took/are taking part?

Approx 100 people have submitted work so far, final number to be confirmed.

For how long has it been happening?

This work is ongoing

What were/are the main outputs?

This will result in an exhibition in the Special Exhibitions Gallery at The Beaney from Saturday 26 Sept - Sunday 18 October 2020.

Feedback:

“Many thanks for creating this opportunity for artists at this bleak time.”

“These have all been great fun to produce and kept me sane”

“I found the process of drawing and painting both cathartic and healing at the most difficult time of my life.”

“It has given me a purpose each day and kept me positive and good-humored.”

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The feedback from participants and partner organisations has been positive. Regular Beaney group members in particular have commented that they have found the personal interactions both virtual and by telephone useful and reassuring. They have enjoyed maintaining the regular groups digitally and keeping in touch with each other in the absence of being able to attend the museum physically, many spoke about how useful this was in a time when they were unable to meet with friends, families and other people as usual. Many people who submitted work to the Museum of You remarked that the process of being creative has helped them to manage their wellbeing and mental health in a difficult time. Some people who submitted work spoke very candidly about the loss they had experienced - of people close to them, and how the opportunity to make art had provided them with an outlet to express their emotions.

The main challenges were that a number of our regular group attendees were unable to engage with digital content due to the nature of their conditions (visual impairments and dementia having the biggest challenge, especially for those who live alone). Therefore alternative provision of telephone calls was used. The secondary challenge was that not everyone had access to art supplies. The facilitator of Sensing Culture used funds that would usually be used to host physical groups to purchase materials for them and do a no contact drop off. In this respect one of the challenges is that delivering the workshops became more time consuming and we acknowledge that the success of this intervention is in part due to the dedication of our volunteers and facilitators to go above and beyond. Their time was covered by funding that had already been secured pre covid however in the instance that this was a

long-term situation it is likely that more funding would be needed to cover the cost of extra time of the group facilitators to provide a personalised service.

Further information

<https://canterburymuseums.co.uk/participate/health-and-wellbeing/museum-of-you/>

<https://twitter.com/Beaneyfrontroom>

The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge is a Local Authority Museum, Gallery, Visitor Information Centre and Library in Canterbury, Kent, in the United Kingdom. We are a member of the Happy Museum project and we are the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance South East Museums Champion. We have an established Health & Wellbeing programme at The Beaney, with regular groups for people with specific conditions alongside Health & Wellbeing focused exhibitions and events which are open to all.