

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

Remote Connectivity

Art & Soul

Region: Greater London

'It was such a brilliant idea, it has saved my sanity in this terrible time.'

Introduction

'Remote Connectivity', devised by art therapists and the Art & Soul team, is a three-month online programme designed to reduce isolation and assist with maintaining mental and emotional wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Adults with mental health issues in South-West London were posted a pack of art materials and art therapist-devised expressive activities were released via Facebook on a weekly basis, to a private Facebook group,

moderated by the art therapist and project coordinator. Activities were posted or emailed to those who do not use Facebook. Additionally the art therapist and project coordinator hold Zoom calls and private calls with participants to support wellbeing during this time. Remote Connectivity developed an online sense of community for Art & Soul, and resulted in much positive feedback and an increased sense of confidence after taking part.



Image credit: Artwork by BrIndi in response to the theme 'Bravery', created during lockdown in April 2020.

Funders

The Hampton Fund, Richmond Parish Lands Charity and the Civic Pride Fund (London Borough of Richmond upon Thames).

Who is it for?

Our participants were adults with a range of mental health issues, from mild depression and anxiety to those with long-term or on-going conditions who regularly access our services to use creative activity to support their wellbeing and changing mental health needs.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Supporting mental and emotional wellbeing through the arts and through the contact with an art therapist
- Reducing isolation during Covid-19
- Maintaining the Art & Soul community
- Reducing increased anxiety due to lockdown and the pandemic

- Increasing resilience through exploring challenging feelings within art making

Where is it happening?

South-west London

Are you working in partnership?

This project was not a partnership, but it builds on Art & Soul's connections with the local health and social care networks, as many of our participants were referred from NHS or other voluntary organisations who support mental health, such as Richmond Borough Mind.

How many people took/are taking part?

42

For how long has it been happening?

The project began in March 2020 for six weeks and then took a break and will be running for another eight weeks from mid-July to mid-September.

The project offered:

- Packs of high quality art materials posted to participants
- 14 weeks of art therapist-supported online activities run through a closed Facebook group, with offline support for those who do not access Facebook or use the internet
- Thematic activities devised to explicitly support mental health and wellbeing during this challenging time e.g. considering concepts such as 'change', 'rebirth' and 'bravery' to allow negative emotions to be processed through art making, with a space for comments and the support of the art therapist;
- 14 weeks of Zoom call support and/or telephone support, offering a regular time and space to connect with others and try some art making
- The development of a supportive community online, while ensuring those who were not online were supported through weekly phone calls with the art therapist

Evaluation:

60% of participants felt 'safe and secure' after doing activities;

50% of participants reported they 'enjoyed the company of other people' after taking part;

50% of participants reported they felt very interested in trying new things after taking part.

Feedback:

'It was such a brilliant idea, it has saved my sanity in this terrible time.'

'It has been a wonderful, uplifting, eye-opening journey to embark on through quarantine. I'm starting to find my flow - it's been so much fun hearing positive feedback and comments from different people. It's been very inspiring seeing everybody's scale of art and it has given me huge amounts of confidence in sharing my work.'

'I really appreciated the range of materials and the lovely package arriving.'

'I have achieved space and quietness and so my art is maturing.'

'It is something I really look forward to. In the past I rarely made time for my art citing lots of excuses. This opportunity has made me make space in my flat and garden shed to be creative. It has also improved my communication skills as I have something interesting to talk to my friends about.'

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Art & Soul is particularly proud of the way we have been able to support those who do not use computers or Facebook in this project.

Working online and remotely brought increased challenges around safeguarding and it was decided that there needed to be additional support on Zoom calls with participants, as well as the development of an online safeguarding policy.

Further information

Art & Soul uses creative activity to support adults, children and young people with mental health issues in South-West London. Our programme currently offers art therapist-led workshops, exhibiting opportunities, gallery visits and an outreach programme. Our aims include:

- Improving mental health for South-West London community members through structured creative activities run by an HCP registered art therapist.
- reducing mental health stigma and support community wellbeing through outreach workshops.
- creating a supportive and safe environment for those experiencing mental health challenges.
- empowering members to connect with others, develop skills, reduce stress and to positively re-engage with the community.

Art & Soul has been operating since 1998, and after a long-standing partnership with Orleans House Gallery, became a charity in 2017. Our Patron is Sir Vince Cable. Art & Soul is based in South-West London and is a Registered Charity (1173268) employing two arts practitioners and one project manager, all on a freelance part-time basis. Art & Soul's general Facebook page: www.facebook.com/artandsoulwellbeing (The 'Remote Connectivity' project is a closed group to ensure safeguarding.) Art & Soul's website is: www.artandsoul.org.uk