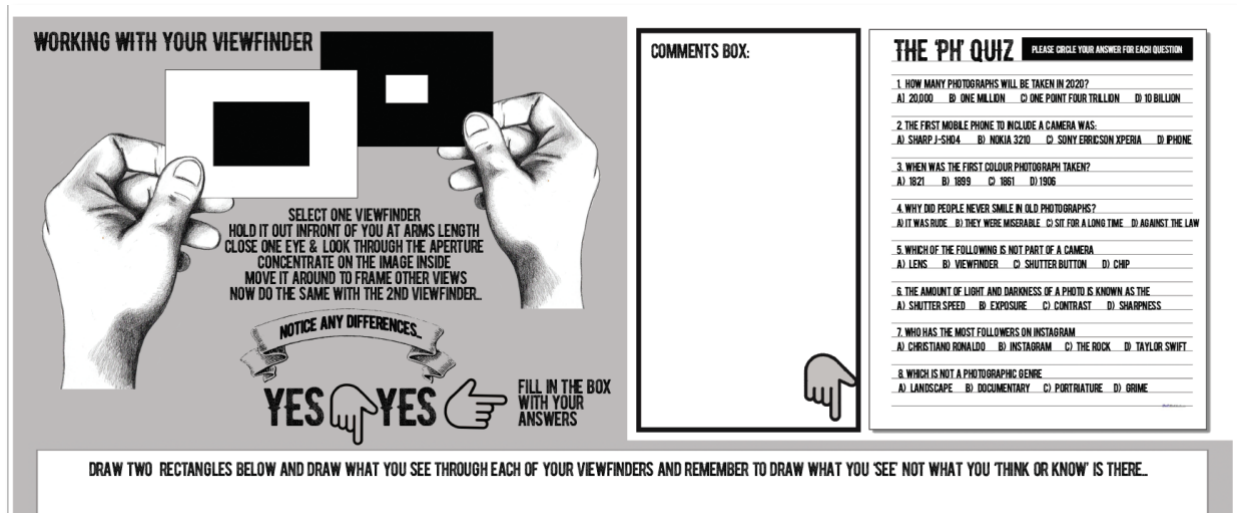


Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Organisation: Open Eye Gallery & NOVUS

Region: North West

Designed for: People serving sentences



Introduction photography pack, 2 x PDF designs 2020, c. Hafsa Naib, commissioned as part of pilot photography prison programme with Open Eye Gallery and NOVUS

Introduction

Open Eye Gallery are working in collaboration with NOVUS on a new pilot photography programme. Open Eye Gallery are actively rethinking what a gallery can be. We produce exhibitions, long-term collaborative projects, publications, festivals, online programmes, and University courses, locally and worldwide. We're taking a lead on socially engaged photography nationally. Bringing different voices, photographers and communities together, we establish projects where the collaborative process is just as important as the final product. This includes our current prison photography programme with NOVUS – who deliver education, rehabilitation support and opportunity to 60,000 adults and young people across England and Wales.

Open Eye Gallery and NOVUS are working together to deliver a pilot collaborative photography project with learners within a HMP setting and their family members in the North West. We recruited socially engaged artist Hafsa Naib to work with both the learners and their family members to use photography as a tool for creative self-expression. The project also aimed to develop creative and transferable skills for the men involved, supporting learners to re-think how to use the medium in the real world as part of process of rehabilitation. This programme began in the middle of the COVID pandemic, which created initial barriers to both when and how we would start engagement with the learners. Rather than seeing the social distancing measures as a barrier, we were able to use the opportunity to completely re-think how we could approach the project and work in a meaningful way with the individuals involved. (see 13 for full details on the programme).

Funders

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Partners

NOVUS is the market leader in prison education and as an organisation we deliver education, rehabilitation support across 52 prison sites. Over the years our role within the justice sector has grown and diversified. The Creative Arts and Enrichment work is one of the ways our offer has grown, aligning current, external project opportunities to our contracted delivery to broaden opportunities for the participants and enhance the experience of engagement and learning.

Who is it for?

We are hoping to work directly with learners currently within HMP settings as well as their family members. We hope to share the learning around the programme as well as any work produced (if the learners are happy to share their work) with the cultural peer sectors, CJS and education and rehabilitation sectors and wider public to breakdown stigma and increase discussion around those affected by the criminal justice sector.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

New participants

How many people took/are taking part?

We hope to engage 12 learners within the HMP setting and up to 12 family members. As a pilot programme we hope to then expand this programme further reaching double/ triple figures across additional HMP and community settings.

Where is it happening?

North West but the wider dissemination of the project can reach national and global audiences.

For how long has it been happening?

August 2020 – on-going

What were/are the main outputs?

We are hoping to have a public exhibition (physical or online depending on the covid situation moving forwards) of the works produced by both learners and their family members (if they wish to do so) as well as sharing learning about the process of engagement through online and written artist discussions and Vlogs including through Open Eye Gallery's 'Open room' digital programme and via NOVUS' extensive networks with the CJS sector partners. If in the situation that the learners and family members wish to keep the work private then we would still hold a private exhibition just for them to reflect upon their own work, reflecting feedback around this to the wider public, rather than the work itself.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Our project aims to use photography as a tool for creative expression for both learners and family members, and as a potential medium, which can build upon and develop relations and communication between the two. We see photography as a creative but also practical, transferable skill for learners to develop as part of their skills-based rehabilitation as well as the overarching belief and aim that the process of engaging in a creative open-ended project can improve the wellbeing for those involved.

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

Working closely with NOVUS and our artist Hafsa Naib we have been able to shift our initial engagement approach (which would have involved direct group workshop sessions with learners and family members on-site), we have moved to creating individual creative postal packs, which learners can engage with within their cell setting. Hafsa as creatively re-worked how we can explore the

medium of photography without using the camera itself, offering a 'cameraless' activity pack for the learners to respond to. This has included (for example) creating a series of postcard photographic works for the learners to respond to, as well as creating their own 'viewfinder' which allows them to re-frame imagery around them like looking through a camera lens. We have slowed down the overall engagement schedule to allow enough time for learners to receive packs, complete them and to be returned to Hafsah for next pack. We will move engagement with the family members to direct online communications with Open Eye Gallery, who can directly then send packs onto family members in an accessible and safe way, once sign posted from their family member taking part within the HMP setting.

Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics¹?

The project has been designed to be inclusive and open to all individuals within the prison establishments. It is about personal interpretation and what the theme means to them. We have used a number of ways to promote the project to individuals and engage them – a written brief specifically designed to reach learners of all abilities; prison officers directly speaking to individuals on wings. A number of participants would be identified through the Equalities Act 2010.

Evaluation & Feedback

We will be able to gauge how the work is being received upon the number of participants who complete and return the packs to the artist but will also gather more qualitative feedback as the project continues through evaluation surveys, questionnaires and through the content the learners and family members chose to focus on within the actual project, using their steer on which direction to take a project theme/ idea as live practice as research. We have, as partners, created a joint evaluation framework for both partners and artist/s involved through a logic model exercise to ensure we are reflecting upon shared aims, objectives and aspirations of longer-term impact for all involved.

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The challenges have been in not knowing who and how many learners might engage with the programme as we have been unable to meet them face to face, but now we have started the postal engagement we will be able to learn more about individual participants and their own creative interests/ needs going forwards and adapt activity to suit. This has meant a longer lead in time and overall a much longer timescale for the programme, which sometimes can feel like a lot of 'waiting' but in fact gives us much more creative thinking time to develop the project going forwards than one would normally have.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

Originally we planned to work with a limited group of 10 learners within the HMP setting due to class capacity but now we are working with postal pack engagement there is actually the potential to reach a larger cohort of participants. We had similar numbers expected for family members but again now we are working remotely with them we may find that if access and travel are no longer a barrier to attend a session physically, this may mean more engagement.

What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

Open Eye Gallery has learnt to embrace a flexible approach to adapting both the programme model of delivery and overall programme schedule to ensure the delivery can take place at an appropriate pace to the needs of the engagement process. This has been supported by our funders Paul Hamlyn

¹Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (Equalities Act 2010).

Foundation who have understood the needs for this flexibility. NOVUS have further embraced an Adaptable and creative approach, thinking about new ways of reaching people, in the most appropriate way given the restrictions within a prison setting generally, but also presented through the remote access to people.

From Hafsha Naib, “The lack of physical engagement with participants in prison in addition to the updated protocols relating to postal engagement created an opportunity for me to really investigate and develop the form and nature of postal engagement available in prison through creating an introductory experience of photography. This, I felt would be of great value to explore in the residency as it allowed me to really devise not only differentiated creative learning activities that would reach to a diverse cohort of individuals but to also present them as effectively as I could through original art work production, design and packaging. It seemed that the circumstances created an instant space in which I could experiment within where a vast set of skills which included visualisation processes used in my filmmaking were brought together and whose effectiveness I was always considering in terms of both ‘user experience’ and prison/postal logistics.

The final pack is highly interdisciplinary, visual and tactile; with hand-drawn design elements and also included handmade components such as viewfinders. This paper based, analogue, non-camera approach to photography created with limited resources will establish successful creative work when working with participants in prison. With support from OEG and Novus, this really has been the first time I’ve brought an array of skills and influences together in the making of an activity pack and I’m looking forward to creating more engaging experiences that focus exclusively on the act of looking and seeing”.

What would you say has made this project possible?

Flexibility and positive solution focused attitude of all partners and artists involved.

What would have made it easier?

I am not sure during the Covid pandemic there was anything that could have been done to make things any easier. The situation has brought about disruption and in the prison establishments it has been a challenging time to start a new initiative. Given all the variables, we have navigated difficult things that have been presented – but this has been done at local level to enable the project to run.

Further information

Our project is still in progress but you can access our first open rooms discussion about the project here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME-e8cwsIAo>