

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

Project: Art by Post

Organisation: Southbank Centre

Region: London and national

Designed for: Residential and nursing homes, hospices, hospitals, mental health services and prison services

“With a bleak winter to look forward to, these packs will have a significant impact on the physical, emotional and cognitive wellbeing of some of the most isolated and vulnerable.”



**Artwork credits:**

*Top line:* Barbara Rigg, Elizabeth-Ann Colville, Rashpinder 'Minnie' Ranu,  
*Bottom line:* Dave Salmon, Luke Squire, Barbara Rigg

### Introduction

The Southbank Centre is a registered charity and the UK’s largest arts centre, situated in the heart of London. It comprises the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Art Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library, the Arts Council Collection of visual artwork, and eight Resident and Associate Orchestras.

We offer an extensive programme of free events and deliver a year-round free public programme for our communities including for schools, families, the socially isolated, and for those affected by dementia, homelessness and addiction.

Art by Post sends free creative activity booklets through the post and via email to people who are isolated and living with chronic mental and physical health conditions, across the UK. The visual arts, craft and poetry activities are designed by artists and aim to inspire participants to be creative and boost their wellbeing. Friends, neighbours, carers and family members are encouraged to take part

alongside the participants, and freepost envelopes are provided so that they can share their artwork with us. We hope this builds a sense of connection with us at the Southbank Centre as well as with others who are taking part, and we aim to create an exhibition of Art by Post artworks when we reopen.

Healthcare workers and other professionals are encouraged to refer people onto the scheme, and organisations can request the booklets in bulk to distribute to their communities. Our regional partner organisations are also helping us reach people from Aberdeen to Oxford, and we now have almost 4,000 people taking part from a range of institutional settings, including residential and nursing homes, hospices, hospitals, mental health services and prison services, as well as many who are taking part from their homes.

## Funders

This project is supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

## Partners

For the initial phase of Art by Post we worked with a network of local partners which included Age UK Lambeth, Resonate Arts and Coin Street Community Builders.

We have recently launched Phase 2 of Art by Post (our next series of creative booklets), which runs from September 2020 to April 2021. Phase 2 of the project is supported by partner organisations from across the nation, and include:

National Academy for Social Prescribing

Age UK Camden

Age UK Oxfordshire

HOME Manchester

Philharmonia Orchestra (working in Leicester, Bedford, Kent and Basingstoke)

The Barn (Aberdeenshire)

artsdepot (London)

Nightingale Hammerson (London)

Beacon Arts Centre (Inverclyde)

Sunderland Culture

Platform (Glasgow)

Arts in Care Homes - nationwide supporting over 3000 care providers

Dulwich Picture Gallery - (London)

Cardiff Community Housing Association

Kings College Hospitals - (London)

## Who is it for?

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

Both

### How many people took/are taking part?

Almost 4,000 people are signed up to take part each month in Phase 2 of the project.

### Where is it happening?

People are taking part in Art by Post across Britain, from Aberdeen to Truro and from Cardiff to Dover, as well as London and our local community of Lambeth.

### For how long has it been happening?

Phase 1 of the project (our first series of four booklets) ran from May - July 2020. Phase 2 will run from September 2020 to April 2021 and we hope it will continue long-term.

### What were/are the main outputs?

Two poems from Art by Post participants have been included in the Southbank Centre's outdoor poetry and visual art exhibition, *Everyday Heroes*, on display until November. You can find out more about this exhibition [here](#).

Art by Post was also part of the National Day of Arts in Care Homes on 24th September 2020, as part of our partnership with Nightingale Hammerson care home. In a one-off edition of *Everyday Heroes* and inspired by Art by Post activities, Nightingale Hammerson held their own on-site exhibition curated by and for their residents to celebrate their 'everyday heroes' through poetry and photography. More information can be found [here](#).

We hope to celebrate Art by Post with an exhibition of the participants' artworks when the Southbank Centre reopens. Our ambition is for this exhibition to tour to other arts venues and community partners involved in the project, from HOME in Manchester to Age UK Camden's charity shop, as a way to bring the artworks to the communities who have created them, and hopefully create a sense of being part of a nationwide community for all of the participants, supporters and referrers who have taken part.

### What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

We hope that the booklets can provide a useful resource for staff working in residential settings, particularly care homes, where usual activities for the residents have had to be suspended due to national and local lockdowns, and visiting restrictions. Our ultimate goal is for the creative activities to keep minds active, spark imaginations, combat boredom and boost wellbeing for those taking part.

We also hope that the activities would provide a talking point for conversations between carers, staff, family members and participants, during a time when daily life has become significantly limited, and that taking part in the activities alongside someone else (even remotely) would build and strengthen a sense of connection for those most isolated. During Phase 2, we will be holding virtual sessions with the artists to offer further support with the creative activities and ideas for expansion, which we hope will also strengthen the sense of being part of an Art by Post community.

When participants send their artwork to us, the Southbank Centre team correspond with them about their work and the experience they had creating it, which we hope builds a sense of connection. We also hope that the possibility to be included in an exhibition gives participants a sense of being part of something bigger.

For Phase 2, we are proud to have been able to involve an Art by Post participant, Barbara Clarke, in the creation of the sixth creative booklet. Barbara is living with dementia and has previously taken part in our *(B)old* series of workshops. She has collaborated with mixed media visual artist Cherelle Sappleton to produce the booklet, *Home Is Where The Art Is*, which asks participants to reimagine their space as their studio and somewhere they can be creative. Cherelle and Barbara co-produced the booklet entirely through phone conversations, without being able to meet in person.

In the words of Alan, an Art by Post participant, '[Art by Post] has brought out a part of me that has laid hidden for virtually all my life, so for that alone, I thank you,' and this is what we aim to achieve on some scale for all participants. We encourage participants to use the creative exercises to explore the full spectrum of their emotional response to the current situation and to know that they are heard and seen.

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

Art by Post was conceived as a way to continue reaching people who had been taking part in the Southbank Centre's (B)old creative workshops for people with dementia and their companions, before lockdown meant that we had to close our buildings. During spring, we innovated to make sure that the creative writing and singing workshops could continue remotely using telephone tutoring and postal packs, and these postal packs were then developed to become Art by Post.

## Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics<sup>1</sup>?

In Phase 1 of our project, 50% of our artists were Black, Asian and ethnically diverse and in Phase 2 we aim to build on this. Most of our participants are living with one or more long-term health conditions, a protected characteristic under disability, and over 75% of our Art by Post community are older participants. As such, they are statistically less likely to be digitally literate and therefore at further risk of isolation.

The Southbank Centre has a longstanding commitment to supporting enabling environments for artists to thrive, to removing barriers regularly faced across the creative industries, and to commissioning diverse artists. As part of the Art by Post project we are working closely with our partners to ensure our artists represent the audiences we are reaching, especially disabled artists, those who live with one or more long-term health conditions and older artists. With geographic barriers removed, we can utilise our partners' specialisms such as promoting work from queer, working class and disabled artists and collectives from across the UK.

As mentioned above, our sixth Art by Post booklet was the product of an intergenerational exchange between two Black artists of Caribbean heritage, with Chelle Sapperton, a mixed media artist and Barbara Clarke, an Art by Post participant and former nurse living with dementia working together to co-produce the activities and resources.

## Evaluation & Feedback

We have held virtual feedback sessions with organisations and with friends, family members and carers to gain insight into their experience of the project and supporting participants with the creative activities. We have also distributed surveys to all participants, and have been undertaking guided telephone calls with participants.

We are also creating regular opportunities for our partner organisations to share their feedback on the operations of the project with us, and we will be working together to gather feedback from participants, organisations and referrers as part of our evaluation of Phase 2.

The survey for Phase 1 has shown:

- 100% of organisations who signed up said it had improved their Covid-19 response in supporting their community
- 85% of participants agreed Art by Post helped them feel more positive
- 85% of participants said Art by Post gave them something to look forward to
- 90% of participants felt inspired to be more creative
- 80% of participants would recommend a friend or family member to take part in Art by Post

These findings have informed the development of Phase 2 of the project, and we plan to undertake a significant evaluation of Phase 2 with input from our partner organisations.

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

Alan, 73, Kent - Art by Post participant

Alan is from Kent and lives in sheltered housing. He has several health conditions, which means he has been shielding for many months. He is a member of [Breathe Arts Sing](#) - a singing for breathing group which offers a supportive and sociable way for participants to experience the benefits of singing for lung health, and who usually have their weekly singing sessions at the Southbank Centre. Alan was introduced to Art by Post by the coordinator of the *Breathe Arts Sing* group. He is new to writing poetry, painting and drawing but has relished the exciting challenge that being a part of Art by Post has brought. Completing the monthly activities has been a vital part of helping to keep his mind active during what have been very challenging times for him, as he has not been able to attend his regular social groups. He has shared his artwork with his friends and would recommend anyone to take part. He loves sharing his work with the Art by Post team and wants to share his work with the world. He says he has become a better person for taking part in Art by Post, and has gone from being a complete novice to writing poetry to having now written 30 poems (and counting)!

Rosemary, 81, Norfolk - Art by Post participant

Rosemary went into hospital to have a pacemaker fitted the day the UK went into national lockdown. She lives alone, after losing her husband 15 years ago. With family close by, her daughter in law signed her up to take part in Art by Post. Her family love visiting the Southbank Centre and heard about our project on social media. Through the last 3 months, they have been “pestering” her to keep going with the poetry. Rosemary had never written poetry before and receiving the booklets during lockdown has brought her “enjoyment and kept [her] mind active”; an “extremely useful” resource giving her something to focus on. When discussing one of the poetry exercises, she said “[the funny thing is], the words come to you when you’re laying in bed at night, [I] woke up around 3am and had to scribble something down on my notepad beside my bed. I couldn’t read what I’d written, mainly because I’d written it without my glasses!... I spent all day perfecting the line before it was right!”.

Supporter

“It’s wonderful to have something sent to you - something you don’t have to dream up for yourself! - that gets you thinking and talking!”.

Participant

“I’ve never written poetry before! Ever! This is making my mind work ... they [the booklets] are extremely useful.”

Supporter

“With a bleak winter to look forward to, these packs will have a significant impact on the physical, emotional and cognitive wellbeing of some of the most isolated and vulnerable.”

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

When Phase 1 of the project launched, we set an initial target of reaching 300 participants. We met this target very quickly and adapted to be able to accommodate almost 2,000 participants. This was both a success and a challenge, as we quickly had to scale up our processes to meet this increased and unexpected level of demand. To ensure that we could continue to meet the demand and reach even more people (particularly in ‘cold spots’ with few or no participants) without compromising on depth of engagement, we established our national network of regional delivery partners for Phase 2.

This network of delivery partners is a strong success of the project so far. We are proud to be working with organisations from right across the nation who are not only cross-arts but cross-sector, from Aberdeenshire to Sunderland, and Manchester to Oxfordshire, and it is a privilege to be able to share and benefit from their varied expertise. In addition, there is a huge variety of organisations from across the arts, health and social care, and other sectors who are referring people onto the scheme and



enabling the project to reach people who the Southbank Centre team couldn't have engaged without the support of this network.

The team's conversations with participants and organisations have certainly demonstrated that Art by Post has been highly valued by many people taking part as something positive to look forward to during a very difficult time. We are pleased to have been able to offer a depth of engagement with the participants despite challenging and unusual circumstances, and we believe that our new regional partnerships will enable this to continue, reaching even more people.

Furthermore, we have heard from professionals working in residential settings, as well as family members of people in residential homes, for example, that the activities have been able to fill a void created by the sudden lack of usual activities for residents. So far we have received over 120 pieces of artwork in the post and via email, and the high rate of people choosing to continue taking part in Art by Post in Phase 2 also shows that people are enjoying and benefitting from the project.

Finally, it's important to mention that this project has been created and delivered at a time when over 80% of our workforce has been on furlough. This has been a significant challenge and meant that our team has needed to innovate and establish new processes which could normally have been delegated to wider teams. Nevertheless, this project has enabled the Southbank Centre to continue in our social mission of bringing art and creativity to people's everyday lives even during our closure, and has been a way to continue to serve our communities during a very challenging time.

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

We are reaching people in distant locations, such as Aberdeenshire and Cornwall, where people are unlikely to have been able to engage with Southbank Centre projects previously.

Creating, launching and delivering Art by Post under lockdown and the remote nature of this project has also driven us to work with organisations we have never worked with previously, without having to consider the usual geographical limitations. This has also changed our approach to commissioning artists, and we are consciously considering artists from across the UK.

Through this project, we believe we have reached a greater number and a broader range of people than we have reached with any other single Creative Learning project in our history. Our participants for this project are also notably diverse, being based in different settings, being spread geographically, and living with a range of different health needs.

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

- We have adapted and drawn on our experience delivering in-person participation projects to change delivery to remote forms of engagement, supporting participants to connect over the phone and by post.
- The wider Southbank Centre team, including design and marketing colleagues, have had to adapt to be able to deliver this brand new project remotely at a time when the majority of our staff have been on furlough.
- We have further developed skills in supporting participant wellbeing, including signposting local COVID-19 support organisations.
- We are facilitating professional development and networking opportunities for healthcare professionals and artists over digital platforms such as Zoom.

### What would you say has made this project possible?

In March 2020, we received a grant from Paul Hamlyn Foundation as part of their 'Test and Explore' funding to continue developing and delivering our *(B)old* series of creative activity workshops for people with dementia and their companions. This support enabled us to be responsive with our

Creative Learning programme and to adapt our work to remote delivery, which led to the creation of Art by Post.

A network of local partners supported the launch and delivery of Art by Post in its initial pilot phase, including Age UK Camden, Age UK Lambeth, Resonate Arts, Nightingale Hammerson and Coin Street Community Builders, ensuring the project reached our local community in Lambeth and Southwark. The National Academy of Social Prescribing has also been a delivery partner from the project's outset, and their nationwide network of Link Workers have played a key role in identifying people in their communities who could benefit from taking part and referring them onto the scheme.

Working with a huge range of referral partners and being met by a clear need for resources has been motivating and encouraged our organisation to refine our purpose and ensure we had a unique and valuable offer during the initial lockdown period.

### What would have made it easier?

We believe that a creative telephone befriending service would have made engaging with the project easier for potential participants, and could have provided valuable additional support for the friends, family members and care professionals who are supporting the participants with the activities. In time, we hope to be able to set up such a service, whereby participants could be matched with a creative befriender to discuss and take part in the booklet activities alongside them, with the befriender able to offer support, encouragement and companionship. We believe this could enrich the experience for participants and also help remove possible barriers to taking part (for example feeling daunted or needing encouragement to take the initial step to begin). We hope to partner with an organisation with specialist experience of providing such a service in order to ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are integrated across the full scale of delivery, in an area outside of our inhouse expertise.

Had there been funding opportunities which encouraged cross-sector applications to fund new ideas, this would have provided an opportunity to research and develop our telephone creative befriending idea as part of Phase 2.

### Further information

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/artbypost>