Creative Health

Practitioner Wellbeing Toolkit

For Artists and Creative Practioners

BRADFORD Culture Company

Healthy Minds

Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership

ACTasONE

LIVING WELL

This toolkit has been developed through a series of Mental Health and Wellbeing Support sessions for Creative Health Practitioners, facilitated by Thahmina Begum. It is grounded in the lived experiences of practitioners and has been shaped through discussion, reflection, and co-production with those working directly in the field. The content reflects real challenges, shared strategies, and collective knowledge from across the Creative Health community.

Emotional Load

The weight of feeling that comes from supporting others, holding space, witnessing stories, and responding with care, especially when resources are limited

In creative health practice this can include:

- Absorbing distress
- Managing group dynamics
- Holding responsibility for participant wellbeing
- Feeling pressure to "hold it all together"

Emotional load is not weakness, it is often a sign of care

Boundaries

The limits that protect your energy, role, and responsibility.

They clarify:

- What belongs to me
- What belongs to someone else
- What belongs to the system

Boundaries are not rejection, they are clarity

Mental Load

Ongoing cognitive effort of planning, organising, anticipating needs, and problem-solving often invisibly

For artists,this might look like:

- Preparing materials
- Writing funding bids
- Risk assessments
- Monitoring participant needs
- Post-session emotional processing

Mental Load + Emotional Load = Deep Fatigue.

Empathy

Ability to understand and feel alongsid someone else's experience.

Healthy empathy says:
"I care about what you're feeling."

Overextended empathy says:
"Your feelings are my responsibility."

Empathy is a strength. Without boundaries, it becomes depletion

Reflection

What kind of load have I been carrying that no one sees?

Staying With Yourself While Holding Others

Professional Hygiene for Practitioners

What I Need Support Holding

- Safeguarding concerns
- Emotional intensity
- Funding insecurity
- Complex group dynamics

What Belongs In My Role

- Facilitation
- Signposting
- Holding time boundaries
- Offering creative structure
- Maintaining safer space agreements

What Belongs Outside My Role

- Fixing trauma
- Solving systemic injustice alone
- Being available 24/7
- Taking responsibility for outcomes beyond my remit dynamics

Gentle Nervous System Reset

1. Longer Exhale Breathing

- Inhale for 4
- Exhale for 6
- Longer exhales signal safety to the body

2. Orienting

- Slowly look around the room
- Name 5 neutral objects
- This reminds your body: I am here, I am safe.

3. Feet Press

- Press your feet firmly into the ground for 10 seconds
- Release & repeat
- Grounding restores agency

4. Shake & Release

- Shake out your hands
- Roll your shoulders
- Exhale audibly
- Completion matters

"Burnout is not a personal failure. It is often structural. You deserve support."

Sustainability and Collective Care

Staying in the Work Without Losing Youself

Collective Care means:

Collective care is protective and political

- Sharing knowledge
- Naming systemic pressures
- Advocating for better conditions
- Valuing practitioner wisdom
- Supporting each other's boundaries

Sustainability is Structural Remaining in Creative Health work requires

You're not meant to carry this alone

- Fair compensation
- Peer networks
- Clear referral pathways
- Time off
- Spaces to process

My Sustainable Working Map

I need more of :

I need less of :

I deserve :

What Every Creative Practitoner Should Know

You are allowed to pace yourself
Care without boundaries leads to depletion
Rest is part of the work
We cannot out-empathise structural inequality
Your creativity needs protection

Closing Ritual

1. Place one hand on your chest
2. One hand on your belly
3. Take one slow breath

You are doing emotionally skilled labour. It matters, and so do you

Support and Network Organisations

Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance

Wales Arts, Health & Wellbeing Network

Arts, Culture, & Wellbeing Scotland

Arts Care (Northern Ireland)

Northern Ireland Creative Health Network

Réalta

London Arts and Health

Artists Represent Recovery Network (ARRN)

Advocates for Representation in Creative Health (ARCH)

Anti-Racist Action in Arts & Wellbeing Services (Flourishing Lives)

Welsh Government Community Cohesion Principles for Practitioners

Awen Trust, Bridgend, Wales - Global Cafés (in the interests of safeguarding the cafés are invite-only)

Creative Mental Health & Global Majority Communities (event – 19 Mar)

Creatively Minded and Refugees - The Baring Foundation

Embers of Care

Maya Artist Traineeship programme

Doing The Right Thing (creative writing with Black Wales based NHS workers)

Emergence: Creative Workshops Celebrating Queer Voices and Community

Span Arts We Move (global majority families)

Connection - SPAN Arts

Myriad programme guidance (core competencies for creative health practitioners working in a mental health context with global majority communities)

Mental Health Foundation Perthyn Wales

Multi Cultural Hubs Wales

Queercircle – including the recent Let's Create Change report

NCVO support for charities "in times of division and racial hatred"

WAHWN Stepping In programme (diversifying the arts and health practitioner workforce)

Sub Sahara Advisory Panel, Wales

How You Dey Exploring Identity and Expression Through Art | Wales Arts Health & Well-being Network

Singing Walks - One World Choir, Wales working to support the mental health and well being of refugees and asylum seekers