

Reaching Out, Drawing In

Pilot Project - Workshops for learning disabled Adults



Produced as part of a fused glass workshop at Centre Celf

Introduction

This pilot project was to look at and test the impact of long-term engagement through the arts and in the environment with learning disabled adults. This was to be done by offering regular blocks of six-week art courses, 2-hour each week over a two-year period at Centre Celf.

Part of the project was to give participants the chance to work alongside professional artists with relevant experiences from their own life challenges to co-produce art work inspired by nature and the landscape, this would include working with partners Radnorshire Wildlife Trust and artist in residence, poet Ira Lightman, at Giffach Nature Reserve.

Celf o Gwmpas is a long-established arts charity, operating in Powys providing arts experiences and activities for people excluded from society and we wanted to build on this experience to gather information about the longer-term benefits and the challenges of providing on-going activities.

We believed that working over a long-term period, establishing relationships between artists and participants and among the participants themselves, we could have an impact on the health and well-being of those our work supports, whilst creating a body of evidence which we hoped could help change the way arts are used in therapeutic practice in Powys.

There is increasing evidence that participating in the arts has a range of health benefits and these benefits persist long after the event.

Challenges

The challenges of running this project mainly centred around specific needs of participants and their environment, including where they lived both physically and geographically.

The challenges around this were:

- Introducing new opportunities to learning disabled adults, who do not like change or doing something unknown or different.
- Being and working outside can be a challenge for some people, especially for those with specific physical and sensory needs.
- Programming opportunities that allow for people living in supported homes where staff shifts and enthusiasm for attending could affect participants attendance.
- Allowing for the wide geographical range of where people live and the effect on their ability and desire to attend activities.
- Accommodating for diverse needs and abilities, something that works for everybody, the more able can be more prolific and therefore artists would need to ensure there was enough differentiation.
- Building up a commitment of continual attendance by participants, helping combat the high levels of social exclusion.

Powys being a large rural area means many of the target group live long distances from each other and may have limited access to local services, support and resources especially catering for their needs, all leading to social isolation.

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A particular difficulty, especially for those living in supported accommodation, is the availability of staff to bring participants to workshops, especially those who live with a small number of service users. If there are only two members of staff to three service users and one does not want to attend, this generally means no one can attend. Celf o Gwmpas do not provide 'care' for those attending, everyone has to have their own carer with them and sometimes this is not practically possible. Another issue related to living in supported accommodation lies with the passing on of information, or lack of, from one staff member to another and between shifts.

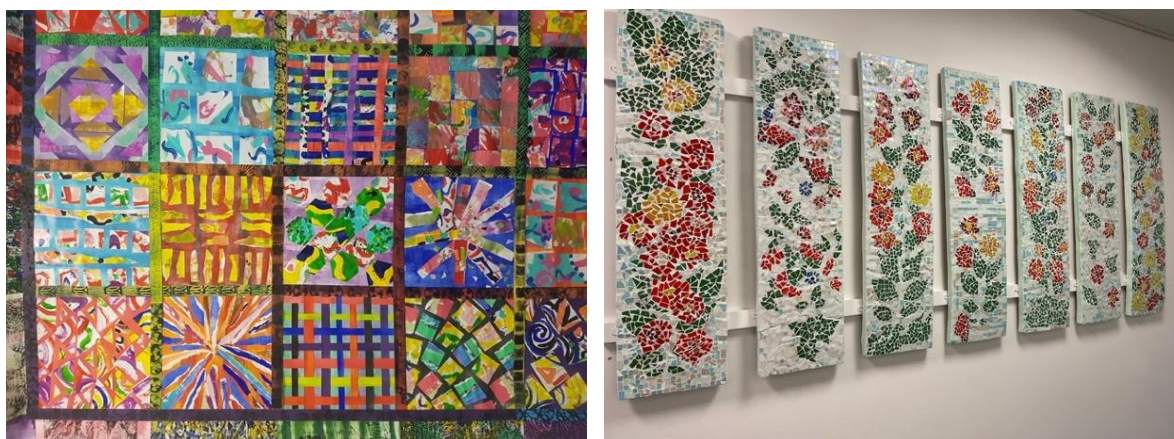
There was already a core group of learning-disabled adults who had been attending sessions with Celf o Gwmpas when this project started, but as there wasn't a continual established programme, leading to uncertainty about what was or wasn't on, attendance numbers varied greatly.

The lack of visibility and therefore acceptance and acknowledgement within the community can have a detrimental effect on people with disabilities, leading to a lack of willingness to engage in community events or opportunities and therefore missing out on making social connections and making and building relationships.

There were very particular challenges around the two residencies, with Scott Berry and Ira Lightman. Both were due to run workshops and stay in Llandrindod Wells.

Ira Lightman, artist and poet, was to run a project around engaging with nature and the environment, specifically with Radnor Wildlife Trust at Gilfach Nature Reserve. Getting to Gilfach and on time could be a challenge for some the participants, as well as physically negotiating the terrain for others.

In collaboration with The Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts (The Nina) Scott Berry, a Canadian learning-disabled artist, was due to travel from Edmonton, Canada and stay in Wales for three weeks, running a series of workshops at Centre Celf centred around his own practices, whilst working to produce a collaborative piece of new art for exhibition. It became apparent nearer to the time of residency that Scott Berry was having second thoughts about travelling at that time. Over a period of time he became increasingly anxious about the trip and very resistant to the idea, therefore it was decided not to go ahead with the residency.



Collaborative pieces produced as part workshops at Centre Celf

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Solution

Project staff worked hard to establish and plan a two-year programme of workshops, each series of workshops were six weeks long, with breaks for holidays based around schools' terms. Continuity and routine were key to enabling commitment, so establishing a two-year programme was key to the success of this pilot project.

The project established a regular group of participants, no more than eight at each session, with the need to book beforehand. Booking encouraged people to commit to attending, consider routine and gave staff, working in supported homes, the ability to manage staff time and shifts around attending the workshops. The workshop start time was amended part of the way into the project after feedback from participants support staff who expressed frustration around not having enough time to get to Centre Celf on time after starting a shift.

Having limited numbers meant participants could choose which workshops they wanted to attend, ones that were of interest to them, rather than coming along because it was what they did, therefore giving them more autonomy with their choices.

The group sizes were kept at a reasonable size allowing artists to spend quality, concentrated time with individuals, enabling them to learn and develop their skills. Building up a core group of artists, who participants came to know, enabled the artists to establish strong relationships and knowledge of how the participants, and their carers, worked, ensuring the participants were engaged as much as possible in meaningful artistic activities.

It was clear that email communication was not best suited for those living in supported homes. Emails were read but not printed out and quickly forgotten. This meant the information about workshops was not passed on to the learning-disabled adults themselves, those who booked activities or those on shift the day of the workshops. Bright, easy read paper posters were produced for each series of workshops, these were printed out and given to workshop participants as flyers with A4 size posters sent to participants, already connected to Celf o Gwmpas, postal addresses. Posters were also displayed at Centre Celf and around the town of Llandrindod Wells, in English and Welsh. Initially, project staff would ring different participants and supported homes a couple of days before the workshops to remind them of the workshops and to see who was planning on attending. As the sessions became more established this became less necessary.

The series of workshops run by Ira Lightman were split between Centre Celf and Gilfach Nature reserve. Participants found it easier to transport themselves to Gilfach directly rather than travel together from Centre Celf, this allowed for the different distances people had to travel. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to be out in a new and different environment and Gilfach staff made it possible for people with mobility issues to access their learning space. Ira felt there was an increased sense of wellbeing within the participants who were proud of the work they produced in the workshops and often wanted to take it home and to show others. Participants talked about plans and hopes for the future. A public artwork was created, inspired by the workshops and the groups journey through the nature reserve.

Ira commented, "I learnt a lot and really enjoyed working with the different groups, I'm pleased we produced work that everyone was proud of."



Finished Xylophone, made by Celf o Gwmpas artist Geraint Edwards in response to Ira Lightman workshops

The piece was unveiled in November 2017 at Gilfach to coincide with an event to celebrate the return of the 'leaping salmon'; to the Marteg Falls. The artwork was then available to view both at Gilfach Nature Reserve and Centre Celf.

The project worked with The Nina to form a programme of events so the exchange with Scott Berry could go ahead but in a different format, a unique 'digital residency' was planned to enable the sharing of artistic practice. This digital residency consisted of a number of elements which included,

- Collaboration on works of art between learning disabled artists at both centres. Unfinished art work posted between Celf o Gwmpas, Scott Berry and other artists at The Nina, being finished by the receivers.
- A series of workshops where new art work inspired by Scott was devised by participants for exhibition.
- An exchange of video calls and blogs between The Nina Haggerty Centre and Centre Celf, introducing and showcasing participatory art work taking place at both centres. Also, the sharing of work practices of Scott Berry and other artists at The Nina with Celf o Gwmpas participants.

Inspired by Scott Berry's installation 'Confusement' which explored what it feels like to be started at for being different, the participants final piece for exhibition was 'a crowd' of strong bodies, standing proud in the face of critical and staring eyes.



Still from a video of people walking between the finished piece

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Benefit

The benefit of the project was to be able to consistently run weekly workshops for up to 9 participants (and their carers) for a number of years. The sessions became part of people's regular routines, this meant residential homes were able to plan and book ahead for participants and staff, whilst individuals who had personal assistants were able to ensure they could attend.

The artists, volunteers and staff became familiar and known to the participants and therefore offered a level of security and confidence which allowed the participants to try new things and move slightly out of their comfort zone. This can be a huge thing for people who routine and the known forms a large part of their day to day life.

Working on a project at Gilfach Nature Reserve opened up a completely different environment for people, mostly who had never visited the reserve before, allowing them to reconnect with nature, supporting them to visit and explore the natural environment. Working within nature and with words and poetry was something Celf o Gwmpas hadn't done for a long time and it was extremely beneficial to all. The art work produced will remain as a permanent display of the landscape and a source of pride to those who participated.

Feedback from participants and carers include,

- "N is always more settled after she has been to one of your workshops"
- "It is relaxing, I feel happy"
- "P enjoys coming the Celf Centre. He has more to talk about when he gets home"
- "Learning to do new and different things [has helped her confidence]"
- "I like to do it myself if I can"
- "His confidence is improved through doing the art"
- "Being part of the groups has helped C's self esteem"

Through using a number of evaluation tools, we were able to establish that the project enabled us to demonstrate that involvement in arts activities can lead to greater connections with others, lessening isolation and opening doors to other community activities. One of the evaluation tools the project used was to ask participants to complete a simple emoticon faces form at the beginning and end of a series of workshops.

Project #: Bird Box I.D. #

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Date:

Five emoticon faces are shown: a green happy face, a yellow happy face, a yellow neutral face, an orange sad face, and a red sad face. A horizontal bar with a gradient from green to red is positioned below the faces. Below the bar are five checkboxes labeled: Extremely Satisfied, Satisfied, OK, Unsatisfied, and Extremely Unsatisfied. The 'OK' checkbox is checked with a handwritten mark.

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The project also used the Warwick-Edinburgh well-being scale and tracked participants where possible through attendance over a series of workshops.

Result

The pilot was a great success, participants enjoyed working with the same artists, knowing what was happening from week to week and being able to plan for participation. As each series of workshops were usually 6 weeks long this allowed for the development of work and skills. Attending with the same people each week enabled friendships to grow and most enjoyed the social aspect.

By employing a small group of artists, all of whom would run a number of different workshops over the two-year period, the project offered them the opportunity to get to know the participants well, learn what they were able to do and work to encourage them to expand their skills and try different things and therefore ensuring artistic progression. Our artists are experienced at working with community groups and prepare work that will be both challenging and achievable.

Participants found satisfaction from experiencing a variety of art forms and using different media, as well as from producing a finished product. They were able to explore creativity and develop new skills and interests as well as enjoy the social contact

The project worked with a number of partners, including The Radnor Fringe and Radnor Wildlife Trust, producing both individual and collaborative pieces. Postcards produced in collaboration with The Radnor Fringe were part of the artwork at the Radnor Fringe Festival in June 2018 in the Rock Park, Llandrindod Wels, an event with an estimated 20,000 attending. Having artwork on display gives this group of people a bigger, valued presence in the community, making them more prominent and visible in society, whilst bringing their experiences into contact with the wider public whilst providing them with the feeling of making a valuable contribution to their own community

In February 2019 the project held an exhibition featuring work produced by both the learning-disabled adult and dementia group participants. There was a well-attended opening, with an article in the local press. Many of the participants attended with their friends and families, having their photos taken with their work. This was featured as a blog on the Powys mental Health (PAVO) blog.

- “Participants responded well and grew in confidence.”
- “Participants enjoyed being creative and experimenting with new techniques and sharing this with others.”
- “Working in a group improves her communication”

The exhibition was open to the public for six weeks and was visited by many people including those attending groups, workshops and meetings at Centre Celf. At that time (pre covid) we had an average annual footfall of approximately 13,000.

All participants found seeing their work on display as a very positive experience, giving them a sense of pride and achievement.

- “It makes me proud to see my work in the community”
- “She was very proud to see her work on display. We took a photo to show her mum”
- “It makes me proud and happy to see my work [on display in the community]

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- “C definitely loves to go to exhibitions and to see her own work exhibited”
- “Seeing his work on display makes him really happy, full of smiles. This helps his confidence
- “She feels proud of what she has made

Ymestyn allan i dynnu llun

centre CELF o Gwmpas



Fe'ch gwahoddir i agoriad Ymestyn allan i dynnu llun

Dyma arddangosfa i ddathlu gwaith oedolion gydag anabledd dysgu a phobl sy'n byw gyda dementia. Cynhyrchwyd mewn gweithdai gyda Celf o Gwmpas ac ariannir gan raglen Arwain LEADER

**21 Iain chwefror 2019 4 - 6 y.h.
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