

Rugby

Early Intervention Team Project with 16-35 year olds at risk of mental health issues due to factors such as substance and alcohol abuse .

Project partners: Early Intervention Team (North Warwickshire), Rugby Assertive Outreach Team, Rugby Community Health Team, Community Arts Workshop (CAW)

Project Outline: Entitled *Future Rugby*, an installation was developed from the idea of a transformational journey from old, mundane black and white photos of Rugby through a series of imaginative places, ending up at the beach. The work was developed on a long pinboarded wall in the art room at Rugby Museum and Art Gallery, and gradually built up with layers of different materials, including hessian, paint, natural materials, found objects on small shelves, collage and mosaic. An opening event was held for the final art piece, which was then open to the public for two weeks, gaining lots of positive feedback from visitors.



Future Rugby - a multi-layered 3D installation

Participants: A total of six people participated, with three of those attending most sessions. The support worker, an Occupational Therapist (OT), and a trainee OT also attended regularly and were full participants. Three other members of staff were occasional attendees.

Making Participation Possible

Participants valued the “relaxed atmosphere and positive nature of all the helpers.” They commented on the group effort, and “encouragement from the team”. The artists’ approach was valued by the partner organisation, who felt they understood the mental health issues, and fostered motivation and excitement, whilst creating an atmosphere that was fun.

The OT and her trainee both participated fully in the project themselves. The former explained that participating was important and part of her practice. She also noted a positive working relationship with the artists, whom she also felt participated in the project, rather than merely leading it. This encouraged a feeling of equality and helped build confidence.

The support worker and artists saw an increase in confidence over the course of the project, with participants arriving early, and increasingly taking ownership of the activity.

Benefits of Participating

Participants experienced an opportunity to work with people in a different way, as a group towards a shared piece of artwork, which incorporated ideas from all involved. This helped to develop social skills, building their confidence to engage with other people of different ages and backgrounds, and developing the motivation to see things through.

“Initially I was hesitant to share my ideas, but now I know that ideas can be worked on as a team.” Participant



Participants add the final layers to the work

Participants also came to recognise and have confidence in their own creative skills and abilities, finding out what they could do and having the opportunity to try things out. This contributed to raised self-esteem.

“I experienced working with people in a different way, and felt more confident about creating something.” Participant

Having the opportunity in the first place was valued, as was the choice that was built into the projects. The flexibility of the artist to respond to interests and needs was significant in enabling this choice.

Continuing the Journey

A number of participants were keen to continue engaging in different arts-based activities. One participant, who came to the group saying she was not creative, and who had initially needed a lot of support from the hospital and the Early Intervention

team to attend, began over time to come independently. By the end of the project she was considering pursuing further education in this field:

“I am now considering a jewellery making course, which I may not have contemplated had I not taken part in the project.”

Another has since joined the regular art group run upstairs at the gallery by staff from the YMCA. Links with this group were developed by Francis Goodwin of CAW. A third group member, who at the start of the project found it hard to remain in any social situation for more than about ten minutes, has been travelling for an hour to CAW’s regular ArtVenture group in Leamington.



Participants felt a real sense of achievement and pride

In addition to those involved as participants, the support worker and trainee OT who attended fully engaged in the project, and reported benefits for themselves in terms of increased confidence to use creative skills. They clearly valued the way the project had supported the needs of the client group. The Early Intervention Team’s OT has shown a strong commitment to working in this way, and is actively seeking ways of making this sort of activity available to the team’s clients in the future.

Other Learning Points

Being in such a public venue was seen to be valuable, as it gave greater prestige to the project, with the ten-day exhibition at the end helping to develop pride for participants. However, the artists also felt that the public nature of the venue may have discouraged some participants from attending.

Having to limit the project to Rugby residents meant that there were people the team was working with who would have benefited, but who could not attend. Future models might work better if the team’s whole client base across the north of Warwickshire was eligible.

Jo Smith, the OT from the Early Intervention Team, had been involved right from the beginning and this provided consistency, helping her to have ownership and understand the project better. However, she felt that early on in the project it was hard at times for participants to understand what it was all about. The emergence of a clear theme made it possible for them to see how it related to them and how they could engage.

Jo identified the importance of having someone with a mental health background engaging participants. For this group of people there is no one place they congregate, nor would the service wish there to be one. The Early Intervention Service aims to make activities as integrated as possible, rather than fostering a culture of separation or dependence, potentially leading to 'professional service users'. The service likes to work with partners such as Millennium Volunteers or the Prince's Trust, and feels that doing so helps to build progression routes for people involved in the projects. The service would see projects as stepping stones to other things and therefore did not want to see an on-going group established, though it would like to develop more time-limited projects.

It was noted that the Early Intervention team has more capacity to give dedicated time to such projects than some Mental Health services and there is a clear interest in developing work further, possibly with other partners.

About the Evaluation

Data collection: carried out by CAW. No data was collected during the project, as it was felt by both artists and support worker that with this group of young people it was important to tread carefully, so as not to alienate participants. They felt that introducing regular evaluation into the session was not appropriate, particularly as a member of the group took their life early on in the project, which inevitably had an impact on the dynamics and concerns of the group.

Final learning session: *creativityteam* met with CAW and Jo Smith to discuss ways the final learning session could gather data. This was done through discussion in the last session of the group, led by CAW with support from Jo Smith, with participants noting their responses to the following questions:

- What did you get out of the project?
- What's the next step for you?
- What did you like/not like about it?

Feedback was also gathered from people attending the private view of the finished installation through a comments book. A meeting was then held between *creativityteam* and Fran Goodwin of CAW to consider the information gathered from participants and gather views and observations from the artists. A further meeting was held with Jo Smith to gather her views and observations.

All photographs by Community Arts Workshop