

*Arts on Referral
at Fresh Arts:
NHS Charities
Together*



EVALUATION REPORT

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Nicola Holt, Caroline Elliott & Donna Baber

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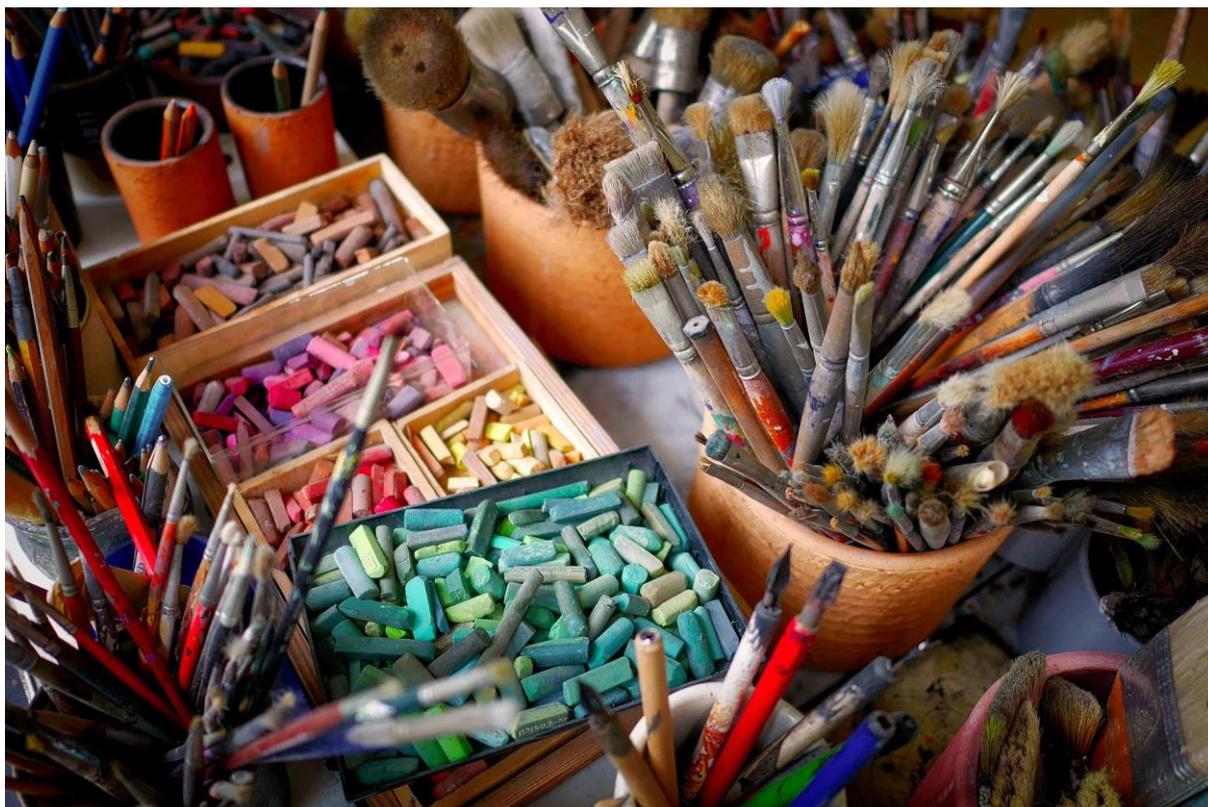
This report describes the evaluation methods and outcomes of four arts on referral programmes delivered through Fresh Arts on Referral at Southmead Hospital, Bristol. Arts on referral, where people are referred to art workshops, led by a skilled arts for health facilitator, is more commonly used in primary care, to help improve people's psychosocial wellbeing (reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression and improving wellbeing). The current project used this model within secondary care, with the hope that art on referral would likewise help to improve patients' wellbeing, help them to manage health symptoms and reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

The evaluation of eight six-week-long art programmes are reported on here, to which patients were referred to help with neuromuscular conditions, weight management, drug and alcohol use, chronic pain, chronic breathlessness, diagnosis with cancer, and anxiety and depression (with two community groups, based in Somerset and South Gloucestershire). The evaluation took a mixed methods approach with: 1) a pre and post programme design, assessing wellbeing and loneliness; 2) a process evaluation to assess the immediate impact of the art workshops on mood (anxiety, happiness, alertness), attention (the 'flow state') and social connection; and 3) qualitative methods to draw out the stories and experiences of participants, including a thematic analysis of focus groups with participants, and interviews with participants culminating in four case studies.

The quantitative analysis suggests that the art on referral programmes worked in a similar way to those in primary care, with improvements in subjective wellbeing and reductions in loneliness being reported at the end of programmes. During art workshops participants reported feeling less anxious, happier and more alert. On average, they entered an attentional state of absorption (flow), which can help to improve wellbeing. They also reported, on average, feeling less lonely after taking part in art workshops. Qualitative analyses supported these findings, with participants reporting that the interventions were appropriate and meaningful, and helped to improve their wellbeing, reconnect with others, learn how to use the arts to improve attention and manage health symptoms, and as a steppingstone to new opportunities and continued growth and development.

In conclusion the evaluation supports the use of arts on referral in secondary care, as an intervention that can help to improve psychosocial wellbeing. However, further research would be useful to replicate and extend these findings, for example, to evaluate its impact on health symptoms (such as experiences of pain).

INTRODUCTION



FRESH ARTS ON REFERRAL AT SOUTHMEAD HOSPITAL

Fresh Arts (FA) is the art programme for North Bristol NHS Trust (NBT), based at Southmead Hospital and runs a broad range of arts for health activities, exhibitions and programmes, including arts on referral. Fresh Arts enhances the hospital experience through an innovative art and design programme, putting creativity, health and wellbeing at the centre of care. This includes Fresh Arts on Referral (FAoR). Through creative writing, print making, visual art and poetry, FAoR aims to support patients with chronic long-term illness to better self-manage their condition. FAoR aims to alleviate symptoms and promote self-care through improving experiences of stress, social isolation and loneliness, boredom, pain, anxiety, and depression.

Previously FAoR has worked with patients experiencing chronic pain, chronic breathlessness and cancer. The current funding enabled FAoR to extend its provision to additional groups, including patients referred to help with neuromuscular conditions, weight management, drug and alcohol use, and anxiety and depression (with two community groups, based in Somerset and South Gloucestershire). This evaluation report will focus on the outcomes from these eight groups.

AIMS OF THE INTERVENTIONS

Programmes were six-week-long creative arts workshops (using the visual arts), run by experienced professional art for health facilitators. AoR programmes were designed to give participants structure in their daily lives, the chance to express themselves creatively, to see things differently through arts activities, motivation, enjoyment and some social connection, which could help to improve their wellbeing and help them cope with their health conditions.

BACKGROUND TO ARTS ON REFERRAL

Arts on referral is a form of social prescribing, involving referrals to visual arts programmes (rather than to other activities such as sporting activities) (Crone et al., 2018; Holt et al., 2022; van der Venter & Buller, 2015). Social prescribing occurs when health professionals signpost people to community resources and groups with the hope that engagement with these will improve their psychosocial wellbeing. Social prescribing is offered for various reasons: psychosocial (e.g., social isolation); mental health (e.g., low to moderate levels of stress, anxiety or depression); and physical health (e.g., chronic pain or illness) (Keenaghan et al., 2012). It recognizes the social cultural determinants of health, for instance, the role of social isolation in stress, anxiety and depression (Fixsen & Polley, 2020; World Health Organisation [WHO], 1946).

While the focus, thus far, has been to use social prescribing within primary healthcare, it is also possible that social prescribing could reduce the burden in secondary care. While there is limited research or evaluation in this context, initial findings suggest that there is potential for arts on referral (or prescription) to improve wellbeing, for people experiencing chronic pain and cancer (Crone et al., 2018b; Holt et al., 2022). Evaluation reports for pilot programmes have reported a meaningful increase in WEMWBS scores for cancer and chronic pain groups (Crone et al., 2018; Willis Newson, 2019). For example, the Flourish art on prescription programme for adults experiencing or recovering from cancer reported that participants had significantly higher wellbeing scores and lower depression and anxiety scores at the end of the programme (Crone et al., 2018b). The current project contributes to this emerging work, examining the impact of arts on referral for specific health conditions in the context of secondary care. It continues existing work with participants experiencing chronic pain, chronic breathlessness, and with a diagnosis of cancer, by FAoR (Holt et al., 2022; Willis Newson, 2019) and extends this to participants referred for help with neuromuscular conditions, weight management, and drug and alcohol use.

BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION

This evaluation took a mixed methods approach, using surveys, focus groups and interviews. The quantitative evaluation aimed to explore the impact of the arts interventions on the wellbeing and social connection of participants, focusing on changes in subjective wellbeing and loneliness over time, using established psychometric measures (both global and 'in-the-moment measures). The qualitative evaluation focused on learning from participants how FAoR helped them, leading to a thematic analysis of focus group discussions and individual case studies based on in-depth one-to-one interviews.

Previous research on arts on prescription, in primary care, has used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), a global measure of subjective wellbeing that includes questions about positive moods in daily life, positive relationships with others, feeling useful, and being able to think clearly and solve everyday problems (e.g., Crone et al., 2013; van der Venter & Buller, 2014; Holt, 2020). This research has consistently reported that the wellbeing of participants (typically referred due to moderate anxiety and depression) has significantly increased from the start to the end of arts on referral programmes. To build on this previous research, the current evaluation assessed the subjective wellbeing of participants at the beginning and end of the art-on-referral programmes, using the same measure of wellbeing (WEMWBS). However, further measures were included to assess both: 1) the impact of programmes on social isolation, examining both feelings of loneliness and satisfaction with relationships (Holt et al., 2022); and 2) the experiences of participants during the art workshops, to gain more understanding of the processes of change, assessing mood (e.g., anxiety reduction), attention (the extent to which participants became absorbed in the activities – the flow state) and social connection.

Loneliness refers to a subjective appraisal of being unsatisfied with one's relationships with others and is associated with adverse health outcomes (Park et al., 2020). Social bonding has been hypothesized to be a mechanism for the efficacy of participatory arts programmes (Daykin et al., 2020) and social prescribing has

been described as a 'social cure' (Wakefield et al., 2022), hence a reduction in loneliness was predicted across programmes.

Mood has been modelled as having three dimensions: hedonic tone (e.g., happiness), tense arousal (e.g., anxiety) and energetic arousal (Matthews, Jones & Chamberlain, 1990). Hedonic tone assesses the extent to which people currently feel happy, joyous and content, rather than sad, unhappy and depressed. Tense arousal assesses whether people currently feel agitated, anxious or distressed rather than calm relaxed and serene. Energetic arousal assesses whether people currently feel alert, awake and full of energy compared with tired, sluggish and bored. Such affective momentary experiences, of positive affect, contribute to mental health and wellbeing in daily life (Seligman, 2011). All three dimensions of mood were assessed before and after art-making in the current study, using a measurement tool designed for quick and repeated measurement of mood in everyday life (Wilhelm & Schoebi, 2007). Measuring in the moment wellbeing in this way is a useful way to assess wellbeing impact of interventions and can help avoid and reduce such biases with our recall (Dolan, Kudrna & Stone, 2017). It was predicted that all three dimensions of mood would be improved through the art workshops.

The flow state is a state of being highly absorbed in a task, so that one's attention is entirely focused on it, time passes quickly, and there is less awareness of self and reflective and critical thoughts about oneself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The flow state is important to wellbeing, because engaging in tasks in which one enjoys can build skills and competencies, is enjoyable and increases momentary subjective wellbeing, leads to a sense of having a meaningful life, through engaging with meaningful activities (Holt, 2018). It can also be used to help distract one from and manage health conditions, such as anxiety and chronic pain, by temporarily focusing entirely on something else (whether that is knitting, painting, playing golf or music) (e.g., Reynolds & Prior, 2006). It was predicted that participants would report being in a state of flow in the art workshops.

In addition to the quantitative approach, qualitative methods assessed the experiences of art on referral from the perspectives of participants. These included a qualitative questionnaire about their experience, at the end of the programme, focus groups and case studies. Focus groups were held with participants of the Weight Management and Neuromuscular Conditions programmes, and a thematic analysis of the discussions was conducted to identify key experiential themes. Further, one-to-one interviews were held with selected participants, from diverse programmes, in order to develop case studies, giving them an opportunity to tell their stories about how participating in FAoR impacted them personally.

AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

In this report, we will report on the quantitative outcomes from eight groups: Neuromuscular Conditions; Weight Management; Drug and Alcohol; Chronic Pain; Chronic Breathlessness; Cancer; South Gloucestershire Community Group; and the Somerset Community Group. We will ask:

- Does wellbeing increase from the start to the end of six-week-long programmes?
- Does loneliness decrease from the start to the end of six-week-long programmes?
- Do art workshops improve feelings of happiness, energy and alertness?
- Do art workshops reduce feelings of loneliness and anxiety and stress?
- Do participants feel absorbed in the art activities, entering the 'flow state'?
- We will explore individual experiences of participation in programmes through a thematic analysis of focus group discussions
- We will also share four case studies from participants of the FAoR programme, based on one-to-one interviews about their experience.

METHODS



INTERVENTIONS

FAoR consisted of six-week-long art programmes, where participants took part in a weekly, two-hour-long art workshop. Art activities were designed to be engaging and accessible, with the aim being to encourage exploration, creativity and play, in a supportive atmosphere. Activities were broad and included painting, mark making, collage, felting and quilling. One additional cancer group focused on creative writing. For six groups (Neuromuscular, Weight Management, Chronic Pain, Chronic Breathlessness, Drug and Alcohol and Cancer) the workshops were held online, using Zoom, and for the two community groups (in North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) the workshops were held at local community hubs, and were delivered in person.

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

All participants were invited to take part in the evaluation by artist facilitators and were given a participant information form to read and keep, which informed them about the evaluation, ethical considerations and data protection, and explained how the data would be used and how they could withdraw it if they wished to. All participants in the evaluation gave informed consent for their data to be used for evaluation purposes.

Participants completed wellbeing and loneliness measures at the start and end of the Art on Referral programmes. Participants were sent links to these forms by the artist facilitators or were given paper forms to complete, as appropriate. Participants were also invited to complete state questionnaires before and after each art workshop. Links to these state questionnaires were sent to participants as text links before and after the online sessions or were given as paper forms to complete where appropriate. All data was collected anonymously and was cross-referenced across time points with a unique code, which participants answered on each form by responding to two questions with memorable answers.

For the case studies, participants were initially contacted by an artist facilitator, and were emailed an information sheet about what participating in an interview would involve, how information would be used and stored, in addition to ethical and data protection information. Interested participants were introduced by email to the interviewer (NH), signed a consent form, and arranged a time for an interview, which was held by telephone, Teams or Zoom, according to participant preferences. Interviews lasted for about an hour and involved participants sharing their journey from referral to the current time. The audio recording was then transcribed and edited in order to produce a case study, using the participants own words as much as possible.

Focus groups were held in the Fresh Arts art room at Southmead Hospital and were run by Donna Baber and a research assistant from UWE (Caroline Elliott). These were held in small groups, with attended from each programme, and explored experiences of participating in AoR and its impact on wellbeing, following a semi-structured schedule. Care was taken to ensure participants were comfortable, felt free not to talk if they did not wish to, and to steer the conversation away from sensitive topics/discussions. Participants read an information sheet about their right to withdraw, how the data would be stored and used, and other ethical and data protection issues, and gave informed consent before participation. The focus group data was transcribed by CE and analysed thematically by NH and CE.

The evaluation was given ethical approval by the University of the West of England's Ethics Committee (Reference Number: HAS.17.07.197).

PSYCHOMETRIC MEASURES

Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, WEMWBS (Tennant, Hiller, Fishwick, et al., 2007). A 14-item scale enquiring about psychological wellbeing over the previous two weeks, including feeling connected to others, self-esteem, experiencing positive affect and clarity of cognition. The scale has excellent psychometric properties and is responsive to change (a minimum 'meaningful change' being one of 3 points across measurement points) (Maheswaran et al., 2012; Putz et al., 2012). A score of 40 or below has been interpreted as indicative of probable depression, and 44 or below of possible depression (Bianca, 2012; Trousselard et al., 2016).

Direct Measure of Loneliness, DMoL (Office for National Statistics, 2018). A single item measure of loneliness with a five-point response scale, ranging from "often/always" to "never": "How often do you feel lonely?". A score of 1 indicated always/often feeling lonely and a score of 5 never feeling lonely.

Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool, CtELMT (2019). This scale has been co-designed with a range of groups with the aim of producing a scale that uses appropriate and positive language to reduce distress or embarrassment when responding to items. It is a three-item scale with a 5-point response scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree that asks about satisfaction with social connection and relationships: 1) "I am content with my friendships and relationships"; 2) "I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time"; and 3) "My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be". Possible scores range from 5 to 15, where people with scores of 5 to 8 are thought to be experiencing intense loneliness, and people with scores of 12 to 15 to be unlikely to be experiencing loneliness.

Short Mood Scale, SMS (Wilhelm & Schoebi, 2007). A six-item scale, based on a three-factor model of the structure of mood, and longer versions of the scale, that include: hedonic tone (feeling happy and cheerful rather than sad or depressed); tense arousal (feeling anxious, tense and stressed rather than relaxed or calm); and energetic arousal (feeling active and energetic rather than sleepy and sluggish). Each item was presented with a line between two 'opposites' (content versus discontent; unwell versus well; agitated versus calm; relaxed versus tense; tired versus awake; and full of energy versus without energy). This scale was designed to repeatedly sample individuals' mood and has been found to be reliable and sensitive to individual change.

Flow Short Scale, FSS (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008) is a 10-item scale designed to measure phenomenological features of the flow state, including absorption in the moment, concentration, not being preoccupied with thoughts from the past or about the future, losing one's sense of self-consciousness and of time passing, and feeling a balance between the challenges of a task and one's own skills in relation to it. Items are responded to on a 7-point Likert scale and include "I am totally absorbed in what I am doing." The scale has excellent psychometric properties.

State loneliness, SL (Reissman et al., 2018). A single item that has been used to measure loneliness in the moment: "How lonely do you feel at the moment?" with a visual analogue scale, where a slider can be moved from "not at all" to "very much", which has been used in previous arts for health research.

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES: ACROSS THE PROGRAMME

This section reports on responses to the pre and post programme questionnaires, asking about general levels of wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and loneliness. It was expected that following participation in the six-week-long programmes, participants would report having higher levels of subjective wellbeing, less frequent feelings of loneliness and feel more satisfied with their relationships with others.

IMPACT OF ARTS ON REFERRAL ON WELLBEING

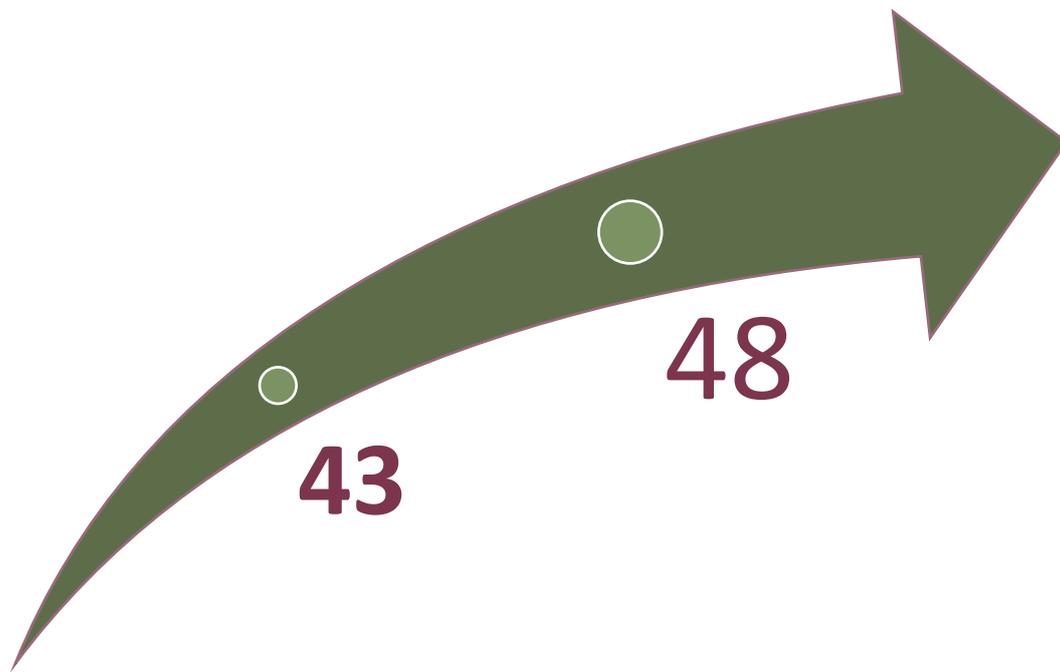


FIGURE ONE: AVERAGE WELLBEING SCORES AT THE START AND END OF PROGRAMMES

Changes in reported subjective wellbeing (over the past two weeks) from the start to the end of FAoR programmes were examined. Improvements in subjective wellbeing were observed across programmes, as illustrated in Figures One and Two.

- **Wellbeing across all programmes:** Mean (average) scores on the WEMWBS were 43 ($n = 55$) at the start of programmes, in the range of possible depression, and were 48 at the end of programmes on average ($n = 39$), out of the range of possible depression. This represents a meaningful shift in wellbeing of **five points** (above the minimum increase of three points indicative of meaningful change; Tennant et al., 2007). Although data was available for 74 participants, only 17 of these had data available at both the start and end of programmes. Nevertheless, for these 17 participants there was a statistically significant increase in WEMWBS scores ($t = -4.57, p < 0.001, df = 16, 1-t$), rising from a mean of 41 to one of 48 across the six-week-long programmes. ↑

- **Wellbeing change in individual programmes:** This pattern of wellbeing increase was broadly replicated across the eight groups (however, there were insufficient data points to enable meaningful comparisons for some groups).
 - *Neuromuscular group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 43 to 48 ($n = 4$; $n = 7$) ↑
 - *Weight management group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 49 to 55 ($n = 3$; $n = 5$) ↑
 - *Drug and alcohol group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 46 to 50 ($n = 7$; $n = 3$) ↑
 - *Chronic pain group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 33 to 40 ($n = 5$; $n = 4$) ↑
 - *Cancer group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 44 to 52 ($n = 12$; $n = 9$) ↑
 - *Chronic breathlessness group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 49 to 59 ($n = 5$; $n = 1$). ↑
However, only one person completed the post-programme evaluation form in this group, making this subset of data unreliable.
 - *South Gloucestershire community group:* Mean WEMWBS scores rose from 42 to 45 ($n = 14$; $n = 7$) ↑
 - *Somerset community group:* Mean WEMWBS scores decreased from 40 to 18 ($n = 3$; $n = 1$). ↓
However, only one person completed the post-programme evaluation form in this group, making this subset of data unreliable.

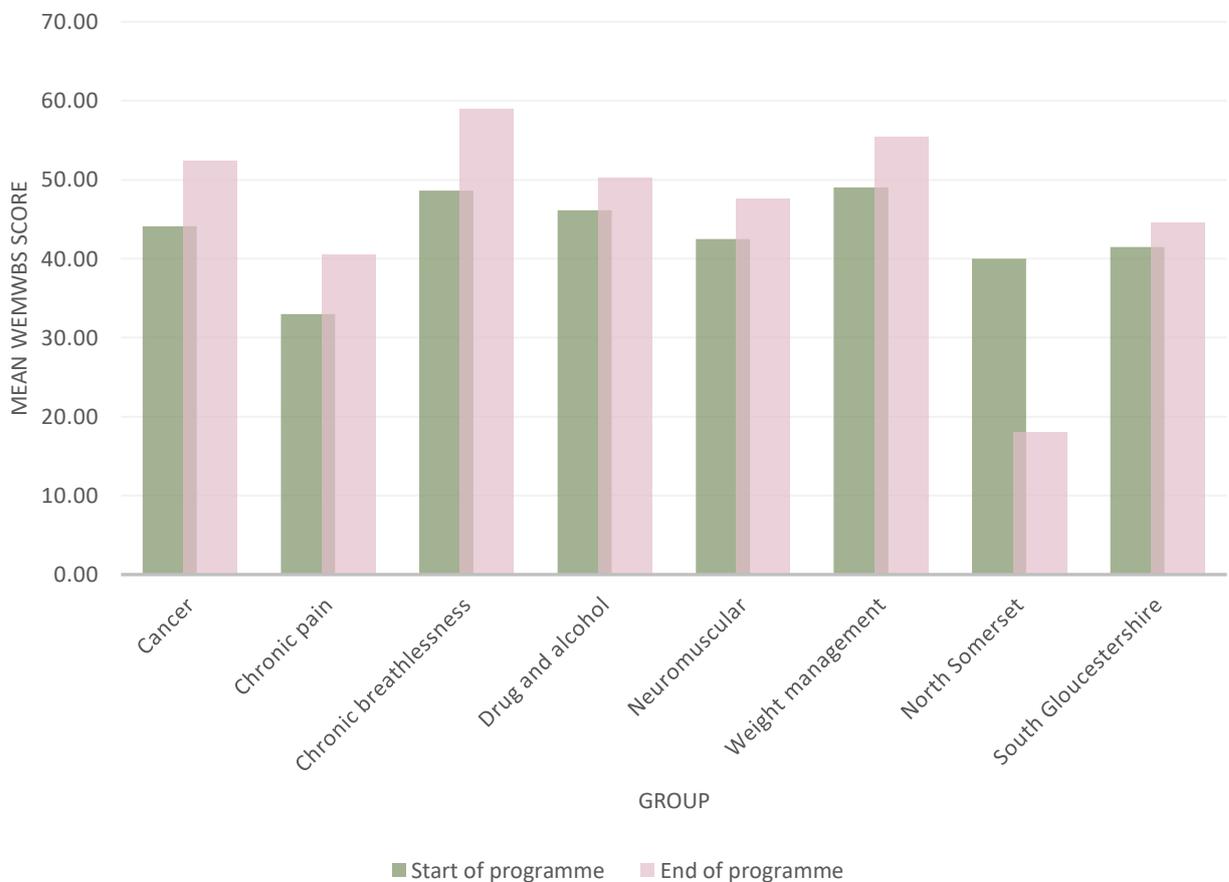


FIGURE TWO: CHANGE FROM THE START TO THE END OF PROGRAMMES ON THE WEMWBS

IMPACT OF ARTS ON REFERRAL ON LONELINESS

Two aspects of loneliness were assessed at the start and end of the FAoR programmes: satisfaction with relationships in everyday life (CtELMT) and the frequency with which people felt lonely in life (DMoL). Both indices of social isolation and loneliness improved across the six-week-long programmes.

- **Changes in CtELMT across all programmes:** Mean (average) scores on the CtELMT were 10.08 ($n = 55$) at the start of programmes, indicative of feeling 'neutral' in terms of satisfaction with relationships, and were 10.38 at the end of programmes on average ($n = 39$), suggesting only a very slight increase. However, for participants with data at both time points (pre and post programme), there was a statistically significant increase in mean CtELMT scores, rising from 10.27 to 11.83 ($t = -2.62, p < .0001, df = 16, 1-t$), across the six-week-long programmes, suggesting that participants shifted towards agreeing that they were satisfied with their friendships and relationships in daily life. ↑
- **Changes in DMoL across all programmes:** Mean (average) scores on the Direct Measure of Loneliness measure were 2.48 ($n = 51$) at the start of programmes, indicative of feeling lonely 'some of the time' to 'occasionally', and were 2.94 at the end of programmes ($n = 35$), indicative of feeling lonely occasionally. For participants with data at both time points (pre and post programme), there was a statistically significant increase in mean CtEL scores, rising from 2.80 to 3.27 ($t = -1.97, p = .017, df = 14, 1-t$), across the six-week-long programmes, suggesting that participants shifted towards feeling lonely less often, but still feeling lonely sometimes (rather than reporting low or no feelings of loneliness in life [represented by a score between 4 and 5]). ↑
- **Changes in loneliness across individual programmes:** This pattern of loneliness change was inconsistent across groups, improving most in the cancer and chronic breathlessness groups (however, there are very small sample sizes and insufficient data points to enable meaningful comparisons for some groups).
 - *Neuromuscular group:* Mean CtELMT scores decreased from 11.50 to 10.71 ($n = 4; n = 7$) ↓; mean DMoL scores remained similar, decreasing from 3.53 to 3.40 ($n = 4; n = 7$) ↓.
 - *Weight management group:* Mean CtELMT scores remained similar, reducing from 10.83 to 10.20 ($n = 3; n = 5$) ↓; mean DMoL scores rose from 2.67 to 2.80 ($n = 3; n = 5$) ↑.
 - *Drug and alcohol group:* Mean CtELMT scores rose from 10.00 to 11.17 ($n = 7; n = 3$) ↑; mean DMoL scores rose from 2.57 to 3.33 ($n = 7; n = 3$) ↑.
 - *Chronic pain group:* Mean CtELMT scores decreased from 9 to 7.5 ($n = 5; n = 4$) ↓; mean DMoL scores remained similar, reducing from 1.80 to 1.75 ($n = 5; n = 4$) ↓.
 - *Cancer group:* Mean CtELMT scores rose from 10.25 to 12.33 ($n = 12; n = 9$) ↑; mean DMoL scores rose from 2.60 to 3.86 ($n = 10; n = 7$) ↑.
 - *Chronic breathlessness group:* Mean CtELMT scores rose from 9.80 to 14.00 ($n = 5; n = 1$) ↑; mean DMoL scores rose from 2.80 to 4.00 ($n = 5; n = 1$) ↑. However, only one person completed the post-programme evaluation form in this group, making this subset of data unreliable.
 - *South Gloucestershire community group:* Mean CtELMT scores fell from 9.97 to 9.50 ($n = 14; n = 7$) ↓; mean DMoL scores remained similar, rising from 2.24 to 2.29 ($n = 14; n = 7$) ↑.
 - *Somerset community group:* Mean CtELMT scores decreased from 9.67 to 3.00 ($n = 3; n = 1$) ↓; mean DMoL scores fell from 1.67 to 1.00 ($n = 3; n = 1$) ↓. However, only one person completed the post-programme evaluation form, making this subset of data unreliable.

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE PROGRAMME LEVEL CHANGE

On average, wellbeing increased across programmes, with a meaningful increase of 5 units, moving from average scores indicative of depression to scores above this threshold (43 to 48). Further, on average, loneliness decreased slightly and satisfaction with relationships slightly increased following participation with FAoR programmes.

Levels of missing data varied both by participant (across time points) and by programme, meaning that some programmes were difficult to evaluate independently due to inadequate sample sizes. Nevertheless, where complete data was present, statistically significant improvements in all three indices of wellbeing were obtained. This outcome supports the aims of the FAoR programme, suggesting that the programmes helped to increase the wellbeing of participants, and help to reduce feelings of social isolation, across clinical and community settings.

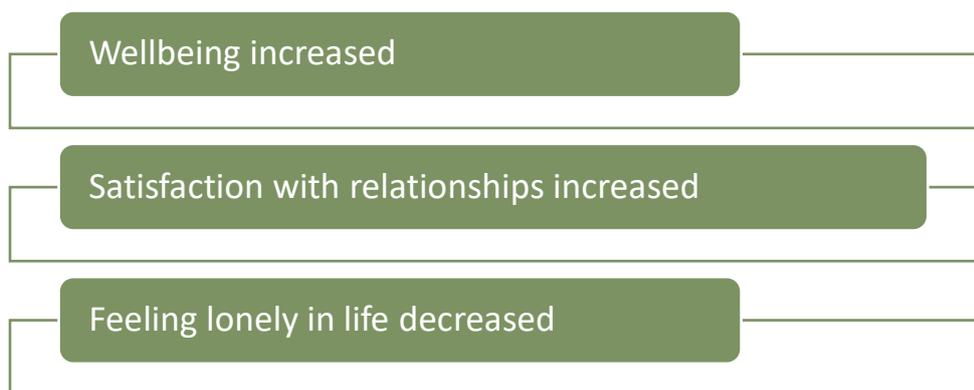


FIGURE THREE: WELLBEING CHANGE FROM THE START TO THE END OF FAOR PROGRAMMES

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES: IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN ART WORKSHOPS

This section examines the immediate impact of art workshops, looking at in-the-moment (state) wellbeing before and after participation. It was expected that after participating in the art workshops, participants would report improved mood, feeling less stressed, tense and anxious; more content, well and happy; and less sluggish and more alert. It was also expected that they would feel less lonely after connecting with others in the workshops. Finally, at the end of art workshops participants were asked about their concentration and attention, to assess the extent to which they felt absorbed while art making and experienced the 'flow state'.

IMPACT OF ART WORKSHOPS ON MOOD

426 reports of in-the-moment wellbeing were collected, at the start and end of art workshops, across all programmes (by 75 participants). As illustrated in *Figure Four*, after participating in the FAoR workshops participants reported higher levels of in the moment wellbeing. Participants reported feeling less anxious (and more relaxed), more energetic and alert, and more content and well. To see if these changes were statistically significant, multi-level models were conducted (nesting state reports by participant), with a random intercept, with Time (start/end) as a factor, and with mood scores as dependent variables. These outcomes are listed below.

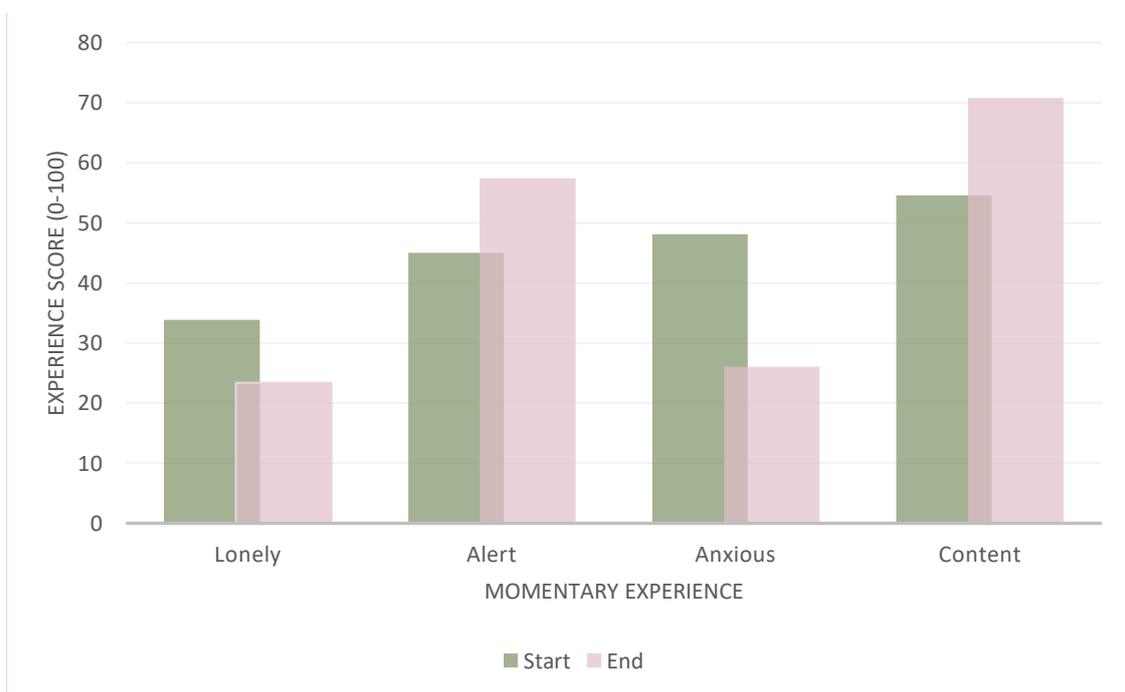


FIGURE FOUR: CHANGE FROM THE START TO THE END OF ART WORKSHOPS IN MOOD AND LONELINESS

- **Tense arousal:** Participants reported a reduction in tension, anxiety and stress, after participation. On a scale ranging from 0 (indicative of complete calm and relaxation) to 100 (indicative of extreme stress and anxiety), participants had an average score of 48 ($n = 237$) at the start of art workshops, decreasing to 26 ($n = 170$) at the end. This decrease in tense arousal was statistically significant ($F_{(367,1)} = 136.12, p < .001$).

- **Energetic arousal:** On average, participants reported feeling more alert, energetic and awake after taking part in the art workshops (mean = 57; $n = 170$) than at the start of the art workshops (mean = 45; $n = 237$). This increase in energetic arousal was statistically significant ($F_{(372,1)} = 36.50, p < .001$).
- **Hedonic tone:** participants reported feeling more content, well and happy after taking part in the art workshops (mean = 71; $n = 170$) than at the start of the art workshops (mean = 55; $n = 237$). This increase in hedonic tone was statistically significant ($F_{(364,1)} = 87.79, p < .001$).

When examined according to individual programmes, as detailed in *Table One*, below, we can see that these patterns were broadly replicated, with increased feelings of energy and alertness (indicative of engagement, interest and excitement), reduced anxiety, stress, agitation and tension, and increased feelings of wellness, contentment and happiness. It is worth noting that the reliability of data differs according to groups, with some groups having much higher levels of data (e.g., Neuromuscular Group) than others (e.g., North Somerset), hence some patterns must be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, the overall data supports the prediction that engaging in the art workshops would improve subjective mood (in-the-moment wellbeing).

	Sample size		Alert		Anxious		Content	
Cancer	8,2	Start	41		62		35	
	6,2	End	59	↑	28	↓	59	↑
Chronic pain	22,12	Start	37		63		41	
	22,12	End	44	↑	27	↓	63	↑
Chronic breathlessness	21,9	Start	43		55		52	
	15,6	End	60	↑	25	↓	68	↑
Drug and alcohol	33,7	Start	51		39		60	
	29,6	End	66	↑	20	↓	78	↑
Neuromuscular	76,17	Start	45		47		59	
	63,16	End	49	↑	29	↓	72	↑
Weight management	6,6	Start	52		44		59	
	0,0	End	Missing data		Missing data		Missing data	
North Somerset	5,5	Start	46		29		46	
	4,4	End	66	↑	40	↑	64	↑
South Gloucestershire	66,17	Start	45		47		55	
	50,14	End	62	↑	26	↓	69	↑

TABLE ONE: MEAN SCORES AT THE START AND END OF ART WORKSHOPS FOR MOOD AND LONELINESS FOR EACH PROGRAMME

Note: Sample size refers to level 1 = number of sampled experiences, and level 2 = number of participants contributing data.

IMPACT OF ART WORKSHOPS ON LONELINESS

At the start and end of art workshops, participants reported on how lonely they felt at each moment, on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 100 (very much). As predicted, participants reported feeling less lonely at the end of the art workshops (mean = 23; $n = 145$) than at the start of the art workshops (mean = 33; $n = 208$). This change is illustrated in *Figure Four*. A multi-level model was conducted (nesting state reports by participant), with a random intercept, with Time (start/end) as a factor, predicting levels of loneliness. This was showed that loneliness was significantly lower at the end of FAoR workshops ($F_{(290,1)} = 23.34, p < .001$).

A chart illustrating the changes in loneliness according to programme can be seen below, in Figure Five. This shows that the reductions in loneliness were broadly reported across programmes, irrespective of delivery format. These findings support the prediction that meeting to make art with others, whether in person, or online, helped to provide a sense of social connection with others.

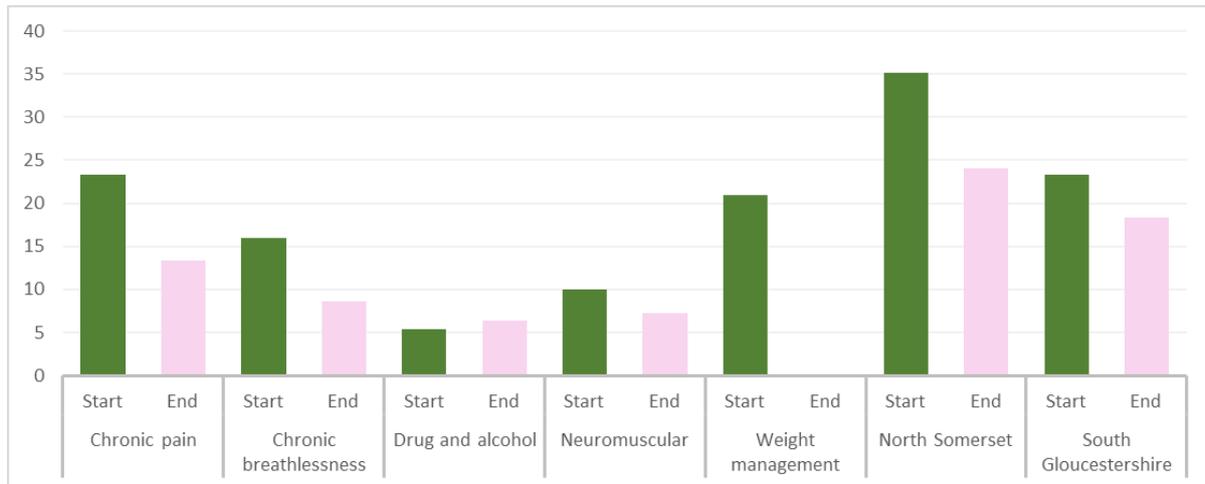


FIGURE FIVE: MEAN SCORES AT THE START AND END OF ART WORKSHOPS FOR LONELINESS FOR EACH PROGRAMME

IMPACT OF ART WORKSHOPS ON ATTENTION

The final analysis examined whether participants felt that they could become attentionally absorbed during the art workshops and experience a state of 'flow'. Participants reported a mean flow score at the end of art workshops of 47.5 ($n = 162$). The maximum score is 70 (and the lowest is 0), hence this indicates that participants, on average, were agreeing that they were in a moderate state of absorbed attention, feeling engaged with the art activities and focused on these rather than feeling distracted and preoccupied. As illustrated in *Figure Six*, the flow scores were similar across programmes, albeit slightly higher for the Cancer Group ($n = 6$) and lower for the North Somerset Group ($n = 3$) (however, these groups also had the smallest sample sizes, meaning that this data may not be represented of the general experiences of the group).

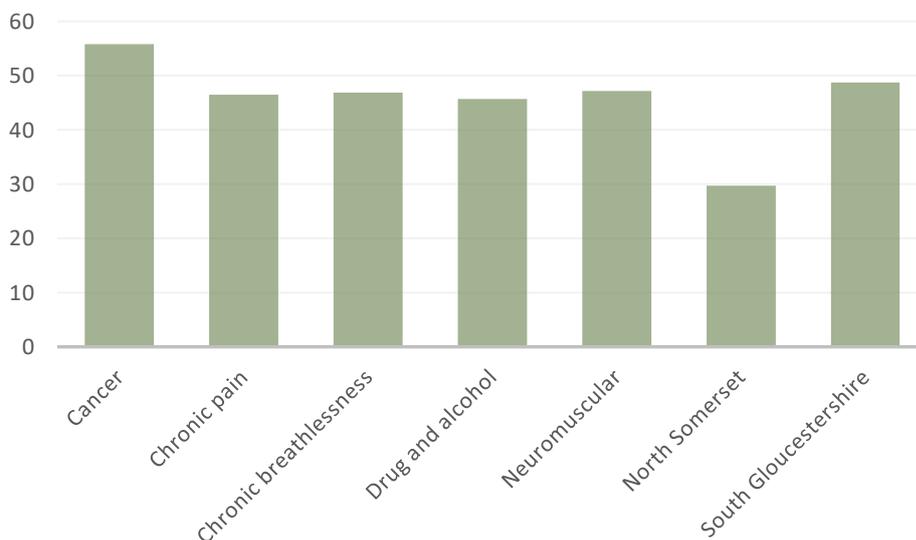


FIGURE SIX: FLOW SCORES DURING ART WORKSHOPS ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT PROGRAMMES

SUMMARY OF IMPACT OF ART WORKSHOPS ON MOMENTARY WELLBEING

After participating in art workshops, across programmes, participants reported feeling: less anxious and stressed (calmer and more relaxed); happier, more content and well; more energetic and alert; and less lonely (to a statistically significant degree). On average, across programmes, participants reported being in a concentrated state of absorption while engaging with the art programmes. Levels of missing data varied both by participant (across time points) and by programme, meaning that some programmes were difficult to evaluate independently due to inadequate sample sizes. Nevertheless, the data supports the aims of the FAoR programme, suggesting that the art workshop helped to increase the momentary wellbeing of participants, improving mood, attention and social connection.

Mood improved (happier, calmer, more energetic)

Participants reported absorbed attention (flow)

Loneliness decreased

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK: SURVEY RESPONSES

Participants responded to open questions on the final programme evaluation questionnaire that asked about their experiences of the intervention. Below are some examples of responses to this qualitative survey.

RELAXATION

- “I joined some sessions extremely stressed, but it forced me to stop and take time out, so after each session I really did feel much calmer, and relaxed, the me time was wonderful and much appreciated”. (Neuromuscular Group)
- “I find the whole experience contemplative and relaxing. I really mean relaxing, because I can feel my whole body respond to the experience, it physically eases. My mind eases a lot. Part of that has to do with the fact that it is two hours long, I think that is a very important aspect, because it gives you enough time to really get into the experience. It takes time to relax, and the quietness and calmness is wonderful.” (Weight Management Group)
- “The time for myself, the time to relax, the time to just not have to think about other things in my life. It's been a welcome relief from a lot of high-impact stress in my life lately.” (Neuromuscular Group)
- “It relaxes my brain and gives me some time out of normal life” (South Gloucestershire Community Group)

LEARNING NEW SKILLS

- “Learning new skills and gaining confidence in applying them. I felt supported in learning to use the various ways of making marks and using different materials” (Neuromuscular Group)
- “I looked forward each week to learning something new and to experiment. I enjoyed the inclusion of everybody on the course and it was fun to see how each person interpreted the brief. Esme was absolutely lovely and totally inspired us all. The warm-up was so totally needed and enabled my imagination to run to different ideas never anticipated.” (Neuromuscular Group)
- “I have enjoyed discovering so many different ways to create art. Being part of a group is helpful as we shared our work and could learn from each other. Jennifer is very encouraging and supportive.” (Neuromuscular Group)

CONCENTRATION

- “To take my mind off alcohol and other things troubling me.” (Drug and Alcohol Group)
- ““I find the whole experience contemplative” (Weight Management Group)

MINDSET

- “It helped me to see that nothing has to be perfect, something I struggle with, especially with art. Being part of a group helped as we could draw inspiration from each other. Finding that work I felt was awful could be re-used to create a new piece of art was inspiring.” (Weight Management Group)
- “The fact that I can do art. Having suffered a stroke and lost the use of my right arm, I was pleased to see art is still possible” (Drug and Alcohol Group)
- “There is no wrong doings in arts and crafts, that art doesn't have to look perfect or clean, when just trapping the paint brush with paint on to a piece of paper to create splashes is okay to do.” (Weight Management Group)
- “It increased my confidence in art making” (South Gloucestershire Community Group)

SOCIAL CONNECTION

- “Meeting new people, the company, the enjoyment of using new art equipment, the time for me.” (Neuromuscular Group)
- “What I found helpful is to talk to new people because this helps me to get things from battling up from my chest and this helps me to focus more better” (South Gloucestershire Community Group)
- “It is also lovely chatting to other participants and seeing their positive journey over the weeks. I also love seeing how talented so many people are!” (Weight Management Group)
- “I have really enjoyed the sessions, the people and the interaction. I have also enjoyed learning and trying the different types of artwork.” (Weight Management Group)
- “Some of the social aspects of the group may have been genuinely helpful.” (Somerset Community Group)
- “It has made me realise I can bond with people (which I find hard) and that I can express emotions through writing but also talking about writing with others. This is a big step for me.” (Cancer Group)
- “Being able to relax and chat about ‘normal’ things and topics, which cheer me up, not talking about the bad things in my life. I have really enjoyed going over art methods I have not used for years” (Drug and Alcohol Group)

This feedback shows how the FAoR helped participants in numerous ways. It helped participants to relax (e.g., “I joined some sessions extremely stressed, but after each session I really did feel much calmer, and relaxed”). Participants described feeling more confident through learning new skills and art techniques (e.g., “Learning new skills and gaining confidence in applying them”). They described feeling able to focus on activities and thereby forget about worries (e.g., “To take my mind off alcohol and other things troubling me.”) They also benefitted from the group, the social connection and spending time with others (e.g., “It is also lovely chatting to other participants and seeing their positive journey over the weeks”). We can also see some of these ideas being expressed in the thematic analysis of focus group discussions and case studies that follow.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Three focus groups were conducted, in-person, with participants from the Weight Management and Neuromuscular Conditions programmes. These followed a semi-structured schedule, that focused on their experiences of attending the programme. Participants were invited to share artwork that they had made on the programme to help illustrate their journey if they wished. The focus group discussions were transcribed and conducted to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to organize participants' experiences into themes.

Four themes were identified, which focused on how the art workshops impacted and had helped participants. These are detailed in Table Two, and included: 1) 'Connection to others', participants felt supported and inspired by others, and their art making, in the group; 2) 'Making space', articulating the benefits felt from the structure of the art-programme that gave permission to relax and focus on art making; 3) 'becoming' which described experiences of change across the AoR programme had two subthemes: 'positive change', where participants described becoming more confident, developing positive identities and becoming more resilient and less self-critical; and 'igniting memories', where, as part of this process, participants reconnected with 'past' parts of themselves (e.g., being playful) and worked through past inhibitions about being creative (e.g., 'not being good at art'); and finally, 4) participants discussed clinical implications of engaging with the FAoR programme, including feeling better able to manage health conditions and an improved relationship with hospital services.

Themes	Subthemes	Example codes
Connection to others		Feeling a part of something
		In the same boat
		Inspiration from others
		Relaxing with others
		Sharing
		Pride in artwork
Making space		Protected time
		Relaxation
		Concentration
		A happy place
Becoming	Positive change	Change of attitude
		More confident
		Being an artist
		Springboard to something new
	Igniting memories	Remembering playing
		Reconstructing past identities
Clinical implications		Different type of treatment
		Benefits of online workshops
		Managing health conditions
		Trusting hospital referrals

TABLE TWO: THEMES AND EXAMPLE CODES

CONNECTION TO OTHERS

This theme focused on the benefits participants reported from spending time with others in the group and feeling a part of something larger than themselves. This connection with others was described as supportive, relaxing and as improving happiness and wellbeing. Further, working with people with similar health conditions was described as reassuring, feeling understood by others and 'in the same boat'.

"and that was that nice feeling about being part of the group, you know just feel like you are part of something, and, and then this is my like OK, I got to get on with it now."

"So my, my erm...my clay person, I've got it the wrong way round though because this is my er...happy face so my...y'know this is my sad face, erm...this is before I started doing the arts and crafts erm, and my first group I was like really nervous. Am I going to do this, aren't I gonna...I sat at the computer for ages thinking am I gonna do this? Erm...and then I literally just fiddled with the computer and ended up on screen and before I knew it, I was out here going "Hello" so...that was me obviously really nervous erm, feeling down, how am I going to do this? But once I'd got into the group I found it really relaxing and meeting different people even though it wasn't y'know in person but it was online, so I find that quite relaxing as well, because, obviously, you are not face to face and you can disappear under the counter if you wanted to [laughter] but um, so this is my face after, happy [laughs]"

"I think that the fact that everybody who was in the Zoom group, was also struggling with weight problems. So, we're all coming from the same sort of situation, obviously everybody is different, you know, but I think there's something [sigh]reassuring to know that other people have the same battles um, and are, and the fact that we all had a weight problem of some sort."

"In the art group I'm like 'Yeah, it's fine, let's chat about it, it's all good', like I just really enjoy having time to, to breathe really and just be me, not so stressed not so snappy and snarly, not so, having to work everything out so man, manage to still think."

Participants described finding inspiration from each other, sharing ideas and enjoying sharing the art making journey across the programme, including seeing the progress made by others. This not only fostered interest and excitement in art making, but helped to develop a sense of pride, support from others in the group helping people to recognise the merits in their artwork and their achievements on the programme.

"But after he died, I had absolutely no inspiration whatsoever for anything. How, how do I start finding any inspiration? But by seeing what other people were doing and sharing ideas and so on found, that's really quite inspiring and that really helped me."

"I think it was seeing everyone else was working thinking wow, we have actually accomplished so much in six short weeks, I think it was...Yeah, 12 hours isn't that? and everyone's work was so different and unique to themselves, and. I think I did get some inspiration from what some people had done."

"And so, my picture today is 'let the joy of art begin' because that's how it felt for me. Erm and to make memories with new people, meeting people erm, learning to grow, having an impact on the way that you look at life and the way you look at arts and crafts, again, with what you said about having that, that place where you don't always feel that you are very good at something but being inspired by someone saying 'no that's really good that's excellent, that's what we're looking for'. Art is whatever you want to make it."

MAKING SPACE

Participants discussed how the weekly art group provided a helpful structure, protecting time and giving permission to use that time to make art. In this space provided by FAoR, participants discussed finding calm, being able to relax, and being able to concentrate on making art, in a way that they had previously found difficult. The two-hours of art making, each week, was described as being 'just for me', and a space that helped people to become calm and let go of stress, to 'escape' from worries and difficulties and concentrate just on the art.

"So yeah this, this sort of brought things a bit of calmness, even if it was for just these couple of hours, and, but it also. I don't know it just sort of like, it it was almost like a de-stress of work, it all sort of left my body and I could go, and I could actually sit and think of what I was gonna do, right I'm gonna do this and gonna do this and I'd actually, be able to get up and just do two things, y'know ... I can sort of feel myself going up, and then there's a [exhales] calm down, calm, down. But yeah it's um it's definitely made me a bit more calm and about more relaxed."

"That really resonates with me as well, time I give to myself that is just for me, and isn't for, and something that I can feel really good about and is just about me and not about work or...you know. Erm so yeah, it's that yeah that sort of mental space. And I really liked that someone said happy place, yeah [laughs] saying that here is my happy place."

"and actually to have that space that's not about work that I can just escape from and, and yeah, I've taken time out of work to do Make Arts and to do other things and that's...it's given me a kind of, actually something else in my life that matters as much as my job, if that makes sense[laughs] and I think I was a little bit too skewed towards, putting all my energy into work you know? Erm, so yeah so that's why I think it's healthy in that way for me."

"it's just given me more time to be me really, shut off from everything else and just concentrate on, on what I need to be honest and give me time to shut out the everyday, rubbish that happens in life and concentrate on something just for...even if it's just for a couple of hours a day, just the whole shut everything else out. Nothing can affect me in these two hours, doing everything later, kind of..."

"time I give to myself that is just for me, and isn't for, and something that I can feel really good about and is just about me and not about work or...you know. Erm so yeah, it's that yeah that sort of mental Space."

"...your head goes to different places. It just sort of quiet and things... I always feel like when I'm doing like sort of artwork, it's like my brain is sort of looking outwards more and then when I'm doing like you're filling a form or something you're very focused like this, aren't you? But it's really nice when your head can just go ahhh..."

"Um ...so...um I did think well, is it going to help? Whatever and actually it has helped far more than any of the other things that I have been doing [laughs]. N...in the way that it actually has taken my mind off stuff and helped me to focus on something else, and um, and wh, wh, wh, is what I needed."

"...before I was, had like my taster session, I was, I was very stressed all the time, um, I had no time for me. I was giving 110% of myself to everyone else and forgetting about me um, so, so, I was stressed."

This space was also described as 'healthy' and 'happy', and could extend into everyday life, using art to help to relax at home, too. The space was described as being a 'mental space' that participants

learnt to access in their own time and was also discussed in terms of a physical space that was created to enable this. Irrespective, this 'space' was something that was recognised as being highly beneficial and as giving respite from anxiety, rumination, stress, through focusing on and enjoying art making.

"I think it's erm, for me it's er gave me a bit more...because I was at a stalemate with my creativity and I've got a shed full of tools and whatever down there because I've gone brain dead, so for me doing this it's been a bit more erm... I don't know what the word is but it's just a bit more inspiring and I've actually been able to go down to my shed and do some silver things. Whereas before it, I just struggled, it was, yeah like I said it was just, I wasn't doing anything because I had so much on my mind I couldn't focus on one thing but erm, as I've, as I've said here, it doesn't have to be, you don't have to do everything, it doesn't have to be right, you can do what you want on here, yeah and it just made, just made me relax a bit more, so I was able to concentrate a bit more on what I, what I wanted to do and as I said, I went down into my little workshop and, and made some stuff so that was, yeah, that was good."

"I've now got my own space with my art room so I'm the same I'm making sure I go up there maybe one or two hours and have that time out when my head is muddled. I go up there and just let everything go, and just sit there and do something, whatever it is, but it's helped me the same as you to get back into doing something that I enjoy doing rather than just sitting there ruminating all about what other stuff is going on in your life."

BECOMING

POSITIVE CHANGE

Participants discussed how their sense of self, behaviours or identities had changed over the course of the programme, taking them on a 'journey of becoming...'. This included coping better with stresses in everyday life, and using art to help manage anxiety. It included having a more adventurous and less critical attitude, being open to trying new things and taking opportunities in life, being less hindered by self-criticism or anxiety and having a new sense of confidence.

"Yeah, it's allowed me to just deal with, with the stress of, of everyday life, like when I've got a brother that um, likes to get himself addicted to whatever drug is going at the time, um, I can deal with that better."

"It's encouraged me to try new hobbies, erm, to meet other people and um, to not be too critical of myself or how well I'm doing."

"I don't automatically think it's total rubbish, which I always did before. And I can actually lose myself in doing something like that, erm and not worry about whether it's perfect or... or not, or whether it was right even, you know? Knowing that everybody, everybody has a different way of expressing themselves, and that's good. It's not that you're worse than everybody else, and er yeah, I think it's just highlights to me that in a way, whatever you produce in your artwork is a... a result of your life experiences and, and we all have different life experiences. So yes, it's, it's helped me to to feel more confident in in that respect and not to rubbish myself all the time."

"I remember the first two weeks just being so preoccupied with getting it right. And I had to draw right. Which is the one point where I'm in agreement with May whose so, so talented and you're like [laughs] comparing yourself with, who you think is an amazing artist and you're rubbish and erm and then I realised that, actually there's no rules, and actually I started to play, and when I started to play,

I started to think, well actually my art is much better when I was playful, it was a lot less sort of stilted.”

Participants discussed feeling more confident about their art making and of thinking of themselves as an artist as a result of attending FAoR, which gave a sense of pride and a new, positive, sense of identity.

“... surely, I’m not an artist, but no, I do I think, I do think of myself as an artist as well, an amateur artist.”

“... this was my highlight at the end of the twelve weeks I did with ArtMake... I had a piece exhibited at the art gallery in a little exhibition...which was lovely so there was like, it was lovely to go and instead, of like ‘Well how did you hear about it?’ It was like, ‘well I’m one of the artists!’ [laughs] a kind of defining moment [all laugh]. I call myself an artist. [laughs]”

“it’s changed how I see myself and how I view myself and my own talents and not just someone who can work well, at a job, I’m someone who has other things.”

As part of this new identity, and an attitude characterised by less self-criticism, participants also discussed an interest in trying out new things and experiences as a result of attending the course, leading to new opportunities.

“Can I just say as well, since I’ve done these courses online, I’ve actually gone to two other ones as well, because of this. It’s one at Welling, erm, which I’ve gone to and then I’m starting the one at Falburn which...it is Falburn isn’t it? Yeah, so that’s coming up and I’ve also done one for pottery, creative one for pottery”

“I mentioned before I started a boot camp a few weeks ago and I am Not really fit compared to everyone else there. But I don’t beat myself up over it. You know, I just go and try my best, you know, do what makes me happy. What works for me and not be like ‘Oh I can’t do that’. ‘I’m not good at art, Sports, etcetera’ ... It’s almost like an attitude change.”

IGNITING MEMORIES

As part of this journey of ‘becoming’, participants discussed how making art brought up childhood memories. These included memories of play and exploration in childhood, and how the FAoR reconnected them with those experiences. This included reconnecting with ‘play’, crafting and drawing in childhood, and remembering past enjoyment in these activities.

“...but I mean, happy times, I used to go out on my bike every day with your lunch box, which you did in these days, and my mu...you know for the whole day didn’t you and I used to take me sketch pad”

“It’s a thing I did when I was in primary school and I’m like, I want to do it again? I really enjoyed doing it when was this big so I’m gonna enjoy doing it when I’m this big ... I liked drawing on bits of paper and um, crafting and things like that and yeah, I almost instantly back to being five, six years old again...and everything was, y’know no worries, nothing ... because actually you sort of fall out of it from being a child. And it’s brought back to me the things that I used to do, that you sort of have to stop doing because of life and it’s busy.”

While some of these memories were positive and involved reconnecting with a sense of uninhibited play and creativity, other memories of art involved reconstructing and making sense of negative experiences, including criticism of art skills at school.

“It was a big turning point for me, having somebody say they wanted to actually display something I’d done, because at school I was thrown out of art and told I wasn’t good enough. ...When I hit high school. I kind of hated art, and I think it’s down to the teacher. ... I have always believed that I have...don’t have an artistic bone in my body because that’s what I was told at school.”

“My art teacher was very cruel and shouted at me and tore my work up every, every lesson because it wasn’t good enough and you know... So, you know, I’ve had this very fixed thing in, in me that I can’t draw, I can’t paint, I can’t be artistic. So, I thought of doing this was quite daunting but I, I wanted to give it a go.”

Hence, part of the journey of ‘becoming’ was processing, rejecting, and moving beyond negative beliefs about artistic ability and developing confidence and the identity of being an artist.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Participants discussed, in various ways, how FAoR related to their health conditions. They discussed how their experiences of FAoR changed their experiences and relationships with the NHS or hospitals, and how different this experience was in contrast to previous experiences of hospital. They described feeling supported by the FAoR programme, a sense of kindness from FAoR, that made them now feel more connected ‘to the hospital’.

“you all, like know that the NHS is, like you know, and there’s so much sort of like, pressure and then and you know, like you worry about contacting them for anything because you think ohh, you know, it’s like I shouldn’t take up time and then, this sort of happens and you say ohh, that’s like, ohh somebody had time to think about you... so I felt very supported by that.”

“...sort of going to the hospital’s always sort of bit scary bit, horrible. I don’t really like it. And, and then this made it seem much more personally accessible. So actually, I think it’s sort of like has changed my relationship with the hospital. Changed how I see my relationship with the department.”

“And then you’d go in and then you’d have to wait behind this curtain, and they would all, the doctors and all the students and be like ten or so...they would be talking about you; this is when I was in my sort of early teens, and then they sort of like pull the curtain and the Consultant would rush in and there’d be all this and it was, I just remember it being absolutely terrifying, and, and just hating it so much, you know. So, so, this feels like very different and like very, you know kindly... and this and this is sort of felt like a reinforcement of that which is lovely.”

“...I think it’s all affected me erm... you know with this thing about being like more comfortable, I, I, I think I’ll always now go to that, because that’s where the...we go, isn’t it? for the clinics, P1: Yeah. P2: Where I went last time, yeah and I think I’ll always, like have this much more positive association, now we’re going... also, partly cos the exhibitions there.”

Being referred to FAoR was important to participants. They discussed how having a referral validated attending the art classes, to themselves and also to others, such as employers. Because the referral came from a medical professional, attending the art workshops was given more importance.

“I wouldn’t have gone and looked for an art class. A number of my friends do go to art classes, and they said you wanna come and I’d? Always said no. I1: What was different about this? P1: I don’t know I. I think because it came from the hospital, and I thought they must think there’s some benefit from me in there somewhere, right?”

"...because this was offered as a... like a bit of medical information. I could sort of actually ask my manager, could I take time out to go. And um, which she agreed to because, um I wasn't being very functional"

Participants discussed how FAoR had helped with their health conditions in various ways, from helping to manage anxiety, helping with the mobility of hands, and helping to manage eating behaviours (e.g., by using art making as a tool to regulate emotions and help to promote health behaviours). Participants also described how their improved wellbeing and confidence, led to giving more time to 'themselves' and doing more activities that promoted health and wellbeing.

"Yeah, well, I think it was good as well because it certainly helped my hands to do things"

"It's definitely made me a bit more calm and about more relaxed. And thinking yes, I don't have to do everything all in one day, because I would be worn out the next day if I did that you know, wouldn't be able to move."

"...in these struggles of living with a kind of condition has, which is a physically invisible condition which you do not see[chuckles] you know? Erm, erm and I think that this has enabled me to actually go 'what do I need and what do I need to nurture myself?'"

"Yeah, I've found that, that's really helped stopping me from, from overeating because I'd have my tea and then carry-on eating, Eat the fridge! You know, so I've got the fridge full of food and I need to go and get more. So, I've found it's really helped in that way, and it's really helped me concentrate on putting things on certain times."

"I find that it's helped me in that, I will sit at home on an evening and watch TV programmes and I will eat because I'm just sat there like that [imitates eating] I'm like... when I'm not thinking about it and now, I don't eat I do crafts"

"It certainly helped my mental health, er with everything else that's going on in my life because, I think it would help anyone really"

"I mean from a weight management point of view, I found that by giving time to doing this, it takes your mind off feeling peckish, wanting to nibble, thinking about what am I going to eat? Because you can focus on something that takes you out of all of that, out of your very noisy headspace that you have a lot of the time"

"I think my lifestyle is just a bit healthier now, I have a much better work life balance erm I'm making time for myself, erm getting up a little bit earlier in the morning so I can go for a swim before work and yeah, slowly losing weight and starting to feel a bit fitter, and er, in general I think I'm a bit happier."

Being able to access FAoR from home was described as important for participants. This was for various reasons, including being able to control what other people saw or heard, which could help when feeling socially anxious, to being able to join from home, avoiding journeys to a physical space that could exacerbate symptoms of pain or exhaustion.

"Not, not an easy thing to do. I sometimes say I think you have more control with zoom because you can turn the camera on and off or mute it... Well in in some ways in Zoom you can be, as you say, you can step back a bit from it if you want to."

"It was very convenient for me not to have to commute into the centre...it's like a 40-minute drive, something like that, and so that would have then used up a... easily almost another two hours out of

my day, and um, it was quite convenient how I was still sitting at the desk I was working out I just changed my laptops and got my art equipment out [laughs] I find that quite relaxing as well, because, obviously, you are not face to face and you can disappear under the counter if you wanted to [laughter].”

“For me having mobility problems and getting to places and getting set up, parking and all that sort of thing it’s a lot easier for me to do it online in a zoom class, and it’s brilliant because I’m at home. I’m in my comfortable place, I’ve got my comfortable chair to sit in, and my desk at the right height, so y’know, that’s all that sort of builds up to less pain, if everything is set up and when you’re in your comfortable place.”

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP THEMES

The four themes: ‘Connection to others’; ‘Making space’; ‘Becoming’; and ‘Clinical implications’, illustrated how the FAoR programmes were experienced as being extremely meaningful and useful for participants with chronic health conditions. The sessions provided social support and bonding with others in a similar position to themselves, and provided skills to enter a psychological space, through engagement with art making, that enabled worries and stresses to fade and positive states of wellbeing to be experienced. Across the programme these experiences of making, sharing, and re/connecting with play and creativity, helped to foster confidence, pride and to positive attitudes enabling participants to explore new opportunities. Art could be used as a tool to help manage health conditions in daily life by some participants, beyond the programme. Further, the supportive experience of FAoR helped to reframe their experience of ‘the hospital’ as more positive and caring, potentially impacting future medical interactions and relationships.

CASE STUDY ONE: CHRONIC PAIN GROUP

JAY: "IT DID FEEL LIKE A FAMILY"



I was referred to the arts programme by my pain psychologist. I have a chronic illness and at the time I was pretty much homebound, and I was very isolated. I was finding that during the week, I was really struggling. I couldn't get out at all to make friends, and I was finding it difficult to join groups online, because I found it very fatiguing. My mental health was declining.

I was extremely anxious and nervous about starting because I didn't like meeting new people. I had first contact with Donna (Fresh Arts Programme Manager) and I told her over the phone that I was very, very anxious about joining. Donna said that she would kind of hold my hand through things, and she did. She came online with me the first time I went to an online workshop, and she introduced me to the artist (Julie). That really helped me to settle into that session, and I met other people that were on that course. I think there was about seven of us. Julie said that I could

have my webcam off if I wanted to, that I didn't have to speak, at all, and that I could just listen. So that was really reassuring for me, I could just watch what happened at first, and didn't have to be involved in anything. That really helped my anxiety, knowing that I didn't have to participate, if I didn't want to. The online delivery, for me, was a lot more suitable for my needs than face-to-face sessions, because I didn't have to get ready to go out, or travel, which causes a lot of fatigue and increases my pain levels. With face-to-face sessions you are out of your comfort zone, you have to interact more, and there's so much going on – a lot to pay attention to. It was much easier for me to access sessions from home. I found that the online art workshops were an appropriate thing for my pain psychologist to send me to. And, although, at first, I didn't know what to expect, I was pleasantly surprised by the reception that I got from the team.

I didn't really talk in the first session at all, I was quite shy. The group was a mix of males and females, and the age range was quite varied. I think I was one of the youngest in the group. I preferred this because I was embarrassed by the stage of life that I'm in. I felt like I should be achieving more at my age and didn't want to compare myself to other young people. I feel like I'm missing out on a lot. I was aware that people in the group all had chronic illnesses themselves, which was reassuring. It meant that if I was tired, and had to leave early, I didn't have to explain to anyone. I could go and I wouldn't have to explain why – people just got it. The conversations people were having about how they were struggling with chronic illness made me feel comfortable. It was like they were talking about my life. It was their life, but it was my life as well. It felt it made me feel really at ease with the group. So, the second time that I came to the group, I was chatty, and we had some lovely chats. It did feel like a family. It was very nice.

After the first referral, I chose to do an online follow-on group, and I've been to four groups in total. Each group has been completely different, because you have a different set of people. But the thing that stays the same is that you are always welcome, and you always feel cared for in the group. In the second group that I went into, people weren't all chronically ill, they were just in a position where they were lonely, and there were more younger people. The pace of the group was different, some people would turn out two or three products in a session, while some of us, like myself, with a chronic health issue, could only manage one or maybe couldn't even manage one in the session. That would make me feel quite anxious, because I wasn't keeping up. So, the atmosphere was completely different. But I still felt like it was a valuable thing to be doing. I still looked forward to it each week.

In one of the sessions that I really enjoyed, we recreated a picture. The tutor cut it into four and we each created one square from this image, and at the end of the session, each of our quadrants was put together to recreate the picture. It was cool to see your one piece become part of everyone else's. And I felt that was very symbolic. I

was a part of the group. I really enjoyed that, being part of a group, like one little part making a whole. I also enjoyed a session where we made handprints, which I have kept, and these make me quite happy when I think about them. We decorated handprints with things that we are drawn to or things that we like. On the back, we wrote words that we find soothing, or words that we like. Soothing hands. Awesome. When I think about that activity, I think about how calming it was, and the words that make me feel nice.

Attending the art workshops was important to me. I've got a lot of crafting material at home, but I really struggled to do anything with it. I was staring at it and not really knowing what to do. I was struggling with concentration and finding it hard to focus. My motivation was completely down. Attending the art programme really helped my concentration levels. My motivation is better. It's not great, but it's better. Attending the group helped, not just because of the calming effect, but also because it helped me to concentrate and organise myself. It's partly because there's an outcome to the workshop, that has been organised for us. It helps me to be thinking about how I'm going to get from A to B. Otherwise, I could sit there the whole session with a blank piece of paper, quite easily. Having other people doing the same thing around me, is very motivational. If I was just sent an information sheet with ideas on each week, I wouldn't do it at all, it wouldn't happen. Making art with other people helps me to concentrate. It happens at a set time each week and that helps me get my head down and do it. On my own, my thoughts wander, I go off on tangents, and I have no motivation. It helps to be part of the group, and having a leader of the group, because they ask, "how are you getting on?" or check how you are feeling. It is supportive. If I feel like I don't even know where to start, they can give me hints or tips. The structure of the programme gives me something to focus on, and sometimes I can be quite mindful doing the art, using the colours in a specific way, and choosing them for a specific reason. Before, my concentration levels were out the window. The art workshops have definitely helped to improve my mental health. It's been calming to me, and it has given me something to focus on when I didn't have



*I really enjoyed
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anything to focus on before. Overall, my anxiety has improved, my low moods have improved, my confidence has improved, and my calmness and ability to relax has improved, as well as my motivation to do things.

Attending the art workshops also helped me to feel less isolated. I definitely feel less lonely. In general, I feel more confident going into groups and new places. I'm still shy, and I'm still anxious beforehand, but I feel more confident doing it. I've also made friends outside of the art group now, within the Bristol area, and I've started college, which again has improved my social life. I'm going to in-person classes, one day a week, for two courses, on British sign language and counselling. For me, that is a big step. I wouldn't have been able to start college without the motivation that came from attending the art workshops, because I was in quite a low space. I needed something to lift me out that low space and I think the arts really did support me with that.

I think the art programme helped slowly, over time. The first step was making friends. After being in the group for a while, I realised that people aren't that scary and they're not actually that

different from me. This helped me to reach out, online, to other people that were looking for friends too. I met some people for coffee and now I am friends with them. We've actually formed a friendship group. As my confidence increased through attending the arts group, and my mood improved, I had the realisation 'what is the worst that could happen?', whereas before, because my mood was so low, I thought 'what's the point?'. I realised that I couldn't stay in the position that I was in – the art workshops helped me to find the motivation to change, and so I started small. I made one friend here and one friend there, and from there I met their friends and now, I have got quite a large friendship group. Obviously, this has boosted my confidence and my morale, and I have people to reach out to. But the first step towards this was definitely joining the first art group and building my confidence through that. With college, I first started by doing an online college course, and when I finished that, I decided to do an in-person college course. I feel like I am in a very different place now, from when I started the art programme. But it's still important to me, to do creative work each week, with a group, so I'm going to keep doing the follow-on art group for a while.

CASE STUDY TWO: NEUROMUSCULAR GROUP

SAMANTHA: "I'M ONE OF THE ARTISTS"



I was recommended to take part in Fresh Arts by the neuromuscular team. I've always been creative, but I've never seen myself as an artist. When I was younger, I decided that I wasn't very good at art, and so I didn't expect great things from the programme. I was very nervous at the start and very preoccupied about getting it 'right' and worried about making 'good art', whatever that means. You get these hang ups in school. We're taught how to do things 'properly', that there's a right and wrong way of doing things. And then, at some point, perhaps with doing collages, that turned, gradually, into me realising that, actually, I just needed to have fun and play. Once I took that playful approach, my art just got better because it wasn't so constrained. But I also found I was able to enjoy it and explore my creative side. I then began to feel the impact on my well-being, which came from having that space 'for me'. The effect on my wellbeing has been profound and I cannot now imagine my life without art in it.

I can't imagine life without art for a few reasons. Firstly, because I genuinely really enjoy doing it, and that process of exploring, and I still feel that I'm discovering things and trying to work out what my style is. That is just a pleasure. Secondly, I feel proud of my achievements. I have started to think of myself as an artist. Because I have a muscular condition that limits what I can do, I have a very finite amount of energy and a very finite amount of physical strength. Previously, I put virtually all that energy into work, and I felt that I wasn't very good at life. Sometimes I felt like I was failing at life. Art has given me something else. The art workshops give me two hours that are just about me, where there's no expectation for me to do anything else. And I'm able to produce something I feel proud of in them, and there's something in my life that I'm good at. I feel a real sense of achievement about that and that's huge for me. That sense, that I have something other than work to anchor myself into the world with, has changed my life. Simple as that.

I did the first six week-long programme, and then a follow-on course for 12 weeks, online. This was hugely important to me, because during the coronavirus pandemic I had to shield, and I am only going back into the world very tentatively even now. I wouldn't have done the art workshops if they were face-to-face. Since September, I've been doing an online experimental drawing class with a college, as well as the online art on referral follow-on group. But I feel safer with the art on referral group. I feel more willing to push things and experiment more. There is also just an understanding, although we never spoke about it, that we were there because we had chronic conditions, because we had things in our life that weren't easy. You don't want to talk about it, it's your escape from all that, but in the group you feel that you are understood. Sometimes a comment would be made, and you would know exactly what the person meant, about pain, or fatigue, or just feeling really tired that day, and nobody would need to explain. There is unspoken understanding. I think this is what made the groups feel safe. The classes were facilitated incredibly well, in a way that makes you feel safe, holds you in that space, but also encourages creativity and playfulness, helping you to appreciate your work in different ways and see different things in it.

I like the structure of having a group to join, because it gives me a focus, so I'm not just doing art in a vacuum. The weekly art workshops really help with my condition because it can be difficult to get started with things. Having sessions at specific times helps to ensure that I do my art. I do art outside of those sessions sometimes, but I think if I didn't have that the structure that the programme gives, I would struggle to motivate myself to do it. It's just the way my brain works, and it's linked to my condition, something to do with the frontal lobe? My brain says it will, but the 'get started' button doesn't work, so I have lots of plans, but they don't always come to fruition.

I think a big part of it what I enjoyed in the workshops was the variation and the range of activities, which leads to the opportunities for play, and something new to try. But I especially enjoyed 'gluing and sticking', basically making collage out of paper is the thing I loved more than

anything. I love the texture and that's probably where that turning point was for me in the Fresh Arts was when we got glue out and paper and I realized, actually, yeah, this is this is just fun, isn't it? I love what you can do with paper. I work quite differently now; I think about actually what I'm creating and the image I'm trying to create now more than I used to. But sometimes I don't think about it, and I just see what comes and that's equally interesting. I also enjoy mark making, and the idea that you don't have to have a perfect picture in mind, you can create something with just different ways of using your pen or pencil. I also really enjoyed making a group piece where we took a painting of a splash and broke it into six pieces and then reinterpreted one part in our own way and then the artist facilitator put them all back together again on photoshop to make a finished piece. I loved the collaboration on that, and it looked so good finished. A proud moment for me was having one of my individual pieces go into the winter exhibition at the art gallery. There was someone at the door and he asked how I found out about the exhibition, and I replied, "I'm one of the artists". I was able to describe myself as an artist! It was wonderful. There's something about seeing your piece on a wall in an exhibition that is so very special, and I felt really proud to have a piece there, of mine.

I think the art programme has impacted how I feel about myself, my sense of self, my self-esteem, and my confidence. Now I feel that there's something in life I can do. I don't feel like I'm just struggling through every day. There's something that I can do that I'm good at and that's what's important to me. It's not easy, living with a long-term condition, particularly with an unseen one, and people don't get it. But when I do the art it kind of melts away. I can forget the pain. I can forget how tired I am. I just I can escape, escape from my own thoughts a little bit. It gives me a space that's good for me and I feel invigorated by it. So, that's my 'go to' now. If I feel like if I'm not having a good day, I can get my sketch pad and just lose myself a bit and get away from things. If I'm not busy with work, rather than doing nothing, I can get my sketch pad out. It's a pleasure, and I feel sense of achievement from it.

NOTHING IS OFF LIMITS



I'm open to more opportunities,
and have the confidence to put
myself out there

I feel like I have more in my life than before, and I have better balance with work. I've always been guilty of ploughing 95% of my energy into my job and now I don't want to do that because I want to keep some of that back. It's as if, once you start to add one new thing to your life, you can start to think about the other things you could add to your life, other things that you wouldn't have done before. I was more hesitant about doing things before, I was worried about making plans in case I was too tired to see them through. That has always been the case, and the covid pandemic magnified that. But the art has helped me to see more possibilities, to not be constantly judging myself and limiting myself. I guess that's the thing. I didn't think I was any good at art at all and I found out that I was not bad actually. I think that gave me a sense of possibility in life. Nothing is off

limits, and nothing has to be perfect as well (I now reject the concept of 'good' art). So, there is no sense in worrying about making plans in case they don't go well, because it doesn't really matter. Life doesn't work like that. If something doesn't work, it doesn't work. Just like a piece of art, I can just stick it in the folder and forget about it. There's a lesson there for life, I think. For me, what has been most important from attending the art programme is the change in my well-being and mindset. I used to limit myself. When you live with chronic condition you put structures around it, and you can focus too much on the negative. That's easy to do. But now, I'm open to more opportunities, and have the confidence to put myself out there – like having my artwork in the exhibition. The art programme has been so meaningful to me, and it's changed my life in a way I'd never have expected.

CASE STUDY THREE: SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COMMUNITY GROUP

LOTTIE: "IT WAS GENTLY POWERFUL"



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I had been signed off from work by my doctor and have been for just over a year now. I was a teacher, for twenty years, but I've left teaching now, and I just, I had a bit of a mental health crash last year and I was having severe panic attacks and I was in a bad place, so the doctor signed me off. I was assessed and I was severely anxious and severely depressed. Since then, I've had so much support. I can't fault the NHS.

When I was starting to get back on my feet a little bit and the anxiety the panic attacks were reduced (I was still having them, but they weren't as bad), a social prescribing nurse suggested the art class to me. I thought, oh, I don't know, because I knit and crochet, but I don't do any drawing or painting. But

she explained the process, how the art is simple, and how there would be an artist leading the classes, who would understand what to do and help us to get our creativity flowing. So, I said OK, I'll give it a whirl. The depression was still very severe. Because I'm a functioning person with depression, I can get out of bed and do things, and perhaps look fine on the surface, but inside I'm absolutely struggling. Sometimes, I would take the kids to school and then dash back inside and lock the door and just stay inside for the rest of the day, because I was just so exhausted by the amount of energy it took to do things. So, I thought, let's try the art classes, because they are going to get me out of the house, and it will be with people who will know why I'm there and

understand. So, that's how I came across it. The first group that I went to wasn't far from where I lived, so that helped. I used to cycle there, when it was warmer, in the summer, so I was getting some exercise, too. It was just brilliant.

When I went to the first art class, I was extremely nervous because my concentration was incredibly poor. It's not great now, but then, I was just finding it hard to concentrate on anything for more than a couple of minutes. I was worried about how I was going to sit down and manage in a two-hour-long class and focus on doing some artwork. Also, I was just so nervous and so anxious. I remember pulling up to the first one and I was sitting in the car and doing my breathing exercises before I went in. I left early. I just made it to an hour, and I took quite a few breaks, because it was difficult. I just couldn't do any more. The session was accessible to everybody, but I felt overloaded, and talking to the other people there was very tough. But, when I went back the next week, I managed to stay a bit longer and, gradually, I was able to do the whole two hours. It got easier.

What helped me to build up to staying for the whole two hours was being allowed to work at my own pace and do what I wanted to do. For example, we did felting one week, and Julie showed us what to do. She said it's up to you what you do, and gave us lots of materials, pictures and ideas for inspiration. We could use this as a starting point and see where it took us. There was no expectation to do anything specific or finish the piece of work that week. It was absolutely fine to do our own thing. I used to bring my crochet every week just in case I didn't fancy the activities or couldn't concentrate. But, actually, apart from bringing it out of the bag to show people what I was doing, I never did any crocheting, because the art making was just so accessible, and at any time you could ask Julie for help or ideas. If I ever hit a wall and felt like a project needed a bit more, but I wasn't sure what to do, she would always be helpful. For example, she'd pick it up and she'd walk across the room and put the artwork on the wall, because it looks different from a distance. She would sometimes make suggestions to give ideas, but she preferred you to develop your own

ideas. The fact that we were making art, but art without any expectation, really helped. Nobody felt like being a good artist or a bad artist had anything to do with our work at all. We knew that whatever we created was amazing. There was nothing to compare it to, we were just creating things. It was so interesting to see where my mind went on some of the pieces of work I made, to see what ideas I was coming up with.

I went to the art workshops regularly and I really enjoyed them. There was such a welcoming, calm atmosphere. All the other people on the programme were just so lovely and so was Julie. We were in a nice big room, and it was private, so there was nobody coming in or passing by. It was just our little space, and we really respected each other's views. We all agreed at the beginning that whatever we talked about would stay in the room, and not be shared, and it was just so lovely. Julie would play some music and it was just ... almost like stillness. When you've got anxiety, it feels like your brain is spinning at 100 miles an hour and with depression, you feel dead inside a lot of the time, as if there's just nothing happening, no emotions or anything. But the art workshops felt so quiet, so calm, so relaxing. I think that helped me to settle, even though it took a few weeks, and start to enjoy it. That's what helped my creativity to come out. Before, I struggled to engage, to concentrate, I struggled to relax, and to get out of the house. The art workshops helped with all of that, because they gave me a purpose, knowing that I could go to them and just be myself, and feel good.

Going to the art workshops helped me at home too, because, before, I used to pick up my crochet, do a couple of stitches, put it down, go and do something else, pick it up, and this would repeat. I wasn't able to sit still for very long, or I would just sit still, and nothing was going on at all. The workshops helped me get into a routine again. I had that routine of taking the children to school, but this was something for me, and it allowed me to have time for myself. It gave me something and it built my confidence. It helped to build my people skills because I was talking to people. Just being in



a room full of people who were going through a similar thing to me, meant they got it, you know. So, when, the first time I went to the class and I left early, it wasn't a problem, because they knew that it's hard - they knew what it's like - that getting up and getting dressed in the morning is just so exhausting, let alone like leaving the house. In the art class everybody wanted the best for each other. We were all supporting each other and that was absolutely fantastic.

When I heard that my artwork was going into the art exhibition, even though I didn't get chance to go along to it, I was amazed. I told my children and they asked, "your art?", "hanging on the wall in Bristol Museum?". They were so proud of me, and every week they would ask what I did in the art class, and I'd bring some artwork home and they loved it. Julie framed one piece. We did quilling one week and she framed it. With quilling you have a tool like a pencil, but it's got like a split in the top, and you get strips of paper, put them in, and you wind it around the tool in a little tight coil. Then you can do various sort of designs with the

coils. You stick them on paper, you can stretch one end out longer, and do different things. That was my favourite art activity. That piece is up in the front room and the children said "Mum, Mum, I can't believe that you made that". They were really delighted and could see that I was feeling good about myself. It made them feel better, too, because they could see that I was doing something so positive. So, it changed their mindset as well.

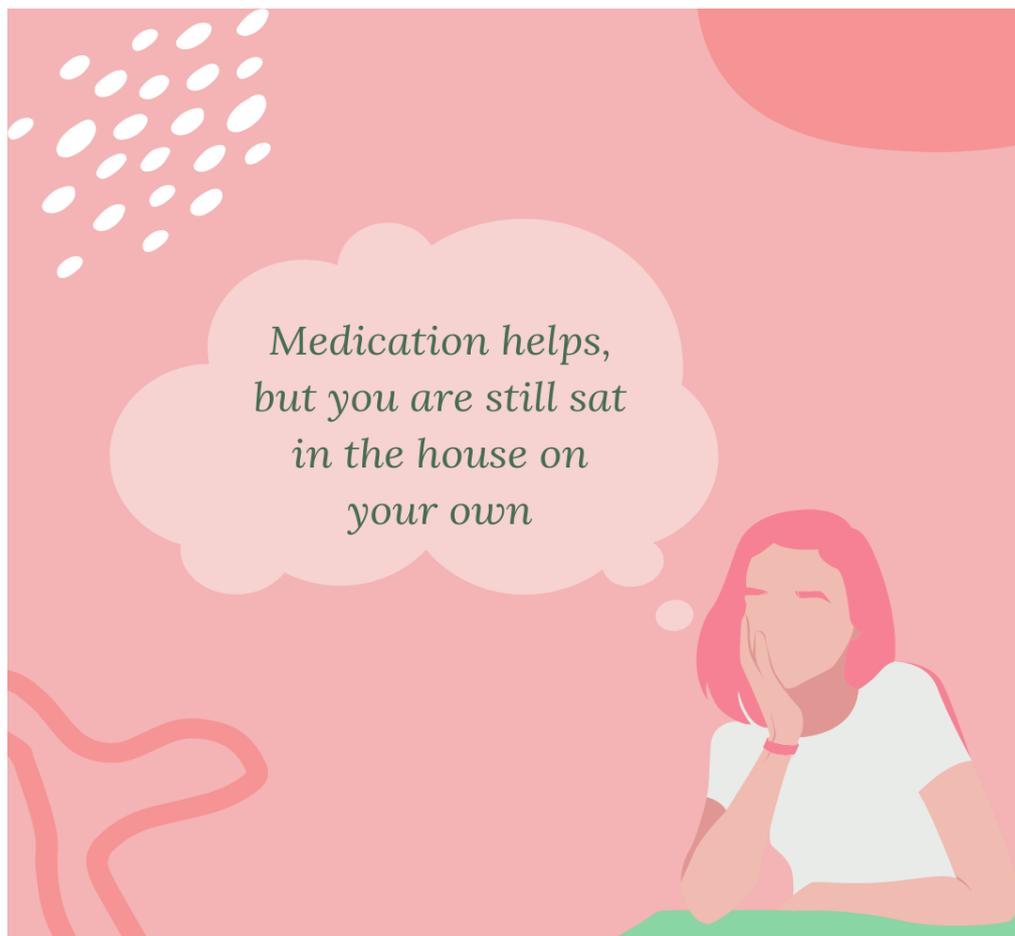
You know, I've had some great support from the NHS, but I think the art workshops were so different to anything else I did because it was just very ... gently powerful. It just very gently built you up, in a powerful way. It's probably done as much as my CBT or my medication, I think. I genuinely think that I do. The doctor might prescribe you some medication, which is great, and it does help, but you're still sat in the house on your own. Whereas the art class gets you out the house. It gets your brain working, and it gets you to do what you're able to do at that time, builds your confidence and your socialization skills. It just made me feel a lot better about myself and I feel

that I've achieved something. My mental health got better. I'm not quite there yet, but I am million miles away from where I was. It just gradually got better and better. And then I felt confident enough to take the next step and to think about returning to go to work.

I've just done a work placement with the Women's Work Lab. I'm really moving forward. The art classes built my self-esteem to the point where I felt more confident to engage with something like that, which has been an intense programme, for twelve weeks. The programme helps to prepare you for work. They do a lot to help boost your self-esteem and identify the way you like to work, to make sure that when you do go back into work you are matched with the right job. The art classes gave me the confidence to apply for it. I did a work placement through the scheme, and you know, six months ago I wouldn't have been able to do it, and I did it. I mean, don't get me wrong, I was absolutely exhausted; and I learnt that I can't work for more than two days in a row. But I can do it. I

discovered that I couldn't go back to teaching. Otherwise, I'd end up with another crash again, because the pressure and the stress is too much. I'm hoping in the new year that I can go back to work, part-time. But I would really like to join a move-on art group and have that as that kind of buffer and keep going with that therapeutic side.

I'm going to be taking a step now on my own from now on. Although I am still depressed, my anxiety is very minimal now. I haven't had one panic attack in the last couple of months, which is amazing because I was having about seven a day. It was really debilitating, and my depression is just ... I will get there ... I'm a lot better even though I'm still depressed. I'm not getting full marks anymore. I'm a lot lower. I've learned so much about myself through the art classes and then through the Women's Work Lab. That built on what the art class started. The art classes made me feel really good about myself, and then the Women's Work Lab helped me to identify what I can do next. Just brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.



CASE STUDY FOUR: CHRONIC PAIN AND CANCER GROUP

ALICE: "IT BROUGHT SOMETHING ELSE INTO DAILY LIFE, ANOTHER DIMENSION"



I was diagnosed with secondary breast cancer, metastatic breast cancer, in September 2020 and that was following a previous period of being unwell. I had a brain tumour removed in 2019, so I'd had a spell of being off work and recovering from the brain tumour operation. Then I got diagnosed with this cancer, so it was obvious that I wasn't going to go back to work. I was a science teacher in a pupil referral unit, which is pretty full on, so my life was actually very full, full of thinking about others, troubled individuals. That was my job. Obviously, I wasn't going to go back to that, so then it was like, what do I do now? I had this diagnosis, so everything was focused on that, and what it would mean for me. How was I going to deal with the diagnosis and life with cancer? Because they're not going to get rid of this. It's terminal, but it could be years, they don't really know how long. So, that was a massive mind shift.

My background has always been sports and science, not the arts at all. But I am a person who likes challenges. So, when I was thinking about what I could do to help myself through the diagnosis, I thought I'm going to just put myself out there and try new things. Of course, it was the pandemic as well, so we had Covid, and because I was on chemotherapy, I couldn't go out and be in groups or classes. So, I was restricted to Zoom activities. I think that I heard of the arts and creative writing on referral through Penny Brohn Cancer Care. So, I applied for both, thinking that both were out of my comfort zone, and to see if I'd enjoy them. I did three programmes of the art, and one programme of the writing and then joined the follow-on group. It was nice because it gave a structure to my week: art on Tuesday; writing on Thursday. It brought something else into daily life,

another dimension, another thing that I can use going forward, in dealing with the cancer.

Although I say I'm not an arty person at all, before joining the groups, I had started making my own cards, making all my Christmas cards, and I had really enjoyed doing that, so I had a few art materials. I'd done things like watercolour Christmas trees, so art wasn't completely alien, but I was very restricted in what I did. I didn't do art for just the enjoyment of it, but to make things for others. When I started the arts on referral initially, I struggled because I was starting a new treatment, so I pulled out. But the artist said it was no problem, and you can join the next one or join whenever you're ready. She was so sweet. She was. Really lovely. So, I did that. I pulled out and I carried on with my treatment and then I started up again. And then I didn't look back, and really enjoyed it.

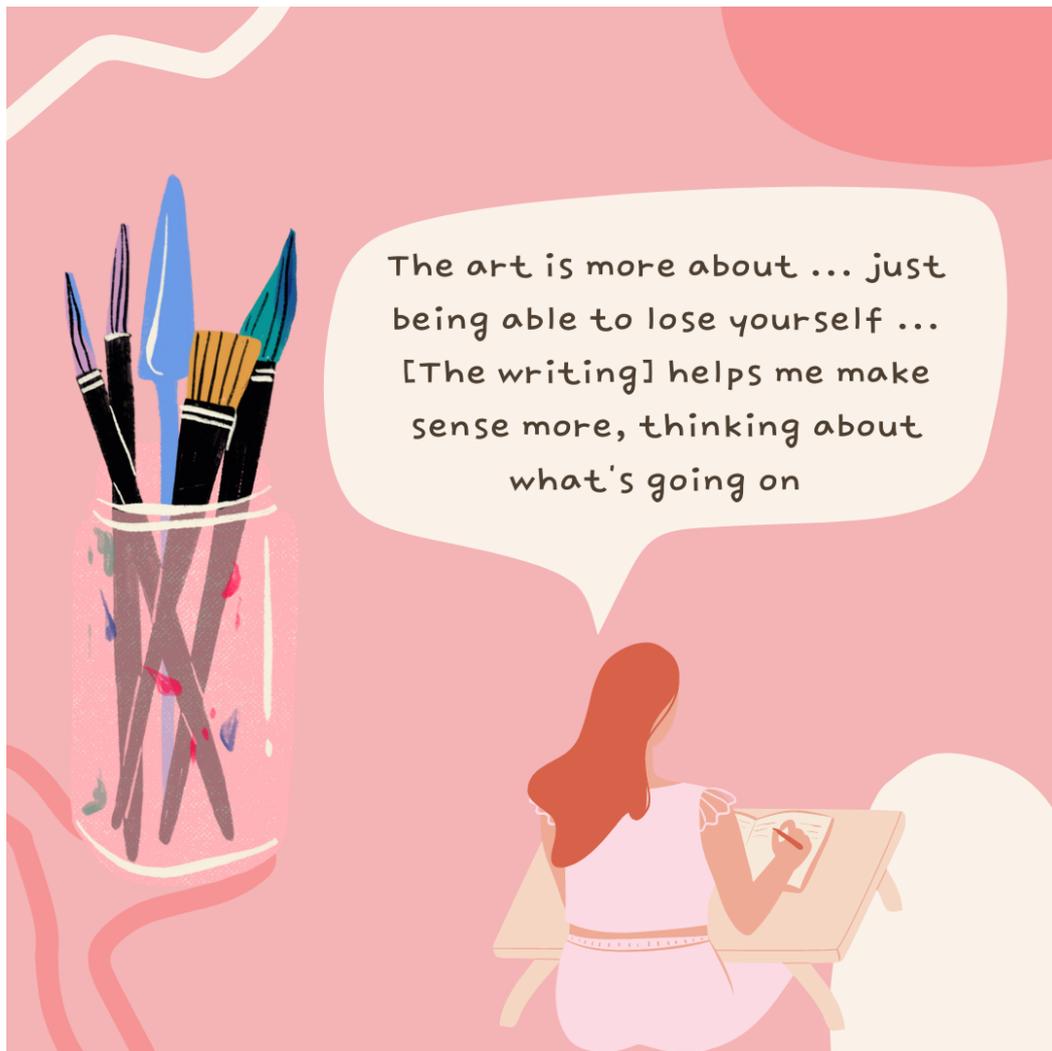
The art helped because you could just kind of lose yourself in it. You're focusing on the art. There's a fine balance, which needs to be got right, which the artist is excellent at facilitating. It's a balance between losing yourself in the art making and getting stressed with it, because if you get stressed with it then that's it, you can forget it. That defeats the whole object. But the artist helped and is just really good. She would check that you were okay and were on track, see if you wanted some help, and she'd always have some suggestions if you were not sure where to begin or were stuck.

We always did something completely different every week and some weeks were more challenging than others, but that's partly what I was doing it for, and the difficulty was more in getting my head around trying a new thing rather than the actual thing being difficult. The actual thing was never difficult because you could always do it at your level, whatever that was. The difficulty was more just getting used to the discipline of doing something that I was asked to do, as I hadn't had to do that for a very long time, since I stopped working. The challenges in the art sessions helped, they introduced me to lots of different art techniques, which I can now use, and it gave me confidence, because it made me think that, actually, I can do art. I can do more than just

the little Christmas cards that I was doing. I can use different techniques and do different things, and I enjoy it more, because I've got a choice of techniques to use. Also, I used to feel a bit guilty doing art, whereas if you've got a session that's your time to do your art. So that was another real positive for me, because I tended not to, and still don't, sit down and just do art for the sake of art. With the cards, I enjoy doing it. You're focusing on the art, but you're also focusing on doing that card for somebody else. It gives you that excuse to sit down and get everything out on the table. It's just a nice thing to do, and I'm proud of it. It's given me a sense of achievement.

The artwork I was most pleased with was making a story on a plate. I ended up doing something that was quite detailed. It showed a journey. It's the journey from my house up through the woods, up onto the hill, underneath the sun. I also enjoyed an activity where the artist divided a Hockney picture into six squares and gave us each a square to reproduce, using any medium. She encouraged us to do something slightly different, that we weren't used to. So, I did collaging with little bits of twine, paper and cotton. Then she put all six together. That was great because the next week we had this sort of reproduction Hockney that we'd all contributed to, and that was a really lovely moment because it was collaborative.

It wasn't only about the art. It was about having fun and having contact with other people. I've got a really supportive family and I have got lots of friends, but when you're spending every day at home, it can be a little bit lonely. Having that Tuesday morning for the arts meant that I could just sit lose myself in that. The artist was very laid back. She was brilliant. There was never a pressure to get anything ready or 'do your homework'. You could just do whatever art you wanted to do really. I never did that though. It was nice to do the planned activities that the group was doing, so that you could compare and share. It was always nice to take a picture of your work and you know send it to the group. I think that everybody surprised themselves by what they could do. Some weeks more than others. It was a very positive experience.



The art is more about ... just being able to lose yourself ... [The writing] helps me make sense more, thinking about what's going on

Each of the three art programmes I went to was completely different. In the first group the people were quite confident in their art, and I think more of them had been attending for longer, so it was a lot quieter, and people didn't really talk about what was going on outside of the art, we mainly focused on art and maybe what we'd done at the weekend and things like that. The second group was quite lively and there was quite a lot of banter. In the last one, people did discuss what was going on for them, in terms of their health. Each one was just very different, completely different experiences. For me, it's helpful to know that you're not the only one having a bad time. You know, I'm not the only one sitting at home with a horrible disease. You know that there are other people out there that that are worse off or who are going through a bad time as well. It helped to feel a part of something. It became obvious that everybody was there for their own

reasons, and you didn't want to reference it too much, so we didn't really. There were a couple of people who did talk more, about what was going on for them, and that's fine, but I felt it was more about the art and the positivity that can bring, rather than it being like counselling.

I also did the creative writing on referral and that really helps too, but in a very different way. With the art you just sort of busy along and you get on with your art, and can chat and if you choose to, or share something, that's fine. But in the writing, because you're sharing what you've written, it can be very different. The writing was more out of my comfort zone than the art because although I'm a teacher, and used to writing, I wasn't used to writing creatively. The six-week course was absolutely brilliant. The people in the group were lovely and it was quite different in that you were set a task, and did some writing for about 20 minutes, and then you would chat about it in

breakout rooms. People would talk about stuff that's going on for them then, because your writing often reflects what you're going through and people usually share what they've written. That was more of a challenge for me than the art. I do really enjoy it, but I've got to be feeling strong. And so, if I'm not feeling that well, I won't do it because it'll have a negative effect. I am always amazed at what ends up on the page. You don't have to be clever. You don't have to be a poet. You can just write what's in your head, which is something that I hadn't really done before. It makes you realize what is going on in your head, whereas the art is more like escapism, it's more like 'I can just do this and lose myself', whereas the writing brings you back to thinking about what's going on. It's reassuring that you can formulate your thoughts, without really thinking about it, which sounds very bizarre, but whatever the subject is or whatever the prompt is, it always seems to come round to what's going on in your head. I always find it very therapeutic after I've done it. You're also getting an insight into other people's lives far more than you do with the with the art. In that first six-week block of writing it was really nice, because we did all get to know each other quite well and there was definitely a bond.

The art is more about losing myself in whatever art I'm doing. It's just being able to lose yourself and

having that luxury of time spent doing it without feeling guilty, being introduced to new techniques, and learning that you produce some really surprising results with very simple techniques. And it's the joy of doing it with other people and laughing at your disasters and congratulating each other on something that's good. With the writing it is more about making sense of what's going on and surprising yourself, really, about what's in your head, what you can put down on paper. I think it helps in a different way because it helps me make sense more, thinking about what's going on and putting it in the bigger picture.

It has just been brilliant, and I can't believe that these programmes don't do anything but good for people. Certainly, for me, because I still can't, with the ongoing chemo, go into groups of people, having the zoom sessions is vital, and I know that in both groups there were people who found it difficult to get out the house, and it helped them. I think it can benefit so many people in so many ways. I think there are a lot of people that, like myself, have got some rubbish going on that it can help with, and without it, it would be a much sadder place. It does a lot for your mental health. Rather than sitting at home, just thinking about what's bad.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative and quantitative analyses of Fresh Art on Referral programmes suggest that these were successful in improving wellbeing to a meaningful degree and also reduced feelings of loneliness in everyday life, giving opportunities for social connection and bonding. After taking part in programmes participants had statistically significant higher levels of wellbeing and satisfaction with relationships, and lower levels of loneliness. After taking part in art workshops participants reported feeling less anxious and tense, more content, more alert and energetic and less lonely (again, to statistically significant degrees). This was reiterated in qualitative feedback, where participants' discussed how the art workshops helped them to feel calm and manage their stress and anxiety and enabled them to connect with others in a meaningful way, to develop new and positive attitudes and health behaviours, and a 'kinder', more positive relationship with 'the hospital'.

The report suggests that art on referral can play a meaningful role in the context of secondary care to help people to manage health conditions and improve their wellbeing. This was evidence both through quantitative and qualitative outcomes, which reinforced each other. However, further evaluation is required to develop the evidence base for its efficacy with specific populations, and to further examine how art on referral can help with specific health outcomes relevant to particular groups.

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