



Cambridge Community Arts Horizons Project

Developing Excellence
High quality best practice arts for mental health and wellbeing

September 2018



Photo by Toby Peters: Zoe Flynn, Salmagundi Films with Participant Learner

“Horizons is a great example of how the arts and creativity can really transform a person’s view of themselves and their place in society.”

Akua Obeng-Frimpong, Cambridge City Council Arts Development Officer



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Introduction - Cambridge Community Arts

“The arts, including music, dance, theatre, visual arts and writing, are increasingly recognised as having the potential to support health and wellbeing.”

Public Health England, 2016,
Arts for health and wellbeing: an evaluation framework.



Photo by Toby Peters

At **Cambridge Community Arts (CCA)** we look to realise this potential through our courses and projects based on the belief that we are all born with the ability to express ourselves creatively. At some point doors will close to many fields of creative expression, as we feel judged or compared with others. As we grow older and leave ‘play’ behind us, we don’t explore or experiment because we are vulnerable to criticism, both internally and externally. People with experience of mental ill health or facing other or additional challenges are often isolated from the mainstream. This may be due to physical, psychological or economic barriers; often a combination.

Cambridge Community Arts aims to create a safe supportive space for people to explore their creativity. Inspirational tutors offer tools and techniques that can be used for individual expression. The art, whatever the art form, gives people the ability to express themselves and allows their sense of self to grow stronger. Working as part of a small group, aware that each other faces challenges, but not focusing or sharing those challenges is essential. The shared experience is the creative journey and understanding that this is a level playing field with no judgement, creates a strong feeling of support.

We celebrate journeys taken by presenting work at performances and exhibitions, usually with a small invited audience. This aims to provide a safe and containing environment but also opens it up to include family and friends. They can see participants in a new light, often surprised at the artistic achievements and recognising the growing sense of self and the widening of social engagement. Celebrations are held in mainstream arts and cultural venues. These frame the achievements in an artistic context and further break down barriers between participants and their cultural community. It enables empowerment and ownership of the artistic space. Here participants are publicly recognised as artists. The belief we show in them as artists, whilst understanding their challenges, they now share. If they can do this, what else can they do? Confident that they deserve to be heard, practiced at being listened to, armed with the skill of self-expression, people are ready to contribute and re-engage. Many of our learners go on to volunteer, set up peer support (creative) groups and some return to work. They have also re-discovered fun, laughter and trust within a peer group.

Jane Rich
CEO & Founder

Cambridge Community Arts

Introduction - Horizons project

“My practice gained both learning new skills and observing an experienced facilitator”
(Immersed artist)



Photo Toby Peters:
Jane Thewlis, Immersed Artist with Volunteer Assistant

Horizons is the start of a conversation with artists working in the community, looking at what constitutes high quality good practice in arts for mental health and wellbeing. The project was part of a process being undertaken by Cambridge Community Arts to further develop its work, share its practice and contribute to the development of arts for mental health and well-being in Cambridge and beyond. It provided an opportunity to observe and analyse the work of Cambridge Community Arts and to begin to understand more about essential components for realising excellence including high quality practice and outstanding outcomes for participants.

The project was funded by Arts Council England and Cambridge City Council involving three, six-week courses. Each course focused on a different art form including dance, creative digital arts and painting. The project concluded with a celebration event in the Clore Education Studio, at Kettles Yard. Experienced artists led the courses and were supported by volunteers. Amongst participants were immersed artists who were participating for their continued professional development, gaining new artistic skills and workshop facilitation skills.

Twenty-four participant learners took part. Twenty-nine course places were filled. Five signed up for two courses. Participants represented a wide age range from 20-75 years of age. Most came from Cambridge City, a few from South Cambridgeshire; and individuals from East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and Suffolk. The learners represented a diversity of backgrounds including health, economic and employment circumstances:

Health:

- 17 Learners (70%) mental health condition
- 7 (27%) learning disability
- 14 (58%) physical impairment/s
- 7 (27%) sensory impairment/s
- 1 cognitive impairment
- 1 long-standing illness or condition

Economic Status:

- 16 (67%) means tested benefits
- 1 declared low income
- 1 health related benefits
- 5 (21%) not on benefit

Employment Status:

- 9 (37%) not in paid employment and not looking for work
- 7 (27%) not in paid employment and looking for work
- 2 (8%) employed
- 2 (8%) retired
- 1 carer

What we discovered

Participant learners:

Positive and significant change in participants' mental health and wellbeing

CCA, WEMWBS (Short Warwick & Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale), CCA courses, 2018



Photo Toby Peters: Natasha Day, Lead Artist with Participant Learner

"I feel that I have developed as an artist and the course has really benefited my mental health and my sense of wellbeing. I only wish it could be a longer course as this would really improve my health and my art!" (Participant Learner)

"I know when I leave this session that I'm going to have a good week." (Participant Learner)

Skills & Personal development including

- Increased art-form skills
- Increased confidence
- Reduced isolation
- Progression to further training courses
- Better personal relationships
- Increased coping strategies
- Improved mood
- Improved mental health

"I have signed up to train as a nurse because the course has made me feel I can do things."(Participant Learner)

“I’ve had a really hard week of confrontation, but just kept going knowing I can manage things better now.” (Participant Learner)

Artists

Professional development for artists was supported by the Horizons immersed artist model.

Immersed artists gained

- New skills
- Confidence
- Inspiration
- Access to career development



Photo Toby Peters: Katie Keeble, Immersed Artist

“One immersed artist has gone on to teaching assistant roles and will be participating in a further artists development programme which will enable her to teach accredited courses” (Cambridge Community Arts)

Cambridge Community Arts has been invited to build on this work and develop a training programme with Cambridgeshire WEA Adult Learning for artists in Fenland.

Artist network as part of project delivery offers a powerful model for supporting continued professional development, through peer support and sharing of ideas

“having the opportunity to work as part of a network of artists, on the same project, is an enriching experience, especially for artists like me who are used to working independently” (Lead artist)

Programme development

Widened access and opportunity for participant learners with expanded programme including creative digital arts courses

New digital equipment enabling new additional courses to be provided

“Cambridge Community Arts had not previously offered Creative Digital Arts courses. Bringing Salmagundi Films from London was possible with the Arts Council grant. The set of iPads purchased for the project have already been utilised in two further new courses, Digital Photography and Music Production, delivered in Fenland” (Cambridge Community Arts)



Photo Toby Peters: Bo Chapman, Salmagundi Films with Learner Participant

Best Practice

Eight quality principles for arts and mental health practitioners have been proposed by the collective of lead artists

1. Equality, accessibility and inclusivity
Ensuring course content, delivery and facilitation achieves **equality, accessibility and inclusivity**
2. Creative risk taking – being brave
Creating an environment that allows, supports and promotes **creative risk taking and being brave**
3. Respectful environment and safe space
Providing a **respectful environment** aiming to create a **safe physical space** and an emotionally supportive environment for participant learners

4. Enjoyment and shared experience
Facilitating a space for **enjoyment and shared experience** with emphasis on process – ‘being in the moment’
5. Reflection
Assisting individual and group **reflection**, promoting positive self image
6. Responsive & learner focused
Adaptive and flexible in approach, sensitive to learner needs and skilled in ensuring **responsive and learner focused** facilitation
7. Inspiration
Sharing the love for the art form, providing inspiration and co-creating
8. Celebration
Holding an occasion, that embodies all the quality principles above, to recognise and **celebrate** achievement



Photo Natasha Day: Celebration Event – Clore Education Studio, Kettles Yard

Next steps

“Creative activity has been observed to stimulate an understanding of the process of making, giving rise to a greater sense of responsibility and self-reflection, increased confidence and self-esteem and better mental health.” Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017

Cambridge Community Arts understand this well through it’s delivery of Horizons and delivery of other projects. It looks to build on this knowledge by providing more opportunities for more people to participate and to lead the development of excellence in arts practice for mental health and wellbeing.

These following aspects provide a focus for the development of priority areas:

Participant Learners

- continuing to provide a broad range of arts courses and extending opportunity to more people in more areas across Cambridgeshire

Programme development & best practice

- testing, scrutinising and developing proposed quality principles
- working with local, regional and national partners to develop nationally recognised quality principles for arts and mental health and wellbeing

Artists

- continuing to develop immersed artists professional development opportunities and networks for lead artists
- developing frameworks for delivery, training and continued professional development for artists working in mental health and wellbeing continue to raise the quality across the region and beyond.



Photo Jane Rich: Creative Digital Arts

Report compiled and written by **All Ways Making**, Community Interest Company, improving lives through art and culture for learning and health (Sep 2018)