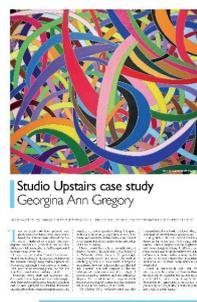




## Studio Upstairs

# ARTS & HEALTH SOUTH WEST PRIZE 2015 LONGLISTED CASE STUDY



**Name of organisation:**

Studio Upstairs

**Title of project/programme:**

Studio Upstairs

**Dates of project/programme:**

Year begin-end 2014

**Summary**

Studio Upstairs believes in artistic practice as a valuable way to create meaning and purpose in life, leading from isolation to community. Our mission is to provide holistic support to people who are experiencing enduring mental or emotional difficulties so that they can re-create their reasons and purpose for living, find new ways to live and experience a better quality of life.

Studio Upstairs provides artistic resources and education within a therapeutic community setting. Facilities are available for painting, drawing, mixed media, digital and 3D work. The service:

- Explores existing relationships and habits and encourages healthier alternatives
- Provides early intervention to prevent relapse and 'revolving door care'
- Works in partnership with other services whilst maintaining independence
- Provides access to shared studios, ranges of art materials and facilities where members, studio managers and volunteers practise and discuss their art together on an equal basis
- Provides art education to individuals too vulnerable to participate in mainstream educational institutions
- Encourages members to take more responsibility by using their own creativity as a catalyst for personal change and to develop their own practice as artists
- Enhances the capacity of members for critical and constructive reflection on their own art

- Takes part in public campaigns against prejudice and in advocacy projects
- Involves members in the day-to-day running of the organisation
- Creates opportunities for professional development including training and volunteering
- Seeks to prevent social isolation and to return people to mainstream education, voluntary and paid work

## **Overview**

### **Identifying need**

We aim to create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all working team members are recognised and valued. This goal is supported by our Equal Opportunities Policy. We monitor and measure the needs of our members through an initial questionnaire upon joining and a regular (six monthly) review as well as informal reviews and feedback throughout their time here. This enables us to keep track of what members require and where their strengths lie, both in terms of recovery and as artists.

### **Aims and Objectives**

Our aims and objectives are to achieve long-term stability and improved wellbeing for our Studio Members; to support people towards more autonomy and in the development of a creative identity; and to challenge the stigma and prejudice projected on to those experiencing mental and emotional distress and help them escape the labels and linear parameters of society.

### **Artforms and Artists**

Facilities are available for painting, drawing, mixed media, digital and 3D work. The artforms that are supported are based on the objectives and needs of the individual member – there is no house style or prescribed route in terms of materials or approach. Our Studio Volunteers (volunteer artists - 2 every day) work alongside our members, creating artwork and sharing their technical and theoretical expertise.

### **What you did**

Through this, our members were able to engage in specialised art forms such as printmaking, clay sculpture, willow-weaving and soapstone carving. As a consequence, we invested in the equipment able to support these as continuing activities.

Any member that wishes to or has reached a point of artistic development is encouraged and supported to hold a Review of their work. This is a chance to present their artwork to the community and to discuss it openly, supported by the Studio Managers and Studio Volunteers.

We supported our 45 members in taking part in 6 public exhibitions throughout the last year – a group exhibition at the Bristol Guild Gallery; as part of the West Bristol Arts Trail 2014; our annual Open Studios 2014; at the Bristol Crown Courts; and at the head offices of Goldman Sachs and Societe Generale, both in London. Work was sold at every exhibition, an excellent result for supporting confidence.

### **Intended health outcome**

To reduce relapse and “revolving door care”. Regular attendance at the studio leads members to develop a stronger ability to trust; helps decrease self-medication and

prescribed medication; prevents relapse and the use of acute care as well as leading to fewer GP & Psychiatric appointments. Over time, people develop their ability to cope on their own and feel able to comfortably end their relationship with the Studio and to move forward.

## **Beneficiaries**

Members - the term we use in place of service users, as an act of inclusion - either self-refer (we respond to anyone who enquires about our service and offer free initial visits - which are an informal initial assessment - and a free Introductory Day to experience the service) or are referred by appropriate professionals (GPs, Community Mental Health Teams, therapists). Key characteristics of our beneficiaries on arrival are that they:

- Have been through a crisis (in terms of their mental and emotional health)
- Are in need of a supportive environment
- Display feelings of isolation, rejection or exclusion
- Can see a way out of their situation
- Have an interest in the arts and in creating art
- Have made an informed choice to come to the Studio

## **Outputs**

On leaving the service, beneficiaries:

- Develop confidence to create work and feel able to express themselves through art
- Take part in exhibitions or are able to go on to further/higher art education
- Display a readiness to engage and interact with others
- Improved wellbeing
- Feel they should and can make more of life
- Develop stronger feeling of safety, stability and trust
- Embed creativity in their routine
- Coping on their own and are able to take the next steps, or have achieved a defined recovery
- Move on to peer-supported artistic community, education, volunteering or employment

## **Partnerships**

We are a confirmed partner organisation with Spike Island, Bristol, an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design.

## **Location**

We are based in central Bristol, close to the Marina and waterfront, next to Aardman Animation, Spike Island and the SS Great Britain.

## **Innovation**

The Studio is committed to innovation and learning on which quality is contingent. We are committed to the continual re-evaluation of our practices in order to create the best possible conditions for all members of the community. Members are encouraged to create and use art as a serious endeavour leading to professional exhibitions, online and print

promotions, sales and auctions. The effort to achieve the highest quality possible in the presentations of our artwork is sustained and focused.

The skills and theoretical background gained through the artistic and therapeutic training allows greater insight and awareness of the workings of the human psyche, group dynamics and the use of images to explore and communicate inner states and emotions. However, this is only the beginning. The approach of art therapy as a modality of treatment is not what the Studio practice utilises as its process. This notion can be challenging and requires not only strong commitment to professional development and learning – it asks from the practitioner to be more 'as they are, present in their everyday persona', rather than to be bound by often unquestionable profession-centred dogma.

Over the years we have invited independent researchers to gather data on our effectiveness. As an example, we have just completed our participation in the 18 month long national research project "Mutual recovery through communities of creative connection: the role of adult community learning and community arts initiatives" led by the University of Nottingham and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

## **Participation**

Studio Upstairs is a community of artists, members, arts therapists and the wider team form a part of this community and we look to our strengths as a group to drive the organization forward. For our participants – who we term as Members - participation and involvement is a key component of our structure and community. Regular monthly meetings - as a management team, forum meetings in which members suggest and arrange activities and meetings of the full team – always include ways in which their own particular strengths can be formed into an activity or a project within the organization. We have a rolling programme of training and workshops delivered by Studio Managers that will be in line with their particular artistic specialization, as well as a series of training sessions for practitioners. The members of Studio Upstairs are actively involved in the running and development of the project and programme through the Member Representative system, which allows a Member who has reached this level of confidence to communicate and represent our members' view at meetings and as required. This ensures that our participants' voice and opinion is always represented and involved in our development. In numbers, we have one Member Representative for each day of opening to a current total of 3, and they canvas and communicate the views of the full membership, totalling 45.

## **Outcomes**

The effectiveness of the Studio is validated by the beneficiaries who often have not found sufficient support elsewhere. 70% of our members report reduction in stress levels, fewer episodes of crisis, decreased use of medication or mental health services as a result of studio attendance. 73% feel more part of the wider community and 68% have a stronger sense of identity, giving more meaning and purpose in their life.

We evaluate the progress and impact of all our services through formal six-monthly reviews, where a Studio Manager and the member work through a form that allows us to ask clear questions and identify their progress and responses. This allows us to capture and interpret this qualitative and quantitative data.

Members can always inform us of any changes at any time by requesting one-to-one discussions with a Studio Manager and this allows us to continuously evaluate a member's position in the service and the impact and changes the service is having on them.

## **Learning**

Against a backdrop of continuously shrinking economic resources we have had to rise, time and time again, to the challenges confronting us. This has involved a large and increased demand on volunteer time and expertise to continue delivering the service that is so highly valued by its beneficiaries. We continuously make changes to our service delivery in response to our membership, which we have detailed earlier.

## **Critical success factors**

One member that joined the service for a fixed period of one year expressed a strong and clear desire to hold a solo exhibition of a considerable body of work that had been made in response to previous therapeutic work. Working closely with this member, we were able to support them to achieve the confidence needed to hold this exhibition, under a pseudonym, in April 2014. The exhibition was a significant and tangible milestone in their development and use of the service at Studio Upstairs.

This was a distinctly successful outcome in terms of listening to a member's needs, identifying a programme of support to allow it to happen and delivering it within the timeframe set by them. This was successful because of the model used by Studio Upstairs, which allows this close partnership working to develop and transfer into tangible, achievable results. By offering a defined period of time and a clear objective we were able to tailor our support accordingly and ensure this milestone was reached. As a result, this individual was able to move on from the service with a greater level of self-confidence in themselves and their work, and is continuing to pursue their own work without the support of the Studio – the ideal result of our working model.

As a result of our continuing success and development we were awarded Creative Seed Funding by Bristol City Council to allow us to offer two six-week terms of low-cost access to our services on a Friday.

## **Funding and Resources**

The funding sources for the charitable company include invoiced fees for services to local authorities in Bristol and the surrounding area, grants from trusts and foundations and income through other fundraising activities such as donations and artwork sales.

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