

Happy Crafters Miners Court Residents Association



Name of organisation: Miners Court Residents Association

Title of project/programme: Happy Crafters

Dates of project/programme: January 2014 - ongoing

Summary

Happy Crafters is an art club run twice a week by older people through Miners Court Residents Association. Coastline Housing operates the extra care-housing scheme, which has a local community day hub; the project meets in Pats Diner after lunch.

Now running for over two years, the club provides regular opportunities for socialising and uses art projects as the focus. Happy Crafters encourages older people to live well managing on-going health issues and or disabilities. We are situated in rural Cornwall. The project seeks to encourage mental and social wellbeing in an area of health inequalities. The project is open to older people at Miners Court and those living around Redruth. So far over 140 vulnerable adults have benefited as new people constantly access the scheme.

Participants look forward to meeting formally twice a week. The projects are fun and enjoyable, facilitate relaxation, distract from pain, motivate and encourage positive thinking. Happy Crafters often work on self-directed group projects that respond to local community events and exhibit in high street shop windows for example, St Piran's day and Christmas. The project uses participant's interest in using tools and materials to undertake new skills or revive forgotten skills and meet on a regular basis to reduce isolation and loneliness. Older people are supported in directing the project themselves and this makes it a success.

Overview

Residents of Miners Court identified the need for an arts/ handicrafts club in 2013 and Coastline Housing asked for help set up a project. Many residents were skilled craftspeople that no longer had access to facilities, or couldn't physically undertake activities the way they used to. Giving up such an important part of their lives greatly undermines the confidence of those people experiencing health issues later in life. We wanted to enable older people to try something new, achieve and be part of a community, and through developing communal activities, give participants a reason to leave their homes regularly. The club also allows for mistakes to be made, giving participants the ability to laugh at their blunders, a valuable transferable skill.

The activities at Happy Crafters are underpinned by the following objectives, which aim to enable people to live well for longer whilst managing long-term health conditions and or disabilities:

- The arts can support people in feeling better and living well; helping with stress, pain and depression.
- Formal elements such as colour and texture, using tools and materials will stimulate meaningful activity.
- Making art and other hand works distracts from stress, pain and problems in life by encouraging a calm focus.
- The right step-by-step activities give time for clarity of thought and reduce anxiety.
- Completing great fun projects is rewarding, being active encourages positive thoughts and improves participants' mood.
- Arts activities enable expressive ways to connect to our community.
- Working together improves social behaviours; regular sessions give life structure and

something to anticipate.

- Making together allows the opportunity for sharing recollections, giving a sense of belonging and a supportive community.
- Arts participation provides ways to use develop and maintain wider life skills without pressure; this raises self-esteem and confidence.
- Motivating participants to try something new and relearn learning develops independence in daily life.

The project began in January 2014 and is ongoing.

'Within weeks of the project starting we had noticed a difference, and residents were commenting too. Residents that had not previously been seen socialising in communal areas were starting too on a more regular basis, and seemed to be getting involved more generally. Some new residents moved in and the craft group has acted as a great 'bridging' for them to meet new people. All involved in the project are delighted that it is available.'

Helen Crewdson, Coastline Coordinator

Artists enable participants to pick up tools and materials with adaptations and simplified techniques. This positive approach gives participants a sense of achievement, raising confidence that transfers through to daily life.

'I show my work hung outside my flat to other people as it turned out so nicely'

Participant

Since the beginning we have actively approached artists and arts organisations for collaboration. So far we have worked with:

- Tough Dough CIC - Second bite food project
- Cascade Theatre Educational Theatre – Brewing up the past, memories of the old brewery
- Redruth Town Council – St Piran's day and Christmas festivals
- Six point foundation - A better life for older people poster competition
- University of Falmouth – Action research 'Future thinking for Social Living'
- University of Lancaster - Action research 'Proto policy- using design fiction to negotiate political questions' Potential futures for older people
- Poole Academy School – Christmas lantern making
- University of Falmouth – 2nd year BA Hons student Photography project

Collaborative work allows us a connection to the local community of arts practitioners. We are very conscious that the project must enable regular access to local communities to get more people visiting and to raise the profile of this group.

'Interaction with other people keeps my brain active'

Participant

In the beginning we undertook simple arts and handwork activities. We bought our now

very popular hand crank sewing machine and made Miners Court applique bunting and felt flowers for Valentine's Day. By summer, some of the group were ready to undertake the painting and drawing of landscapes and we started to frame and hang work in communal areas. At this time we also produced work for the garden, scarecrows and mosaic planters. Christmastime we undertook our first high street window display.

Happy Crafter sessions always have a variety of activities, depending on participants' choices of tools and materials, whether they want to work on their own or on a group project. We have participants who come to support their projects carried out at home, support with their painting or perhaps deciphering a knitting pattern. Likewise I provide 'homework' to those who wish to keep busy. We decorate Pats Diner for Christmas or for events at Miners Court, such as a recent Valentine's party. We make high quality finished products that are admired by the community, an essential for the project's success.

I am the lead facilitator and coordinator, a trained multidisciplinary artist who has worked with vulnerable adults for twenty years (<http://www.ruthpurdy.co.uk/index.php/about/>). I collaborate with participants, using their ideas as the starting point for projects. I introduce tools and materials, so participants can try something new; for example, glass painting, relief printmaking, giant knitting, felt construction and embroidery.

'It helps people get in touch with their hidden skills'

Participant

The group is a social one, people work at their own pace, have a cup of tea, stay for two hours or if that's too much drop in for one. Participants often work in pairs, sharing their skills and interests.

Beneficiaries have a wide range of health concerns, sensory impairments, mental health problems, mobility disabilities and chronic conditions. Miners Court has been designed with this client group in mind, with 64 flats and people attending day services. We have had over 140 beneficiaries so far, supporting settled individuals or those in periods of change. I work closely with staff; identifying possible participants, encouraging people to come for a chat and a cup of tea, give me a hand with something... As the facilitator I work as a reflective practitioner and researcher, writing reports that support the impact of the project.

Innovation

Miners Court offers many services to local older people around Redruth. It has a hairdressers, a diner and since 2013 the 'forever young social hub'. Happy Crafters began the following year when the need was identified by residents. Based in a comfortable environment designed for people with disabilities and using the communal areas as a gallery for their work, it has made a quick impact in a fun way and brought the place alive.

Activities are not prescribed, new participants come to observe, have a cup of tea and a chat, then they tend try their hand. It builds on skills participants have, activities undertaken in new ways and or advocates trying something new. We encourage the use of technology; the first time participants had used devices to enable the production of vector self-portraits from photographs for 'colouring in'. Volunteers support beneficiaries with all aspects of

Happy Crafters from managing the accounts, support with using tools, making refreshments, listening and adding to the fun. All participants produce artwork that they didn't think they were capable of before. By working with other organisations and institutions we wish to contribute to new strategies for arts practise to influence change.

Participation

Every session revolves around 'doing' but time is taken to discuss the broader outcomes they are achieving by participating. Explanation is given in many ways to involve all; everybody has a contribution to make. We work in different ways, for example, participants wrote down their thoughts on this document. Others worked in groups with a scribe to contribute and I talked through the questions on a 1to1 basis with some. More than consultation, the project advocates autonomy in the running of Happy Crafters.

All participants actively contribute to sessions, guiding and planning their future sessions. We check that we are doing this by asking all participants and beneficiaries what they think. We do this at the end of each session reflecting as a group and at the end of each month individually. Participant's feedback to the residents association once a month and at the end of two years we also undertook a survey of all the beneficiaries who use Miners Court. Participants are encouraged to join in pastoral care of each other, calling for people before sessions and checking why people haven't been coming. We have had over 140 beneficiaries and there are usually up to ten people directly participating at sessions with school groups and others joining in on occasions. As the lead facilitator I see Happy Crafters as integral to my arts practise, not an added extra.

Outcomes

We have evidence of an improvement in the health and wellbeing of participants with long-term health conditions and or disabilities over the last two years. This is collated through our feedback procedures, listening is undertaken at every step informally and backed up more formally. Participants document their progress themselves, scribing answers to sets of devised questions (recently updated through reflection and research) and producing photo albums of works in progress.

C's eyesight deteriorated significantly and quickly, so we revived the skills that he had put to one side; now he paints effectively on black grounds with bright colours.

'As a result of doing the activities here I have seen a positive change, my specialist doctors think it's a direct influence from happy crafters.'

Until recently B was always getting out and about, being registered blind for over twenty years. Now, physically, this was becoming more challenging and she felt lonely and unable to share her life with others.

'I have been enjoying giant knitting and getting to know other people as well as getting out of my flat. I also love turning the handle on the sewing machine'

Living with Bi-Polar and now health conditions that came later life, A was prompted to come and try something new.

'Because of my particular condition I find it hard to socialise however I look forward to the craft sessions and enjoy the companionship of others and working on the various projects.'

At the end of two years we undertook a larger survey of the beneficiaries who live or access Miners Courts day services: 97% of beneficiaries felt that happy crafters improved the mood at Miners Court and they wished it to continue. Three months after the survey we are now working towards meeting these findings, including the production of art works for newly identified communal areas.

Participants express how they look forward to attending and new participants are often surprised as what they think is not for them turns out to be very much so, this supports the key findings of Arts Council Research January 2016:

76% of older people say arts and culture is important in making them feel happy; 57% say arts and culture is important in helping them meet other people; 60% say it is important in encouraging them to get out and about. Audiences with long-term conditions and or disabilities have a substantial disadvantage in accessing cultural activities from which they become increasingly cut off, strategies used in projects such as Happy crafters work towards removing such barriers.

(<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/value-arts-and-culture/>)

'We have completed all the projects we started. Some of them such as the pictures decorating the corridors are permanent'

Participant

Learning

From the beginning there have been many staff changes at Miners Court. For the first three months the project was developed and managed by Helen Crewdson from Coastline Housing. I then took on the administration and funding responsibilities, liaising with new facility managers, four in two years, learning new skills such as writing feedback reports for funding bodies and successfully applying for funding. For myself the main challenge has been the handover, taking on the administration role, working with spread sheets and understanding and explaining the budget. I have recently begun refining evaluation procedures to more closely meet outcomes and beneficiary's needs with an eye on current research, the more of these roles I undertake the clearer it all becomes.

We also currently plan to put happy crafter ambassadors in place, we are at a stage where I feel we can hand over more responsibilities of the day to day running of the project directly to the participants and beneficiaries. Changes to the project happen gradually, and we have physically spread out a little more during sessions. I have learnt that participants who may need to be around people also need the choice of how close to be.

In the future we plan to budget for artists to come, we hope that this will make it easier to

get artists and communities in. We are also considering exhibiting local artists work at Miners Court.

'Some projects were difficult because of reduced mobility. Our tutor came up with ideas of overcoming these'

Participant

Critical success factors

I am pleased that we were able to carry out and continue with the project into its third year. We ran two sessions every week right through the last two years, only stopping for Christmas parties.

Because the club utilises both handwork and visual arts practises we have exceeded our targets of beneficiaries and also engaged more men than expected.

Bringing groups of children and young people in is positive. I have just arranged for a group of textile students to come in April to help us make 'the royal family' in scarecrow form to celebrate the Queen's birthday. Participants love making these, a much discussed annual event.

Offering choice and designing every session to meet the interests of all is the key to our success. Introducing new skills gradually, like drawing and painting, step by step.

The groups works are exhibited round the communal areas in a variety of media, framed or on canvas, mosaic work in the garden. Displaying work on the high street has been a talking point for all the beneficiaries, who will have a break in a café and tell the staff, 'I did that'.

We allow for reflection on activities and achievements, in turn this often recalls memories from individuals, which they share with us. The group builds on these and discuss their priorities in life. People attend sessions with regularity showing interest by footfall, their creativity is dynamic.

Funding and Resources

We were funded by the People's Health Trust in the first two years £17675

From January this year we have had:

£890 from FEAST Cornwall (ACE)

£936 Coastline Housing in kind

£1000 from the Miners district fund

£500 The Clare Milne trust

£1705 from the Wellbeing and Prevention panel

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