



ARTS & HEALTH SOUTH WEST PRIZE 2015 LONGLISTED CASE STUDY



Name of organisation:

Cinderford Artspace

Title of project/programme:

mindSCAPE

Dates of project/programme:

Started March 2014. Ends March 2018.

Summary:

mindSCAPE is an exciting 4 year Big Lottery funded project led by the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and delivered by Artspace Cinderford. Other principal partners include The Forest of Dean District Council, The Forestry Commission and Dementia Adventure. mindSCAPE is a series of fortnightly creative workshops which have been designed to improve the physical and mental well-being of people living with dementia and their carers by offering them creative opportunities to access the countryside and reconnect to the landscape. Sessions are delivered by Artspace practitioners and volunteers and are inspired by the natural environment. They take place at a Forestry Commission site where the group can take advantage of working outdoors in a superb woodland setting, complete with its own log circle, fire pit, towering Douglas Fir trees and resident deer! Participants have enjoyed walking through the woods and making natural sculptures. They have experimented making pin-hole cameras and photographing nature. They've tried Tai Chi, weaving with willow, wood carving, ceramics, landscape painting, eco-printing and leather craft.

In addition to the delivery of 24 mindscape workshops per annum, mindSCAPE delivers training for professional and family carers, enabling people to feel confident carrying out 'mindscape type' activities independently in their own homes/care settings. The project contributes towards the districts aim of becoming a 'dementia friendly' community and has, in partnership with the district council and the

Gloucestershire County Council Dementia Education Team, trained a team of 'dementia champions' who promote dementia awareness in the area.

Overview:

Identifying Need: mindSCAPE evolved from an earlier Wye Valley AONB project called 'Inside Out' which was developed in partnership with the Forestry Commission and designed to allow under-represented groups access to the landscape and work through health issues creatively. Participants included people with mental health issues, physical and mobility issues, visual and hearing impairments, drug and alcohol issues, learning difficulties and those with age related problems and caring roles. This work identified the fact that older people (particularly those with dementia and their carers) faced the greatest barriers to participation and were therefore the 'hardest to reach'. The need for a specialist project for people with dementia sparked a consultation process whereby the AONB focused on the barriers people faced and how these could best be overcome. This thorough consultation included over 40 partner organisations, service users and carers and was a key element of the successful 'mindSCAPE' bid to the Big Lottery.

What We Did: The mindSCAPE project began in March 2014 (we are at the end of year one of a four year project). Artspace initiated the work with a series of taster sessions. Working in partnership with The Alzheimer's Society and the county early onset dementia nurse we were able to visit existing support groups and meet potential participants. By the time we launched the programme of activities in July 2014, we had attracted a fantastic group of participants with early onset dementia and their carers. In consultation with participants we programmed 24 activities (year 1) which we deliver on a fortnightly basis. By December 2014 we had devised a training programme for carers (professional and family) which we delivered in partnership with the Together Trust and the County Council carer training programmes. The professional development of artists and volunteers was a priority, in this first year, 18 artists and volunteers were upskilled via specialist dementia training, 4 volunteers undertook first aid outdoors training, 10 volunteers participated in the County 'Dementia Link Training' award (there were previously only two Community Dementia Links in the whole of the Forest of Dean). The robust evaluation process is underway and we will be externally evaluated at the end of year 1 (details below). The project has been asked to deliver a workshop at the county annual dementia conference in May, this event will be attended by health professionals and the care sector – we are partnering with an ex-NHS dementia nurse to deliver the training and will draw on national research on 'green exercise' and creativity that will illustrate our findings from the mindSCAPE project. As mindSCAPE gathers momentum, it facilitates the strategic promotion of arts and health to the County.

Aims and Objectives: mindSCAPE aims to reconnect people with dementia and their carers to the Forest of Dean landscape in order to reduce isolation and improve participant emotional and physical well-being. By the end of the project:

50 people with dementia and their carers will become less isolated:

- Health professionals, carers, dementia champions or family members will report that people living with dementia related conditions feel more positive and confident about being part of their local community
- People will state that they have made or maintained friendships and feel less isolated

50 plus people with dementia related conditions and their carers will experience improved physical and mental health and become more physically active

- People will report feeling fitter, healthier and happier or report becoming more physically active as a result of mindSCAPE activities
- People will report feeling more informed and confident in undertaking mindscape type activities independently as a result of engagement with mindsCAPE activities and training

(YEAR 2) 50 plus people with dementia related conditions and their carers will be better informed of the range of services available to them in the Forest of Dean resulting in better coping strategies

- People are better informed of or have been directed to services available to them as a result of the mindSCAPE hub support

Artforms, Artists, Activities: Artspace work with an excellent team of self-employed artists from the local area. So far, mindSCAPE has engaged the skills of 12 artists who have delivered the following artforms/activities: Natural sculpture, Tai Chi, Willow Weaving, Pin hole camera making, photography, eco-printing, painting and drawing, ceramics, wood carving, wreath making, mosaics, mark making, leather craft.

Intended Health Outcomes: The lives of many people from the FOD are intrinsically linked to their surroundings, some will have lived, grown up and worked in the Forest landscape. mindSCAPE aims to re-establish or maintain those important connections and provide a support network for participants. The intended health outcomes are: **Improved sense of emotional and physical well-being.** mindSCAPE improves emotional well-being by reducing isolation via the provision of a support network for people with dementia and their carers. Opportunities for therapeutic creative workshops in the natural environment reduce participant stress/anxiety levels and improve mobility/fitness.

Beneficiaries: People with dementia and their carers, professional carers, artists and volunteers, partnership organisations and venues who benefitted from cross-promotion of services and referrals.

Outputs:

- 24 creative workshops per annum (28 participants attended in year 1)
- 2 x Training sessions for professional and family carers (11 carers participated)
- 4 x Events/workshops for GPs, local authority officers, health sector professionals, private care homes and voluntary orgs (over 500 people have been reached via events and workshops to promote the project)
- 10 x Volunteer opportunities (4 regular volunteers support workshops, 10 attended wider training)
- Dementia training and first aid training for artists and volunteers (18 artists and volunteers received dementia training, 4 attended first aid outdoors training and 10 attended further 'Community Dementia Link' training)
- Dementia Hub, signposting/information for people with dementia

Partnerships: FOD District Council, The Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Adventure, Forestry Commission, Gloucestershire Dementia Education Team, Managing Memory Team, Positive Caring Team (Gloucestershire County Council), Forest of Dean Carers Partnership, Carers Gloucestershire, Bracelands Adventure Centre, Forest of Dean Health Forum.

Location: The project base is The Bracelands Adventure Centre, Forest of Dean. The site is situated within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Innovation:

Creative work in a natural environment is proving to be an extremely powerful combination, both in terms of engaging participants, and impacting on participant well-being. The innovative partnership between arts and health organisations, voluntary, statutory and environmental partners strengthens the impact of the project. At the 2015 National Outdoor Recreation Conference, The British Heart Foundation discussed the concept of 'Health by Stealth'. They asked the question whether a health intervention needed to 'look, sound and feel' like a health intervention. They commented on the merits of diverse partnership working to deliver engaging projects that tap into community need and passion, but that also harness multiple health outcomes. mindSCAPE personifies 'health by stealth'. Perhaps for some, the notion of a 'healthy walk' would be less appealing than walking to the woods and creating an exciting 'sculpture trail'? Both activities share the same health outcomes. mindSCAPE participants are discovering, learning and experimenting as well as enjoying exercise in nature. It is hard to ascertain which has the greater impact, creative activity or the outdoors – but we can be certain that the innovative fusion of the two, makes this project a unique experience for participants. We add value to existing service providers by offering free activities for their clients/residents, by providing training for their staff and by signposting participants to their services. We assist the District Council's aim of a 'dementia friendly' community by training artists and volunteers and nurturing 'dementia champions'. We enable 'hard to reach' groups to access Forestry Commission sites.

Participation:

28 participants have attended sessions so far this year. A further 11 attended carer training sessions. The programme content has been devised in collaboration with the group. They originally expressed an interest in activities that would interest them and we continue to consult them regarding ongoing programming. They have made a wealth of suggestions with regards to activities they are keen on trying. One of the workshops for example (festive wreath making) was suggested by the group, prior to Christmas – the activity was led by one of the participant carers who sourced the materials, encouraged the group to collect evergreens from their gardens and subsequently led a fantastic workshop! In addition, a forthcoming session will be delivered by one of the participants with dementia – he is a keen model railway enthusiast and enjoys modelling railway scenery – he will co-lead the group in making some 'mini landscapes', passing on his skills and sharing his creative passion with the other participants. The group are extremely supportive of one another and lasting friendships have clearly been forged. They are keen to explore shared interests and to help us to organise activities that they can all enjoy. The mixture of participant led programming, in conjunction with the skills of professional artists and facilitators is an empowering experience for both the participants and artists involved.

Outcomes:

We know that it isn't always easy to access the countryside, especially if you have health or transport issues. It has been exciting breaking down those barriers and getting people out, enjoying creativity in a sociable, relaxing environment. Levels of engagement have exceeded our anticipation; reflecting the quality of the programme and the enjoyment participants get from the project. We potentially underestimated the value that carers would get from networking with other carers – they are able to discuss their issues and support each other during sessions. Some of the group have reported carrying out 'mindscape type' activities at home, carrying on with creative activity outside of session time – the benefits of the programme far extending session time alone.

Evaluation takes place after each session and in detail at specified intervals via questionnaires and interviews. We also keep a comprehensive diary of project and participant progress. We document each session taking photographs and use the artwork created as a tool for further evaluation. We will exhibit a collection of participant artwork at our venue during Dementia Awareness Week in May 2015. We are inviting an external evaluation from 'Dementia Adventure' (National organisation who lead in the field of outdoor work with people with dementia) at the end of year 1. This external examination of the project will help us to view mindSCAPE within the context of their extensive research in the field.

Below are excerpts from evaluations taken after 6 months of participation (we will evaluate again after 12 months of participation – July 2015). Results showed that at this early juncture 90% agreed they felt less isolated, 90% agreed they felt less stressed, 100% agreed that they felt more positive/happy, 50% more physically fit/healthy, 70% more confident about doing 'mindscape type' activities independently, 70% more creative, 90% feel more positive about being part of their community.

"The project has been superb, it has proved to be a great stress reliever and has enabled me to learn new skills and potentially take up new hobbies. Long may it continue"

"Very well run and organised, great variety of activities to suit all abilities with plenty of support as required"

"Whole thing is so well organised, friendly and accommodating, I wish it were a weekly event!"

"The activity was great fun and relaxing although hard work ha ha! Lunch was lovely enjoyed spending time in the wood and find everyone so friendly and kind"

"I really enjoyed that session [wood carving] to such an extent that I am tempted to continue or at least potter around a bit! Thank you all so much for the work you are doing, it certainly lifts the spirits"

"I am able to settle into these sessions and remain for the whole time. Sometimes I have to leave activities after only a short time. Not with this."

"Friendly accepting and uncritical of limitations, wonderful outlet"

Learning:

The main challenge, when working with people with dementia and their carers outdoors is undoubtedly - the weather. The natural environment can pose a raft of health and safety considerations – uneven ground, slippery conditions and for those with reduced mobility and co-ordination can prove a significant barrier. We adapted activities, for example, rather than taking the 15 minute walk to the log circle site, we used the lawn/grounds outside the adventure centre. During the winter months, we worked inside – using natural materials, and activities inspired by nature we were still able to ‘connect to the landscape’ with sensory stimuli and our imaginations, even if not physically.

In the future, we are developing a programme to include activities that will promote additional interaction with the outdoors outside of session time – for example, designing and making bird boxes, this can be done indoors, in bad weather – however participants will go on to enjoy these throughout the year in their own gardens, in their own time. The wreath-making workshop took place during bad weather – however, participants had gathered the evergreens, pine cones, holly and ivy independently, on walks previous to the workshop.

Critical success factors:

Aside from the clear positive impact the project is having on participants, the main successes have been due to effective partnership working. The promotion of the project and recruitment of participants with the help of the Alzheimer’s Society, the delivery of the training sessions via linkage with the Gloucestershire County Council ‘Positive Caring Scheme’ and the Together Trust ‘Managing Memory Together’ programmes. Our work with the County Dementia Education Team has resulted in trained volunteers who are now ‘Community Dementia Links’. Our work with The Forest of Dean District Council Community Engagement Officer has led to wider initiatives to promote dementia awareness in the Forest (we have delivered promotional mindSCAPE workshops at various district and county wide events for carers and older people). We have promoted the project to the Forest of Dean health forum – enabling Dr Gibbs, Clinical Commissioning lead for the FOD to experiment with willow weaving! We will be delivering a mindSCAPE training workshop at this year’s county Dementia Conference. These partnerships have raised the profile of the project, helping us promote the impact of creative activities in the natural environment to a wider audience. Artspace have promoted arts and health for 25 years, the mindSCAPE project has proven a significant platform from which to further advocate this. The project is raising our profile as a quality provider of arts activities for older people. We have recently started three new commissions with residential carehomes in the area, reaching new participants who are unable to access our programme.

Funding and Resources:

This project was fully funded by The Big Lottery. £129,296 over four years.

Images L-R

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