



ECOArt on Prescription

Name of Organisation

PETROC

Title of project/programme

ECOArt on Prescription

Dates of project/programme

2011

Summary

The ECOArt on Prescription programme follows in the footsteps of PETROC Art on Prescription which uses art to raise self esteem, self worth, is proven to lower stress and anxiety and engages with a hard to reach sector. The ECOArt on Prescription offered a series of taught art classes with the theme based on the great outdoors for inspiration. Outdoor sketchbook sessions visually recorded the environment and were worked into a selection of colourful designs. The designs were then reproduced into a range of outcomes including a printed book, outside art gallery wall and a set of deckchairs.

Shortlisted for an Arts & Health South West Award for an arts organisation in 2012.

Overview

The need for the project is unquestioned with over eight years working in the local communities of North Devon and collaborating with a range of health and community agencies there is a clear need to further engage with people who become isolated, stressed, depressed and anxious. The anecdotal evidence is backed by statistical evidence from reports outlining the health and wellbeing across the wards and parishes of North Devon.

The aim is to target people with a range of mental health issues who would benefit from the combined therapeutic powers of creative activity and the natural environment to improve their mental health and improve local spaces at the same time.

North Devon is blessed with spectacular scenery including moorland, coastline, marine, agricultural land, as well as picturesque villages and urban spaces. Outdoor sketchbook sessions visually recorded the environment to develop sketchbook portfolios, using a range of art mediums and techniques including ink, pastel, paint and photography. The work was then further refined into a series of colourful designs reproduced into a range of outcomes including a set of printed books, an outside art gallery wall and a set of deckchairs.

The courses were carefully tailored to meet the needs of the targeted participants providing a safe, supportive, affirming, inclusive and professional delivery informed by experienced health and educational professionals.

The project was promoted through local media and established links with Medical Centres, Community Mental Health Teams, Link Resource Centres and voluntary/community groups. Participants were primarily referred to the service by their GP or other healthcare professional. Individuals were also able to self-refer, although all participants underwent a thorough but sensitive initial assessment to ensure the programme will be appropriate to their needs.

The project consisted of three short courses that ran consecutively over a 12 month period at three sites in North Devon - Ilfracombe, Bideford and Barnstaple.

Ilfracombe – supported by TRANSFORM, the Link Centre and Community Mental Health Team at the Gables and Runnacleave Supported Living - delivered at the community room (Spring 2011). GP Practices. Waterside Practice / The Warwick Practice

Bideford – supported by the LINK Centre Upper Gunstone, Community Mental Health Team Fernwood and the Burton Art Gallery – delivered in the Burton Art Gallery. (Summer 2011). GP Practices: Bideford Medical Centre / Northam Medical Centre / Wooda Medical Centre

Barnstaple – supported by the Community Mental Health Team and the Flying Fish artists – delivered at the Lodge (Flying Fish social cooperative) Rock Park (Autumn 2011). GP Practices: Brannam Medical Centre / Litchdon Street Medical Centre / Boutport Medical Centre

Each course ran for ten weeks followed by a further two sessions to present artwork produced and have a local celebration of achievements. Each course was delivered by an experienced art tutor with a special interest in Art and Health supported by a qualified assistant providing additional learning support (ALS).

The second phase of the project is now under way following a very successful two week exhibition celebrating the work of the participants at the Goodwin Gallery Barnstaple.

A conference entitled 'Naturally Creative' complemented the exhibition and fed back the initial outcomes as well as raising the awareness of the project and the active connections between art health and wellbeing.

Speakers included Ann Ley – independent project evaluator/researcher

Linden Lynn – Recovery Devon

Alex Coulter – Director AHSW

Alex Murdin – Environmental artists

Sandy Brown – International Ceramicist / Resurgence trustee

Two of the students from ECOArt on Prescription also stood up and read out their testimonies. (See Appendix)

Innovation

Innovation comes from the Educational lead. The focus of the workshops is education based, providing opportunities for participants to re-awaken old skills and to gain new ones. Where good teaching happens there is a sense of achievement, self worth a raise in self-esteem. The experience also enables participants to feel normal, they become students. The art classes don't just finish at the end of the 12 weeks but there are progression routes embedded, with participants now on a level 2 art qualification, level 3 Access to Art and Design and one student is on the part time degree!

- Working with Education
- Progression routes
- Continued support
- Genuine 'normalising experience'
- Gain transferable skills
- Professional links across organisation
- Highly professional and responsive

Participation

All the participants were involved with the presentation of their artwork, setting up the outside art gallery wall in Ilfracombe, distributing the printed books in Bideford and the mounting of the 'Naturally Creative' exhibition. Participants also provided qualitative written feedback at the end of their programme.

Outcomes

Participants had experience of mild to moderate depression, stress or anxiety, and most were between the ages of 25 and 60. Over the three centres, 32 females and 7 males enrolled and completed the course. Attendance over the 12 sessions was extremely high at 91%.

Participants were asked to complete the Long Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale at the start and end of the course. They were also asked to give qualitative feedback in terms of three things that they had learned, discovered, been surprised by or gained from the project. The courses were independently evaluated by Ann Ley, researcher, who observed the fifth session of each course and analysed both the qualitative and quantitative data.

Based on previous work in North Devon amongst a similar sample (North Devon College, 2009), an average increase in wellbeing of 0.5 was anticipated. In fact, there was an average increase was 0.78 across the three courses. "Independent observation of a sample of sessions revealed a group of people utterly absorbed in what they were doing. There was a relaxed, friendly atmosphere with friendships forming amongst students, who were mutually encouraging in their artwork." Ann Ley

Qualitative feedback was given by 27 participants and the key themes can be summarised as sheer enjoyment, educational (art related) benefits, and increased confidence, both artistically and socially.

"I've loved every minute of it – so much so I've applied to do a full or part-time course at the college. David is great – he explains all the mumbo jumbo in very basic terms and cuts it all down to size. My doctor thinks it's great – it's done me a power of good and has inspired me to paint". (Bideford student)

Learning

No challenges just opportunities. The project has been delivered within its key benchmarks on time and on cost. We would wish to continue to build upon the growing relationships with other agencies, extend the delivery to further outlining areas and consolidate the support from GP's to explore further funding opportunities.

Critical success factors

The aims of the project have been achieved with significant results. Wonderful creative artwork has been produced, community spaces have benefited, we held a successful exhibition and conference with 54 delegates attending and over 200 visitors to the exhibition across the two weeks. Evaluation and monitoring is in place and documented. A paper has been written and now to be published in the Journal for Mental Health and Social Inclusion. Progression for participants into further education has been taken up and supported. Participants recorded a rise in wellbeing. Wonderful creative artwork has been produced at a competent level. We have been greatly encouraged by the collaboration and support from a breadth of agencies which has been crucial to the success of the project.

Funding and Resources

Funding: £20,000

The project was funded through Ecominds, Mind's open grant scheme supported by the Big Lottery Changing Spaces programme.

The project was further resourced by PETROC with in kind contribution.

A second phase of funding has been applied for to provide the opportunity to disseminate the findings and prompt the use of art and the environment to raise wellbeing.

Appendix

"I have just finished a 10 week course called Eco Arts on Prescription. I couldn't attend the last day, as I was so sad that it has finished. I couldn't bring myself to say goodbye to my fellow artists. Four years ago I lost my partner to suicide. I was devastated, I went onto losing my job, friends, due to my spiralling depression. I just wanted to join my partner. I cut myself off from everything and everybody. Because there was a risk of me harming myself, my doctor referred me to a CPN. He kept trying to encourage me to go to a course called 'Art on Prescription'. For two years I thought about it. I had this image in my head that there would be people there with severe mental health problems, with a draconian attitude towards people like me. Three years later, I eventually plucked up the courage to go and have a look, with my support worker. I was scared. I had been suffering with panic attacks when I went outside, scared of groups of people and didn't trust anyone. I met David, our Tutor. He seemed kind and I felt a little better about joining. Through the weeks, I have learnt so many different ways of drawing, painting, printing. David was a thoughtful, kind, tutor. He had one rule. To have fun, and boy, I did! It awoke something amazing inside of me that I had buried with my partner. I felt creative again, felt motivated to paint at home. I started feeling more confident each week. I started to call my old friends, I had something to share with them now. I joined a few other groups, which has led me to feel so much better. I can now confidently say that this has turned my life around. I never once felt that I was in a 'special group', only that I met very special people there. My experience was extra special, I have now been offered another group in January, where I could gain a certificate in creative art, which I can't wait to do. I have always suffered with anxieties, which have been debilitating in many ways. I have found when I am creative I feel a lot calmer, this is a precious gift for me to find, much better than any medication from my doctor. I just hope that other people in my situation get the chance to be part of one of these courses".

Justine

"I am deeply touched that someone cares about me. I am made to feel wanted, that my input is valued. Especially humbling is the fact that when I arrive, there is a space for me. Things are handed out and I haven't had to think about this, I feel almost waited on! This two hour anchor in the week, secured to a steady unfailing rock, is precious. Our tutor, David, gives me inspiration. If only he knew how my 'down' is lifted when I walk in that open door. I had a life once, before I became a carer, and I do believe it's beginning to emerge again. I live from Friday to Friday. I feel liberated when I am doing the artwork. No one probes into my private life. I can leave that behind for those special two hours and create something positive. Creating swirls, shapes, patterns and gorgeous colour from the photos and designs within the park has been so constructive. I never thought I would see myself working on a large canvas in a studio ever again, as my close friend, with whom I painted, stabbed himself to death in his studio. It's been a brave step forward for me and this has helped me to partially come to terms with it. Thank you for this wonderful time. I am so sad that it is coming to an end. Please can it go on? I don't want to go backwards again". **Anne**