



'Artsparks Art at the Heart of the RUH'

Name of Organisation

Royal United Hospital NHS Trust Bath

Title of project/programme

Artsparks Art at the Heart of the RUH
Activities for young patients

Dates of project/programme

2012

Summary

Artsparks brought a series of regular creative workshops to young patients on the Children's Ward and the School Room's Hospital Education and Re-integration Service (HERS). Our aim was simple, to create a positive environment using inspirational professional arts practitioners to provide a stimulating distraction from the day to day routine of their treatment.

Young people often feel threatened by the hospital environment and isolated at home during convalescence, those questioned felt that because they were ill they had a completely different experience of being a child or teenager.

They created artworks in response to materials, methods, themes and issues, which were showcased in their new gallery.

Shortlisted for the Arts & Health South West Award 2013 for an arts organisation

Overview

Art at the Heart (AATH) has sustained a colourful and dynamic arts programme at the RUH, and we received recognition for our outstanding visual arts programme through a highly commended accolade from the Building Better Healthcare Awards in November 2011.

Artsparks brings enormous value to the RUH through its product, processes and ideas. The programme, which has been running in its entirety since 2011, has successfully met the needs of young people, who may be vulnerable and often feel isolated, to provide an inspiring and engaging arts programme within the Children's Ward and with home schooled pupils who are educated through HERS. Hetty Dupays Arts Programme Manager says, *"It is fantastic to see how Artsparks has gradually found its feet and evolved over the past seven years, into a rounded, innovative and inspiring project for young people at the Royal United Hospital, Bath"*.

Our aim was to build upon the fantastic workshops from previous years by continuing a high quality series of art and animation workshops as well as establishing a children's gallery along the RUH central corridor. Artsparks was funded from September 2011- November 2012 by the Arts Council, B&NES Arts Development and the Bath Galleries Group auction.

The idea of the Artsparks gallery was to help put a high value on children's creations by giving them a platform to share their work and present it to the wider hospital audience. Consequently the gallery has transformed the central corridor and has created special joyful moments in an unexpected environment, championing positive experiences and in turn improving patient and visitor experience.

We agreed upon a number of intended health outcomes prior to the programme, which came from working closely with the Head of the RUH School Room, HERS, and the Children's Ward Play Specialists. With their vast experience and knowledge we were able to collaborate effectively to achieve measurable outcomes such as self-awareness, motivation and managing feelings amongst the patients and pupils.

Artsparks ran a total of 60 creative and participatory workshops

over 15 months, within the Children's ward playroom, engaging on average 12 children per workshop and over 150 participating parents and carers. Participants learned about the workshops from posters and leaflets across the ward, although attendance did heavily depend on patients who were there at the right time.

It was the role of the Artist in Residence and workshop facilitators to correspond with each other and create a series of themes throughout the year. 8 themes were chosen which reflected current exhibitions in our award winning Central Gallery, national events, environmental issues as well as tackling ward-specific issues.

These popular themes included:

- **Cold Places**, a theme inspired by Sue Flood's outstanding photographic exhibition in our Central Gallery
- **Animate Me!** primarily for HERS pupils but a show reel was made by ward participants with an Olympic theme
- **Face Britain** – a national project to celebrate the Queen's jubilee
- **A Wildflower Meadow** project in the summer, to raise awareness of the threat to meadows and precious but endangered flora and fauna
- **The Bed Olympics** – creating games that can be played in bed
- **Reassurance Project** which is now installed outside the ward's playroom and sends a positive message to all
- **Emerging Young Talent** - two photographers were showcased in 2012 and one was awarded a free year's membership to the Royal Photographic Society
- **Tree of Life** – now on permanent display in the Artsparks gallery

Art media varied between workshop facilitator styles and techniques and included the following: painting, sculpture, drawing, printing, clay modelling, animation, wire work, photography, collage, self-portraits and embroidery. Supporting artists to Edwina Bridgeman were Charlotte Stowell, who worked with the modelling material Fimo and also ran the Bed Olympic workshops, Claire Day worked with clay and Sophie Lowe sculpted with wire.

Art produced during these workshops were collated and curated by the Artist in Residence Edwina Bridgeman and installed by our Exhibition Coordinator.

A major strand of Artsparks is our animation project Animate Me!

Letters were sent out to all HERS pupils inviting them to sign up for Animate Me! workshops to make their very own films with animator Elle Farnham from Suited and Booted Studios, a Bath based Community Interest Animation Company (CIC) who specialise in digital media and communication. The home sessions were based on 5 one to one sessions each for a total of 6 pupils signed up through HERS across a 12-month period.

Catering for a range of ages, illnesses, learning capacities and abilities, the project was also able to provide a unique and rare opportunity to enhance the curriculum which the Royal United Hospital is able to offer children with medical needs. Elle Farnham gave the young people the freedom to not only have a creative input through storytelling, character and narrative design but also to direct, lead workshops, edit and create audio input. When asked what the young people would like to make their films about they wanted to animate things that make them happy and which they felt were important to them. *"The beauty of animation is the ability to play, you can make anything come alive which is very exciting and magical"* Elle Farnham, Being neither in school nor in hospital they felt it was very good to focus on things that helped them through the day and made their illnesses more bearable.

"In the home situation the project was welcomed, appreciated and valued by all the families who participated. It was differentiated successfully to cater for the different ages, illnesses, learning capacity, styles and abilities of all the pupils. Illness ranged from mental illnesses (severe anxiety and depression) to the more physical disabilities associated with ME." Valerie Thyers: Head of the Hospital School Room and HERS

INNOVATION

Innovation came from the workshops themselves. Creating the 'Tree of Life', Artist in Residence Edwina Bridgman reflected upon what constitutes a popular workshop. She realised successful workshops were those that involved transformation.

"Creating something from found materials fires the imagination. Transforming materials establishes an idea that 'anything is possible'. The children then go on to transform their own environment and spirits through their creations, pictures on walls,

sculptures on bedside cabinets and traction beds becoming installations! This creativity seeps out of the ward and down the corridors."

Artsparks and supporting themes have radically transformed the ways in which the RUH Children's Ward interacts with RUH, because of the showcase gallery in a main thoroughfare, the public and staff are able to see all of the wonderful projects that are offered to young patients to make their stay less stressful. Combining such imaginative and diverse arts projects has been a great achievement with 100% positive feedback being part of the overall hospital patient experience.

The Arts Programme Manager and Artists in Residence have nurtured a positive relationship with staff on the Children's Ward; in particular the Head of HERS and the Children's Ward Play Specialists, who are fully behind the programme and appreciate the inspiring opportunity it provides to enhance the curriculum, activities in the Play Room and at bedsides. Artsparks stands out from other children's ward hospital programmes; the seven years which have gone into the programme have made it what it is today; unique and enriching.

PARTICIPATION

Artsparks is all about participation, engagement and involvement. Artist in Residence Edwina Bridgeman commented *"In my experience process has to be given priority in a clinical setting. Although our aim was to create a gallery space for children's work it was primarily about young people participating and being able to take ownership, enabling them to create their own environment, in a situation where it is not always possible to be proactive"*

It is a fair to say that our target audience is varied and unpredictable, to ensure that we meet the realistic needs of our patients and their carers, our workshops and project themes are open and flexible, often letting the participants lead the workshops under the supervision of the Artist in Residence or workshop facilitators. The playroom is an excellent working space to allow this way of working as children feel welcome and it is easy for them to dip into and out of activities, but if they are unable to leave their beds then the artist will work with them at their bedside. It is

sometimes difficult to get teenage boys to the playroom but they will join in the workshops from their bed or Teenage Chill Out Room.

Workshops on the ward and one to one sessions for home schooled pupils lasted approximately 3 hours each and families were welcome to join in. Over the course of the project we had over 900 participants and included young patients of all ages, their parents and siblings.

OUTCOMES

It is often pointed out that children don't get the time they need to engage creatively in school and often work is over prescribed. On the ward children have enjoyed the freedom to produce their work in a non-judgemental setting. The children are usually very proud of their work and there have been issues about taking work home or leaving it for the gallery. We resolved this issue by inviting children to create two pieces of work and choosing which to take and which to leave. Throughout the project participants, staff and facilitators were encouraged to evaluate our service through questionnaires and surveys.

Fulfilling our aim to provide opportunities for promotion and fostering new sustainable partnerships we were invited by Helen Mason, Director of Animation Therapy to present our project and examples of the films that were created through Animate Me! at the one-day study event at the Arnolfini, Bristol in September 2012. The event, which featured keynote speaker David Sproxtton CBE, Co-founder of Aardman Animations as well as a host of leading occupational therapists and artists, explored the use of animation in health and social care.

Pupils commented that Animate Me! had raised their self-esteem and they took pride in what they had achieved. In addition a few films were screened in the New Emerging Talent at the Animated Exeter Festival, with one student going on to apply to College as a direct result of being involved in the project, as it has inspired his love for animation and film. There have been occasions when families have gone on to visit galleries and museums for the first time as a direct result of being involved in the workshops. The best outcome of the entire project has been the number of children who

started workshops shy and unsure and left with huge smiles and an enormous sense of achievement. Inevitably this makes the whole ward a happier place.

"Ella and I had lots of fun painting together, it's not often we get to do such a wonderful activity" Patients Mum

As a lasting legacy to the positive work which has been created an Artsparks evaluation book alongside Animate Me! short films can now be viewed at any time by anyone in the central corridor via a touch-screen gallery and via our website. The touch screen gallery is housed in the newly designed Enchanted Art Forest corridor and now permanently hosts Artist in Residence Edwina Bridgman's Tree of Life. Our audience for the Artsparks Enchanted Forest Gallery is unknown, but 2000 patients, staff and visitors pass through the central corridors every day.

"I overheard a child saying that the RUH does not look like a hospital because of the lovely paintings on the walls, congratulations to all. I work here and have seen the difference that it makes to patients and visitors." RUH Nurse

LEARNING

During the course of the year Artsparks did encounter challenges both internally and externally and areas for improvement have been set for 2012-2013. Working in weekly blocks has proved more successful than previously working fortnightly morning sessions. Projects gather momentum and work is not diluted because energy and enthusiasm are maintained. The weekly sessions have also proved beneficial for working relationships with staff members, as they come to view the workshops as less 'bitty' and more integrated within their working weekly schedule.

Working more closely with the Play Specialist was very helpful when it came to buying in materials. Learning from previous years a material wish list has now been created. This list has formed an effective communication channel prior to a workshop, ensuring the workshop facilitator is aware of what she or he needs to bring to the workshop. To improve the situation further it would be good to invite the Play Specialists to the Bristol Scrap Store, to encourage their own ideas and emphasise the importance of decent materials.

Good quality materials make the children feel valued.

We would like to provide professional development opportunities for play specialists and teachers. It is important to value the unique work that is being produced on a number of levels. We are proposing to achieve this by looking at the broader context and what is being achieved in other hospitals. This will hopefully help move away from the idea that workshops are simply a diversion.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Artsparks has met and exceeded its original aims, as demonstrated by our outcomes. To our knowledge we have been working in a unique way in a clinical setting, celebrating children's creativity and facilitating their ideas.

On the ward families have the opportunity to really engage and play together through making for some families this is a new and welcome experience. Making together is life affirming.

Workshops on the children's ward have focused in value of using humble, everyday materials to tell stories, put together using simple techniques and plenty of imagination. Families re-connect with the pleasure this brings and often comment on the desire to make time to continue making at home.

A patient's mother even commented that her daughter had asked to stay another night – a rare request for a hospital.

Overall our funding strategy was very successful and the budget increased by £12,000 from the previous year and came to £20,000 for September 2011 – November 2012. We estimate that 900 young people and their families took part in the programme. We successfully worked with 4 workshops facilitators across the year, creating a more varied programme with a 200% increase in number of workshops from previous years.

On the back of Artsparks Edwina Bridgeman has been invited to run projects in Schools in BANES and Wiltshire as a result of meeting teachers on the ward with their children and regularly works for Barnardos as a result of the work with the hospital.

FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Artsparks demands tremendous resources, both managing and funding the programme. In order to maintain a level of high quality Art at the Heart have partnered with Bath Galleries Group over the last 2 years, as their official charity. We are actively involved with the organisation and annually benefit from events. An Arts Auction raised over £6,000 towards match funding for Arts Council England grant 2011-12 and the Art Raffle in November raised over £2,000. Successful grant awards are becoming few and far between so small pots of money to contribute towards match funding, and also raising awareness of the project and championing it's successes to the wider world, has become critical to sustaining a healthy future for Artsparks. During 2012 we were responsible for positive partnership working:

Funders

- Arts Council Grants for the Arts for £9,500 (main funders for 2012)
- Strategic Partners B&NES Arts Development awarded grants for The Bed Olympics and Animate Me! (£5,500)
- Bath Galleries Group Art Auction raised £6,000 towards match funding for Artsparks grants in 2012
- The National Fine Art Decorative Society donated £500 towards materials.

External Partners

- Suited and Booted Studios CIC
- Artists: Edwina Bridgeman, Charlotte Stowell, Elle Farnham, Claire Day, Sophie Lowe

We are currently applying for grants to continue Artsparks and we will be the Official Charity for a Bath Galleries Group Fundraising activity in November 2013.

Contact details for further information

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