



## **'Art & Mind at THG'**

### **Name of Organisation**

Thelma Hulbert Gallery

### **Title of project/programme**

Art & Mind at THG

Providing exhibition inspired art activities in an inspirational setting.

### **Dates of project/programme**

2012

### **Summary**

This is a collaborative project run by the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (East Devon's only public art gallery) and Mind in East Devon. 'Art & Mind at THG' supports people with mental health and anxiety problems to gain confidence and escape everyday worries by immersing themselves in art activities inspired by the gallery's changing programme of innovative art exhibitions.

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

### **Overview**

#### **Identifying need**

On a one off visit to the gallery, staff from Mind in East Devon highlighted that there was a clear need for people with mental health and anxiety problems to meet and be creative in a neutral space where no stigma was attached and where you weren't defined

by the place you met. A space was needed where doors weren't closed and participants could interact with other members of the public not just those with similar problems. From this chance conversation at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery 'Art & Mind at THG' began.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of 'Art and Mind at THG' is to benefit people's wellbeing, by giving a time and place for participants to explore their own and exhibiting artists creativity, whilst being able to interact with other gallery visitors. Leading to raised levels of confidence and self-esteem and giving participants a new interest which might extend beyond the project and gallery, with the objective of reducing people's need for health care services.

#### **Aims for participants:**

- Relaxation and respite: absorption in something other than their daily worries
- Enjoyment and exploration of art materials and techniques
- Learning, refreshing or increasing of artistic knowledge and skills
- Social contact
- Sense of belonging and shared interest

### **What you did**

One morning a month participants meet as a group and look around the current exhibition at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery. The Curator, an exhibiting artist or member of staff from Mind talk about the exhibition and the works on display. Participants are encouraged to respond to the art works and find something within the exhibition that they are attracted to and if they are suitably enthused they are urged to articulate their reasons for choosing a particular work and talk to the group about it.

The temporary nature of the exhibitions keeps the group stimulated and able to compare and contrast exhibitions and different artists works. Exhibitions have included 'Disability in Animation' an Animated Exeter exhibition where animations were displayed on television screens to Edwina Bridgeman's 'Edge of Enchantment' where she created a life sized meadow in the gallery from recycled materials including saris, fruit bags and off cuts from Mulberry leather handbags.

After taking in the exhibition the participants then head to the THG Learning Room\* where they work with staff or visiting artists to produce their own work or a joint piece of work inspired by the exhibition or a particular piece of work within the exhibition. Resulting work has included collage, textiles, printmaking, painting, recycled sculpture, installation, flick books and animation.

*\*The THG Learning Room is a dedicated space within the Thelma Hulbert Gallery for community groups to use and exhibit their work, from school groups to knitting groups, sheltered housing tenants to the gallery youth group. Visitors to the gallery can access this room at anytime and create their own artworks. It is an inspirational room covered floor to ceiling with works of art and is full of art materials which have either been donated or from the local Scrapstore.*

### **Artform**

From paint to print, textiles to animation participants are encouraged to try out new skills where they feel able to. Drawing materials are always available should they not want to explore new mediums.

### **Intended health outcome**

The intended and the resulting outcome has been improved mental health and wellbeing.

### **Outputs**

Artistic output has been amazing with work generated being shown at both Mind in East Devon and within the gallery itself.

### **Partnerships and who was involved**

This project has been an excellent example of partnership working between a local authority run gallery, the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) and the charity Mind in East Devon. Self Heal Association, an Exeter based charity, is also involved in providing financial support to run the sessions.

### **Location and activities**

The activities have all been based at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery in Honiton, East Devon, in both the exhibition galleries and Learning Room.

### **When the project/programme happened**

The group has met once a month throughout 2012/13 exhibition programme. The project has proved a great success and is continuing once a month to tie in with the 2013/14 programme of exhibitions at the gallery.

### **INNOVATION**

The 'Art & Mind at THG' project is innovative by being based at a gallery and incorporating the programme of contemporary art exhibitions as a starting point to the art activities undertaken. With the use of the Learning Room at the gallery the participants do not have to visit an exhibition then travel back to the Mind offices to produce work, meaning the exhibition is there for them to reference throughout their activity session. The activities are also in a room accessible to the public so the participants are able to involve other visitors to the gallery in their sessions and their work, making the experience far more accessible than would otherwise be possible. The project is perfect additions to our learning programme which is an integral part of the gallery's offer to the community. As a public art gallery in a small market town it is essential that try to reach all members of the local community as well as attracting visitors from afar.

### **PARTICIPATION**

Participation has been key to the success of this project.

The participants joined the group through referral to Mind by a member of the Community Mental Health Team, The Depression & Anxiety Service, or a GP. They also joined by self referral to either Mind or directly to Art & Mind at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery through publicity displayed in various places in the town, at the gallery, on the gallery website and through leaflets.

### **OUTCOMES**

The outcomes are best described by some of the participants:

"Whilst in the group concentrating on art in question makes your worries much less and is very relaxing"

"It has encouraged me to use art as a means of focussing myself on something when feeling negative, anxious or depressed"

"The course really transformed my way of thinking about myself and realise that I'm not bad at learning new skills"

“.....joining in, freedom to be creative..... that it is ok to play and let yourself go, enjoy being with other people again”.

## **LEARNING**

Some exhibitions held particular challenges for those involved in the group through the exhibition content and some art forms were seen as too challenging and had fewer participants. There was also a certain amount of trepidation by some about working with the actual artists whose work was on display. An awareness of all possible challenges that the exhibitions might throw up became ingrained in the planning of activities and also in my programming of exhibitions for the future.

## **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

The main success is experiencing the increased confidence and the inspiration gained by the participants following the sessions. The take up by participants and the low drop out rate has been something that has surprised all involved. The continuation of the project is a real success and is testament to the quality of the partnership working. The artworks produced are a credit to all the participants and can be hung with pride in the gallery alongside the main exhibitions.

The success of this partnership has seen the project continuing in to the future. It has also lead to talks with Honiton Memory Cafe, a group for those with dementia and their carers and it is hoped the gallery will undertake a similar series of art activities inspired by the exhibition with this group.

## **FUNDING AND RESOURCES**

Mind in East Devon received support from Self Heal Association, an Exeter based charity supporting arts and health organisations.

## **Contact details for further information**

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