

November 2014

Creativity Works



Co-production for better mental health

When it comes to mental health, many local authorities now strive for peer-led services, delivered in community settings and designed to fit around individuals. Rather than people adapting to fit with services provided by councils, they develop the best approaches to improve their mental health themselves. This idea of co-production underpins the work of many arts organisations, including **Creativity Works**, whose work to empower people to design their own services chimes well with commissioners' priorities.

Creating better mental health

Creativity Works uses creativity as a catalyst for personal and social development, with people of all ages, from all backgrounds. Founded in North East Somerset 30 years ago, the charity works with a range of partners—from mental health practitioners to the criminal justice system—to deliver positive change through creative projects. *'There are many layers to what we do,'* explains Project Manager Philippa Forsey. *'We specialise in delivering outstanding creative projects, targeted at specific communities in areas of health and wellbeing. We use the power of the creative process to make a real difference to peoples' lives; inspiring and empowering them to explore, develop, and grow. Our Co|Create programme delivers training and support to artists, health and social care professionals and volunteers in the field of socially engaged arts practice to equip them with knowledge and skills to deal with challenging situations.'* Service-users and providers work together to develop the best way forward.

Creativity Works is commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council to deliver its Mental Health Creative Support Service, offering people experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health issues a chance to build confidence, learn new skills and make new friends. Participants can join a variety of free weekly creative groups, from 'photography and rambling' to 'writing space'. If participants want groups to continue, Creativity Works helps them take the steps to independence, assisting with the practicalities of budgets and planning alongside members. Creativity Works remains on hand to provide support, but independence is the goal.

People-centred services

These self-support groups and peer-led networks are very much in tune with B&NES priorities around mental health. Basil Wild, a commissioner in Adult Social Care and Housing at B&NES, explains that the council is in the process of redesigning its mental health services with people, rather than services,

Key commissioning facts

Project: Mental Health Creative Support Service

Provider: Creativity Works

Commissioner: Bath and North East Somerset Adult Social Care and Housing

Location: Bath and North East Somerset

Timing: Initial 3-year commission awarded in 2010, extended for a further 2 years in 2014.



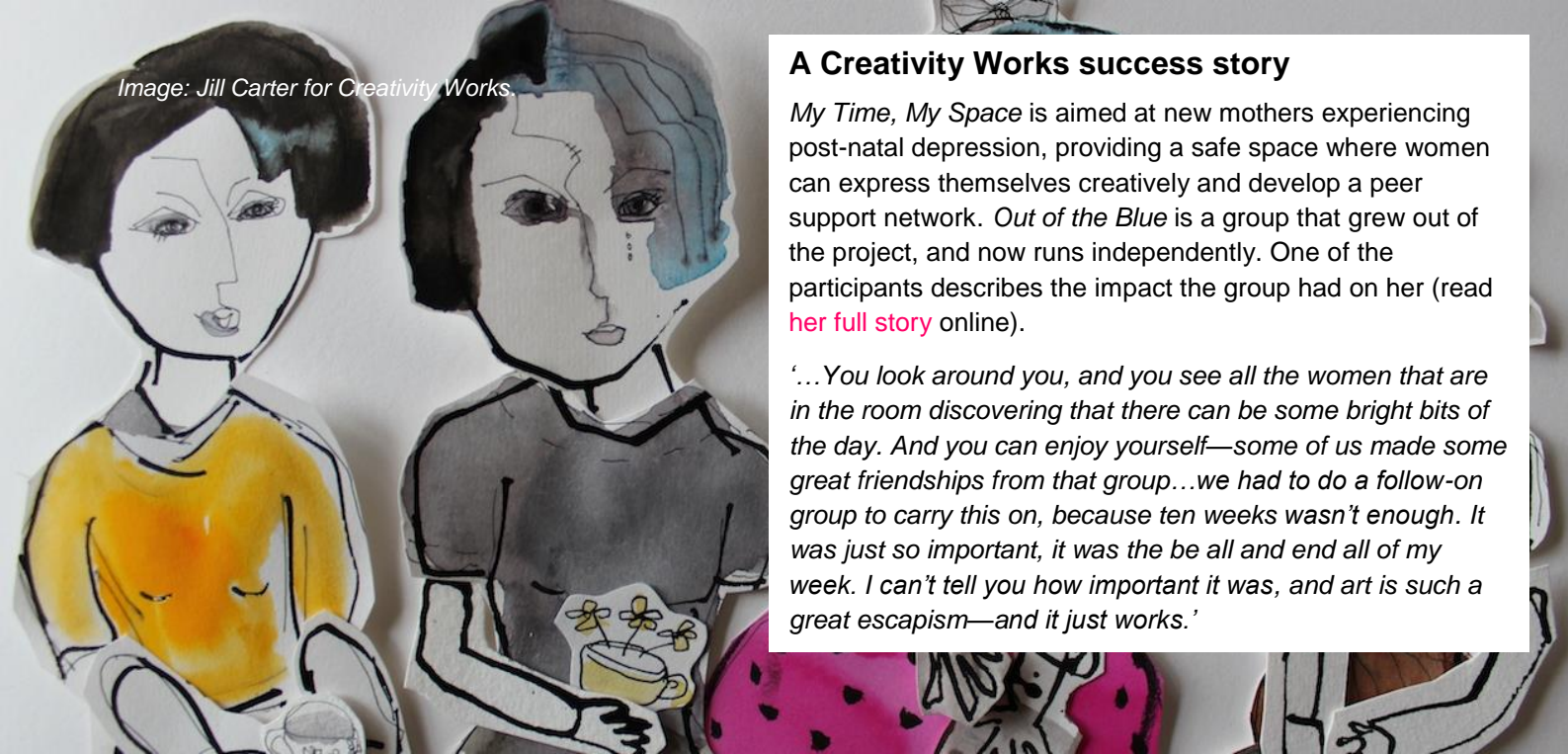


Image: Jill Carter for Creativity Works.

A Creativity Works success story

My Time, My Space is aimed at new mothers experiencing post-natal depression, providing a safe space where women can express themselves creatively and develop a peer support network. *Out of the Blue* is a group that grew out of the project, and now runs independently. One of the participants describes the impact the group had on her ([read her full story online](#)).

'...You look around you, and you see all the women that are in the room discovering that there can be some bright bits of the day. And you can enjoy yourself—some of us made some great friendships from that group...we had to do a follow-on group to carry this on, because ten weeks wasn't enough. It was just so important, it was the be all and end all of my week. I can't tell you how important it was, and art is such a great escapism—and it just works.'

as the starting point. *'It's a big overhaul, and what Creativity Works does is very much in line with how we want services to be run,'* explains Basil. *'We want to hand the focus back to people, rather than commissioners. We want lots going on in the community that people can go to—activities using their mind, their social networks, their support networks.'*

Perhaps the best recent example of this co-production approach is the Wellbeing College, a new delivery model that brings mental health services into the community and hands power to service-users. *'The emphasis is on self-management and prevention,'* says Basil. *'We talk about wellbeing, rather than mental health—we want to mainstream it so we deliberately didn't call it a recovery college. Anybody who wants to improve their wellbeing can take courses—it's breaking down the barriers I suppose.'* A number of existing providers, including Creativity Works, offer a variety of courses and groups designed to help people develop confidence, live independently, and maximise wellbeing. *'All these things are going on in the community, outside traditional services,'* says Basil. *'We're moving away from being service-based to community-based, but with support in the background as needed.'*

Developing good relationships

The Mental Health Creative Support Service is the latest in a long line of work with the local authority for Creativity Works, stretching back ten years. Initially, Creativity Works was a grantee, applying for funding from the council's annual grant round. In 2010, the council switched to a commissioning model, putting services out to tender. Creativity Works responded and was awarded a three-year commission for mental health services. This year it was tweaked and renewed for a further two years.

Philippa sees building good relationships with commissioners as key to Creativity Works' success; proactivity is required to keep those relationships current. *'The key is listening, making sure you're on the various strategic forums, the health and wellbeing networks, so you understand where people are coming from and what they need to achieve.'*

In B&NES, says Philippa, *'commissioners have very open relationships with providers—we sit on forums that are very democratic. They take time to find out what we think, what we would do about something, our approach.'* Ideas from the Mental Health Provider Forum can develop into fully-funded initiatives, like the Wellbeing College. Sometimes commissioners and providers work together to develop projects, which are discussed and tweaked to suit both sides before being commissioned. As Basil explains, *'it's a waste of everybody's time to commission something for three years and find out a year in that it could be done better.'*

Proving peer-led support makes a difference

Cold, hard facts are also essential; providing the evidence necessary to convince commissioners to part with funding is a priority. *'If they're uncertain of a project's value you need to assure them over a period*

of time that this approach works,' explains Philippa. 'It's about reputation as well, a good track record as an organisation where commissioners can see meaningful results over time. We've got that.'

'I always draw on what we've done before. If we haven't done work in that area for a while—for example we are about to start a project working with older people in care homes and addressing issues such as dementia—we look to other sources. We reference research on dementia and creative activities that's currently out there, and research the need through a lot of consultation.' To inform this work on ageing, for example, the team has been looking at resources available online from the cross-council **New Dynamics of Ageing** research programme, amongst other sources.

The Mental Health Creative Support Service is commissioned based on the agreement that a number of key outcomes will be met around increasing availability and awareness of activities, and widening access. These outcomes are demonstrated by the delivery of certain tangible services, including a range of taster sessions, supporting the development of two new groups each year as co-facilitated groups and five as independent progression groups, and delivering five celebration events each year. Outcomes specified by B&NES include participants feeling able to express their issues through different art forms, and peer tutors feeling encouraged and empowered to support their own groups. For B&NES, self-observation in this way by participants and peer tutors is evidence enough.

Commissioners are interested in how many groups the project has supported, and how many move towards independence—although Basil is clear that the end of a group is not necessarily a negative outcome. *'We see activities as much more than just a six-week course. But some groups have a natural life to them. They'll meet for a year, then say, 'OK, that's it. We've got what we want out of it'. Part of the remit is to make sure groups end in a good way. We look at what happens to them—do members go onto other things, like education?'*

In 2012/13, Creativity Works delivered ten creative projects across B&NES to more than 100 people, and held seven events that reached more than 570 people. It also supported six creative peer-support groups, five of which were newly developed during this financial year. As well as these numerical outputs, Creativity Works collects subjective feedback from participants in the groups; its 2012/13 report into the Mental Health Creative Support Service claims 96% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of the service.

Anecdotal feedback in the report from group participants supports the art-led approach: *'I wouldn't go to a group where there was a specific label of mental health. I don't want to be labelled,'* says one; *'I come to this group because it's an art group,'* agrees another. Another explains that *'doing something with your hands takes off the pressure. It's therapeutic without feeling like therapy.'* One participant describes how the service *'has helped letting go of the cognitive and thoughts and coming back to sensations and feelings.'*

'Commissioners hear about our results regularly not just from us,' says Philippa. *'We empower the people we work with to tell their stories through events, publications and exhibitions of the work they create.'* With this approach, co-production really does run right through every stage of the project—right down to its final evaluation.

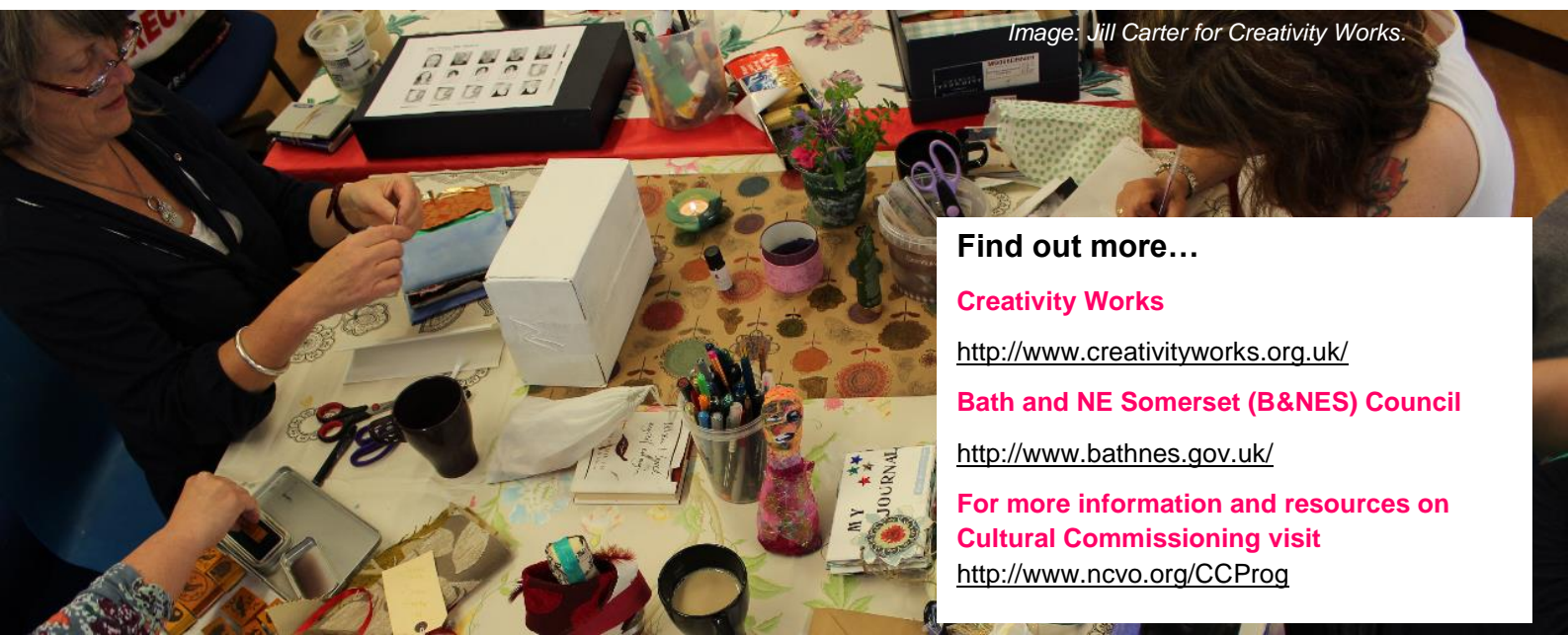


Image: Jill Carter for Creativity Works.

Find out more...

Creativity Works

<http://www.creativityworks.org.uk/>

Bath and NE Somerset (B&NES) Council

<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/>

For more information and resources on Cultural Commissioning visit

<http://www.ncvo.org/CCProg>