

Arts and Minds

'Inspired By...' Project delivered by Louise Jensen 2021-22



Inspired by ... was an Arts project engaging participants in group visits, discussion and artmaking activities to explore some of Cardiff's cultural venues and spaces, whilst focussing on the question of... what does it mean to be inspired?

It aimed to promote the wellbeing of those involved through meaningful connection, and the exploration of relevant creative processes in a gentle, inclusive and welcoming environment.

Who was involved in your project?

4Winds Mental Health Resource Centre
National Museum, Cardiff
Grange Gardens Bowls Pavilion
Arts for Health and Wellbeing Team, Cardiff & Vale Health Charity

Who were the participants ?

Adults with mental health issues and many also with long term health conditions. Participants were referred through the 4Winds Mental Health Resource Centre, and from local GP practices.

Outputs

The project delivered 16 sessions over a period of 7 months in 3 blocks of 5 sessions Nov-Jan 2021, Feb-March 2022 and April-May 2022 :

- Two visits to the Cardiff National Museums of Wales,
- 2 zoom meetings,
- 10 art sessions in two community venues in Grangetown, the Grangetown Hub and the Grange Gardens Bowls pavilion,
- a visit to the Cardiff Bay Wetlands
- a visit to Llandough Hospital Hearth gallery.

25 people, referred by the 4Winds Mental Health Resource between November 2021 and June 2022, have accessed at least one of the art sessions offered, with most attending 2 or more.

A core group of 12 individuals, attended between 3-14 sessions each over the duration of the project.

Outcomes and feedback from participants

Inspired by .. People

In the first set of sessions we visited Cardiff's National Museum 'Rules of Art' exhibition (in particular the part of the exhibition related to portraiture) and enjoyed some rich discussions around people's response to the different works on display. We followed the visit up with an exploration of our own making of a portrait (exploring collage and matchbox portraits).



For some the visit to the gallery, and the follow up we engaged in, was a first time experience.

'I've achieved something that I've never done before and it's such a pleasure. I feel safe I'm learning I feel more confident going to art gallery's it has definitely sparked my interest there'

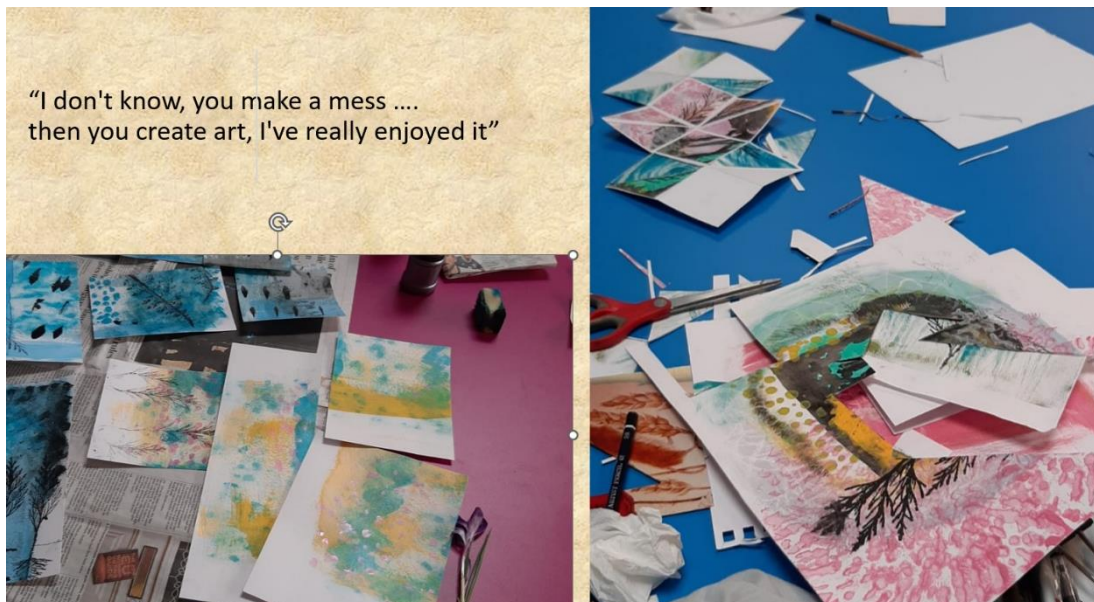
At this time we were just coming back out of the third lockdown and beginning to tentatively enjoy the ability to visit indoor spaces together. For 6 of the participants it was the first time they had been out amongst others since March 2020



Inspired by.. Nature

For the second block we visited the Natural History section of the Museum and looked particularly at fractals and patterns in nature. Our follow up creative work involved some playful exploring with acrylics and printmaking creating greetings cards and expanding books.

Some of the comments people have made, reflect the part the project is playing, both for their wellbeing and for their enjoyment of the creative process





‘My anxiety has been bad recently, but in spite of this I've just got on with preparing for the session at home. It helped because the process was not overwhelming, I could find patterns and colours, it was very accessible and very relaxing. I could do it without obsessing too much. It was a tonic, I'm feeling joy rather than feeling ‘I can't do life’

‘ It's like being given the tools and your hand is held throughout it, someone is supporting you . I've really enjoyed this’

Inspired by...This Place

For our third set of sessions we explored being inspired by a sense of ‘This Place’, with our first meeting being a visit to the Wetlands in Cardiff Bay.

4Winds once again emailed all of its registered members and interested contacts, and we welcomed five new participants, as well as some of those who had been previously involved.

‘ it helped to do something constructive and I particularly enjoyed writing the poem. As I do not usually socialise with others I found it boosted my confidence to be among others’ Participant



A digital was produced as part of the exhibition. Click link to view [A Wetlands Anthology](#)

The Exhibition

A further 3 sessions explored poetry, collage and Dioramas and participants built on the previous three project blocks, Nov- May, to create an art exhibition, 'Arts and Minds' which was displayed at The Hearth Gallery, University Hospital Llandough, running from June 14th to July 25th.



'We had a very positive response to the exhibition from our patients, staff and visitors. The artwork made by the group shows a wide range of skills and interesting making processes, demonstrating different ways of creating art to the viewers, and showing how they can be inspired by many different aspects of their life.'

Magda Lackowska,
Hearth Gallery Co-ordinator



The feeder, Cardiff Castle Grounds
Mid-town hum, a mirror shines,
Lighted leaf, trees, twisted tines.
Breath space, spiralled mind unwinds.
Participant , (Englyn- Welsh Haiku)

Project Outcomes

Partnership with 4Winds

The partnership with 4Winds worked very well, with workshop- based conversations feeding in constructively to the work of 4Winds and vice versa.

Workshop sessions were attended and supported by 4Winds staff member, Nina, who provided support for participants and the artist, helping to identify further support that 4 Winds could offer participants.

The ability of 4Winds to encourage people to attend at the point when they are in need but also ready to be involved in participatory art, was a key element to the success of the project.

'Over the weeks people opened up about their mental health. Many of the participants shared their past experiences of poor mental health and how the encouragement to take up creative activities was having a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing. Some people talked about how the sessions had inspired them to start practicing art/creative work after a long break due to ill-health, others talked about how inspiring it was to learn a new skill; everyone seemed to benefit greatly which was lovely' Nina.

Susan, the 4Winds Manager says:

‘We were delighted to be part of this Inspired By project. Enthusiasm for the project and feedback from participants has been excellent; testament to the hard work that has gone in to planning such interesting and welcoming sessions with a broad range of creative processes covered. I met with members of the group to visit the exhibition at the Hearth Gallery, Llandough Hospital. I was bowled over by the quality of the work and the way it was presented. It was lovely to be there with some of the people who had created the work and witness the sense of pride and satisfaction at the exhibition. An extremely worthwhile project with lovely outcomes. We look forward to exploring future development opportunities with Louise and funding partners.

It is a recommendation from this project that support for individuals be continued through mentorship to further enhance individual’s growing confidence, improved self-esteem and positive, uplifted mood as a result of engagement through the Arts and Minds creative arts initiative.

The spaces

The Bowls pavilion is a beautiful space to work in, although there have been some booking issues. The project ran in 3 parts, and we found we needed to be flexible, particularly due to staff illness /post pandemic restrictions.

The Pavilion sits at the heart of a multi-cultural community in Cardiff, and the presence of artists and workshops at the centre generated interest from other users in the space. The project has helped to build connections through the community by supporting regular art sessions.

In addition to the relaxing indoor/outdoor space of the Pavilion, it is to be noted that the visits, whether to the museum or to the Wetlands, were all well received and very much enjoyed by the participants. These new spaces offered an inspiring starting point for participants, extending their experiences and horizons and helping to build confidence.

As restrictions have eased, The 4Winds Mental Health Resource are able to offer workshop space at their centre, which is located a short distance from the Grange Bowls Pavilion, establishing a firm link between the two venues for future sustainable development of the project.

An appetite for arts activities

The majority of participants were interested in continuing to engage in more arts-based creative activities, some identifying specific activities such as drawing, printmaking and creative writing as possible activities to try.

There is also an appetite among participants to engage with a number of artists and art workshops through The Stiwdio Arts project, to provide a thematically based arts programme with a variety of starting points including:

Ceramics, Storytelling, Poetry, Drawing, Illustration and Lino printing, with the aim of supporting the learning of new skills, building confidence, providing a space for social interaction, creative conversations and shared experiences

Zoom

Although initially a good stand-by, during the second half of the project zoom meetings were less favoured by the participants, with in- person sessions being more well attended. In person sessions built on the opportunity for participants to leave their homes, to gain a weekly focus, a new interest and an opportunity to meet up with others in a gentle, safe environment.

The 4Winds resource centre, continued to offer online support, so a hybrid delivery approach to art sessions / support groups developed by the project partners, created a versatile, adaptable arts initiative in support of mental health and wellbeing.

Project Potential

Groups at the Pavilion

The Grange Gardens Bowls Pavilion has been a very beneficial space to work in and the hope is that some other groups currently meeting in that space might also benefit in being offered arts workshops. There is currently a dialogue with Ali Abdi, the Cardiff University Community Gateways Partnership Manager who has strong links with the community of Grangetown, and involved in many of the community events in the Grange Bowls Pavilion. Early discussions have touched on the idea of an arts project in connection with the 'Youth Forum' for mental health and wellbeing, and how best to maximise accessibility and inclusivity if such an initiative were able to go ahead.

New Artists and new participants

Throughout the duration of the project 4Winds Mental Health Resource Service received referrals (for anyone over the age of 16) from a wide range of community organisations, GP practices and Community Mental Health Teams, creating a link for arts on prescription through the opportunities provided by the Arts and Minds project.

In addition, the project attracted artists with lived experience to firstly experience the sessions, but to also gain knowledge, skills and confidence for possible art workshop delivery of their own.

Recommendations Summary

The project has helped establish referral pathways for arts on prescription in support of mental health and wellbeing, and the recommendation is to build upon this pathway through future projects.

Connections with the local community are being established, with opportunities to invite local groups such as the Youth Forum based in the Grange Gardens Pavilion to engage in the arts to creatively improve mental health and wellbeing, and these are recommended to be supported

The unique project approach is to create gentle, non-intrusive, supportive sessions which quietly build confidence, art skills, and self-esteem, helping to support recovery and wellbeing through self-expression alongside other guidance provided by 4Winds. Personal storytelling emerges through shared discussion in a supportive, non-judgemental space. The recommendation is to maintain this gentle project approach for vulnerable, marginalised community members.

Thank you to the Baring Foundation and Arts Council Wales, staff at the Grange Gardens Bowls Pavilion, the 4 Winds Mental Health Resource and to the Arts for Health and Wellbeing Team in CAVUHB, whose support for the project and for the subsequent exhibition was invaluable.

Throughout the weeks of the project, many of the participants shared stories about their mental health, their own connection to the art making and its power to help them in recovering and maintaining their wellbeing. There was a growing connection between members of the group as support and advice was shared freely between us. It was a privilege to be part of the group and to see the work that emerged from our sessions. I was inspired at every step of the way to see what people made, and offered so generously to the project.

Louise Jensen, Arts in Health Practitioner, Stiwdio Arts Project, August 2022