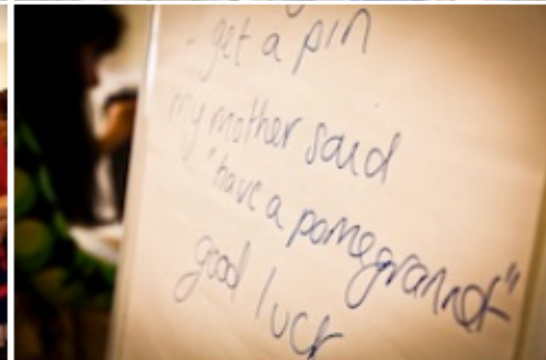
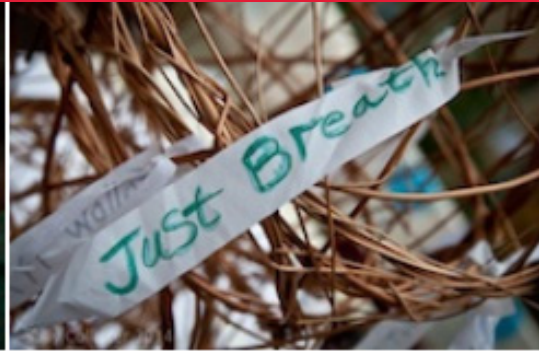


creativity works
a creative organisation
working with local partners to
develop digital studios
case study



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About the NAACJ case study series

One of the key threads running through the work of the National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice is the promotion of good practice within the arts and criminal justice sector. We want to encourage excellence amongst organisations and individuals working in this area, and ensure that our work continually encourages and celebrates good practice. To address this, we run a professional mentoring scheme, which expands opportunities for our members to develop professional skills and knowledge in the field of arts and criminal justice through a one to one mentoring relationship, and we continually update our online Evidence Library, which houses the key research and evaluation documents on the impact of arts-based projects, programmes and interventions within the Criminal Justice System.

On top of this, we want to explore and share some of the excellent work already happening in the sector on a more detailed level. We focus on interesting collaborations happening between arts organisations and criminal justice organisations, exploring how they work together and the impact this has on participants and the process of rehabilitation.

Partner settings engaged actively with the process by placing a support worker alongside the Networks artist, supporting spaces of informed understanding and safety alongside new ideas and skills. Cultural partners Arnolfini, the Pot Stop, Bristol Museums Partnership and Light Box enabled connections to the city's culture. The project supported participants to learn informally (non-accredited) through creative processes facilitated by professional socially engaged artists, with the support of health professionals in the context of small groups and peer support.

A series of digital studios was central to each course, creating connections and communication between the groups and the city's culture, through the women's artwork, and this has developed in to the Re|Source.

Digital Outcomes

The Re|Source is an online platform and virtual creative studio which works in tandem with a creative engagement programme. It has been developed collaboratively by professional artists and participants from the Networks courses and supports:

- Digital inclusion
- User-led work (technology adapted to users' feedback)
- Peer support (enabling groups to support themselves)
- Aesthetic Confidence (quality of creative work)
- Community Development

The studio provides an online space for sharing. It works by allowing women to work in stages; firstly they upload photos of their activities and artworks and inspiration from elsewhere (a bit like Pinterest), they are then able to comment on their own and others artwork, build a visual narrative and document their creative progress and process. Secondly they open up their virtual studio to women on other courses to safely create shared creative space across sites. Finally they can choose to share with a wider public audience or with professionals in their lives.

Recently the Re|Source has been highly commended by winning the Positive Practice in Mental Health Awards 2014, in the Arts and CJS section and being highly commended at the Lankelly Chase and Lemos and Crane Digital Empowerment Awards.

Outcomes

Developing good relationships

The project's work is rooted in partnership-building; creating broader community structures across different contexts by working through an increased understanding of different approaches and needs.

All partners voiced the successes of their work with Creativity Works and wanted to continue working in collaboration. The following is feedback from some of the partners.

- Two settings highlighted the distinct value of Creativity Works socially-engaged professional artists as being beyond that of craft-based artists because of the distinctive set of facilitation skills they have for working with this client group as well as their engagement with the community through their knowledge of contemporary art (highlighted by all partners).
- A further two settings highlighted that Creativity Works artists are not art-therapists and therefore the value they bring is working with creativity outside of an agenda or therapeutic model – that they work with the integral value of the creative process for the individual's own discovery and recovery.
- Four settings recognised that Creativity Works artists create engagement with the participants through initially bringing cultural artefacts to them, engaging them through this stimulus – which creates an emotional response and discussion between groups, furthering participants' engagement in their own creative development and responses

to their own and other's original artwork and through engaging them with the city and cultural community as 'art consumers'

Centrality of user voice and co-production

As the women became more confident in their own artwork, they became more likely to give voice to their opinions of others artwork. When their work was seen by others, they became more confident in their own artwork.

As the women became confident in using the Re|source they began to support each other in the following ways:

- Making comments on their own and each other's work, which in turn developed their communication skills.
- As each group had their own on-line studio it reinforced a sense of group ownership and community, through both the physical space of making but also the digital presentation of that process.
- Testing and building the technology together (and using print outs for women in prison unable to access computers) ensured that the whole process was co-designed by the women themselves. As they suggested tweaks, easier usability suggestions and potential uses of the Re|Source, the IT Mediator and technologist acted on these and built them in to the development.

Impact

Participants have used the resource to manage a peer support group, go on to an arts foundation course and collectively curate an exhibition at the Arnolfini. The women told who took part told Creativity Works that the project offered:

- Creative self-expression
- Development of communication skills
- Nurturing and developing relationships [with family, friends, staff]
- Being a part of the cultural lives of their communities
- Developing autonomy and confidence in making decisions about their pathways of recovery
- Developing skills in managing projects

Quotes from participants and staff

Participant voices

Did you get what you wanted from the course?

*"Yes, a sense of achievement, it made me feel valued and made me realise my creativity extends far past what realised I was capable of. It's made me see if I'm given opportunities I can go far, my capabilities go far wider than I ever thought and that's made me feel really good. I'm so proud of my f***** bowl!" - Participant.*

"I got what I wanted definitely – I didn't think about what was in it for me apart from stretching my imagination, it's given me a process where I think now I'm going to carry on being creative; I'm going to fill that gap. Everything we've done here on this course is something I've never really done before. I can't remember having ever done art – maybe with my son at primary school, but not really anything else." – Participant.

Which parts of the course did you think worked best?

"Being in a group with women; it was really safe and peaceful more than anything. The environment was calm and safe." – Participant.

How did you find using the online studio?

"I didn't even try to do that myself because I'm really quite computer illiterate but once I was shown how to do it, I found it really good and enjoyed that part of the course. Making comments and viewing others work was really interesting. I'm definitely going to try getting back onto the [virtual] studio and make more comments, I really want to make more and try and upload more images. Up until now I didn't have the time; it takes quite a lot of time to learn those skills." - **Participant**

Partner Settings

"It is such a good model, it's so important to offer clients different ways of understanding themselves, of finding an identity, and finding that sense of self which they lose through mental health and drugs. There is a need." **Bristol Drugs Project**

"Having artists invest in them as individual's long term, is validating for them and challenges their previous experiences of others abandoning them or not caring. This is very important for the women's sense of self and recovery and adds to our philosophy of care". **Teign Ward**

"The course has given the participants a real sense of validation and pride. There has been a palpable atmosphere of relaxed engagement and a belief that they can learn new skills and successfully achieve good results." **One25**

"It's different ... It gets them doing things off the wing. The benefits of someone coming in from outside, getting a touch of reality. They see us every day. So, providing a bit of the outside world. If you had a space it could be women from all over the prison – there are quite a few people who aren't doing education who could benefit; especially someone with self-harming behaviour and anxiety." **HMP Eastwood Park**

Cultural organisations

"It has directly fed into our key aims around audience development. It's really made me think about how to introduce exhibitions to diverse groups and how to think about the whole idea about people feeling welcome in this building. We are working on this, but it still needs a lot of work." **Arnolfini**

IT Mediator:

"In this role I worked with participants as we explored the possibilities of using the digital interface and experimented with putting the creative work, physically produced during art sessions, up on the virtual studio space. I think it was tremendously useful that we were testing this technology together and that there was a sense we were building the digital resource collaboratively. For example participants suggested a selection of emoticons they would like to use to tag their own art work and/or 'like' the work of others such as Thumbs Up or Heart icons. These suggestions were then acted upon and implemented by the Developer Dane Watkins for participants to use in the next session."

"It's made me see if I'm given opportunities I can go far, my capabilities go far wider than I ever thought and that's made me feel really good. I'm so proud of my f** bowl."***

Challenges and solutions

Despite the overwhelming success of the project, there were of course challenges faced throughout its duration. These are outlined below, along with their solutions.

- Limitations to internet access in the secure environments of Teign ward and Eastwood Park prison meant there was limited capacity to connect these groups with the other digital communities in Networks. However artists uploaded images on the women's' behalf so they did have their own virtual studio, and showed them print outs which they were pleased to see. A further positive outcome was that the prisoners were able to show their work to friends and families by sending them the link.
- As participants progressed, it was difficult to represent the project in public spaces (flyers, exhibitions) in a way which honoured and yet identified some of the project's purposes; the term 'vulnerable' evoked anger for example, so this was then omitted. The emphasis on the CJS aspect of the project is difficult to distinguish from the mental health needs of participants, although the two are often strongly related.
- Securing the continuation of the project was not possible during its lifetime. Partners were unable to contribute to further funding and at this time the outcomes of any funding bids are unknown. They are still scoping and applying for funds to continue this valuable work in an era of cutbacks in education and creativity within the system itself.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Creativity Works is going to try and develop and foster relationships with Working Links- Tier One Providers for the South West in the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. They feel this is much needed to support community rehabilitation and 'through the gate' services as it can be started in prison to chart learning and skills and subsequently used in the wider community to seek employment and further volunteering or community opportunities.

Additionally, they have had promising conversations with OLASS (Offender Learning and Skills Service) around working closely alongside the Virtual Campus Champions within Leyhill Open Prison, and are developing locally led consortia and making their case to be funded in the future. They will be attending some Virtual Campus Developer Forums for Third Party Submitted Content and are through to Stage 2 of Nominet Trust Funding.

Finally, they are going to continue to seek additional funding from previous and new funders to deliver the creative activity to populate and enhance the development of the digital tool created as part of the project.

For more information, you can visit the Creativity Works website by [clicking here](#).



Case study written by Kate Davey, 2015
National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice

With thanks to Creativity Works, and their funding portfolio derived from public sector commissions and contracts, charitable trusts and fundraising activity. They are currently a National Portfolio Organisation of the Arts Council England, for the second time running and are commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council to deliver the Mental Health Creative Support Service.

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