



Dudley MIND

Contact:

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Manager

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Artists:

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PRIMARY OUTCOME

FOR DUDLEY MIND:

To develop health and arts sector awareness of the value of using the arts to engage with communities

OTHER OUTCOMES

FOR THE PROJECT:

Access communities in the Black Country

Engage and involve participants in ongoing activity

Develop confidence among participants

Dudley MIND is a charity providing a mental health support service, funded by Dudley NHS Primary Care Trust.

People can be referred to the service in a number of ways. Services include therapeutic and social day activities, evening and weekend drop in sessions and outreach support in the community.

The project was undertaken with a group of ten service users who regularly attend a weekly

drop-in centre in order to re-learn skills which have been neglected as a result of personal illness.

There were slightly more females in the group and ages ranged from 31 to 60+. Everyone in the group classed themselves as 'White British'. The *What is Happiness?* workshops were held at the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, over four consecutive Fridays: 31st July, 7th, 17th and 21st August 2009. The group met for an hour each time.

What is Happiness?

Attendance and Initial Response

All service users attended the sessions and were keen to take part. The support workers commented that the sessions were "*fantastic*" and that the participants enjoyed them very much, every week looking

forward to the next one. All the monitoring forms received rated the delivery and quality of the activity and their experience overall as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. The majority had not taken part in an activity like this before and all said they would take part in an activity like this again.

The Process

The artists made a visit in their own time, the week before the first session to introduce themselves, talk about the project and check out the space. This contributed to a feeling of trust and familiarity with the Service Users, and also enabled the artists to undertake some preparatory work, bringing a range of diverse images relating to those things the group had said made them happy. Service users said that they liked the artists, the way sessions were managed and the processes used - particularly welcoming opportunities to discuss ideas and to choose designs from a selection. Due to the fact that they were working from a hired space, the artists felt a little limited with the techniques that they were able to use. Methods included the use of individual ink stamps to decorate and an overhead projector to transfer images onto their houses.

The artists said that they enjoyed working with the group and that the support staff and the local authority Arts Officer were extremely helpful. They noted that the group were:

“... supportive towards one another”

and seemed genuinely interested in the process. For example, at one session a participant didn't seem to want to work on his house, preferring to sit at a table, so

other group members helped transfer a picture on to his house for him.

Support workers mentioned that group members talked about the activity during the week in between sessions and seemed pleased with what they had achieved. One participant (who had seemed withdrawn from the session) asked if he could take the practice ink stamp he had made home to show his parents.

The houses were exhibited at a civic open day at Dove House, where the group meet regularly (at Bushy Fields Hospital in Dudley). This was clearly an important event for the Service Users which did much to foster pride in their achievements. It was opened by the Lord Mayor, prizes were awarded for work and many staff and senior managers attended. In addition to this, the group received more high profile recognition of their efforts by contributing to a BBC Video Nation documentary as part of the 'Headroom' campaign. The final film was shown as part of the BBC's coverage of World Mental Health Day on large screens across the East Midlands.



Challenges

One participant removed himself from the activity after week one, preferring to sketch on his own, which he seemed to really enjoy. The artists saw the importance of not pushing him and accepted that he would not finish his house.

Some members of the group became frustrated with drawing as their moods fluctuated, but a key support worker pointed out this was nothing to do with the sessions, which the artists found reassuring. This worker left for university part way through the workshops, and his support was very much missed.

Other issues for the group were flexible use of space, storage and the ability to work on the houses in between sessions, as the group was not working in its own centre.



Benefits

The participant who preferred to draw on his own started talking about his sister who is an artist; something the staff had not known before this and which gave them an important insight into his background. The artists also felt that the fact that he was participating in an art activity was very positive, and he spoke to them about his desire for continuing with his drawing after the project ended. The artists also observed that other participants:

“...have increased in confidence and that they have been, for the most part, working together well as a team”.

The Day Services Manager felt that the project had helped people remember things and they had voiced their likes and dislikes through discussions around history and storytelling.

Conclusion

The group had never used professional artists before, and the Day Services Manager felt that the artists' relationship with them was crucial to the success of the project. She commented that the service users were encouraged to work in a team (something which they do not usually do during activities), as well as using their own initiative:

"It was something totally different...the scale of it was unique"

The Day Services Manager has already spoken to the local authority Arts Officer about the possibility of engaging artists to work with service users across all of their venues. She feels the pride this project gave people has encouraged them to take the important next step on their road to recovery.

