

**Contact:**

Michaela Wilson, Unit
Manager

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Artists:

Karl Greenwood, Adrienne
Frances and Chloe Brown

**PRIMARY OUTCOME
FOR FOUNTAIN
COURT:**

**Develop confidence
among participants**

**OTHER OUTCOMES
FOR THE PROJECT:**

Access communities in
the Black Country

Engage and involve
participants in ongoing
activity

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

Fountain Court Residential Unit

The workshop programme was developed with Sandwell Third Age Arts who specialise in using the arts to improve wellbeing and enrich the quality of life of elders with mental health needs. Service Users living at Fountain Court Residential Unit have moderate to advanced dementia.

16 service users live at Fountain Court. The staff encouraged those people they felt would particularly benefit, to join in the workshops, which took place on four consecutive weeks from 9th – 30th June 2009.

Each session lasted an hour. The work was included in the final exhibition at The Public and the artists returned to Fountain Court for a final celebration on 3rd November, to show staff and service users their houses.



What is Happiness?

Attendance and Initial Response

Before the workshop programme started the Unit Manager (Michaela Wilson) and Assistant Manager attended a planning meeting. Michaela felt that this meeting was essential. She felt they got to understand a bit more about the project and had the opportunity to have a taster of the types of activities their

service users would be involved in. It meant that they could also make suggestions about things that would and wouldn't work. Their advice to the artists was to keep things as simple as possible. Michaela remembered that she left the session feeling positive about the workshop programme and the theme. She was committed to make the project work and allocated two members of staff to each workshop to support the artists, including Joanne Porter.

Both Michaela and Joanne thought the service users enjoyed the workshops and talked enthusiastically about the programme. They felt the sessions were very successful at getting people to talk. Some of the participants were usually very quiet, not having a lot to say:

"It's a big thing to get people talking, the workshops encouraged people to think about happy memories and their past lives it made them happy"

Joanne Porter

The Process

The Support Workers felt the artists quickly adapted their sessions to involve their service users in a range of creative activities. This included working with people to collect pictures and images that were important to them and stick them in their own journal. The service users have different levels of concentration and this was an effective way of getting them involved in talking about the theme. Both Michaela and Joanne felt that working together as a group to talk and share memories about things that made them happy in the past was a very positive experience for all participants.

Challenges

Michaela was pleased to be able to exhibit the work of the service users but commented:

"It's important that you don't miss groups like us out of an arts projects just because the end product might not be as good as others, the experience for our service users is the most important thing"

Although a smaller group of service users participated in every workshop, others benefited from the 'events' - seeing and meeting the artists and talking about what was happening.

Some of the group talked about things the staff had never heard before, enabling their carers to understand more about their lives and the things that are important to them. In the final session the service users' ideas and pictures were combined together:

"We saw all our residents' memories put together to make a Happiness House and this was great for them....the project was a very positive experience for all involved."

The homes created by the service users were shown in the final exhibition at The Public. They were returned to Fountain Court and were exhibited for all the service users to see at their 2009 Christmas Show. This was also an opportunity for staff and service users to see the work from other Units across Sandwell.



Benefits

The workshops had a number of positive outcomes for service users and staff.

Joanne commented after the second session that service users had *“enjoyed the workshop and it had a positive effect on their mood”*. After the programme ended she said: *“the project did what it said it would do...make people happy”*.

Staff also benefited from participating. They gained confidence in using different

ways of starting and developing a conversation with their service users. After the project the staff team were keen to develop this



work and have purchased a set of large format picture books on a variety of themes. Joanne and other staff have also

successfully taken the lead in developing a life history story book for each of the service users, passing on the

confidence they have gained from the project to others:

“Activities are very important here they enable people to feel valued and worthy. The happiness theme enabled

us to see what can be done with a simple question: what makes you happy?”

Michaela Wilson

Conclusion

Staff at Fountain Court previously had experience of working with Sandwell Third Age Arts on a very successful project which involved the residents transforming part of the Unit into a pub. Michaela felt that artists working with people with dementia need to *“think out of the box”* and engage with service users to make sure they are relaxed and feel able to fully participate in the creative activities. She went on to explain that some service users feel concerned and anxious about meeting new people. Others might say they don't want to join in but are really afraid they might not do a good enough job.

The artists felt it was really important to have some knowledge and understanding about each of the service users and valued the time they spent with the staff before they ran the workshops.



Michaela felt that the artists involved in the project rose to the challenge of working with people with dementia:

"It can be frightening for artists working with our service users, people make strange connections and can use very strong language but it's really important that our service users get the chance to participate in an arts project and don't miss out"

