



Now, Voyager: Run by Start in Manchester
Part of Manchester Mental health and Social Care Trust

Download the full evaluation at

<http://www.startmc.org.uk/exhibitions/voyager.shtml>

Summary

Now, Voyager is an action research project run by Start in Manchester to develop the staff team's understanding of their practice, in arts for mental health interventions, and to help service users towards recovery.

The project consisted of two courses of art and art appreciation workshops, run in partnership with a mainstream gallery – Manchester University's Whitworth Art Gallery (WAG). These workshops were carefully structured to promote critical thinking, on the premise that critical reflection would help to build emotional literacy and self-management around illness.

The service users' reactions to the courses were scrutinised through detailed feedback. The whole project was evaluated in detail, with reference to external research. The story of the course and the research was then presented as a visual arts exhibition for the public, at the partnership gallery's premises. The idea behind this was to build better awareness of mental health issues for the gallery and the public, to improve social inclusion in the local community, and to encourage better strategies among the public for managing their own mental health.

Background

Statistical evidence shows that Manchester has a particularly high incidence of mental illness. Manchester's services, delivered through MMHSCT, strive to offer an effective, diverse and individually tailored set of treatments that include, amongst others, arts interventions by qualified specialist artists, through their well-regarded service Start in Manchester.

Start has been offering specialised interventions for 20 years, and has done much to contribute to the recognition of its field across a range of sectors.

Like many health workers, the Start team is well aware that a stigma exists towards people with mental health needs. We are also aware that, while there

is good anecdotal evidence for the efficacy of art as a mental health intervention, there is still patchy understanding of how and why benefits occur.

At Start we have been evaluating our work in detail for seven years, and we were keen to try a piece of 'action research' that would help us uncover more about the effects of art on emotion and health.

Start is situated very close to what has become termed the Art Corridor of Oxford Road. Here, along with the Whitworth Art Gallery (WAG), the Manchester Museum, and the Royal Northern College of Music, are Manchester's two main University sites as well. It made great sense to us to team up with a local partner from the cultural sector to explore art, health and social inclusion. The Whitworth Art Gallery was interested in developing this theme with us, and we have now been working together for three years on this project. WAG is on main bus routes and attracts a high number of visitors from a wide range of backgrounds, so it also provided a useful platform for our social inclusion and health messages.

Key issues/problems

The project's main themes were:

- contributing to recovery programmes: for Start service users: building critical reflection and emotional literacy skills, improving confidence and changing perceptions of self and others – these outcomes to be obtained through improving art and art appreciation skills
- practice development for key staff involved in the project
- building an evidence base for Start's work : with an effective evidence base the field may be developed nationally to become a choice of treatment available to more people in the mental health system
- encouraging the public to use creative activity to care for their own mental health more effectively
- tackling stigma through educating the public about mental health issues
- building social inclusion
- attracting new audience groups into WAG
- bringing diverse partners together to more effectively build cross-sectoral change

What we did

- Start set up a partnership with WAG to deliver an innovative project that would tackle these key themes
- Start and WAG devised a learning programme for Start service users
- the learning programme was delivered by Start and WAG staff working together
- feedback mechanisms were devised and used to establish personal developments felt by project participants

- learning programme delivered a second time to a different set of students with less experience, to test out whether the ‘model’ would work for others
- feedback established the model as successful
- feedback analysed, external referencing carried out, evaluation produced
- project registered as an NHS Live project
- exhibition planned and produced in partnership with WAG, including production of interpretive video film, made in partnership with Salford University’s media Studies Department
- public health information leaflet produced, encouraging the public to get involved in creative activity to protect and improve their mental well-being
- new projects being developed with two other art galleries as a result of this project

In piloting a scheme of this nature, Start, on behalf of MMHSCT, was following recommendations for best practice around mental health promotion, and around building routes towards social inclusion and recovery out of the heart of specialist mental health services. We have also followed best practice guidelines in resourcing and strengthening the project through external partnerships, which allowed us to achieve much more, and in a much wider arena, than if we had worked alone.

Key outcomes

- analysis of service user feedback shows that 100 per cent of project participants felt some benefits to emotional literacy and self-expression, 70 per cent reported continuing gains in confidence and changes in self-perceptions, 50 per cent reported better anxiety – management levels
- Start has been able to build a better understanding of what constitutes best practice
- Start has contributed to the national evidence base for arts and mental health by publishing a detailed and externally referenced evaluation of the project See this at www.startmc.org.uk/exhibitions/voyager
- Start has produced a public health information leaflet to help with Manchester’s general mental healthcare
- WAG has explored a major public health and information theme, a new use of their resource base
- as a result of the success of this project, Start has been offered further opportunities for working with local galleries. This will open up employment training possibilities for our service users
- Start has registered Now, Voyager as an NHS Live project. The exhibition itself was launched by Aidan Halligan, Director of Clinical Governance for the NHS, who registered strong encouragement for the development of the arts and mental health field. This is raising the profile of Start’s work and of this professional field

Resources

- The overall timescale of the project, including planning, was three years. The project was resourced principally by Start in terms of materials, although WAG contributed significantly to the exhibition budget, launch costs and staffing of the project. The budget was in excess of £4000.
- Staffing needs were high due to the intensive nature of the support required. Start provided specialist arts input whilst WAG provided education and curatorial staff. The whole project was principally managed by Start, although a curator from WAG played an important role in helping Start to put the final exhibition together. WAG publicity staff helped MMHSCT publicity staff to publicise the exhibition successfully

Who was involved?

Start in Manchester, is an award-winning arts and mental health project working with people with severe and enduring mental health needs. As one of the leading representatives in its emergent professional field, its team has followed exemplary NHS practice in creating strong internal governance and standards of care, based on a sound evidence-base that Start itself has done much to build. The Start team continuously innovates around existing practice to discover more about how and why art is such a significant benefit to mental wellbeing, and how it can be used most effectively to build recovery, maintain mental health and open doors to employment.

Now, Voyager is one of its many projects, closely evaluated, that examines structured arts interventions for mental health by qualified specialists. The whole Start team was involved in this project.

We worked with the following partners:

- Manchester University's Whitworth Art Gallery (to create and deliver the project and mount the exhibition)
- Salford University Media Studies Department (to create an educational video about creativity and mental health that accompanies the exhibition)
- Salford University Occupational Therapy Department (supported the creation of the video)
- Manchester Public Health Promotion Service (to create a public health information leaflet 'Do something creative, it's good for your mental health'. This will go out around Manchester, across GP surgeries, libraries and other community venues. As far as we know, this leaflet is a first for the region, and we hope will promote better health by encouraging creative self-care and preventative approaches amongst the public, reducing incidences of mental illness

Barriers and how they were overcome

Our principle barriers to overcome were these:

- the health of the participants, and the difficulties they have attending Start sessions on a regular basis could have hindered full participation – overcome through staff support
- some participants have literacy issues, others have difficulties articulating thoughts and feelings – this could have affected accuracy of feedback – overcome by staff support
- the type of intervention and exhibition we were aiming at was a completely new experience for our partners at the Whitworth Art Gallery. There was potential for a clash of cultures – overcome through good partner communications
- costs – overcome through partners sharing some expenses
- protracted timescale of the whole project could have meant it becoming stale – overcome by working to keep the project fresh and current during its 'dormant' periods
- presenting a really engaging art exhibition of process (rather than product) is a challenge. Overcome through partners working together to design and market the show well. Also use of our website as a marketing and communication tool was significant, as was the use of a video to enhance the overall communication package of the exhibition
- a small staff team at Start, making the project vulnerable to external pressures – overcome through contingency planning and delegation

Critical success factors

The main factors contributing to successful outcomes were:

- intensive staffing levels
- format of learning programme, mixing critical and practical skills with discussion and opinion sharing
- inclusive setting
- mixed ability group
- effective feedback mechanisms
- staff had high expectations of service users, who rose to this challenge
- time allowed for ongoing monitoring of programme
- time allowed for detailed project evaluation
- an effective partnership with clear roles and responsibilities across the partner members
- the right skills mix within the team
- the commitment from team members to take on challenging new work
- enthusiasm of project participants

- open attitude of hosting organisation (WAG)
- celebratory attitudes towards achievements of project participants by all concerned
- ownership of project by project participants

How we would do it better

- We would consider using a validated skills/self-development measure to evidence health outcomes
- We would consider working in alliance with a clinician
- We would negotiate the setting up of longer term group activities at a partner gallery as part of the initial project brief
- We would incorporate public information leaflets and web-based information as an integral part of the project rather than an add on at the final stages
- We would be clearer about how we would implement practice changes at the end of the project – the unknown quality of the project led us to try first then forward plan later, with the result that we may be slower in implementing changes we have recommended

Access the full report:

http://www.startmc.org.uk/pdf/getting_to_know_wallis2.pdf

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