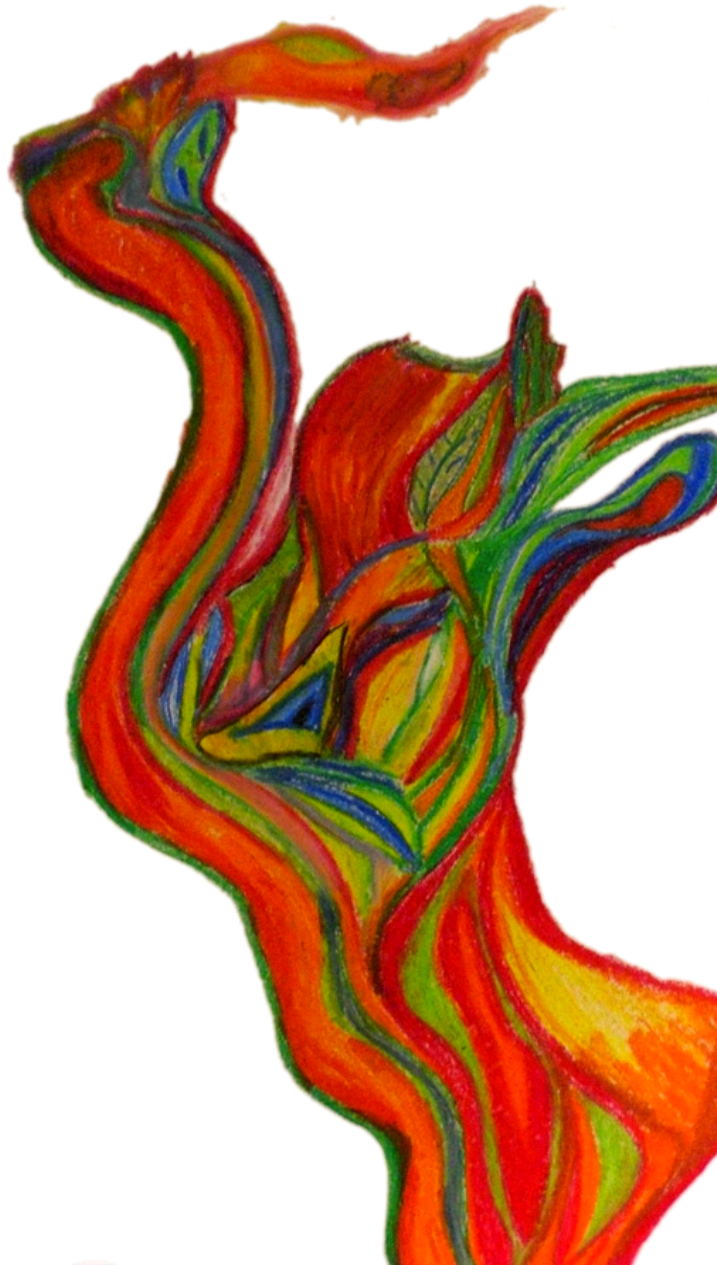


**Arts and Well Being**  
**Pilot 2 October 2008 – April 2009**  
**Evaluation Report**



Prepared by Geoff Broadway April 2009

Telford and Wrekin **NHS**  
Primary Care Trust

## 1) Executive Summary

*“There’s a rough diamond of a project here that needs careful handling if we are to see the gem of an offer shine through for some of our communities more vulnerable adults. Like any jewel it needs containing within a structure that does it justice and doesn’t result in it getting lost.”*

John Cocker, Senior Arts development Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council

*“It has helped learning some new skills and has given me another step up on the wellness ladder in order to go onto the next level of my recovery. It has been an important stepping stone that I hope will lead to employment again one day.”*

Arts and Well Being Workshop Participant

*“My confidence has grown even more, and I have gained even more great friends from it. Knowing that everyone else here has the same kind a problems has really helped, we can be ourselves and know that we’re not going to be judged by the others is a fantastic experience and helps everyone settle in quicker. I have started an Open University course to study for a degree in social care, and have now just signed up for two more courses for later in the year.”*

Arts and Well Being Workshop Participant

### 1.1) Overview

The Arts and Well Being Pilot 2 project initiated and delivered by Sharon Walford and Natalie Toplass at Hadley Farm Community Centre, Telford, and funded by the Joint Commissioners for Mental Health of the Primary Care Trust (PCT), was in overall terms a clear success when considered in relation to the stated aims and objectives agreed the funders and when considered in relation to Pilot 1 (2008).

Central to this success is the deepening of understanding of what elements of the project are working well, and what can be done to improve its future effectiveness in contributing to the journey of recover for participants engaging with this kind of creative activity. This evaluation reflects upon some of these key areas and discusses: participant referrals and minimum numbers; professional support for special needs; participant retention; impact upon participants; project structure.

The number of participants referred to the two series of workshops of Pilot 2 were much higher than in Pilot 1 and this is clearly the result of much ‘on the ground’ work of the project manager (with particular support) in actively advocating for the project wherever possible. All the potential barriers that were seen by both central and south CMHT as negatively impacting on referrals and indicated in Pilot 1 were actively addressed in Pilot 2. Despite this, referrals from central and south were still relatively low and more work needs to be done to build up levels of communication and understanding of the project with both south and central CMHT. There were 30 overall numbers referred to the 2 series of creative workshops.

Pilot 2 reveals the issue of referring of participants with special needs and learning difficulties and this evaluation indicates that such participants need to be much more carefully referred and more actively supported if they are to benefit from participating in this kind of workshop.

The issues participant numbers and problems of around retention are discussed at length in this evaluation. It is suggested that funding agreements that require minimum numbers during the start-up stage of a new workshop series are counter-productive to the growth and establishment of a committed participant group. If the series of workshops are to be put upon hold due to low numbers of participants it is recommended that this decision should be the responsibility of the Project Manager in consultation with both funders and the project support team.

The experience of Pilot 2 shows that the roles of Project Manager and Lead Artist are too onerous for one person to fulfill and this evaluation suggests that they are separated for the next series of workshops.

It is suggested that a Project Steering Group is established that consists of invited individuals who represent a wide range of interests in mental health, well-being and art. It is understood that this will serve to support and advise the project to be as effective as possible in both further defining and meetings this projects' aims and objectives.

This evaluation of Pilot 2 of the Arts and Well Being project considers that it was a success because it:

- Demonstrably improved the participants' sense of social isolation and self-confidence.
- Significantly contributed to many participants overall well-being
- Demonstrably widened the participants' perceptual horizons and enabled them to connect to wider networks.
- Helped establish foundations for the participants to take the next steps on their own journey to well-being.
- Gave service users the permission to creatively develop their own individual voice and to meaningfully express and celebrate keys aspects of themselves with others.
- Encouraged service users to be active participants in their own journey of recovery.
- Further proved the potential of an artist-led / ex-service user-led model that emphasizes non-analytical creative expression.

## **2) Outline and Format of the Project**

The *Art and Well Being* Pilot 2 project was funded by the Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust following the marked success of Pilot 1 that ran in the first quarter of 2008.

As in Pilot 1, this project was managed and run by artist Sharon Walford who is committed to exploring the transformatory potential of non-analytical creative practice. Sharon considers her approach as 'aiding and sustaining a good mental health balance, (and) using the arts as an aid to recovery'. For the purposes of this evaluation it is worth re-citing

the broader context that led to the establishment and funding of the first pilot as articulated in the evaluation report from Pilot 1:

The pilot project was conceived as a response to the larger government strategy articulated by the Nation Mental Health Framework (1999) which aims to shift mental health care from institutional settings to community based outlets - from social care to social inclusion. A key motivation of the lead artist was to provide potentially therapeutic opportunities focusing upon art rather than health issues in a non-institutional setting, and realise a project that clearly distinguished itself from formal arts therapy. The pilot project sought to position itself as part of the concept *arts for all*, that promotes broad access community partnership projects, often supported by the National Lottery's *Awards for All*, and as such contributes to regional and national strategies around improving health and well being.<sup>1</sup>

It is also worth restating that the Arts and Well being project has been initiated and led by a former service user who is passionate about all forms of contemporary art and has a clear understanding and particular vision of how it can be a catalyst for personal transformation and increased well being when exploring in a participatory workshop setting.

In order to broaden the reach and the potential of Pilot 2 it was funded on the basis that two levels of workshops would be run:

- 1) Workshop Series 1 aimed at service users with prior experience of art making. This series was known by the support and delivery team as 'The Monday Group' and this name will be used for the evaluation.
  
- 2) Workshop Series 2 aimed at service users with no prior experience at all in art making but who have strong interest. This series was known by the support and delivery team as 'The Tuesday Group' and this name will be used for the evaluation.

The decision to expand the reach of the Arts and Well Being initiative to include an additional workshop series was made in response to feedback from the three Telford and Wrekin Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs). It was stated in the Pilot 1 evaluation that many care coordinators from these teams considered that the focus on service users with art experience was exclusionary and felt that they could refer many more participants to a project that could accommodate individuals with no particular art experience but had a strong interest.

It was specified in the funding agreement that the minimum number of participants should be 10 with an ideal of 12. If participant numbers fell below 10 the funders were to be consulted and subject to discussion potentially put on hold.

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<sup>1</sup> Geoff Broadway, Arts and Well Being – evaluation report May 2008

The participatory workshops ran for a period of 12 weeks, with each session running for a duration of 2 1/2 hours per session. The series commenced 21<sup>st</sup> October 2008. They were held at Castle Farm Community Centre, Hadley, Telford.

The 12-week workshops consisted of a wide range of activities that gave the participants: greater awareness of art forms, artists and art movements; hands on experience with a range of materials and technique; guidance in the development of their own ideas and creative approaches. Both series of workshops featured a field trip to Walsall Art Gallery. The workshop culminated in a final exhibition at the same venue on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2009 for Workshop Series 2, and a celebratory sharing for Workshop Series 1 on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2009.

This report evaluates Workshop Series 1 (The Monday Group) and Workshop Series 2 (The Tuesday Group) concurrently as it can be considered that although they were aimed at slightly different service users in terms of their art experience, both series were funded by the same source, they had the same aims and objectives, management and delivery personnel, wider support structure, and they both took place in the same venue. The advantage of interleaving the evaluation is that it allows opportunity to compare and contrast and thus enhance the drawing out of key learning points.

### **3) Aims and Objectives Arts and Well Being Pilot 2**

The agreed aims of the project were:

- To provide high quality artist-led creative workshops that could potentially aid and sustain mental health recovery in the Telford and Wrekin area.
- To advocate for and raise the profile of the role of creativity in health and well being outcomes.
- To further identify and test a viable project structure that is able to successfully meet its aims and objectives and attract sustained funding.

The agreed objectives were:

- To provide a non-institutional setting for service users to explore creativity with professional artists.
- To provide the participants a safe and nurturing environment to explore aspects of creativity.
- To promote through exhibition the artwork of the workshop participants.
- To positively impact upon the participants' sense of social isolation.
- To raise participants sense of confidence and levels of well-being.
- To positively improve upon the participants social networks.
- To support and develop the competencies of professionals working in the delivery of community projects.
- To continue to build good working partnerships between Mental Health Service providers, Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin Arts in Health Partnership, and Telford and Wrekin Council's Arts Team.

#### **4) Project structure and who was involved**

The Pilot 2 Arts and Mental Health project was funded by the Joint Commissioners for Mental Health of the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

Sharon Walford was both Project Manager and Lead Artist.

Natalie Toplass was Support Artist.

Helen Chesters, Arts Development Officer/ Arts and Well Being, Telford and Wrekin Council, provided oversight support and helped manage the budget.

John Cocker, Senior Arts development Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council, provided some oversight support.

Jane Dunnaway, Care Coordinator based at North Wrekin Community Mental Health Team (CMHT), was available to provide support for the delivery artists in helping resolving any participant behavioral and interpersonal issues during the sessions. Jane also supported Sharon in liaising/communicating with participants.

Geoff Broadway was artist mentor whose role was to provide support for Sharon Walford and the wider project.

The Telford and Wrekin CMHTs (north, central and south) and Social Inclusion Recovery Team would make referrals to this project on the basis of assessed and prioritised need. Referrals also came from Listen and Care' at Leogomery, West Bank Sheltered Housing and one self-referral from Dawley Department of Psychological Therapies.

#### **5) The Evaluation Method**

This evaluation report is based upon both quantitative and qualitative data and discusses the project with particular reference to the stated aims and objectives. It is based upon the following information:

- Questionnaires completed by the participants at the end of each session.
- Questionnaires completed by the participants at the end of workshops prior to the final exhibition.
- Post-session reflections detailing personal learning and observations from the lead artist.
- Questions sent by the evaluator to the lead artist, the Arts and Well Being Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council, Lead Arts Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council, and care coordinators of the CMHTs
- Notes taken from follow up telephone conversations where necessary.
- Recorded discussion with the Lead and Support artist, the Arts and Well Being Officer, and the Mentor.

#### **6) Evaluation Results**

##### **6.1) Issues around Participant Referral**

In the Arts and Well Being Pilot 1 the total number of participants exhibiting in the final show was 3. It was recognised that although up to 7 participants had attended at different

times over the series of workshops and the value that participation had on lives of the 3 exhibiting individuals, it was widely felt that numbers could be improved with a more robust referral system put in place for future projects. The evaluation report Pilot 1 identified and outlined four key issues that may have impacted upon referral numbers:

- 1) CMHTs did not have enough time to effectively communicate with and refer the participants. It was considered that they needed at least 6 weeks notice before the workshops started.
- 2) There was poor communication with the central and south CMHT that led to no referrals for Pilot 1.
- 3) The project was focused on participants with art experience and was thus exclusory – those with interest but no experience were not eligible or able to participate.
- 4) The venue was too far away from individuals living in the south Telford area.

### **6.1.1) Pilot 2: Addressing these issues**

#### **1) Referral Time**

For Pilot 2 Sharon Walford with support from Helen Chesters organised personal visits to each of the 3 CMHTs to make short presentations that explained the nature of the two proposed workshops series and outlined timescale, proven value, and what kind of service user the series aimed to attract. Each CMHT was notified of the workshops start date approximately 9 weeks in advance. Sharon Walford also invited the 3 participants from Pilot 1 to contribute to the presentations and provide personal testimony as to the transformatory potential of this project model.<sup>2</sup>

Presentations were made to:

- North, central and south CMHT
- Social Inclusion and Recovery Services (SIRS) based in Wellington
- Department of Psychological Services, Dawley
- Listen and Care Day Centre at Leegomery
- Away Day for Service Users, Castlefarm Working Mens Club

In addition to personal visits, printed flyers and posters were distributed to all known day care centre and other places service users and health professionals frequent in order to promote the workshops.

#### **2) Poor Communication**

Sharon Walford and Helen Chesters made concerted efforts to ensure that better methods of communication and connections were built with all the 3 CMHTs, including regular phone calls, visits and emails to inform and update care coordinators, and to continue making the case for their participation in the process. Significant time was invested in the

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<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy to mention that all Pilot 1 exhibition participants actively engaged in advocating for referrals for this project to a wide of range of individuals in unfamiliar contexts reflect their increased self confidence, communications skills and willingness to reach out, as well as the importance that they themselves see in this kind of project for other service users.

referral process and presentations were made to several locations that catered for service users. It is clear that a concerted effort was made to: increase lines of communication between participants, service providers and health professionals; build a network of awareness of what the project offers; increase intelligence of service provision and personal that exist and operate in the Telford and Wrekin area.

It is also clear that this significantly impacted upon the amount of time that needed to be spent 'out there' engaging in these activities. As John Cocker, Senior Arts development Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council, observes, the referral process "still took up a lot of project management time. Any future model needs to reflect the actual cost of delivery and must be accurately reflected if people are to operate beyond goodwill."<sup>3</sup>

While much has been achieved in both building up awareness of the project and further developing networks, there is still much more work that can be done in increasing the understanding of and communication with both central and south CMHTs. There were 4 referrals from south and central CMHTs' for the entire project and Sharon Walford notes both teams were slow to respond to any requests for communication<sup>4</sup>. No members of south and central CMHT attended the Workshop Series 1 final exhibition. All team members of north CMHT attended the final exhibition.

### 3) Provision for Participants with no art experience

The provision of Workshop Series 1 for participants with no experience but interest in art aimed to encourage a much broader range of service users to take part in Pilot 2. Sharon Walford states that all potential referrers were clearly informed about the differences between the two workshops on offer and it was left to the care coordinators to decide which of the two workshops they would refer particular service users to. This is discussed in greater length below.

### 4) Location of Venue

Sharon Walford spent significant time researching alternative venues that might be more centrally based, and many possibilities were considered and noted. It was decided to wait until the referrals numbers came in before booking the venue to be used for the actual workshops, allowing this to be determined by what would best suit participant needs. Castle Farm in Hadley – the venue for the Pilot 1 - was booked as it was considered that it best suited both the needs of the workshops and the participants when their domestic locations become clear in the final few weeks before the workshops began. At that point no referrals had been forthcoming from both south and central CMHT.

## 6.2) Referrals Numbers and Issues of Participant Retention

It seems clear that the extra work invested in the referral process, the extra time between referral and the workshops start date, and general 'word of mouth' networking, meant that both series of workshops started with adequate numbers of referrals. Whilst many more referral was made to the project, attendance was very sporadic for the Monday Group, and

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<sup>3</sup> John Cocker evaluation 16 Feb 2009

<sup>4</sup> Email from Sharon Walford February 2009

the issue of both minimum numbers and participant retention came into focus. This section looks at these issues in more detail.

### **6.2.1) The Monday Group**

The Monday Group (aimed at service users with no experience but strong interest in art) had 14 initial referrals. During the series the numbers of participants fluctuated widely, ranging in the first 6 sessions from 12 and 4, averaging out at 6. Due to the stipulation in the funding agreement of a minimum numbers of 10 participants the Project Manager considered that The Monday Group had to be put on hold in week 6 in order to: reestablish referral numbers; provide time for reflection of project direction; make any follow-on practical and structural changes considered necessary by the delivery team. The more able participants were invited to join The Tuesday Group but for differing reasons either did not attend this session or declined to continue after attending one or two sessions. The Monday Group was restarted in March 2009 and completed in April 2009 with participant numbers averaging around 10.

### **6.2.2) The Tuesday Group**

The Tuesday Group (aimed at service users with both experience and strong interest in art) had 14 initial referrals. The numbers remained fairly consistent, mostly above the desired threshold, and ranged between 8 and 16, averaging out at 10. For The Tuesday Group the minimum goal of 10 participants was reached.

### **6.2.3) Retention and Viable Number of Participants**

The issue of numbers became a major issue in The Monday Group as, indicated above, numbers dropped well below what was stated in the funding agreement and the series was put on hold: by week 6 numbers were down from 13 initial referrals to 4 actual participants. In contextualising issues of participant retention it is valuable to understand the variety of significant challenges of participants who experience a range of mental health issues face when attempting to attend any regular pattern of activity. According to participant and lead artist evaluations, and the experiences of interviewed care coordinators, barriers to regular attendance include:

- Wide fluctuations in energy levels
- Debilitating lack of confidence and low self-esteem
- Difficulties in working in groups and fear of seeing other people
- The draining effects of therapy prior to attending sessions
- Physical ill health
- Lack of self-motivation
- Inability to maintain any regular routine and many individuals live life 'one day a time'
- The unavailability of a support worker for individuals with severe needs to accompany participant/s to session

These issues are relevant to both series of workshops but have a particular relevance to The Monday Group as it was newly established and had a more diverse range of

individuals referred to it in terms of personal experience, levels of motivations, and individual needs. The participants who attended these sessions had a much wider range of skills, interests and particular needs than the more clearly defined Tuesday Group. Although it was expressed as being part of the Towers Above Arts Group, the Monday Group had no core members and the creative activities that the lead and support artist introduced to the group were at this stage taken directly from the Tuesday Group model, and as such was experimental. It soon emerged that some of the referred participants had quite severe special needs. There was no regular service support for these individuals and the lead/support artists struggled to maintain workshop cohesion as a great deal of time was spent giving one-to-one support potentially at the expense of time spent with the rest of the group. It is worth looking more closely at the issues around referral and support of individuals with special needs.

#### **6.2.4) Appropriate Referrals and Participant with Special Needs**

The referral of participants with quite severe needs to The Monday Group without the necessary support to fully participate in such a setting was problematic and indicates that there were still issues with the referral process. The presence of unsupported individuals with particular needs in the group negatively affected the Lead and Support artists ability to build group coherence and provides the appropriate support. The Lead Artist Sharon Walford reflects upon two participants with particular needs:

“one of which was complaining of hallucinating and saying he ‘wanted his life to end’ and continues ‘they are both a real concern to me by being in the group, and I don’t want their behaviour to upset the dynamics of the group...I really don’t think they even have an initial interest in the subject”

She goes on to consider:

‘that they have been wrongly referred as the project is not aimed at participants with special needs but for participants with no experience but strong interest in art. These participants had no interest whatsoever.’<sup>5</sup>

It became clear to both the lead and support artist that unsupported individuals with severe needs can significantly undermine the formation of a strong, cohesive group with a shared identity that in itself can be a key motivator for the participants to regularly attend. In seeking service support for these individuals Sharon Walford had several conversations with their particular care-coordinator. It was understood that support resources were not available to provide such support on a weekly basis from the care coordinator, but this could happen to a limited degree. This situation may indicate:

- It was not yet fully understood by both all how participants with special needs would actually fit into the workshop in a successful way.

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon Walford, evaluation 27 November 2008

- Referrers have not understood the project clearly enough and have referred unsuitable service users.
- Referrers were not fully informed at the outset of the project how it functioned and whom it could cater for, and were thus unable to make appropriate referrals.
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Jane Dunnaway, care coordinator from north CMHT, reflected on the need of care-coordinators who are making the referrals

“of being more clearly aware of what it is that they are asking the individuals to do – they have not thought about what they are asking the participants to join and the difficulties they are bound to face, particularly those with greater needs.”<sup>6</sup>

Jane suggests all care-coordinators who make referrals

“to the project should have the chance visit the sessions in progress to observe for themselves and more deeply understand the nature of the project. It needs to be fully understood that referrals with special needs have to be fully supported by them. The art workshops are not occupational therapy, and they are not geared up to be drop-in sessions.”<sup>7</sup>

Helen Chesters from the Telford and Wrekin Arts Teams echoes this when she says that:

“Perhaps some of those referring to project did not fully understand the nature of the project. It was not a drop in, or another activity to send a service user too. The potential participant had to have expressed some interest in art and wanted to take part. We have to make it much clearer who it is for the next time around.”<sup>8</sup>

It seems to be clear that more work needs to be done around information sharing and levels of communication before referral take place in order to ensure the referrals that are made are as appropriate as possible. This will be one of clear tasks for the dedicated role of project manager as it moves into the next level of development.

### **6.2.5) Putting the Monday Group on Hold**

No matter how well the referral system works, the inherent lack of stability of many service users and the individual challenges they face meant that building a regularly attended series of workshops from scratch does not happen in the short-term. The evaluation of Pilot 1 indicated firsthand some of the issues and barriers that participants face in attending the workshops. It seems clear that one of the key factors in motivating participants with a wide range of difficulties to regularly attend is the building of coherent group where they actually feel comfortable, recognised and accepted. It should be acknowledged by all interested parties that this process takes time and that greater

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Dunnaway, telephone conversation with evaluator 22 February 2009

<sup>7</sup> Jane Dunnaway, telephone conversation with evaluator 22 February 2009

<sup>8</sup> Helen Chesters, telephone conversation with evaluator 1 April 2009

flexibility should be given in accepting that numbers will fluctuate as the project builds for the longer term. Jane Dunnaway considers that the decision to put the Monday Group on hold due to low numbers was a mistake, and makes it clear that the stipulation in the funding agreement of a minimum number of participants was unproductive, creating a potential barrier to the growth and development of the workshop series:

“The issue of numbers being the key thing became a big detractor really. I think the project (The Monday Group) should have carried on regardless of low numbers and this would have let the group evolve – this kind group is just not created in an instant.”

Jane goes on to point out:

“that a lot other groups start with a lot of referrals but then end up running with very small numbers – for examples the anxiety management group at Dawley runs with only one or two attendees - and this seems perfectly acceptable to the funders.”<sup>9</sup>

A few of the participants had started to come regularly and halting of the Monday Group did have a negative impact. One wrote after the group restarted March 2009:

“I thoroughly enjoyed our art group... it gave me loads of confidence, and I looked forward to it each week to boost my self-esteem. But suddenly people started not arriving so unfortunately I couldn't come any more. I quickly deteriorated into my shell again, and gave up experimenting with art and drawing, even though I received art things to do at Christmas. I wasn't interested or motivated in continuing. I eventually ended up in Castle Lodge for 2 weeks to try and build up my confidence up again. I am pleased and happy to enjoy the group today.”<sup>10</sup>

By being tied to minimum numbers the project manager/lead artist had to put the group on hold. There was subsequent loss of continuity and some negative impact on the participants, some of whom were not able to fit into the Tuesday Group. These were subsequently lost to the project.

However, it can also be said that there were some advantages to putting the group on hold at this point. Helen Chesters considers that the breathing space created by doing so

“gave the lead and support artist a chance to review the range of activities that they had introduced to the group and realise that planning and delivery had to be slightly different to the more advanced and motivated Tuesday Group. It gave the chance to re-scope and find the right level of activities for where the participants are actually at.”<sup>11</sup>

The support artist Natalie Toplass observes that:

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Dunnaway, telephone conversation with evaluator 22 February 2009

<sup>10</sup> Comment in The Monday Group Comments book 5 March 2009

<sup>11</sup> Helen Chesters, telephone conversation with evaluator 1 April 2009

“The second sessions were much better, my working relationship with the lead artist was reviewed and I had much more input in running certain sessions. As we no longer had the two special needs participants in the group we could spend much more time with the group as whole. It also very different dynamics of the people this time around, much more together and really started to feel like a group.”<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that there were both pluses and minuses to putting the Monday Group on hold. The disadvantages were:

- That the stipulation around minimum numbers does not account for the variable nature of the client group and the importance of maintaining continuity for the process of forming durable groups.
- That stopping the group had some negative impact upon participants’ well-being.

Stopping the Monday Group mid-way provided the opportunity:

- To review the referral process and, as was proven to be the case, recruit more suitable participants.
- To further interrogate and clarify the issue of service support for participants with needs. Participants would not be taken on without the commitment of service level support.
- For the lead and support artists to re-examine the range and depth of the activities on offer.
- For the lead and support artist to re-examine their particular roles (discussed further in 6.5.1)

### **6.3) The Importance of Group Identity**

As indicated above, there are many potential barriers that can affect participants’ ability and motivation to attend any regular activities. A key factor that emerges from the Arts and Health workshop series is that each gradually develops its own sense of identity aspects of group cohesion and participant ownership starts to become emerge. This in turn further enables the participants to be increasingly motivated to attend and feel engaged in what they see as meaningful activity, developing a sense of affinity and community with others.

It is clear that the Tuesday Group had a head-start in Pilot 2. It had the strong foundation of the 3 participants who had already completed Pilot 1 and who had actively advocated for Pilot 2 and, in their own particular way, had been positively affected by being involved in this project. Through Pilot 1 the Tuesday Group had: already been through the very low numbers that were to be experience by The Monday Group in Pilot 2; established the name of *Towers Above Arts Group*; had a much clearer identity of what it was about and

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<sup>12</sup> Natalie Toplass, telephone conversation with evaluator 1 April 2009

whom it was for. Many of those who attended were clearly interested and motivated and the sense of group spirit was strengthened in the Pilot 2.

In contrast, the Monday Group was a new start-up series with a much broader range of individuals referred to it, and these varied widely in both expectation and ability. The complex dynamics of this group in terms of the levels of support for special needs and the lead/support artist's short-term struggle to provide the most effective offer of creative activities resulted in initial uneven attendance in the first few sessions. Nevertheless, when it restarted in March 2009 with mostly new participants and the reviewed mix of activities it started to grow its own sense of identity and group momentum. It is valuable to consider some of the many comments in the participant evaluations that indicate what aspects of the workshops worked for them, what they really enjoyed and what motivated them to regularly attend.

The general comments "being with others"<sup>13</sup>, "being involved in the group and getting to know the different people attending",<sup>14</sup> "pleasure in listening to everyone's ideas"<sup>15</sup> "being part of a team"<sup>16</sup> captures some of the essence of many participants. Also the factors of "watching people bloom"<sup>17</sup>, "the general humor"<sup>18</sup>, "working in teams in such a friendly atmosphere"<sup>19</sup>, and "seeing friendly faces and being part of bigger group where I am completely accepted"<sup>20</sup> summarises many other participants comments. Many pointed to the very diverse range of creative activities on offer that encouraged them to try new "forms and ideas out that were sometimes a bit scary for but me really quite exciting too".

The supportive role that the lead and support artists Sharon Walford and Natalie Toplass played and evidently inspired many of the participants, and obviously encouraged them to want to return each week. One participant wrote:

" Both Natalie and Sharon have a real infectious passion for what they are doing. I felt this helped to motivate the group. Indeed I felt motivated."

Another participant wrote that getting a call from Sharon a key moment "really helped motivate me to come back to the sessions", and another commented

"Sharon and Natalie gave full support and guidance in every session to everyone in the group, they encouraged us to do things how we wanted to, not what we thought others would like not what we thought others would like."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> workshop evaluation 25 Nov 2008

<sup>14</sup> final evaluation 1 April 2009

<sup>15</sup> workshop evaluation 2 Dec 2008

<sup>16</sup> final evaluation 3 April 2009

<sup>17</sup> workshop evaluation 25 Nov 2008

<sup>18</sup> workshop evaluation 2 Dec 2008

<sup>19</sup> final evaluation 3 April 2009

<sup>20</sup> final evaluation 1 April 2009

<sup>21</sup> workshop evaluation 2 Dec 2008

There are other factors that directly contribute the success of the workshops and the building up a sense of communality amongst the participants. Care coordinator Sarah Ormrod outlines in detail what she sees as the very important fact that:

“The knowledge was there that this was a group of individuals with differing mental health concerns but this fact was never fore-grounded at all or made a big thing of. But it was important to them that they knew that all the people in the group have some kind of difficulties and it really gave them a sense of safety in the group and a means to connect with each other.”

She goes on to say that:

“If this course was in a mainstream setting many would have felt worried that other groups member would find out about them – there is stigma attached to mental health and this can be a barrier for some to attend particular classes or activities.”<sup>22</sup>

One participant of the Tuesday Group echoes this when she says:

“I think I’ve always tended to take a back seat in a group in the past, but I was definitely no shrinking violet in Towers Above, I think I was probably a little bit more well than some people, also, it was great to be somewhere that I could just be me and I didn’t have to worry about the stigma of having a mental health problem.”

Related to this is the way the sessions are run and how work is discussed. The fact that there is such a diversity of creative invitations on offer that includes individual and group work, exploring withy, paint, pastels, still-life, portraits, collage etc, means that each of participants are able to try something new and through wide experimentation discover which art-form may best suits their own tastes and talents. This was supported by regular presentations around many contemporary artists and concepts, and the highly successful field trip to Walsall Art Gallery. It is clear that as the participants find their own individual ‘creative voice’ through their chosen form, the group sense of identity becomes stronger. This was clearly evident in the diverse but very coherent final exhibition of the Tuesday Group.

The evaluation around Pilot 1 discussed the difference between traditional art therapy and the non-analytical approach taken by Sharon and Natalie in these sessions. Sharon reflect that the energy and depth revealed in the practice and work of the participants, particularly in the Tuesday Group, has

“strengthened my view that the model I used to deliver the project has worked very successfully... encouraging the participants to engage with what they are doing conceptually and not just technically has enriched their experience. I was very aware that to use art as a tool as a therapeutic process for sustaining stable mental health and wellbeing was itself very positive, but should anyone (else) start to impose meanings on

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah Ormrod, telephone conversation with the evaluator 3 April 2009

peoples work would be disastrous and unwelcome by participants in the group. Quite a few of them had had art therapy before and didn't like/benefit it and just didn't want that type of therapy."

Implicit in the way that the sessions were run was the growing emphasis on the self-directed nature of the participant's creative activities, encouraging increased ownership of the journey that the group perceived that they were on together. In effect this is an approach now recommended by leading charities concerned with mental health issues. In the recently published discussion paper 'A New Vision for Mental Health' (2009) produced by seven leading charities working in the area of mental health, one of its key 'Visions of Change' is that:

"Power relations need to shift in order to give real self-determination over the process and direction of recovery to individuals, their carers and families. This will reflect a move from care as something which is done to service users by the system, towards a system of support built by the person and their advocates."<sup>23</sup>

## **6.4) The Impact upon Participants**

### **6.4.1) Sample Comments**

Carefully evidenced in the evaluation around Pilot 1 was the documented impact of the workshops on the participants, much of it in their own words. Similarly, the evaluations produced during Pilot 2 by the participants, lead and support artists, and the care coordinators reflect on some of the positive effects and transformations that many have experienced through being part of this initiative. Many spoke of the positive sense of identity that the course helped to nurture:

"I think that understand through the group that I am an artist, means that I have a more defined role for myself. The continuing sessions (and, to a lesser extent, our extra-curricular meetings) bolster my determination and confidence with those I meet. I am able to be comfortable around greater numbers, more quickly. I am growing in confidence, both as an artist and personally. I am able to be an encourager much more readily."<sup>24</sup>

In a letter one participant sent after the course is useful to quote at length:

"After joining Towers Above for a second time, I really looked forward to coming to the group on Tuesday. My confidence has grown even more, and I have gained even more great friends from it. Knowing that everyone else here has the same kind a problems has really helped, we can be ourselves and know that we're not going to be judged by the others is a fantastic experience and helps everyone settle in quicker. I have started an Open University course to study for a degree in social care, and have now just signed up for two more courses for later in the year, and I've sent off for my provisional driving

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.newvisionformentalhealth.org.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> final evaluation 10 Dec 2008

license and hoping to start driving lessons soon. I've also been asked to help out with an art group in Shrewsbury.

Sharon and Natalie have been wonderful, they not only taught me a lot about art, they were also there to chat with if I was feeling down. Without Sharon and Natalie I wouldn't of been able to do any of the things I have mentioned above, they have both helped me so much, I hope you both can carry on helping others in the same situation as us, you have so much to give, and there are plenty of other people who need groups like this one. Thank you so much."

Several of the participant partners were motivated to write in the comments book at the end the Tuesday Group final exhibition:

"Since the beginning of the first session her confidence has grown enormously and it has led to great things for her. During the first set of meetings my wife made some great friends and they have stayed in touch since. The fact that all of the members have gone through similar problems in their life means that no-one feels like an outsider and the group can feel safe and confident during the sessions as a result of this. Because of the group sessions my wife is now confident enough to try things that would have been impossible for her before the group, including starting a university course. She has thoroughly enjoyed herself and can't wait for the day of the art group so that she can meet with her new friends and show her artwork and see theirs. I must thank the group leaders and organisers for giving my wife back her confidence and her smile. Thank you."<sup>25</sup>

Another participant's husband wrote in the comments book:

"Whilst attending the course Nic was like a different woman. She was keen and creative, enthusiastic and committed and produced steadily over the 12 weeks. Her exhibition piece was both personal and accessible. We were all quite proud of her achievements...then the course finished. She has kept in contact with the group, which in itself is a positive step and continues to produce work, but would benefit from the structure the group sessions gave. On behalf of the four children, the three dogs and myself thank you for bringing her back to us. Hopefully we can maintain this current state until another group can commence."<sup>26</sup>

#### **6.4.1) The Final Exhibition – The Tuesday Group**

The Tuesday Group held a final exhibition in January 2009 at Castle Farm. The exhibition was a showcase of the work the participants from that series had produced over a 5-week period and reflected the very high level of quality that the participants were now working to and the extra time many of them committed to project making work outside the workshop settings. The exhibition was very well attended by many of the friends and families of the participants, many of whom were visibly impressed by what they were experiencing.

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<sup>25</sup> Comments book 10 Dec 2008

<sup>26</sup> Comments book 10 Dec 2008

The exhibition was marked by its diversity of styles and formats that each participant had taken, and rich personal statements that the lead artist has encouraged them to write to accompany their work. Many attendees commented on both the diversity and quality of ideas and depth of understanding that was expressed in both the works and the powerful nature of many of the personal statements.

One attendee comments, "I thought the exhibition was a triumph! There was an air of professionalism about it that I wasn't really expecting and it was a pleasure to know (my partner) had a role within it."

Jane Dunnaway comments about one of her clients who attends the Tuesday Group "it's the most marvelous thing that he does, for him it's his salvation... it gives him a lot of positive experiences." She continues about his particular exhibition:

"it was very contained, his exhibition was less fragmented than the last time and this helped his own sense of wholeness. His encouragement for the audience to physically interact with his work and move the exhibit around - well he is quite insecure so it is quite a bold move for him to allow people to look at his quite personal things more closely."

Sharon reflected:

"I thought the Tuesday group exhibition was fantastic; a very diverse range of work from all participants which is always great to see, the support that many people gave to us and attended the exhibition that day was a great delight. Not only that but their whole engagement with the weekly sessions and contribution to the show was particularly great."<sup>27</sup>

Many participants spoke about how being part of the workshops had made them feel more confident and connected to others, and also less worried about the stigma of having mental health issues:

"I found the last exhibition very daunting and scary because I didn't want people I knew knowing that I was part of the group. But since, I am learning to come to terms with my illness and feel more comfortable with people I know and trust, some who I class as friends, knowing about my diagnosis."

#### **6.4.2) Participants Progression**

Several core members of Towers Above from the Tuesday Group continue to meet up since the workshops series came to an end. In these weekly meetings they connect and support each other, and are making plans to have another exhibition of their work in the local area.

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<sup>27</sup> Sharon Walford, email to evaluator 3 April 2009

Several members have felt confident enough to take larger steps on their own, two former participants have joined an Open University courses in social care, and two are now volunteering in various locations.

One participant actively refers to himself as an artist, and is now planning to expand his practice and career in that area.

#### **6.4.3) Summarising the Impact Upon the Participants**

It is clear that Pilot 2 of the Arts and Well Being project has had very positive effect upon the well being of the participants. The evaluation suggests that the overall project:

- Improved the self-confidence of some individuals
- Raised levels of self-esteem of some individuals
- Improved levels of motivation and to take risks in trying something new
- Encouraged service users to re-connect to others in meaningful ways
- Encouraged service users to identify as part of a wider group
- Enabled them to find their own particular voice and express this creatively
- To understand the power of art and connect this to their own lives
- Enabled the shared celebration of their diverse creative achievements

These goals were met because:

- The project creates the opportunities for participants to get to know each other, share their commonalities and build up social skills and self-confidence.
- It created the environment that enables participants to feel welcomed and accepted, and to feel they could express themselves without uninvited analysis or negative judgment.
- The project does not deny that users have differing levels of mental health issues but this is not seen as the main focus of any activity or discussion.
- The project is run and supported by professional artists who are passionate about art, and have direct experience of mental health difficulties.
- The project encourages experimentation with a wide a range of creative tools and techniques as a means to understand and experience different kinds of creative intelligence.
- The project provided the opportunity and gives permission for participants to creatively articulate complex concepts and personal perspectives in highly imaginative and meaningful ways.
- It marks and celebrates participant's creative achievements throughout, and more formally in the final group sharing/exhibition attended by family, friends and interested parties.

While this kind of project can never be considered as a magic bullet that solves all the difficulties faced by service users it can be said with evidence that the Arts and Well Being workshops provided many participants a very different kind of engaging environment that made a very positive contribution to their overall well being. It should be acknowledge that although progress towards well-being has been significant for many participants, the

challenges they face with their own particular issues means that many are on a long journey to recovery. As care coordinator Sarah Ormrod points out, the effects of this kind of activity can only be measured in very limited ways in the immediate term:

“With issues of mental health and recovery, you really can’t always measure things immediately - things takes time, and the journey can be a long one. Some of the participants on these workshops have been experiencing severe mental health issues for a long time, in some case they may have been experiencing difficulties for 20 odd years.”<sup>28</sup>

The fact that many of the participants connected to these workshops with increasing enthusiasm and determination, with many demonstrating individual motivation and perseverance to overcome a wide range of personal barriers and negative feelings, is indicative of the great value that this kind of structured activity offers. The general sense from the many evaluations combined with the remarkable final exhibition (of the Tuesday Group) speaks of the great potential that this kind of project has to offer and as such this should be recognised and celebrated, and its growth and development widely supported.

### **6.5) Staffing Structure of the Project**

The structure of the Arts and Mental Health of Pilot 2 directly mirrored that of Pilot 1 in terms of both personnel and particular roles (see 4.0 of this document). Sharon Walford as the project manager considered that this structure should be replicated further tested in Pilot 2 in light of the ambition was to run two workshops series concurrently. Overall, this structure proved itself to be very effective in successfully delivering both series of workshops and engaging with the range of difficulties and particular concerns that emerged. However, some of the difficulties that did emerge do reveal that this structure needs careful review and the roles and responsibilities of all involved more clearly articulated before the next stage of the project is delivered.

In addition it has been suggested by the support team and the lead artist that the future of the project would be best served by the establishment of steering group that will help oversee, advise and participate in key decisions as the Arts and Well Being project grows over the coming period.

#### **6.5.1) Project Manager & Lead Artist**

The roles of project manager and Lead artist was played by Sharon Walford whose vision for the workshops and her experience as a former service user put her in a unique position to both advocate for and deliver this project. In Pilot 1 this dual role was easily managed by Sharon but in Pilot 2 the effective doubling of the workload put her under considerable strain. The on-the-ground tasks of network building, referral processing, planning and the significant amounts of practical coordination involved meant that at times she was uncomfortable with the levels of pressure that she experienced. She felt at times under-supported by the role taken by Helen Chester’s of the Telford and Wrekin Arts Team, and that the amount of practical work involved in both jobs was not reflected in terms of financial remuneration.

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Ormrod, telephone conversation with the evaluator 3 April 2009

All issues were resolved as the project continued but there are three clear learning points:

- The role of Project Manager and Lead Artist is arguable too much for one person and needs separating out as this project grows. This does pose it's own menu of difficulties: If Sharon Walford takes the role of Project Manager then the gap created in the Lead Artist post has to be very carefully considered. What makes this project a successful model is that its is Sharon's own way of working – with the active support of Natalie Toplass – with the group, her skills as a professional artist and that she is a former service user that combines to give the project such a strong foundation. Additionally how the space is created the for a new Lead Artist in terms of bringing alternative ideas and methods will need careful support.
- That wherever possible there is transparent communication between delivery and support team. The feeling of being unsupported was unintentionally created by the Arts Team decision to give Sharon Walford more space the manage things by herself as a means to deepen her professional skills. While in principle this may have been done with correct intentions the fact this was not clearly communicated to Sharon left a gap in understand and resulted in feelings of tension and isolation. Future structures should exemplify as much as possible the sharing of decisions that have been taken. This also implies making and role and responsibilities of all involved much clearer.
- The careful consideration of the anticipated workloads of each role is taken into account when devising fee structure. While it has to be understood that at times in 'start-up' projects that additional time is naturally invested by its vision holder/s as it reflects passion and commitment for success, this should be recognised and reflected in future budgets as the project expands and establishes itself.

#### **6.5.2) The Relationship between Lead and Support Artist**

One of key aspects of participant feedback is how much value was placed by them on the way that the project was held and how much an inspiration the lead and support artist were to all. The relationship between the Sharon Walford as lead artist and Natalie Toplass as support artist was a generally a dynamic and productive one, but it also experienced its own level of lack of clarity and frustrations over roles. This gravitated around the perception that the supporting artist felt unable to bring enough of her experience and ability into the workshop environment. In addition there was also a difficulty in being able to communicate this clearly to Sharon who thus had no idea that there was a problem. Active involvement of the support team helped facilitate effective communication and once the issues were fully communicated and understood it was resolved through modifying how the roles are played out in the planning and the delivery of the workshops. There are 2 clear learning points:

- That the development of inter-personal skills of team members is seen as integral to this project. Clear and open shared reflection is seen by both lead in support

artists as essential for the success of the project, and the project support structure is engaged to encourage this.

- That roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, but that built into this is the capacity for how professional progression and development can be encouraged and applied throughout the project.