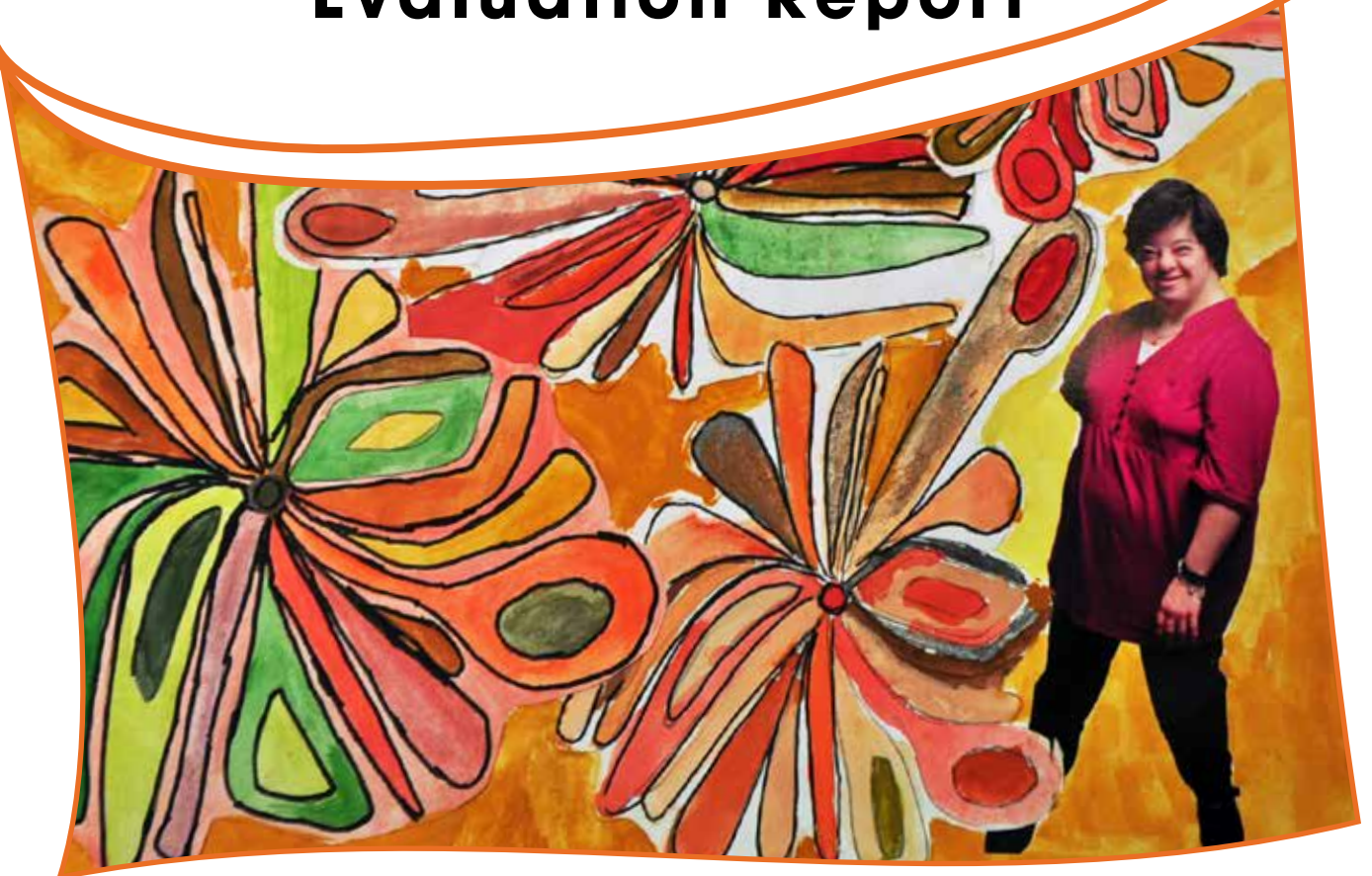


**The Community Focus
In-House Workshop Programme
2011-2012
Evaluation Report**



Executive Summary

The Community Focus In-House multi-arts programme has been running since 1980.

In 2011-2012, 420 people took part on the courses which ranged from Mixed Media Art, Jewellery-Making and Visual Arts to Computers and Studio Photography. Of the total number of participants in Spring Term, 24% were disabled. 60% had learning disabilities. 74% were unemployed and 12% employed.

Programme evaluation and monitoring demonstrates high levels of satisfaction with the programme and its outputs. 91% of participants reported that they enjoyed the workshops and said that they would like to continue attending next term. 82% of CF in house participants said that they created something that they were proud of after completing a workshop.

In-depth qualitative analysis for the report indicates that Community Focus tutors provide a safe creative environment which supports skills development and improved participant well-being and confidence. Tutor observations for this report show how their core approaches, encourage student resilience and confidence in their ability to produce high-quality art. Benefits of participation are also identified in the report from parent and carer observations and also through tutor assessments of long-term benefits of participation and progression of students which continue to ensure the programme's ongoing popularity.

1. The Programme

Community Focus has successfully run its in-house multi-arts workshop programme since the organisation arrived in its Artsdepot home in 2005. Over the three terms of the year 2011-2012, 420 people have taken part in the courses. In Spring Term, for example, there were 22 in house weekly workshops: in Mixed Media Art, Jewellery, Computers, Art, Painting, Watercolour, Computers Beginners, Painting & Printing, Computers Improvers, Ceramics, UKonline Computers, Circle Drumming, Learning to Sing, Creative Writing, Crochet, Drama, Drama for Radio, Textiles, Drumming & Singing, Dance, Life Drawing and Studio Photography. These workshops were for adults of all abilities including learning difficulties, older people and people with mental health problems. Of the total number of participants in Spring Term, 24% were disabled. 60% had learning disabilities. 74% were unemployed and 12% employed.

The workshops generally ran for 2 hours per week with a tea and coffee break, encouraging social interaction and increasing participants' confidence and well being. Workshops for adults with learning difficulties are supported by assistants and volunteers. Courses are well-subscribed and this year Community Focus (CF) will add four additional courses for people with learning disabilities to its timetable for 2012-2013: Drawing, printing, electronic music, introductory ceramics.

2. About this Report...

Previous evaluations of CF programmes have demonstrated very high levels of participant enjoyment and raised confidence as well as strong anecdotal evidence of participant well-being. Other indicators, for example a high number of participants returning year on year to take part in activities, demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with the programme. This report is part of CF's new strategy to improve documentation of programme outcomes and impacts. The report draws on standard evaluation and monitoring forms completed by participants and tutors as well as in-depth monitoring on impacts for funders (London Borough of Barnet). In addition in the summer term, four tutors contributed mini-case studies on their work and took part in an evaluative workshop. Their observations are captured here to provide more analysis of the particular impacts and effective ways of working offered by the CF programme.

3. Programme Aims and Objectives

All CF In-house programmes share the same key aims for participants:

- to increase their social and communication skills
- to increase their self-confidence
- to increase their learning skills
- to increase well-being
- to provide opportunities for enjoyment

For participants with learning disabilities, tutors approaches are aimed at developing interpersonal skills, such as collaboration as well creating high-quality artwork. Tutors recognise that participants may have reduced opportunities for social interaction compared with other groups and plan accordingly to maximise opportunities for personal development. Workshops that are not aimed at adults with learning difficulties also support social interaction and well being.



4. Key Outcomes

CF in-house art workshops programme for 2011-12 has met and exceeded target outcomes set by the London Borough of Barnet. The table below illustrates, for example, that 91% of participants enjoyed the workshops and said that they would like to continue attending next term. 82% of CF in house participants said that they created something that they were proud of after completing a workshop.

	Outcome	Outcome measure	Report
Individual resilience	(Required) People feel more able to cope and deal confidently with challenging life circumstances.	An increase in individual resilience and independence attributable to CF activity and of attendance at the workshop: this may be measured through clients' self-evaluation. TARGET 30-50%	91% of CF in-house participants said that they learnt new skills, 88% developed their confidence at taking part in a 12 week workshops.
	People feel able to access appropriate support mechanisms where needed.	Proportion of activities that are inclusive and in venues that clients find conducive. TARGET 75%	Service Users find CF studios in the artsDepot very accessible and workshops inclusive.
	People are less likely to need to access statutory services such as health and social care.	Clients report increased size and range of social networks for people within their peer - group and also outside of their peer group (through attendance to an inclusive range of activities). TARGET 50 -75%	88% of in-house participants said that they made new friends at CF.
Employment and Volunteering	Increased number of people raising their employability and being ready for work or volunteering in mainstream settings.	Number of people finding work (paid or unpaid). TARGET 5%	3 CF in-house participants are now volunteering at CF and helping other service users to engage in activities and 4 CF in house volunteers have gone on to paid employment.
		Number of people who having completed a course feel that they have increased their employability. This could be conceived in a number of ways, e.g. increased confidence and communication skills. TARGET 30-50%	
Education and Skills	An increased number of people accessing accredited arts education and training opportunities.	Number of people supported to complete an education or training course. TARGET 5-10%	All of CF in-house participants are supported in completing their 12 week workshops.
		Number of people to subsequently apply for a mainstream education or training course.	3 CF in-house participants have gone on to mainstream education and training after completing workshops at CF.

	Outcome	Outcome measure	Report
Other personal attainment	Clients feel workshops have helped them attain their own personal goals or helped them develop skills to do so.	Proportion of service users expressing that the programme they receive enables them to achieve their personal goals. TARGET 75%	82% of CF in-house participants said that they created something that they were proud of after completing a workshop.
		Proportion of service users expressing that the service helps them to engage with their local community. TARGET 75%	88% of CF in-house participants say that they have made friends whilst they took part in CF workshops helping them to engage with their local community.
User Involvement in Service Design	An increased number of participants are involved in the design, delivery, management, review and development of services.	(Required) People feel their cultural / social / faith needs are addressed. TARGET 50-75%	96 % of in-house participants say they enjoy CF in- house cultural workshops and 88% of participants say that they have made friends whilst participating in these workshops. Participants come from a wide range of faiths and CF is sensitive to their needs.
		Number of service users involved in service design, delivery, management, review and development. TARGET 5%	CF in-house programme has a Users Forum that meets quarterly, they review projects and workshops including the design, delivery and management. On average there are 10-12 service users in the forum, 5-6% of the total.
		Proportion of service users expressing that the programme they receive is responsive to their needs. TARGET 50 -75%	96% of CF in-house participants enjoyed the workshops they participated in at CF. Further observations and interviews indicate that workshops are meeting service user needs with regard to skills and confidence development.

5. Outcomes for Participants

In addition to standard monitoring, the evaluator used various self-assessment tools with the 4 case study groups in relation to enjoyment of classes and levels of confidence. In all 4 groups, 98% of group members assessed their enjoyment levels as 'high' with the overwhelming majority (85%) saying they had learnt new skills and gained confidence.

Circumstances varied for each participant; however it was noticeable that, even for those without learning difficulties, substantial obstacles to learning may exist: e.g. recent illness or feeling 'out of the loop' in acquiring new skills. Feedback from computer tutor, Ruth Barrett demonstrates the importance of Community Focus workshops for participants such as these as an alternative to home environments which may not have resources to improve well-being and skills:

'Older people suffering social exclusion through lack of computer skills. Family sometimes block progress as they can't always teach well and reinforce feelings of inadequacy..a good teacher is important. At home it is not so easy'.

Her student noted the subsequent improvements in her well-being as follows:
'it's a whole lease of independence'.... I have 'the confidence to do the technology on my own'.

Assessing impacts on well-being for participants who may have complex disabilities is problematic and relies on observations from carers and tutors. A common feature of tutor feedback in assessing improvements is increased relaxation, or a lack of visible distress as participants immerse themselves and become engaged with tasks of art-making.

'One student I have seen an improvement in is Tess...She has been attending Jewellery sessions for many months and has become more relaxed and technically skilled as time has gone on..... As a new-comer Tess would repeat the same phrase throughout the session, this has decreased slowly and now only happens once or twice....

Tess would also answer 'I can't do it' to most requests..... but after starting with very small simple tasks that are difficult to fail at eg. sorting beads into different colour bags she has worked up to now spending three- four sessions on one piece of work, often choosing tiny beads which are difficult to use, she has also started to develop her own style with which she seems to feel safe and confident and enables her to concentrate quietly in an often noisy and demanding environment'

Working with the Visual Arts - Outcomes

Visual Arts constitute a core strength of the CF in-house programme offer. Tutor observations for this report demonstrate the enduring strength and popularity of this offer for students with disabilities and the particular opportunities for self-expression and improved well-being that participation in the arts provides for these groups of participants. Tutor, Judith Taylor observed how both students and tutors set and adapt tasks of art-making to both respond to and challenge boundaries that may be perceived as inhibiting activity:

'Ramesh is visually impaired but otherwise does not have disabilities. A warm, sensitive and intelligent person, he wants to carry on participating in life and the arts regardless of his blindness. Although the mixed media art class he attends is essentially a visual arts class, Ramesh meets the challenges of the projects with adjustments to allow for his impairment.'



His tutor reports that:

'Ramesh often comments that he doesn't want the Community Focus holidays to come because he doesn't want to stay at home, he wants to be at CF participating in life and being creative.'

Some participants may have complex needs, for example, Fred who is prone to agitation and is non-verbal for the most part. Over a period of engagement, tutors and support staff have been able to identify his personal interests (farms, boats and hotels) and looking at books and drawing from them. Through tasks set for him, he has been able to build his manual skills and dexterity as well as self-confidence and decision-making skills.



'Fred benefits greatly from the class giving him the chance to work more independently ... he calms down and concentrates and derives a great deal of pleasure from his finished work which he likes us to show to the rest of the class, giving him a sense of pride and achievement.'



6. Community Focus - Tutor Approaches

CF tutors have extensive experience of working with learning difficulties groups and some have taught at CF for over 5 years. They bring specialist understanding to their classes and have identified the following elements as core elements of CF practice.

- **Ending Isolation.** Different tutors noted the significance of Community Focus as the primary, and for many students, only creative outlet. Many in their classes do not have the range of resources and entertainments that others 'may take for granted'. Tutor, Judith Taylor commented:

'My students often call CF, "College", they feel a sense of pride and achievement at attending on a regular basis as others would attend a college. Students have often said to me that the focus of their whole week is coming to "college" CF, it gives a sense of purpose.'

- **A supportive learning environment.** Many participants in CF classes are either unable to cope with the pressures of mainstream learning or have been alienated by the stresses they experienced in schools. They are able to prosper in an environment '*which does not put pressure on them but challenges them to learn and experience things they wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to participate in* (Judith Taylor)'. A sense of participation and the journey of learning offer more for students than the outcome.

- **Resilience.** Tutors have to encourage group resilience. Occasionally, the working dynamic is affected by the loss of incapacity of a member and tutors are skilled in both encouraging adaptability and learning from socially difficult situations.

Working with creative media can be an effective way of learning about resilience and confidence. Maham Anjum, Ceramics tutor, noted how one group member got upset when material broke, but that getting used to this happening and 'not getting too attached' gave her confidence to keep trying and not giving up.



Because of the make-up of some groups, tutors also require resilience to learn to manage situations where some participants are anti-social in their behaviour.

- **Skills.** Skills development is an essential part of course input with each tutor integrating progression into delivery.

In drama, for example, in the summer sessions participants worked with Restoration techniques and extended their skills in voice work and improvisation. Tutor Vicky Martin worked last year with both Shakespeare and scenes from Harold Pinter plays and argues that 'ambition is really important' in working with students with learning difficulties.

In Ceramics, high levels of continuous attendance in the class have led to high skills acquisition by all members of every ability, including knowledge of complex processes such as glazing and understanding why pots crack.

- **Competitiveness and encouraging achievement.** Different tutors noticed the importance of competition for some participants to encourage ambition and thinking about how to make progress.





As part of a final reflection, tutors identified other key elements of effective Community Focus practice which included:

- 'Thinking in the material' – creating unexpected possibilities of expression through manipulation of materials and art-making.
- Putting an appropriate level of challenge in each activity was crucial. Projects that lead to problem-solving and questioning promote student wellbeing and engagement.
- Recognition of the importance of small steps also is an integral part of practice.
- Working with the idea that 'each participant is intelligent' and 'that everyone is an artist' is essential to the CF model.



7. Parental / Carer Perspectives

Focus group tutors invited parents and carers to track the impacts of participation on their children or on those they cared for. While the response rate was low to this request, those who responded were able to offer insights into how participation improved confidence and well-being. A particular feature of feedback was the ability to spend longer immersed in tasks and to be more relaxed. One carer commented:

'The course (mixed media) has given S.R a focus, he is now growing more confident in taking part in the group and his ability to take part in art and grow has increased dramatically... he will participate in tasks for a longer duration of time, appearing to enjoy the tasks set. It has definitely benefited S.'s learning and patience....'

All tutors in the focus group gave examples from their class of how parent and carer perceptions of students had changed as a result of their participation in their class. A key element of this change was the status of the student to 'maker' or 'producer', for example in producing objects that were used as gifts and presents. This change, as well as improving student well-being, also in many instances led to a shift in perceptions and understanding among parents and carers. Tutor, Maham Anjum illustrates:

'One student in my ceramics class, her dad called to say how happy she is And asked what exhibitions he could take her too... she now makes money boxes and asks all sorts of questions.'

8. Long Term Benefits

CF functions as a stable 'home' or unit which encourages and supports long-term involvement from participants. One of the key benefits of this sustained engagement is provided by tutor observation and evidence of skills progression and the capacity for students to advance in skills acquisition and employability.

One student, Rebekah who has attended Community for Focus for several years and has Aspergers syndrome now exhibits, sells her own work and has her own website.

Her tutor noted that Rebekah had some learning challenges and found it hard to concentrate for long and that 'she is an intelligent and charming person who badly needs to be in the company of others but has difficulty building relationships'. She joined the class for various reasons but primarily to improve her painting skills. As a result of her taking part and her persistence:

'R. has quietly grown both in confidence with her skills as an artist and her own self esteem...'

Course manager, Caitriona Dunnett has many examples of students who have, for different reasons, found mainstream education extremely stressful. They have found the Community Focus extremely beneficial as 'accreditation is not the main goal' and have been able to make a recovery and return later on into formal education. One recent drama class student who did not have previous qualifications, for example, has recently got A* at GCSE Drama and is now going on to do A Level.



9. Future Development

Community Focus anticipates that, once again, its courses will be fully subscribed in 2012-2013 with the addition of 4 new classes.

The organisation is currently researching opportunities and partners to improve the evidence base of its social impacts and is consulting with ProBono Economics with a view to seeking to adopt an SROI (Social Return on Investment) Model. Community Focus' Director, Tim Balogun is confident about the organisation's core values, quality of work and commitment to better evidencing of impacts:

'We at CF are proud that we know powerful outcomes can be harnessed by individuals using the arts as the vehicle, a creative channel to help positively transform lives.

We have over the years been informed by parents and carers that those they care for have a 'new lease of life' after attending courses at CF, whilst more dramatic feedback has included participants who begin communicating with their peers for the first time in many years, again attributed to direct involvement with CF.

We do not claim to be miracle workers but we do seem to witness miracles occur here. How do we document our rather special organisation and how do we measure the impact we have within our communities? ... I believe this report is just the beginning of CF's journey into honing and evidencing our product so that we can show our social impact for many more years to come.'



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the participants of the Community In-house programme who were interviewed for this evaluation and whose work continues to inspire the organisation and the programme's success. Thanks also to the tutors who make it possible, in particular, Ruth Barrett, Judith Taylor, Maham Anjum, Vicky Martin and Sarah Bradley for their observations and co-operation.

Special Thanks

We would like to say a huge thank you to the London Borough of Barnet whose continued support has enabled us to provide: an affordable, sustainable creative programme which has a far-reaching impact within the community of Barnet.

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