

Inside Out Community

Annual Report 2014 -15

In his now famous book 'Small is Beautiful – the Study of Economics as if People Mattered', the economist and philosopher E.F. Schumacher makes the case for small scale: small communities, organisations, businesses, institutions; he argues that only small scale is compatible with human sensibilities and needs. Big can be isolating, impersonal, disempowering, decentring; small can be involving, empowering, centring and offer more personal and interpersonal fulfilment.



Inside Out is a small local charity and I'm proud that we are small. We want everyone who engages with Inside Out to feel part of something, close to the heart of things, and embraced by the values of inside Out, which are: warm acceptance; inspirational engagement; and personal and creative validation. We have no desire to be big; we want to stay a close knit community; close too to the Ipswich and East Suffolk community we work in, responding to the mental health needs of the area through the provision of high quality therapeutic arts programmes. We want to provide a safe creative space in which anyone whatever their age, background or emotional needs, can begin to feel that liberation from what William Blake called those 'mind forged manacles', which can so easily circumscribe our lives. For many of us the arts can be the key to liberation from the chains of anxiety; from the prison of depression.



This doesn't mean that we don't have BIG ambitions; our vision is to develop our collaboration with the artistic community with which we are so richly blessed in Suffolk and with other mental health agencies and practitioners to provide innovative, professional arts and wellbeing programmes, easily accessible, throughout the year, to all adults experiencing a breakdown in their psychological wellbeing.

A total of 63 arts and wellbeing sessions have been delivered in Ipswich during this past year (April 14 to March 15): 42 Open Arts Workshops; 21 Music Project workshops and 13 Young Adults' workshops. Over 60 individuals have attended workshops during the year.

The Open Workshop attendance on Fridays has remained good with over 30 individuals taking part in the programme (average attendance 10), some participants coming to sessions regularly others more intermittently. The programme has again offered a rich mix of arts experience: creative cartography; moving image making; found poems; shoe stories; drama inspired by the moon; songs and circle dances from around the world, and more. Collage work from the workshop sessions was shown at the Ipswich Art Society annual exhibition in the University building again last July and received some appreciative feedback.





The Music Project has continued fortnightly at St Peters by the Waterfront, with over 20 individuals taking part. Writing and developing new music and lyrics is a wonderfully expressive channel for our emotional life, for the painful realities of life, and for the life that remains to be born out of our hopes and dreams. The musicality of the group has continued to develop and that has been reflected in public performances of new songs at events during the year: the May Day Festival at Alexandra Park, Music in the Park at Christchurch Park and a World Mental Health Day event at Jimmy's Farm. Despite the growing ability of the group it still remains a place where anyone whatever their musical experience can turn up and become involved.

In January we started a new and exciting programme for Young Adults experiencing a variety of mental health issues. The programme is a collaboration between Inside Out and Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust youth pathway teams and is being led by David Hardy an art psychotherapist with the Trust. David is ably supported by Charlotte a workshop assistant and psychology graduate volunteering with Inside Out. The programme started with 12 participants and the average attendance has been 7. The response to the course both artistically and personally has been extraordinary and uplifting for everyone.



During the year we conducted an evaluation of Inside Out's work which produced some very positive and helpful feedback. Everyone completing the questionnaire felt there were positive benefits from attending: 'improves my sense of wellbeing; encourages me to be socially active; helps me express my creativity in different ways; offers something meaningful and interesting to do with my time', were the most frequently reported benefits. Respondents were then asked how they felt participation in the arts helped improve mental health and wellbeing; the most frequent given answers were: 'increases my contact and ease with others; helps me express myself and my feelings more fully in creative ways; takes my mind off the worrying preoccupations of life; and gives me a sense of enjoyment and lifts my mood'.



A particularly pleasing finding was that attending Inside Out sessions increased participant's creative interests and participation in the arts outside of Inside Out sessions. Respondents reported that they now made time for making art, or music, or writing in their everyday life; were more inclined to think of themselves as a creative person; had joined other creative groups; or went to art, music, or theatre events more often.

As always with questionnaires it is the feedback statements that people freely volunteer that are the most interesting and heart-warming. *'I find a freedom in Inside Out workshops I don't experience at other times'; 'It helps me feel more hopeful about myself and my life'; 'You can show your true colours, sometimes I look at a piece of art I've done and I think, that's not bad and it's part of me, part of who I am'; 'I feel more alive somehow after a morning at Inside Out'; 'It helps to be in a place where your feelings are validated; 'I love the relaxed atmosphere and acceptance of everyone'*

Inside Out would not be able to continue its work without funding and we are always exploring new funding streams. Over the years, including this past year, we've had amazing support from Suffolk Community Foundation and from the Ipswich Borough and Suffolk County Council through grants from locality funds. This year we've also benefited from generous donations from John Lewis; Waitrose; and the Unitarian Church. We seek to keep our costs low without compromising the quality of the programme. We know that in a time of austerity personal budgets are tight and we would not want anyone to feel excluded from Inside Out for financial reasons, so we want to continue offering our programmes free to participants, BUT voluntary donations from everyone attending sessions are very important to us. This year our end of year accounts show a healthy balance of £16,269.

Funding is not the only essential resource for our continuation, staffing is also vitally important. Paula - who has taken on an acting programme leaders role this past year and Sian - who generously volunteers her time in an already busy working week, have led the Friday open group. Both continue to be a much valued creative, supportive and enabling presence in the workshops. We the trustees would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to them for their commitment to Inside Out.



This past year we have also benefited considerably from the contribution of our new volunteers Charlotte, Theodora and Matthew, and latterly Ruth, who have brought new energy, imagination and presence into our sessions. Victoria who was volunteering with us is now training as an art therapist and we hope to see her again from time to time.



We have worked with 12 local artists of various disciplines over the year, some new to us and some who have been inside out contributors for some time. Over the year we have benefited enormously from their inspiring creative input. It is this distinctive quality – where else could you get such a rich and diverse artistic experience, which gives Inside out its uniqueness and value as an arts wellbeing organisation

There is something unnameable in the process of making art that has a healing and uplifting quality. I have always enjoyed that quiet, meditative atmosphere that envelopes the group when people are engaged and absorbed in creating a piece of art. Entering the studio room it can almost seem like intruding on a 'soul space'. Perhaps it is that through art we are in some way actualising ourselves, making the richness of who we are more apparent and in that process we grow beyond the fears, the confusions, the depression that can envelop and darken our lives. But it is not about making art in isolation, as Shaun McNiff says 'art heals by connecting us with others, with ourselves and the world in affirming ways¹. It is serious fun!



Pete Watkins

Co-Founder & Chair
Inside Out Community 2015

¹ McNiff S. Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul. London: Shambhala Publications 2004