



An Evaluation of feedback from participants of *Inside Out's* workshop programme 2014

Background

Inside Out Community is an arts and mental health charity founded in 2003. We are committed to providing programmes throughout the year for people drawn to the therapeutic arts as a way of improving and sustaining their mental health and wellbeing.

We are based in Ipswich UK and our programmes take place mainly in the county town and the smaller satellite towns of East Suffolk. Participants are adults aged 18 -80 who may be: recovering from periods of mental ill-health; living with a continuing vulnerability to episodes of psychological distress; or have simply been overwhelmed emotionally by the stress of everyday life.

Currently one in four adults in the UK experience mental ill-health in any one year. Suffolk has a high depression rate with 14.5% of the adult population being affected with the more deprived wards of Ipswich experiencing an even higher incidence. Inside Out provides a mental health resource, immediately available and easily accessible within a community setting, helping to and restore and sustain wellbeing.

Workshop programmes offered by Inside Out include: the visual arts, creative writing, singing, music, drama, and more, led by professional artists who share their skills in inspiring and supportive ways.

Introduction

It is essential to acquire feedback from members/participants of *Inside Out* in order to ensure that we are responding effectively to their needs in current workshops, and in the development of new workshop programmes. Feedback evaluation also provides evidence for referral agencies and funding bodies, on the efficacy of *Inside Out* programmes.

Method

We wanted to evaluate what outcomes members experience from the sessions (for example increased sense of wellbeing or interest in the arts); whether creative activity is currently included in their care plan; what the most successful workshops were, and how the *Inside Out* programme might change to more effectively respond to needs and interests

In October 2014, a questionnaire addressing these questions was sent to 50 active members. 20 were completed and returned. We see this as a small but statistically valid sample.

The Questionnaire

There were 10 questions in total. Each question had optional choice answers with the instruction of 'Tick as many of the following that seem relevant to you' and also space to write down 'any other

ways' in order to offer an opportunity for a freer, subjective response. Some questions used a Likert scale instead, with room for comments, which will also be analysed in a qualitative manner.

Results

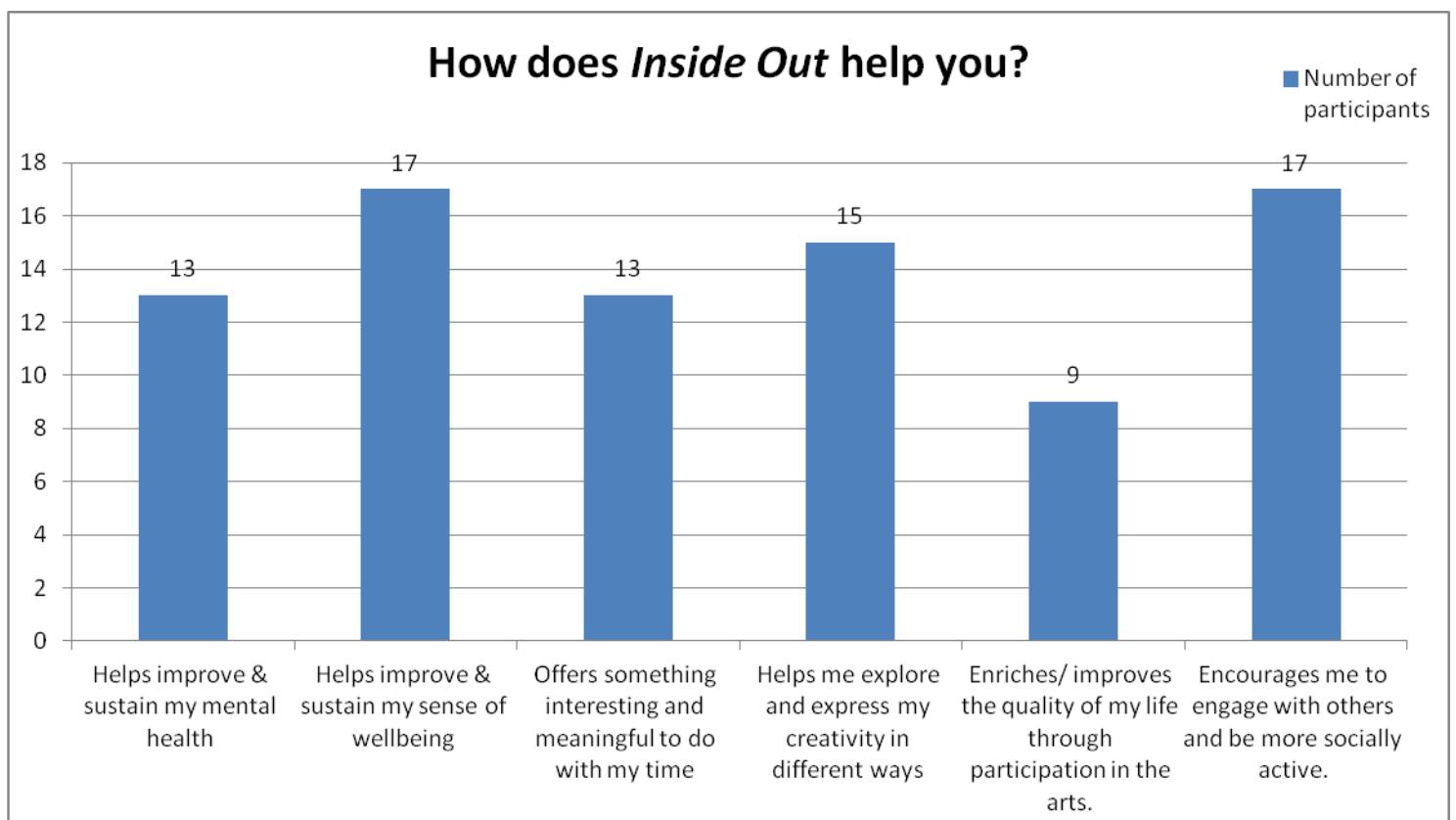
➤ **Question 1.**

Do you feel participating in *Inside Out* is beneficial/helpful to you?

All 20 respondents answered 'yes' to this question. This reflects the beneficial value of the workshops and suggests that it is currently accounting for a variety of needs.

➤ **Question 2.**

Which of the following ways do you feel it helps?



Participants were given optional choice answers and space to write down 'any other ways'. The most popular answers were that *Inside out* 'Helps improve and sustain my sense of wellbeing' and also 'Encourages me to engage with others and be more socially active', with 85% of participants agreeing with each answer.

This strongly suggests that it reduces isolation and engages members with other like-minded individuals. A participant commented that it '*Gets me out of the house- doing something worthwhile*' and this can transfer to other social situations. Another commented it '*Helps me think I really can resume my job*

The high rate of participants agreeing that *Inside out* improves and sustains wellbeing is complimented by 65% of participants saying that *Inside out* helps improve and sustain my mental health. Personal comments such as *'I feel more alive somehow after a morning at Inside Out'* and *'Stops me feeling stuck in the quicksands of depression'* really highlight the therapeutic impact members experience.

Other participants valued the opportunity to develop personal creativity. 75% of participants agreed that *Inside out* 'Helps me explore and express my creativity in different ways'. Other reasons were *'[It] Teaches me new skills that I can transfer into activities outside Inside Out'*; comments such as *'I like the freedom of Inside Out'* an *'Best think I ever joined - I haven't played for years – creativity is a kind of play'* suggest individuals can find what they most need within the sessions.

Question 3.

(Follows up question 2) If you ticked 'Helps improve my mental health or my sense of wellbeing', in what ways do you think Inside Out workshops help with that?

	Number of participants
Increases my contact & ease with others	16
Helps me express myself more fully in creative ways	16
Helps take my mind off the worrying preoccupations of life.	15
Gives me a sense of pleasure/enjoyment & lifts my mood/ spirits	14
Helps build my self-esteem & confidence	14
Being part of a friendly, accepting creative community helps me feel less isolated*	14
Increases my interest in the arts & develops my creative skills	14
Creative activity helps me express & manage my feelings	12
It relaxes me/ makes me feel calmer inside	11
Helps me feel more hopeful about myself and my life**	10
Helps me feel more resilient and stronger emotionally	8
Increases my energy and motivation for living	5
<i>* indicates either underlining or asterisk</i>	

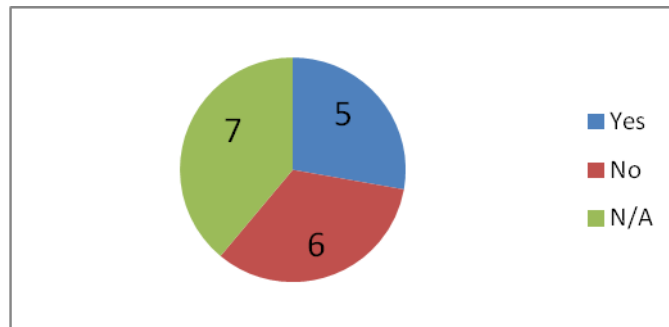
Most participants ticked *'Increases my contact & ease with others'* and *'Helps me express myself more fully in creative ways'* with 80% ticking each box. Additional answers involving social advantages included *'I can join in without joining in – nobody pressures you and I still feel part of the group'*, *'It helps to be in a place where my experience & feelings are validated; no one worries if you're high or low'* and *'No-ones trying to fix you, make you better, you're accepted as you are.....'*. This participant then also explains how he/she is able to express themselves *'.....then you can start to show your true colours. Sometimes I look at a piece of art I've done and think this is not bad and its part of me'*.

The responses to question 3 reflect similar themes to question 1. The social environment created within the workshop provides not only an opportunity to become more socially active, but also

creates a non-judgemental, warmly accepting atmosphere, necessary for creative expression. By feeling able to express themselves in creative ways, participant's wellbeing is improved. ('It's a safe place to be', 'Gets me playing my drums the one thing that makes me happy again')

➤ **Question 4.**

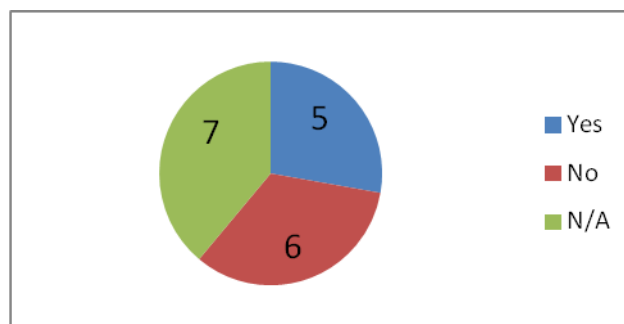
If you are receiving treatment & support from mental health services, is participation in creative activity part of your care/ recovery plan?



Many *Inside Out* participants are supported by other statutory and voluntary mental health services and will have an individualised care/recovery plan. Of the 20 participants, 11 were on a care plan and replied to the question. 5 had 'participation in a creative activity' as part of their care plan, 6 did not, and the question did not apply to 7 of the participants. 2 participants commented that they were 'Not sure', but 1 noted that a nurse recommended *Inside Out* to them and know that he/she attends.

➤ **Question 5.**

(Follows up question 4) Have you had the opportunity to discuss your creative needs with anyone involved in your treatment/care?



This question saw a similar number of people split between 'Yes'/'No'/'N/A' as the last question. Importantly, roughly half of the participants with a care/recovery plan have not had the opportunity to discuss creative needs with anyone involved in their treatment/care. *Inside Out* is keen to

promote discussion of therapeutic arts as way of supporting and improving mental health and wellbeing and it is obvious that there is a need for it's consideration as a therapeutic option within care plans.

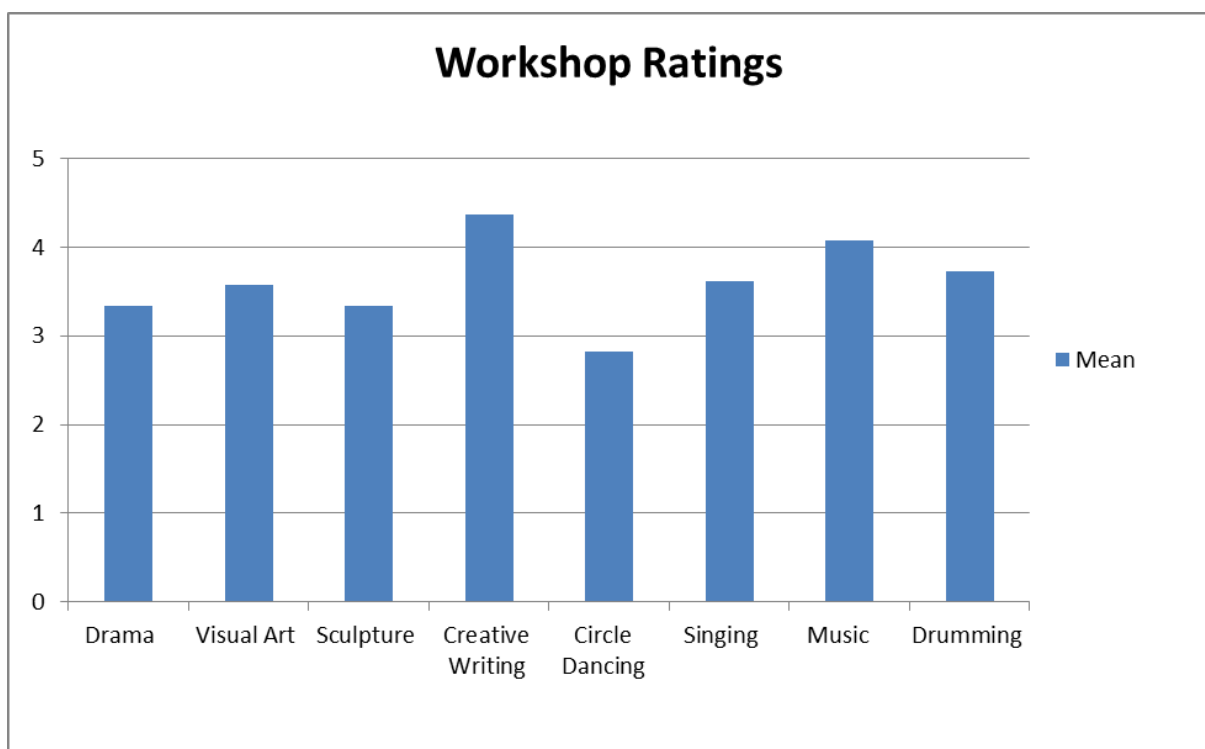
➤ **Question 6.**

Which workshops have you most enjoyed? Use the following scale to rate each activity for enjoyment

Enjoyed a Lot 5.....4.....3.....2.....1 Didn't Enjoy

Workshop	Likert scale results	Mean	Mode	Range	Median
Creative Writing (poetry, prose)	4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5,	4.4	5	1	5
Music	1, 2, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	4.1	4.5	4	4
Drumming	2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5	3.7	4.5	3	4
Singing	2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5	3.6	4.5	3	4
Visual Art (painting, drawing, printing)	2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5,	3.6	3.5	3	4
Sculpture	1, 2, 2, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5	3.3	5	4	5
Drama	1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5,	3.3	4	3	4
Circle Dancing	1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, 5, 5	2.8	5	4	3

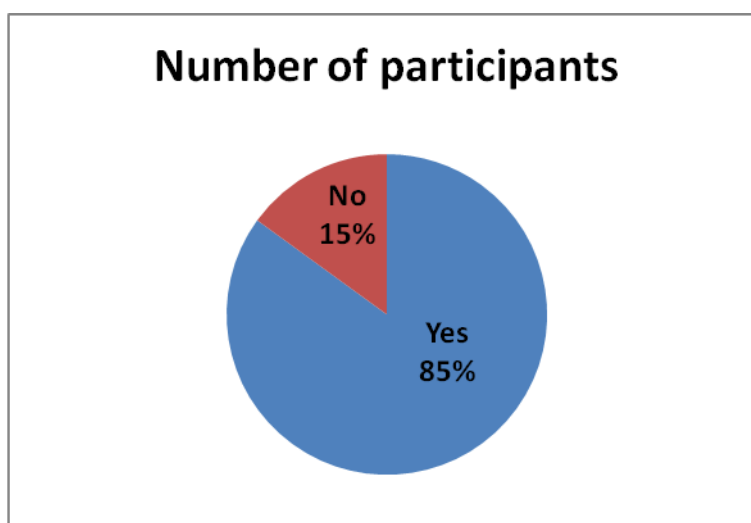
There was quite a high range of ratings, with a lot of workshops scoring a 1 or 2, along with a 5 from other members. The mean is plotted as a bar graph below, and the original scores can be referred to in the table



The majority of participants gave the workshops high scores, meaning they ‘enjoyed it’. The three most popular workshops (using mean) were ‘Creative Writing’, ‘Music’ and ‘Drumming’ however it had a broad range of scores, highlighting the variation in what the participants find a pleasurable activity and the need for flexibility and choice within the programmes- not simply drawing or painting..

➤ **Question 7.**

Has being part of the *Inside Out* creative community helped or encouraged your interest and/or participation in the arts generally?



➤ **Question 8.**

If you answered yes to question 7, in what ways has your creative interest developed?

	Number of participants
Made time for making art, creative writing or music in my everyday life	7
Think of myself as a creative person	7
Joined other local arts/music/drama/ creative writing groups	5
Go to more art exhibitions; music events; dance or theatre events	5
Express my creativity in my life other than through the arts.	3
Enrolled for arts or creative writing courses	2
Volunteer with arts organisations	2

Questions 7 and 8 show how effective the workshops have been in nurturing participants creative skills and interests and to make time to integrate those activities into everyday life. The spread of

answers among the 20 participants (question 8) also shows how the workshops provide different benefits depending on the individual. Some see the activities as a journey of self-discovery and help reinforce a more positive identity, and others have been encouraged to participate actively or passively in the arts outside of our programmes, such as visiting exhibitions or the theatre. This is a key aim of *inside out*.

➤ **Question 9.**

If you could change the *Inside Out* programme in some way what would you change?

This question allowed the participant to write freely. There were mostly requests for more of a particular workshop; for there to be changes to structures, and what workshops individuals didn't enjoy, and why.

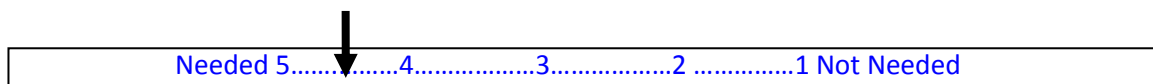
There were four comments regarding the structure of the workshops. There was a request for workshops to be available more often; for the possibility of an alternative exercise, and for there to be some kind of exhibition or performance that the members could work towards.

One participant commented specifically on issues within two workshops. They would not include still life because it: '*excludes people whose drawing is not good*' and also '*it's boring*'. Furthermore, in response to a recent project titled '*Creative Cartography*' (it) '*brings your mood down because 'It requires us to remember and re-live painful experiences' and 'Opens up things which can't easily be closed down. You need therapy for this'*'. The possibility of an alternative exercise was then suggested to avoid causing distress. While this was not a widely held view amongst participants in this project it reminds us that even working indirectly and symbolically (as we do), with the significant issues in people's lives, workshops can be uncomfortable for some and need to be facilitated with sensitivity and awareness.

Lastly, three participants reported a need for more musical based workshops. For example: lyric writing, and weekly music and singing.

➤ **Question 10.**

As a community resource for improving well-being and mental health through participation in the arts, how valuable would you say *Inside Out* is?



The mean score was **4.5**- a very positive result for the charity.

'I love the relaxed atmosphere- the total acceptance of everyone' , 'I like that it's not perfect- we manage even if we don't have everything we need or think we need' and 'it makes me happy'. One

participant makes a clear divide between mental health and wellbeing, commenting that they would score a 5 for wellbeing but 'Only I can improve my mental health'. However, respondents unequivocally see *Inside Out* as a valued therapeutic arts resource; or a resource that can contribute to wellbeing in the community.

Discussion

The feedback received from the 20 members that answered the questionnaire shows that there is a generally positive opinion of the workshops. 100% of the sample saw benefits from being involved in *Inside Out*. It helps improve and sustain their sense of wellbeing/mental health and also encourages engagement and socially activity with others. In addition to these main benefits, *Inside Out* also allows members to explore and express creativity in different ways and teaches them new skills.

By increasing contact with others, in an environment that has a culture of warm acceptance, validation of individuals and their work, through expressing themselves more freely in creative ways, and through providing time out from the worrying preoccupations of life, wellbeing is increased.

Workshops all scored an average of either 3.5 or above which means that they are enjoyable to the majority of members. The workshops that were perceived to be the most enjoyable were Sculpture and Creative writing. Circle Dancing also had some high scores, however, along with Sculpture; these workshops also had the largest range. This suggests that it is important to include a varied programme for members because of the variation in what the participants find a pleasurable activity.

When participants asked what they would change about the workshops, some commented on changes to the structure of the workshops: such as frequency of workshops, alternative activities, and an exhibition or performance event. Other participants saw the need for more musically orientated workshops, and one participant had some feedback on Still Life and Creative Cartography workshops and how they might be used less often or improved. There was some emphasis on an individual's right to 'freely' determine and be responsible for what they 'reference' of themselves in creative activities. The programme remains under constant review and we are open to changes and the introduction new art activities and artists.

The study has already shown that 17/20 participants think *Inside out* encourages them to be more socially active, and 16/20 find that *Inside out* improves their wellbeing because it increases their contact and ease with others. Because of this, we recognise the importance of the social aspect of *Inside Out's* work. It is about the art but not all about the art, and in many sessions, interaction is an integral part of the activity.

Importantly *Inside out* has encouraged members who ordinarily have little involvement with the arts to engage in the workshops in an enjoyable and beneficial way. Of equal importance, the programmes have increased participants interest in the arts outside of the workshops.; with members making time for the arts in their everyday life, thinking of themselves as a creative person, or even joining other local arts groups and attending performances and exhibitions. Increasing this focus on creative activity (active or passive) between sessions helps maintain wellbeing. 17/20 said that being part of the *inside out* community has helped encourage their interest/participation in the arts generally.

For participants who have a care plan there was a split between those who have 'participation in a creative activity' as part of it (5), and those who don't (6). Likewise, the same split has been found in those who have been able to discuss their creative needs with anyone involved in their treatment/care, and those who haven't. For those who have a care/recovery plan, there is obviously a need for more dialogue with mental health professionals and those receiving care about the therapeutic value of the arts.

Conclusion

The feedback for *Inside Out* has been amazingly positive and shows a true need for the continuation of workshop programmes. The workshops have been shown to help members increase their social activity, improve wellbeing/mental health, and express and learn creative skills.

Most workshops were enjoyable to members and a variable programme in which people have an opportunity to explore different art forms works for most members. We need to remain open to change and introduce new and different things into the programme in order for everyone to select the sessions most effective to them.

Previous research around mental health and creative arts has shown that arts participation improves individual empowerment and mental health. Further benefits that have been shown are: Increased self-understanding, self-esteem, resilience, feelings of stability, and improved communications skills. Furthermore, these studies strongly support our findings that members feel more accepted and socially included when being involved in the workshops. This previous research supports the more general findings from this study. There was also evidence against the case that 'one size fits all', Emphasizing the need to provide a broad range of workshops..

Overall, feedback from *Inside Out* members confirm that *Inside Out* is needed as a community resource for improving well-being and mental health through participation in the arts. By providing artistic opportunities, creating a safe and social environment, and encouraging creative interests inside and outside the workshops, we can help to maintain good wellbeing. Possibly even helping individuals become less dependent on statutory services.

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Evaluation by *Inside Out* volunteer Charlotte Woolf (Psychology B.Sc.)