

# Escape Family Support

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Women from ESCAPE family support at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Credit: ESCAPE

*Established in Blyth in 1995, Escape Family Support (Escape)<sup>1</sup> is a county-wide drug and alcohol misuse charity that aims to reach out to local communities by developing hubs of support for substance misusers, carers, families and friends.*

The service is committed to providing a range of high quality services associated with substance misuse and by working in partnership with others to offer the fullest possible range of holistic, complementary and diversionary services. In spring 2014 bait co-commissioned a project in partnership with Escape to enable service users to experience a range of arts activities delivered by freelance artists and covering a range of art forms. The success of these pilot art taster sessions encouraged bait and Escape to establish a longer-term artist residency to be delivered from the newly opened Susan Kennedy Centre in Ashington. The project commenced in November 2014 and was delivered through fortnightly sessions over a six month period.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.escapefamilysupport.org.uk/>

## Project Information

### Project aims

The project aimed to inspire and support Escape service users to create artworks based on a positive recovery. Through the delivery of the visual art sessions, and with the support of the professional artist, service users were assisted in developing new skills and techniques as well as building their confidence and appreciation of the arts. The project was designed to work towards an exhibition of the work at the Susan Kennedy Centre.

### Target participants

The project has worked with both service users and carers accessing support through Escape. Separate sessions were scheduled for each group with service users working with the artist in the morning and carers in the afternoon. This was designed to ensure that the sessions provided respite for participants and were not hindered by any relationship dynamics between service users on their recovery journey and their carers or family members.

In recognition of the importance of family support to service users' recovery journey a total of seven family sessions were also delivered on Saturday mornings, providing an opportunity for service users and carers to participate fun arts activities with their children.

### Project partners

The key partners in the project included:

- **bait** Creative People and Places programme as commissioner. Arts for Health Manager **Lisa Blaney** was assigned as Project Lead and Creative Connector **Rachel Burn** provided support for the delivery of the sessions working alongside the lead artist;
- **Escape Family Support** anchored the delivery of the sessions with support provided by Escape Co-ordinator **Jennie Bell** and oversight by Manager **Nikki Baron**. Additional support was provided by volunteers; and
- **Maureen Hanley** was appointed as the freelance visual artist.

### Project activities

Initial taster sessions were delivered to provide an opportunity for service users and carers to try different arts activities. This approach was valuable in two respects. Firstly, it helped to challenge the negative perceptions that some service users and carers had towards 'the arts' by enabling them to see first-hand a range of different arts activities and identify which art forms they were most interested in. Secondly, feedback from the sessions helped bait to prepare the brief for the freelance artist to deliver the project, so ensuring that the preferences and interests of service users and carers shaped the design and focus of the subsequent art sessions.

The importance of selecting an artist that the service users and carers felt comfortable with was recognised from the outset and both groups were involved in the process of recruiting and interviewing shortlisted candidates. Their active and meaningful involvement in the recruitment process has been a key success factor and ensured that a positive rapport was established between the selected artist and participants from the outset.

The 16 sessions were delivered on a fortnightly basis over six months. The number of sessions and duration of the project provided a range of benefits, namely in maintaining momentum in arts participation and providing opportunity for participants to progress their skills in a particular

art form which, in turn, can engender a powerful sense of mental well-being<sup>2</sup>. The sessions were delivered in the large community room at the Susan Kennedy Centre, Escape's newly opened facility in Ashington, providing a safe space for participants to engage in arts activities.

Within the sessions participants have been able to access support from both the Escape Co-ordinator and bait Creative Connector. This additional capacity has been central to the effective delivery of the sessions by alleviating pressure on the artist and enabling participants to receive one-to-one support when required. The Escape Coordinator has also played an important role in addressing the wider support needs of participants during their recovery journey and helping to encourage their active involvement during the early sessions in particular.

One of the ambitions for the project was to encourage and inspire participants to make regular arts participation part of their life and routine. Within the sessions participants have been provided with practical tips and ideas from the artist on activities they could undertake at home. This has included information on where to purchase affordable craft materials and how to recycle and upcycle everyday items. Alongside the delivery of the art sessions participants have also been supported by Escape to attend a number of local cultural venues which has helped to provide them with creative ideas and themes to form the basis of their artwork.

### **Key challenges**

Thorough design of the project has served to mitigate many of the anticipated challenges to the effective delivery of the art sessions. The main challenge faced by the project when working with a core of 10-12 service users and carers over the six month period is that recovery from addiction is not a linear process. As such participants have suffered setbacks during the delivery of the project. The process of facilitating participation has therefore had to adequately take into account that service users may be struggling with low mood and depression in some sessions and need appropriate support to maintain their involvement at a level they are comfortable with.

## **Outcomes and impact - what changed as a result?**

### **Project outcomes<sup>3</sup>**

The project aimed to deliver three key outcomes, namely:

- To increase the artistic skills and techniques of service users and carers;
- To develop service users' and carers' confidence and appreciation of the arts; and
- To exhibit the art work produced by service users and carers at the Susan Kennedy Centre.

For many of the participants their involvement in the project was the first time they had engaged in an arts activity or at least the first time since they had left school. The project has provided an opportunity for creative expression and for the majority has provided an entry point for longer-term engagement in the arts. Evidence from similar projects highlights the considerable benefits for participants from engaging in craft activities (for example knitting, sewing, painting, papier mache sculpture, card-making and pottery) which require low entry skills, in particular the strong sense of achievement felt from small improvements in skills and techniques and experiencing a sense of creativity which many had thought was not possible for them.

Promoting creativity at a community level through this approach is an important component of

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<sup>2</sup> Skills for Care (2013) - 'What do we know about the role of arts in the delivery of social care? Rapid evidence assessment'. Report produced by Consilium Research & Consultancy. February 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Verbatim quotations taken from the Escape Digital Story created by Curiosity Creative.

wider efforts to increase public participation at a higher level of artistic endeavour<sup>4</sup>. Reflecting on their involvement in the project, both service users and carers expressed their sense of achievement in producing different art works, developing their skills and learning new artist techniques. Importantly, the confidence they gained from their participation also provided them with the motivation to take on new challenges and push themselves outside of their comfort areas.

As the project has progressed many of the participants report to have increased their engagement in the arts, either through further craft activities at home with children and family members or through attendance at art events and cultural activities across South East Northumberland. Participants are also planning to attend the Edinburgh Festival which provides further evidence of their increased confidence, motivation and interest in the arts as a result of the project.

The art exhibition was launched in early June 2015 with the work of participants showcased to invited guests including friends and family. The art work is now permanently displayed at the Susan Kennedy Centre, providing an attractive and creative environment for service users and carers and serving to inspire others to engage in arts activities to support their recovery journey.

### **Project impact**

One of the objectives of Escape is to focus on activities that can achieve improved psychological, physical and mental wellbeing of service users and carers. In the USA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) note four major dimensions that support a life in recovery: health, home, purpose and community. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) Recovery Committee notes that recovery is an ambitious concept that may require someone with drug or alcohol dependence to both overcome that dependence and also achieve a way of life, improvements to well-being and social integration that they did not have prior to developing substance misuse problems.

There is research evidence that for some people, historic and current family dysfunction is an impediment to recovery. The project has provided an opportunity for participants to learn new skills and develop creative ideas that can provide a focus for positive activities at home with children and family members.

**“If it wasn’t for Escape I don’t really think I’d be here right now...I’ve had a very troubled and traumatic past...addictions, alcohol and drugs and I nearly lost my children.”**

**Participant**

Emerging research evidence cited by ACMD indicates that social capital may play a key role in recovery, particularly through the building of non-substance using family and social support networks. It is evident that the project has contributed to building support networks for service users and carers, thus strengthening social capital.

**“Last week I came in feeling really low and within an hour I could feel myself being lifted and just concentrated on the art work and by the time I’d done that I’d gone from a**

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on the importance of demonstrating relevance to engage new participants see Arts Council Wales (2008) - ‘Arts and Public Engagement, Patterns, processes and levers for change’

**two or three to a nine or ten...I love the fact that my kids and my mam and the rest of my family are so pleased with the way I'm coming along and how I'm doing and they're getting me back."**

Participant

More broadly, at a community level there is emerging research evidence that communicating positive stories about people in recovery reduces stigma for this group and that self-stigma can be reduced through therapeutic interventions and mutual aid<sup>5</sup>. Showcasing the art work of service users represents a positive step in addressing stigma and removing barriers (actual or perceived) to wider participation in a range of local events and activities. The review of evidence on recovery from drug and alcohol dependence delivered by ACMD highlights research that suggests that improving well-being improves rates of recovery<sup>6</sup>.

**"It's been a lifeline to be honest, it's helped me get back to being myself and away from the person I was back then...I'm slowly but surely coming out of my shell and getting a bit of confidence in myself and just starting to enjoy life again."**

Participant

**"When I started it, it took me back to when I was myself...I'd lost myself, who I was...and I sort of discovered myself again with art...I hadn't done it for a long time, and I now I feel like I'm looking forward to the future...I can do a bit of art and I feel alright with the group of people. I come here and I really look forward to it, it lifts me up."**

Participant

Feedback from participants suggests that the project has supported improvement to their health and well-being, delivered a sense of purpose, through engaging with family members has improved relationships at home and by building confidence has facilitated wider involvement in the local community.

**"At one time I'd just isolate myself in the house, I wouldn't come out, I'd have my blinds closed, I wouldn't answer my door and I would just get deeper and deeper into depression...now it's great I look forward to getting up in**

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<sup>5</sup> Livingston JD et al. (2011)- 'The effectiveness of interventions for reducing stigma related to substance use disorders: a systematic review'. *Addiction*, Volume 107, Issue 1, pages 39-50, January 2012

<sup>6</sup> ACMD (2012)- 'Recovery from drug and alcohol dependence: an overview of the evidence'.

**the morning, going out... and coming to my groups, it's great."**

Participant

**"There is something about art, it uses the other side of your brain and you just don't think about your problems...I really look forward to coming and when I go I feel really good."**

Participant

Changes in the mental well-being of participants have been measured using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS). The results evidence improvements in mental well-being based on responses provided by nine participants.

**Mental well-being scores**

Number completing assessment	9
Total score (Start)	432
Total score (End)	468
Percentage increase	8.3%

## Legacy

- The success of the project has motivated staff, service users and carers at Escape to seek additional funding to maintain art activities as a key part of the holistic, complementary and diversionary services offered. Options being explored include raising funds through the sale of arts and craft produced by the group at local venues and events, seeking voluntary contributions from participants to support running costs (in particular the family sessions) and submitting funding applications to relevant grant making bodies and foundations to meet the costs of a professional artist.
- The momentum from the project has been carried into a new activity delivered in partnership with Groundwork to design and deliver a new garden space at the Susan Kennedy Centre thus providing further opportunities for participants to engage in another creative process. Participants are also planning to attend the Edinburgh Festival which provides further evidence of their increased confidence, motivation and interest in the arts as a result of the project.
- A number of participants are exploring opportunities to build on the skills and techniques they have acquired through the art sessions by taking up a general art and design course at Northumberland College. Several have also expressed an interest in supporting or leading future arts sessions in order to support other service users and their families to engage in arts activities. The potential for them to lead future sessions can provide a positive focus that continues their personal journey, in particular given emerging evidence cited by ACMD highlighting the positive impact of volunteering on recovery.
- Supporting a number of participants to access training to enable them to deliver future sessions will build local capacity and help to maintain art activities at Escape. However, access to mentoring and support from a professional artist will be important to maintain the quality of the arts activity, to allow participants to reflect on their delivery (consistent with an experiential learning model), build their confidence in supporting others and learn new skills to expand their art form.

- In light of the positive outcomes reported by participants and their enthusiasm to engage in other art activities there is potential for the project to produce resources such as activity sheets and guides to signpost participants and their families to local arts and cultural opportunities, therefore facilitating continued participation.

## Lessons learnt

Key areas of learning which can inform ongoing and similar activities across south east Northumberland include:

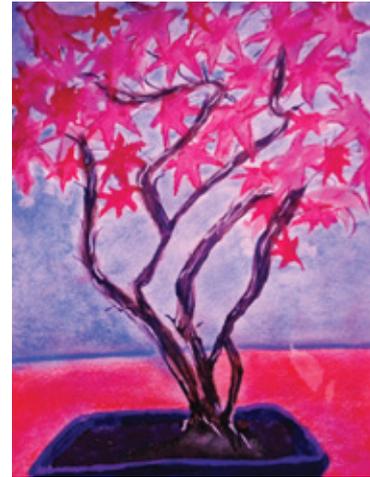
- The project has built the skills and confidence of participants both in terms of creating artwork but also more broadly in terms of seeking out new challenges and opportunities. In this regard the project can act as a springboard for participants to engage in other arts and cultural activities (either as a group or individually/with their family).
- Many of the participants have a limited awareness of other arts and cultural activities events across the bait footprint and how to get involved. It is evident from consultations that more support and signposting is required to provide a bridge for the participants to access these opportunities across Northumberland and beyond.
- Participants' active and meaningful involvement in the process of recruiting the artist has been a key success factor and ensured that a positive rapport was established between the selected artist and participants from the outset. The ability of the artist to motivate, inspire, empower and, when required, challenge the participants has been central to the achievement of positive outcomes. Ensuring that participants felt comfortable with the personality and approach of the selected artist has been essential.
- Whilst ad hoc art sessions and taster sessions have a role to play in engaging people that don't usually participate in the arts, stronger progression and skills development is achieved by scheduling a programme of sessions that enables participants to express themselves creatively, gain confidence, progress their skills, reflect on their experience and achieve broader social, emotional and well-being outcomes.
- The management support provided by bait's Arts for Health Manager and in-session support provided by the bait Creative Connector and Escape Co-ordinator have been central to the effective delivery of the project. This additional capacity has enabled the wider support needs of participants to be met, in particular to recognise periods of low mood and depression commonly experienced as part of an individual's recovery journey.
- Many of the participants are active users of social media, in particular Facebook, through which they have shared their art work with their social network. There is potential to strengthen the use of social media channels and participants' own social networks to showcase the project and promote participation in the arts more broadly through the local community.

## Replicability

The following are highlighted as top tips for replicating this project:

- Actively involving participants in the process of recruiting the artist can provide them with a sense of empowerment and also ensure that they feel comfortable working with the selected candidate;
- Sufficient capacity, over and above that of the artist, should be built into the sessions to ensure that the wider support needs of participants can be adequately met; and
- A sufficient number of sessions should be scheduled to enable the project to build momentum

and provide an opportunity for participants to progress their artistic skills and techniques as this can engender a powerful sense of achievement and well-being



Images: Work created by ESCAPE participants in workshops with artist Maureen Hanley, now on permanent display in the Susan Kennedy Centre. Credits: Tiger by Tracey (above left) and Watercolour by Jane (above right)

## Evidence of progress against Theory of Change

### **Ambition: to make a change in levels of participation in quality arts activity**

The arts project delivered by Escape has provided an opportunity for service users, carers and their families to participate in quality arts activity. The exhibition of the art work produced by participants has helped to raise the profile of the project and the benefits of engaging in arts activities to a wider audience. In addition, the process of supporting participants to gain new skills and learn artistic techniques has encouraged them to create art and engage in craft activities outside of the sessions with family members as well as motivating them to seek out wider cultural activities across Northumberland. The use of bait's Quality Framework has aided the project in achieving high quality standards in relation to the project's product, creative process and quality of experience for participants.

Whilst it is too early to make an assessment of the project's success in contributing to long-term change in levels of arts participation in South East Northumberland, the ambition of several participants to lead arts activities within Escape has the potential to diversify the participation base.

### **Ambition: to involve local people**

Through Escape the project has directly involved local service users, carers and their families in arts activities. Service users have also contributed to the design of the project through their feedback from the initial taster sessions and also by actively contributing to the recruitment process for the artist.

### **Ambition: to demonstrate the benefits to well-being of quality arts activity**

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive with personal stories highlighting the considerable well-being benefits resulting from their participation. As a result of their participation service users and carers have made new friends, strengthened their relationships with family members, grown in confidence, gained a sense of achievement, learned how to communicate feelings and express themselves through art and increased their levels of self-respect and self-efficacy. Importantly, the confidence they have gained from their participation has also provided them with the motivation to take on new challenges and push themselves outside of their comfort areas. The positive contribution to participant's well-being is also

confirmed through the improved scores recorded through the WEMWBS assessments.

### **Ambition: to leave a sustainable legacy of enhanced capacity, resources and infrastructure for the arts in south east Northumberland**

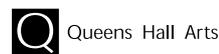
Developing the skills and confidence of local people to produce quality art and facilitate the participation of others has the potential to leave a sustainable legacy for the benefit of future service users and carers at Escape. For many the project has provided an invaluable entry point for longer- term engagement in the arts and motivated them to seek out new art and culture opportunities across South East Northumberland. The Management Committee at Escape has provided a commitment to integrate arts activity as part of its range of holistic, complementary and diversionary services.

Research has established a link between a lack of interest in culture, arts and leisure in adulthood and a lack of encouragement and engagement activities in childhood<sup>7</sup>. This is often in line with parents' own upbringing and a similar lack of encouragement from their parents. Supporting engagement in culture and the arts at an early age is vital to encouraging attendance and participation in later life.

By providing service users and carers with new skills and techniques and an opportunity to participate with their children as part of family sessions, the project has actively supported a process of 'intergenerational transmission'<sup>8</sup> which can help to shape children and young people's subsequent cultural engagement as an adult.

Researched and written by Consilium Research as part of the evaluation of bait (2015)  
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#### **Our Funders**



#### **Our Consortium**

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7 For overview see Arts Council England (2014)- 'Equality and diversity within the arts and cultural sector in England: Evidence and literature review'. Report produced by Consilium Research & Consultancy.  
8 Miles, A. & Sullivan, A. (2010)-'Understanding the relationship between taste and value in culture and sport' Department for Culture, Media and Sport