

sandfield house arts project
steps routes roads pathways to

recovery

A tailored research project for arts, health and wellbeing

Gill Hobson

Edited by Nick Triplow

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foreword

As an artist and consultant I have a profound belief that arts and culture can create a sense of wellbeing and transform the quality of life for individuals and their communities. Participation in the arts has significant impact in supporting fundamental aspects of personal growth and empowerment, helping to build self-esteem, boost confidence and contributing to the richness of a whole life experience.

Whilst attending an open forum to discuss contexts around the arts for health and wellbeing, I realised that most of those participating had different definitions of what this meant for them and the communities and projects they represented. Although many participants were from the health sector, others were from youth groups, community groups, residents' associations, civic and sports groups. The diversity of those for whom arts and wellbeing carried a vital importance was testament to the fact that experience and participation in arts and culture is accepted as having significant impact on an individual's health and life opportunities, as well as being a building block in creating wider social capital.

What was common to each participant was not just that they felt the arts would make a positive contribution to their work and practice, but that they asked the critical question: *'How might this work for us?'*

This publication tells the story of an arts for health and wellbeing project in North Lincolnshire which, from the outset, integrated fresh contexts for innovation and practice. It aims to provide an answer to that question, the elusive *'How might this work for us?'*

In charting the development of a specific programme of activity at Sandfield House - a facility delivering adult mental health services as part of Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (RDaSH) – we highlight the project's multiple and interconnected elements, any one of which could be developed by other agencies in other settings as a starting point for broader activity. We follow the project through its phases of consultation, strategy development, delivery, evaluation and legacy. We illustrate its potential and its results, recognising and celebrating the variety of creative interventions that contributed to a rich experience for artists, staff and service users.

As the project's lead artist, I am indebted to all partners for their commitment and support. The project has been person-centred from the outset, with partners engaged and involved at each stage. It would not have been possible without the forward thinking of RDaSH and the Sandfield House team. As this is an action research project, we all learned a great deal, faced challenges together, worked together and laughed together, responding with positivity and a 'can do' attitude which has been fundamental to the project's success.

In turn, the project provided an opportunity for tangible arts experiences that positively impacted on individuals and their environment beyond direct participation in hands-on activity. The feedback is testimony to this, giving an insight to the benefits that a sustained programme creates and providing a legacy from which future activities can be developed.

In sharing our journeys, experiences and methodologies, we aim to set out a valuable working model for those working in health and other sectors to innovate in their own practice, improve environmental conditions and provide high quality arts experiences that have a lasting and positive impact on people's lives.

Gill Hobson, Lead Artist

Supported by:

Arts Council England,
Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
North Lincolnshire Council Arts Development Unit.

sandfield house arts project

The project focused on developing creative solutions within the Sandfield House site, including: working with the lead artist to develop and manage the project programme plan; development of interior colour schemes for refurbishment; delivery of a range of themed workshops in wood, glass and light and creative writing; and creation of permanent artworks for the site. The overriding aim was to gain insight to how creativity might be used to promote wellbeing for staff, and for service users recovering from mental health problems. A range of themes were identified in consultation with staff and service users, and delivered at the site with artists leading participation and engagement.

The team:

Project leader: Carol Fish Lead artist: Gill Hobson Artists: Kirsty Champ (wood), Gill Hobson (glass and light), Nick Triplow (creative writing)
Staff: Options Team for Employment and Occupation for those Recovering from a Mental Health Problem (RDaSH Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust) Participants: Service users of RDaSH Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (Sandfield Community Resource)

Context and Overview

Recovery

'...a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength.'

Sandfield House is owned by North Lincolnshire Council and used by the Mental Health services for working age adults who are managed by Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber Mental Health NHS foundation Trust. The building has several functions, with staff offices on the first floor and several rooms used by service users on the ground floor, including a computer room, general meeting room, and consultation rooms. Also on sight are workshops, containing a range of facilities as well as a number of under utilised outdoor spaces.

The building was recognised as being no longer fit for purpose and the Local Authority agreed to a major refurbishment programme, updating the office space and renovating the ground floor including changing the layout of rooms, primarily to the benefit the clients.

The Adult Mental Health Team viewed the refurbishment as an opportunity to work with an experienced artist to involve service users and staff in a series of innovative creative interventions. Following consultation with North Lincolnshire Council Arts Development Unit, the lead artist was appointed to assist in the development of project ideas and work with staff and service users to facilitate *their* definitions of creativity in the context of the site and its facilities. This initial work was developed into a formal proposal featuring a series of artist residencies, which in turn would respond to the accommodation and provision at the site, and lead to further artist led activity developed in partnership with staff and service users.

The primary aim at inception stage was the development of an action research project exploring how creativity could promote wellbeing for service users recovering from mental health problems and the staff working with those service users.

The core project proposal consisted of three elements:

- Refurbishment
- Artist Residences
- Commissions

The project would assess the role of the artist as innovator in supporting change, providing fresh contexts and best practice for activities at the site. Sandfield House staff involved in the project themselves would also undertake ongoing clinical assessment of impact for service users.

In consultation with staff and service users, a range of themes and approaches were identified. The involvement strategy introduced a legacy element to the project by up-skilling staff and introducing fresh ideas and contexts for creativity. It was anticipated that these would become integral elements in their work post-project delivery.

All participants were encouraged to follow their personal creative journeys, and to reflect on and consider their own potential in new ways. Using the tangible experience of arts participation, participants built foundational input in support of improved confidence, self esteem and creative thinking.



When it was agreed that Sandfield House was to be refurbished our primary aim was to make it a therapeutic space for service users and staff. We knew from experience the impact the environment can have on an individual's wellbeing and we knew our service users were the best people to tell us what sort of environment was conducive to their recovery. However, having limited creative abilities within the team we weren't sure where to start. Meeting the artists and being successful in the bid to Arts Council England allowed us to explore ideas with expert guidance and harness skills and ideas from staff and service users to create something spectacular and not just another corporate building. This project has allowed the participants to explore their creativity and create pieces of art they would have never believed they could at the start. Participants have found that being involved in this creative journey has significantly helped them in their recovery. The art works themselves are a lasting tribute to the hard work and commitment of all the people involved in the project and will inspire and benefit both staff and service users who use the building in the future.

Carol Fish, Project Leader

Making the connection – creativity, people, place

 *Sometimes you don't feel like coming to group but when you make the effort its worth it as you feel better afterwards.*

A person's health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of interconnecting factors.

From the outset, the Sandfield House project's guiding philosophy was to support access to a range of creative experiences, which in turn would positively impact on people's lives, demonstrating the benefits of creativity and challenging misconceptions such as 'who can be creative' and 'what is creativity'. The project gave participants opportunities to observe, participate in, learn from and create in a broad range of art forms.

Increasingly, studies show that expressing our natural creativity can help build and protect wellbeing, thereby reducing anxiety and stress, and increasing a sense of calm through slowing our breathing and blood pressure.

This improves our resilience to stress which can weaken our immune systems, negatively impacting on our sense of wellbeing which can in turn lead to a cycle of distress, leaving us unmotivated, uninspired and less able to cope with the day to day demands of life. Whilst we are all prone to 'bad days', when mental health problems become chronic, creative activity can and does make a valuable contribution as part of a range of interventions to improve and sustain individual wellbeing and health management.

A person's own cognitive map – the way he or she we makes sense of their world – not only anchors their thoughts in relation to the past and present, but also to their future. Whilst this cognitive map may be to some extent fixed and grounded in personal experience, exploration and experimentation through creative activity can support thinking in future contexts, offering new and alternative routes and pathways not yet experienced. In short, creative thought and activity has the capacity to break into the learned cycle of inevitability.

The physical act of participation also provides valuable reflective space. Negotiating new challenges with encouragement and support helps build confidence and self esteem, improve motivation and inspire and reinvigorate our sense of self. The life skills of co-operation, negotiation, persistence, objective evaluation and shared experience are developed through

individual and group participation in the arts. The creative experience often provides the crucial outlet for self expression and personal achievement many of us seek, but few are given the permission to explore in their day to day lives. This unrealised life possibility is magnified in many of the service users at Sandfield House and others who share their experiences.

In their 2006-8 publication *The Arts, Health & Wellbeing*, Arts Council England define 'arts & health' as 'arts based activities that aim to improve individual and community health and healthcare delivery, and which enhance the healthcare environment by providing artwork or performances.'¹

The Arts Council England publication *Arts in health: a review of the medical literature* states, 'there is a broad spectrum of evidence to show how the arts achieve positive outcomes for patients, for staff, for the patient–staff relationship, for hospitals, in mental health services and in the health of the general population.'²

The team at Sandfield House believed that innovation within their own practice and environment would have a positive impact for all involved, and were committed to developing a strategy that would enable key impacts and provide sustainable models for future practice. It was from this perspective that the Sandfield House Arts project was conceived and delivered.

Project partners recognised the important distinction to be made between process and outcome when designing and delivering person centred approaches. Many people come to arts based activity with an embedded notion that they themselves are 'not creative' or 'artistic'. They find their first steps into a creative activity emotionally challenging, possibly even stressful. Initial anxiety can be high as this is a first step into unknown territory.

Creating a positive emotional environment was essential for participants to embrace the opportunities available. The artists played a key role in establishing and maintaining positive emotional space for participants, and brought a wealth of knowledge, skills, insights and experiences to the fore in supporting and maintaining this space when leading activities, allowing creative thinking to prosper.

The process of supporting participants to find a comfortable space from which to operate, stretching them without resulting in panic or extreme anxiety, is a skill the Sandfield House artists have developed from years of professional practice. This is continually reflected upon and developed which, in turn, reinvigorates the artist's own practice.

The artists appointed for the project were those who demonstrated the ability to enable, reflect upon and de-mystify the creative process within multiple contexts for defining roles as part leader, part mentor, part teacher, part demonstrator.

Everyone within the project required mutual support and respect to perform well and achieve consistently positive results, making the importance of committed partnership working crucial in enabling practical skills and learning to support thinking creatively, differently, independently and with purpose.

Much effort was made by the artists to critically reflect on outcomes, leading participants to consider their work outside of personal criticism and developing tools for objective personal and group evaluation.

Taking that crucial step back to evaluate outcomes on an on-going basis allowed for valuable critical input, mutual support and personal pride in achievements. Participants were able to see their work in a new way, gain insight and experience in creative thinking and use their energy for creative activity over emotional survival.

staff training & participation

Exploring Contexts for Creative Practice

Artworks sited in main building group room and corridor

Lead artists: Gill Hobson and Nick Triplow

Artists: Options Team Staff

To launch the project, Sandfield House staff participated in a specially designed training day. *Exploring Contexts for Creative Practice* took staff members through a tailored creative writing workshop, then used simple collage techniques to communicate written ideas through visual art.

The artist led workshop introduced participants to creative thinking and doing in a full day's focused activity, demonstrating some of the challenges service users would be experiencing throughout their participation in the artist-led workshops and residencies.

Many of the staff acknowledged the intensity and challenges of participation. They were required to step out of their comfort zone, try something different and be open to innovation outside of their professional specialism. The framework required creative thinking in new contexts, group work, exchange and evaluation of outcomes and critical reflection on the experience, led and supported by the artists.

The activity provided staff with the opportunity to re-connect with their own creativity and see their artistic output in a fresh context. Sharing stories and using professional mounting and framing to present the visual artworks helped participants recognise the value of their work, supporting shifting perceptions of their creative abilities and celebrating personal achievement.



“ it was **exhausting**...I've **never done anything like that** before, but **I really enjoyed it**.

“ I started with **nothing** and ended up with **something straight out of my imagination**.
I feel **creative!**

“ I didn't know what to **expect** and it was a **bit scary at first**; I feel like I've had a **mental workout!**

“ The work looks **really good**, I didn't think I was **creative and would be able to do anything like that**.



refurbishment - place-making

“ *When you walk in you just think WOW!* ”

In the first phase of the project, the lead artist consulted with staff and service users to establish colour schemes and develop ‘mood boards’ and reference material for the interior of the Sandfield House refurbishment.

The lead artist and staff at Sandfield House felt strongly that this was an opportunity to develop a bespoke interior scheme that would support feelings of wellbeing for staff and visitors. A detailed interior scheme for the main building was developed through participatory workshops with staff and service users, identifying the important emotional aspects of interior space, with guidance and through discussion. Together partners developed colour and design strategies to be taken forward in the refurbishment.

The consultation promoted ownership and insight as to how the space itself could support confidence and wellbeing, as well as forming the foundations for development of the broader scheme.

The architect and sub-contractors used the mood boards as a general guide for refurbishment. Partners specified paint colours and influenced decisions relating to the selection of lighting, flooring and furniture. Staff and service users not directly involved in the initial development were given the opportunity to decide which of the two colour schemes proposed at the consultation day they felt would best support and enhance their experience of the space.

Choosing the interior treatment was an essential first step in setting the tone and feel of the new space and the ethos of the project. It provided a foundation for wider artistic intervention and opened opportunities for further creative enhancement. Work on the interior schemes directly connected the future developing arts project and creative activity with the daily working environment, establishing engagement, personal connection and ownership.

The new interior specifications impacted directly on proposals for the new entrance reception space. This had been identified as a key area for an artist intervention, being the first space visitors see and experience on entering and setting the tone for the rest of the building. The scheme was sensitive in the handling of essential security issues, and resulted in the creation of a permanent artwork resulting in a welcoming entrance and cohesive space.

artist residences

Rather than introduce a series of formal workshops, our consultative research suggested that it would be more appropriate to introduce a series of artist residencies at Sandfield House, allowing the client group to have access to the artists, as determined by them and dependent on their own level of interest, confidence, needs and personal circumstances.

Designed to give service users the best opportunity to interact with creative practitioners, artists were available on site for at least one day a week for 18 weeks, with service users able to choose to take part at a time and regularity that suited them. There was an informal timetable promoting flexible approaches and also opening up opportunities for staff at the site to interact with the artists and see the development of works, creating a 'buzz' around the site as the project developed.

 *...the project has given me confidence to approach new tasks, and take risks without pressure or anxiety.*

Service users at Sandfield House are encouraged to take steps towards independence and enhancing their ease with social interaction. The project assisted in this process, encouraging service users to take a full part in residency workshops, developing the confidence to explore materials and contexts, and discuss their work with the artist, staff and other members in the group. Continuing engagement was promoted through increasing awareness of voluntary art groups, adult education and other services that may assist participants in furthering their ideas.

Lead artist, Gill Hobson, managed and co-ordinated the artist-in-residence programme, working with the Sandfield House team to develop residency briefs, acting as a consultant in artist selection, overseeing residencies and ensuring appropriateness and effectiveness of the project, its documentation and evaluation.

The artist residencies had three main aims:

To re-invigorate and promote innovation in the use of existing facilities at Sandfield House

To 'up-skill' staff and service users in the use of materials and processes which they can continue to use after the residencies

To create site specific artworks with participants and staff for the site

The identified residencies were:

Glass & Light led by Gill Hobson

Creative Writing led by Nick Triplow

Wood led by Kirsty Champ

All residencies included multi-disciplinary elements, using sketchbooks, workbooks, drawing, use of 'found' items and texts, photography, computer based works, research works as appropriate as well as specific engagement in the process of creativity within each art form.

Each artist was responsible for responding to and using the facilities available at Sandfield House, supporting innovation and up-skilling for staff; working directly with service users, supporting and encouraging participation, interaction, and discussion of works and their contexts.

As part of their engagement, service users were encouraged to consider their input into a range of permanent site specific works as a celebration of their achievement and a legacy of their project, enhancing the environment and inspiring others. This has led to the creation of several original new artworks at the site, designed and made in collaboration between artists and service users.

glass & light

Introduction

A small, well equipped workshop at the site offered opportunities for the development of hands-on activities. Following consultation with staff and service users, the team identified glass making as an ideal medium for development. Although staff had some experience of working with glass, this had not been developed for some time and fresh contexts for creative experiences were proposed as a way to re-energise resources, working practices and enthusiasm.

The workshop facility was seen as an area ripe for new input with staff keen to explore its potential generally and within the glass project other areas of complementary practice were proposed and supported. The project aimed to reinvigorate this area, providing contexts to innovate professional practice and the experience of user groups. As one of three identified areas for development, the Glass & Light project offered a fantastic opportunity to upskill staff, broaden horizons and bring a new creative dynamic to the site.

The Project

The activity used simple practical skills to invigorate practice for staff and service users. A specialist in constructed glass technique, Gill Hobson delivered a series of workshops to build confidence, self esteem and practical skills for all participants using basic glass techniques, proposing a foundation for working towards a significant work for permanent installation at the site. The proposed legacy of the project was threefold:



- to develop staff skills, creativity and insight supporting future independent working
- to develop creative contexts for service users as a foundational aspect of working toward well being and recovery
- to evidence the creative and learning journey through a permanent artwork for the site as celebration of achievement

The project succeeded in engaging participants from the start with staff from the wider service regularly visiting during sessions. The activity brought fresh energy to the workshops and site with visitors consistently surprised and delighted at the quality and diversity of work produced. When time allowed, staff were treated to impromptu demonstrations of technique, making their own small items with input and direction from the artist and service users.

A flexible approach to sessions helped create group cohesion and relationships were developed and strengthened throughout. A 'drop-in' style meant that some continued working far beyond the official session time. This informality enabled better socialisation and stronger relationships. Reflective practice was a key element of the activity, with all participants encouraged to engage in fruitful dialogue about their work and ambitions.

A showcase event offered a great opportunity for participants to reflect on their work and celebrate achievements. Although most were modest about their achievements, there was clear pride in what had been accomplished and talk of the permanent work for the site. Participants selected the large stairwell window as a suitable space to showcase this ambitious work and, using photographic collage techniques, participants were able to think creatively and critically assess their design directions. Confidence grew and the scope of participants' ambition reflected this.

The project became a highly successful demonstration of the value of the way small, sustained individual action can make significant impacts toward larger outcomes. The working process itself uses many smaller elements combining to create a larger whole, effectively illustrating the idea of a long journey being made of many small steps and echoing the steps towards recovery.



The participant experience

“Even when feeling low I attended and felt better during and afterwards. It helps break the dark moods as everyone is pleased to see each other and supports each other. I’ll definitely look back at this as a good period in my life.”

Service users commented that the experience helped them to think in different ways. All said that they felt better able to apply themselves to challenges in life generally as the experience has developed confidence and self esteem and demonstrated the effectiveness of small and sustained actions.

Artistic participation illustrated the value of taking risks, trying something new and that there isn’t always a definitive ‘right answer’ to a problem or situation. Learning new practical skills and trying and succeeding with those skills improved feelings of personal empowerment. Developing the ability to work with others in a group demonstrated the value of mutual support and risk taking which, in turn, improved interaction and social skills and supported a ‘can do’ attitude for all.

Flexible approaches to engagement, timetabling and working together were beneficial, enabling participants and staff to chat throughout classes and enjoy company and shared experiences with others. Meeting new people and trying new things ceased to be regarded as threatening. A regular timetable with a familiar group of people and stable relationships empowered people to feel they could commit with all participants taking risks together and sharing and celebrating the journey.

In general, participants said they felt more confident and comfortable about being in a ‘working’ environment, handling tools and equipment, observing health and safety procedures and being self reliant and responsible. Most were more confident and dexterous in handling materials and equipment, whilst all felt that they had improved life skills and gained experience that will help them in the future.

Participants on coming to class

“Coming to class was a risk as I’ve never done anything like this before, I’ve felt increasingly more creative, with more ideas and reasons to make things.”



"It has been hard to get going with own ideas at first as there has been a lot of learning to do, but practice and more confidence is helping the group come up with their own ideas, there is lots of sharing and exchange and good support from staff."

"We make mistakes all of the time but there is good humour; staff have helped us realise that we would only be learning half the job if we didn't get things wrong and that there is always a way to fix a problem or turn our work into something different. We always end up making something good even if it's not exactly as we had planned."

"Most have remained well throughout the course so it has definitely been worthwhile. I feel that our social and emotional wellbeing has improved: it's been good to have a regularised activity, consistent and stable."

"Its good to see the same faces every week, helps to make you feel more confident and willing to have a go at new things... it's good to have a flexible session time where you can come in earlier if you want to."

"I feel good about what has been achieved – making things and taking them home has been really good. It showed a different side to me and what I can do. Sometimes I get work home and think 'did I do that?'"

Participants on the artist

"I feel the artist has overcome social prejudices and preconceptions about people with mental health problems and taken us all at face value... she supported us to exceed our expectations."

"She has learned how to work with the group as a group and as individuals. She has understanding of different approaches and ways of working for each of us and responds well to different moods and work rates and always tries to get everyone motivated to have a go."

"She stayed positive and committed, always urging us to enjoy our experiences and not get anxious about poor work; everyone does their own thing and is supported to achieve what they can when they can. Everyone works at their own pace - she helps out when needed and doesn't interfere when not needed."



"The artist...has a fresh attitude and enthusiasm which has put us all in a good position to make the most of the opportunity. She has a good attitude and genuine interest in seeing people do well."

Participants on their experience

"The activity provided a base for everyone to move on from. I would definitely like to see this continued as it has been a very positive experience."

"I've remained well throughout the project experience."

"I've committed to making space to attend once a week to do something positive and constructive – I need to maintain this and need support to do this. The experience has brought new perspectives and broadened minds. No class on a Friday will leave a big hole."

"I hope to take these positive experiences with me into the future."



creative writing - a day in the life

Introduction

Creative writing was identified by partners as an area of great potential within the Sandfield House Project, although defining how it might work with a group of mixed ability was not clear at the outset. However there was a significant interest, particularly from service users, a number of whom had been encouraged to detail their experiences in writing as part of earlier treatment regimes, but for whom the process itself and the writing it produced had been unfocused, under valued and therefore, ultimately unfulfilling.

It was recognised that the creative writing element of the project had the immediate capacity for participants to directly express and explore their experiences within the mental health system. In short, writing about their lives would almost certainly open a pathway into good and bad experiences.

The project

Creative Writing workshops were held in the newly refurbished main building at Sandfield House, with participants including service users and staff. Nick Triplow, an experienced writer, editor and journalist devised and delivered tailor-made sessions, developing a course framework using a range of media including song lyrics, poetry, fiction, film and script. Under the banner *A Day in the Life*, these would be the means through which participants could learn

from other writers and their methods and, in the process, be encouraged to develop their writing skills.

The project provided participants with a writer's toolkit – practical tools which, once learned would be touchstones in future creative writing. These included: creating characters; narrative perspective and point of view; creating believable worlds; 'show don't tell'; dialogue; cutting and editing.

Divided into three 'terms' of six weeks, participants were introduced to various forms of writing and encouraged to keep notebooks and journals as well as completing weekly exercises, sharing the outcome with the group. A number of the texts used were novels, song lyrics or poetry which addressed the experiences of mental illness. In Pat Barker's novel 'Regeneration', the main character is institutionalised during the First World War. For participants, the validation of mental illness as a subject for art and writing was a key realisation, a reflection and affirmation of their experience.

Achieving the outcomes for the creative writing project was a clear challenge for all participants – service users and staff members alike. The outcomes fell into basic categories of knowledge and understanding; thinking skills; practical skills; communication and team-working. Underpinning these outcomes was a clear focus on confidence building: *giving participants the tools for the task and the belief in their own abilities.*

The participant experience

“ *Walking into that room on the first day, not knowing who was there – I didn't know anyone beforehand – I wasn't used to having to face people. It was awful, a real risk.* ”

Participants were encouraged to value their experiences and to express them with structure and purpose. Sharing common experience and reflection with others built confidence for all, with staff trying new things and sharing the learning journey alongside participants. Participants agreed that it had been interesting to see how different people respond to tasks and that, in common with the glass and light workshops, they had a better understanding that there is no 'right' answer, that everyone has a different take on things that is valid.

'I didn't really know what we were supposed to be doing at first because it's all new learning and new people...it took a while for things to start to make sense, but the group were given the space to think about and talk about their work to others. Promoting feedback about the work not about the person has helped a lot in supporting trying out new things and ideas, and increased confidence and motivation.'

For participants new to creative writing, the course was probably more challenging than expected, but more enjoyable and rewarding for the insights and experience gained. Most felt vulnerable at first, but the presence of staff learning alongside service users helped to strengthen relationships and maintain confidence and motivation as the group bonded.

Reflective practice and exchanging ideas with others cemented the realisation that each individual's own ideas have merit and the right tools can help all express better their own thoughts feelings and ideas. For example, talking through one participant's issues with a piece of work helped *all* participants realise that sometimes focusing on one thing that is not necessarily helpful: sometimes it's best to take the line of least resistance in order to move forward.

Enabling participants to take a detached position from their own work, allowing the distance and perspective between writer and writing, meant that individual participants felt less exposed. This gave them confidence to experiment with the craft. One service user submitted a short story to a regional arts magazine and was published as a result of this increased confidence.

Exploring writing and words as a structured experience and not looking always seeking the 'right' answer was beneficial, opening up opportunities for participants to think more carefully about which life options may be open to them and how best to take an active rather than passive role in learning and life generally. Importantly, the consistently high turn-out and good time-keeping of the group were an indication that, once engaged, the service users were able to adhere to regular patterns.

"It's made a big difference. I've signed up on another course in Adult Ed. I couldn't get on at first, but I stuck at it..... They still didn't get back to me so I went down there again and stayed until I got onto the course. I'd never have done that before."

"All learning together has been a really good experience: staff have tried same things as the group and had the same experiences: it has helped staff see how hard it is to try something new and learn new things."

"Staff seem to enjoy the sessions and try as hard as the rest of the group with the same tasks. They could use this experience to support other writing activity in the future...it's good for staff to try something different and be creative."

Participants on the writer

"It definitely has been a challenge for him to work with the group as there are lots of different personalities and approaches needed. He has been very successful in keeping everybody motivated. Good communicator, very good at explaining what we should be doing."

"It's definitely been a risk to deliver to the group...good structure for each session – trying new things, helps us to think about what we're doing and move forward, he encourages feedback and thinking about our own and others work so that we can make useful comments."

Participants on their experience

"The course has helped with problem solving, breaking things down into manageable chunks – I'm even applying the same principles to housework."

"The course helped socially, helped to have that day each week as a focus."

"Self discipline, the course gave you a reason to write each week, something to aim for week in/ week out. It helped with communication in a group situation."

"The work on story, on structure. I know better what to dump and what to keep. It helped me to want to work beyond the sessions. I picked up some of the books we used."

"The structure opened my eyes to how films work – I watch them now and I can see the structure behind it, the way the story's put together."

"I've joined another course, I'm going to keep writing. I try to set aside some time every evening. Get into a routine. I have to time it so it's before my meds."

Sandfield House Creative Writers – A Day in the Life

The following pieces were written by participants on the Sandfield House Project and are published with their permission. They illustrate some of the writing skills that came out of the workshops and, more importantly, showcase the talent, imagination and creative potential of the Sandfield writers.

Inuksuk

A stone landmark or cairn built by peoples of the Arctic region of North America as an aid to navigation.

Silhouetted against skies of cold grey
And the endless plains of white
Majestic in valleys of soft green

Through the shimmering sun of long days
And the bleak forever nights
Steadfast against howling winds
Timeless reminders of knowledge
No longer current

A sign of food
A sign of shelter
A sign of joy

Against the whim of Mother Nature
Confident and robust, yet forever fragile
Stone constructs unique from the next

On the earth
From the earth
About the earth

Silent companions of the traveller
Inuksuit show the way

Mobile

Orange, Vodaphone
Nokia, O2
An invention,
compact in your pocket.

I take mine everywhere.
Time, camera, internet.
Everyone has one
Feels lost without one.

All over the world
On a phone.

Pretending

I can't pretend anymore
I can't pretend not to feel guilty
And that I don't miss her

I can't pretend to be this witty, outgoing, confident
When I'm hiding my insecurities and social inadequacies
Behind the mask of alcohol

I can't pretend that I've not made
Bad decisions, bad investments, bad friends
And I can't pretend to be happy

I can't pretend not to like the Bee Gees
And I can't pretend to share my music with others
I can't pretend to be the life and soul when I feel alone

Oh yes, I'm the Great Pretender
Pretending that I'm doing well
Me? I can't pretend anymore

But if I cried, publicly, openly, honestly, genuinely
What would people think?
Probably that I was pretending.

Waiting For Joe

"This damn stain just will not clean out," muttered Maureen.

She'd been scrubbing at a small brown patch on the carpet for over an hour. Frank sat in his favourite chair, saying nothing. "I need to clean this off before Joe comes over." She glanced at Frank who stared back blankly. "Bloody typical," she sighed and continued scrubbing.

"If he sees this he'll go spare. Just like his father that one, isn't he Frank? Remember how angry you used to get with me? You had a temper, especially when you were young, quick to use your fists in those days."

Maureen stopped scrubbing for a moment, re-living the moment. "You don't remember?

Well, we all lose ourselves sometimes don't we?" She giggled to herself. "I spent all last night waiting for Coronation Street before I realised it was Saturday, imagine that, ah I'm a silly woman. You and Joe are right, if brains were dynamite I wouldn't blow my own hat off."

She looked up to her husband, he said nothing. They'd said it was Alzheimers at the beginning, but she wasn't having any of it.

She looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece. "He'll be here soon. I put the money he asked for under the ornament, you know the one on the sideboard, the Victorian lady sitting..." She trailed off. The memory of Frank smashing the ornament before giving her another drunken beating flashed into her head. She flexed her hands to relieve the stiffness and shook her head to throw out the memories. "Still, it's all fixed now, she glued together well really..."

She scrubbed harder. Only twenty minutes now before Joe came.

"Frank, I know it wasn't your fault. Oh, I don't know. Over the last few years I've cleaned up so many stains with no trouble, but by god this is a stubborn one. You could be a bit more careful." She raised her hand to shield herself in case Frank took it on himself to clout her for talking out of turn, but he didn't move and she relaxed.

Suddenly, as if waking from a dream her eyes focused and the stain was gone. She rose from her knees, smiled and wiped her hands on her apron. "There, all done."

Frank sat in the same position, unseeing eyes glazed over; blood and bone plastered against the back of the chair, mouth open, tongue blackening.

Maureen glanced in the mirror and took off her apron, folding it neatly, a quick glance in the mirror and a pat of her hair; she picked up the claw hammer from the table and sat on the sofa, waiting for Joe.

From Jerry to Cherry

Rizzly's hero died back in August '95 - a rehab mishap. Overwhelmed by the loss, Rizzly promised to make a change, take on life with renewed vigour. But years passed without discernible progress. His lacklustre existence travelled unchecked down a lonely path of least resistance until, teetering on the edge of middle age, another wake up call sounded deep within his troubled soul. Fearful of joining Captain Trips in the endless void, Rizzly resolved to simplify his life, knowing it would take drastic measures to confront the ghosts inhabiting his particular machine.

The flight to San Francisco was uneventful. For March the weather was wonderful: soothing sunshine, balmy temperature and a cool, lazy wind. Located on the wrong side of Central, the *Britton Hotel* was far from luxurious, but had everything he required. In fact, he found the nearby community of juicers, junkies and cart-dwellers provided a level of cold comfort. Rizzly found familiarity in locations he'd seen often in movies and TV shows. Then there were the record stores – he passed a full half day in a place called *Amoeba* up on Haight.

Every day was a journey into the unknown as he watched the world scurry by from the safety of a coffee house. Where were all these people going? How many were lonely? Social voyeurism aside, Rizzly knew he had a more sombre task to complete, and there was no turning back.

Save for his faithful, fully stocked I-pod and a lone tub of ice cream slowly softening in the grubby refrigerator, room 253 was a barren hole with matching smell. He slumped uncomfortably to the floor and propped himself against the bed. The time had arrived; he would allow everything to slide into an inaccessible emptiness. With headphones in place, he gently jogged the dial in search of the carefully chosen soundtrack. He pressed 'play'. Familiar music flowed, drowning out the silence. Tossing aside the lid of the ice cream tub, his spoon scooped the first mouthful of his ritual offering. Allowing mind, music and food to meld, Rizzly closed his eyes and waited to drift off to a better place - from elsewhere to somewhere.

The incessant ringing of the telephone snapped him from sleep. The playlist of *Grateful Dead* tunes had run its course and the empty tub of Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia sat damply in his lap - a pink dribble made its way to the carpet. Lifting the receiver, a distant yet familiar voice wished him a 'Happy Birthday'.

Middle age had arrived.

Fine Dining

When I was young and in charge of you
We ate between meals,
Broke beech nuts in our teeth
And chewed the feathery fluff inside.
Sucked sugar syrup
From white trumpets of sweet nettles,
Daisy petals – I ate for the tickle.

Blew away the chaff to nibble dry corn,
Chewed pencils
And liquorice root sticks
And grass.

Last weekend you came to my house,
I served tapas.
I roasted vine tomatoes that burst in their dish
Chargrilled peppers to marinate in garlicky sweetness.
Prepared patatas bravas,
Chicken with lemon,
Smokey chorizo and red onion,
Sweet chilli pork balls with a kick of heat.
And vegetarian options.
And a dessert.
And Bailey's chocolate truffles
That you brought.

And later while they talked
We remembered those meals I made
In our summer holidays.

The Time Between Times

I make my way down the slightly overgrown path to the bottom of the garden. It is twilight, the time between times.

There is an atmosphere at dusk. The last birds finish their song until a lone blackbird is all I hear, then it too stops, leaving just the sound of the gentle summer breeze through the trees. I ache at how tranquil this seems, and lonely, separated from the hustle of the everyday.

A horse chestnut tree is forced sideways by the pear tree that was there before it. A kitten runs along its trunk, playing through the branches. There is a smell of blossom in the cooling air. A moth dances in the day's last light. And in this place, at this time, I feel I could escape my body and be dispersed over the landscape to become part of its beauty.

A hush settles. A horse pushes his head over the fence to pull up the long grass growing next to his field. As the sun falls beneath the horizon, its light spills in a riot of pink and orange. I finish my cigarette and make my way back along the path as the garden loses its colour to the deepening night.

Slither

They slither towards you using warmth as disguise.
Hiding the ice that glistens beneath
A Hollywood smile, they extend a hand in greeting
Tendrils firmly shake you
As they impress themselves upon you.

You respond in kind and give your name,
Repeat the well-rehearsed lines you store -
In that throbbing part of your mind.
Why do you do this when you know the outcome?
Sit through dead silences and dead speech?
Why did you come?

I spot an opening and slide unnoticed to an empty table
Deep breaths, deep breaths.
When I open my eyes, a rat sits before me, champagne in claw,
I prepare myself to keep the peace,
Blend in with its views:
the unemployed are lazy,
immigrants are taking over
People on sick are scroungers
Single mothers, council estates
On and on and on...

I nod, fists clenched,
Imagine jumping from my chair
Shouting at them to stop,
All their purple unblinking eyes looking towards me
As I scream at them for ignoring why this world
Is going to shit...it is *all their fault*

I stand, ready to leave, vowing never again
But knowing, I'll be here again next time
Living with the anger.

I Can Fly

I can fly wherever I want to be,
No place in the world is beyond my reach -
Addis Ababa by three,
Dusk on Copacabana beach.

Dodge traffic in Tehran at ten,
Attend mass in La Paz at noon,
A midnight stroll through Istafen,
Beirut by hot air balloon.

Or maybe I should let myself grow,
Search for Tibetan tranquillity
But before I go, I'll need to know
Is there a tea-making facility?

Introduction

Workshops at site were well equipped for wood working activity and a healthy practice existed for service users making garden pieces and related objects. However, initial research suggested that fresh input into the facility would bring new energy and different perspectives for the development of creative potential. The wood working facilities supported outdoor and gardening activity for service users and it was proposed that the artist working with the theme exploit the potential of combining the facilities and the wider ambitions for the outdoor areas of the site in the development of art works.

The project

Artist Kirsty Champ, a specialist in environmental art and sculpture, led the project, working with staff and service users to identify key areas for development on site. A small outdoor area was identified as a space ripe for development, with the project addressing some of the foundational inputs needed to anchor ideas and provide a framework for future development.

Staff, artist and service users worked together to develop responses to the area, beginning with workshop based activity using basic techniques to familiarise all with the tools, equipment and health and safety aspects of making practice. In common with the other project elements, these early sessions were crucial in forming relationships and winning confidence from participants – a key part of supporting future working and development, promoting dialogue and exchange about the potentials offered by both the practitioner and the site.



The artist brought her expertise in living willow work and three dimensional construction into the arena, with participants driving the siting and form of artist interventions. All worked together to design, develop, cost and build two permanent living willow structures, as well as designing and making a permanent seating feature. These interventions anchor the key elements of the broader scheme, which, it is anticipated will be developed in the future by staff and service users, providing tangible evidence of the potential launched by the project. The chance to work outside, in the elements, in a team with a common aim and vision was empowering and generated a motivated workforce. Collectively planning, measuring, designing and installing the designs generated a great sense of achievement and confidence within the group. The group were able to realise their design through hours of working and grappling with logistical problems together.

Service users particularly responded to being out in the fresh air, reacting well to the environment and nurturing the willow structures they had constructed. The opportunity to develop the garden area for themselves and others to use created a real sense of change and enthusiasm. In the workshop environment they grasped the opportunity to work with tools and respond to the nature of the oak and create a bench that was more organic and in form. Physically using hammers and chisels challenged but engaged the group, generating dialogue and exchange of ideas, a buzz of achievement and ultimately deep satisfaction.

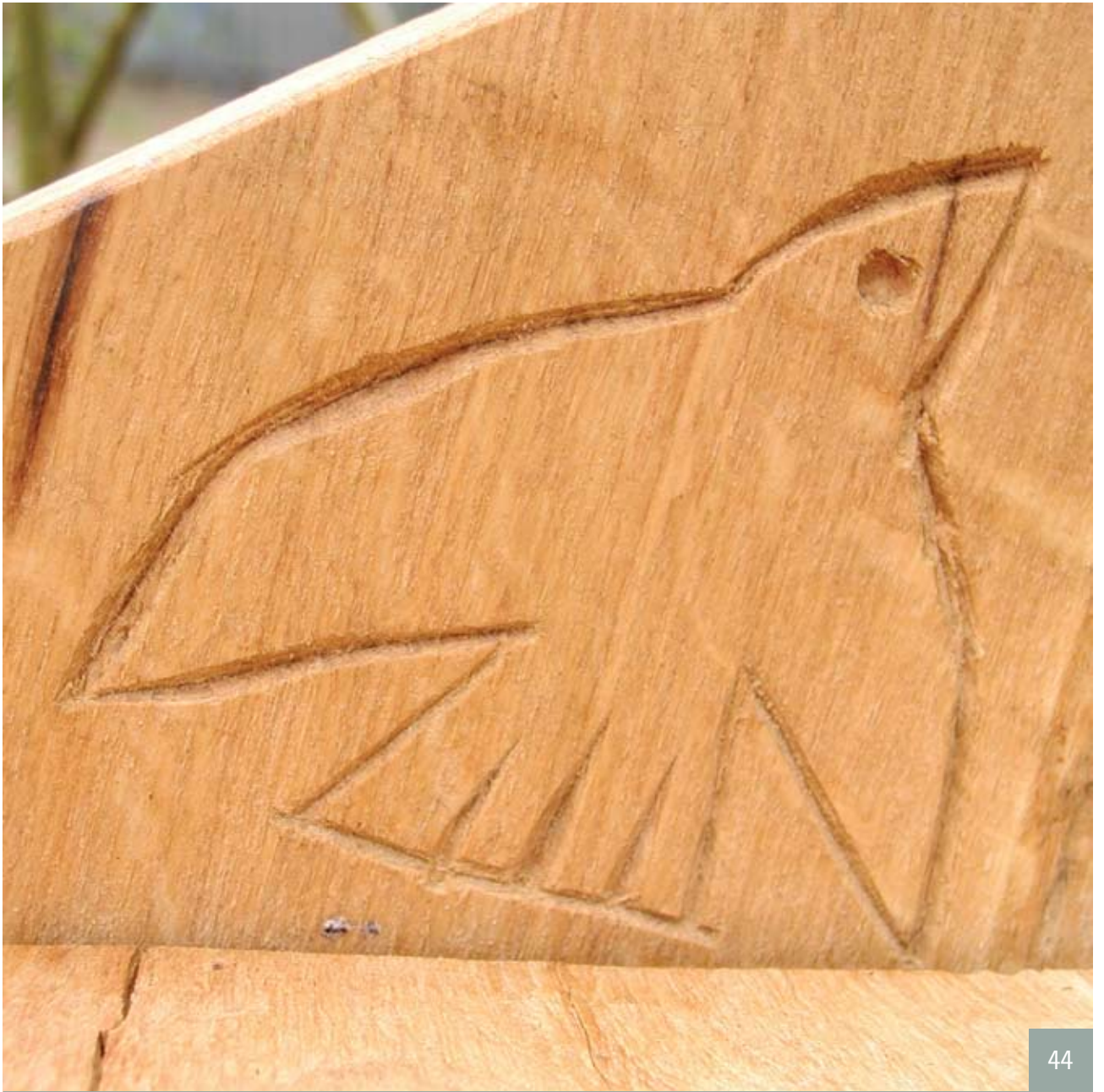
The Participant Experience

"Being part of a group and not being judged has really helped me."

"Finding and using different tools was interesting and enjoyable. I liked being in the workshop, keeping active & doing something"

"I found some things scary but was not pushed into doing things I didn't want. I want to continue with different projects now. I would like to learn to come up with my own ideas but it takes along time to get that foundation."

"I never thought I had any ability to carve wood or make things. I like what I have done but need more time to develop own ideas. This course has really helped me with the support and help and I see it as part of a life long learning experience."



"I was really disappointed when I missed some weeks, missed it a lot. I'm enjoying the combination of practical and artistic activity and would like to take it further but not sure how at present."

Participants on the artist

"The practitioner was very good, always had ideas and things for us to do. She was very patient with me in using the power tools, it took a long time."

"I love being in her workshop, it's a nice environment, nice to be active & participate. It was a risk to have the class as we have never done this before but it worked out well. There was always plenty to do and it was enjoyable using the tools and being in the workshop, it's a very pleasant environment."

Participants on their experience

"There was always something to do and it was always enjoyable, gets you out of the house and doing something. Always reflect on what we have done in sessions but would need more time to develop own ideas."

"The project idea was brilliant, very enjoyable, new ideas: gets you out of the house and into new environments."



permanent artworks at sandfield house

Main building reception area

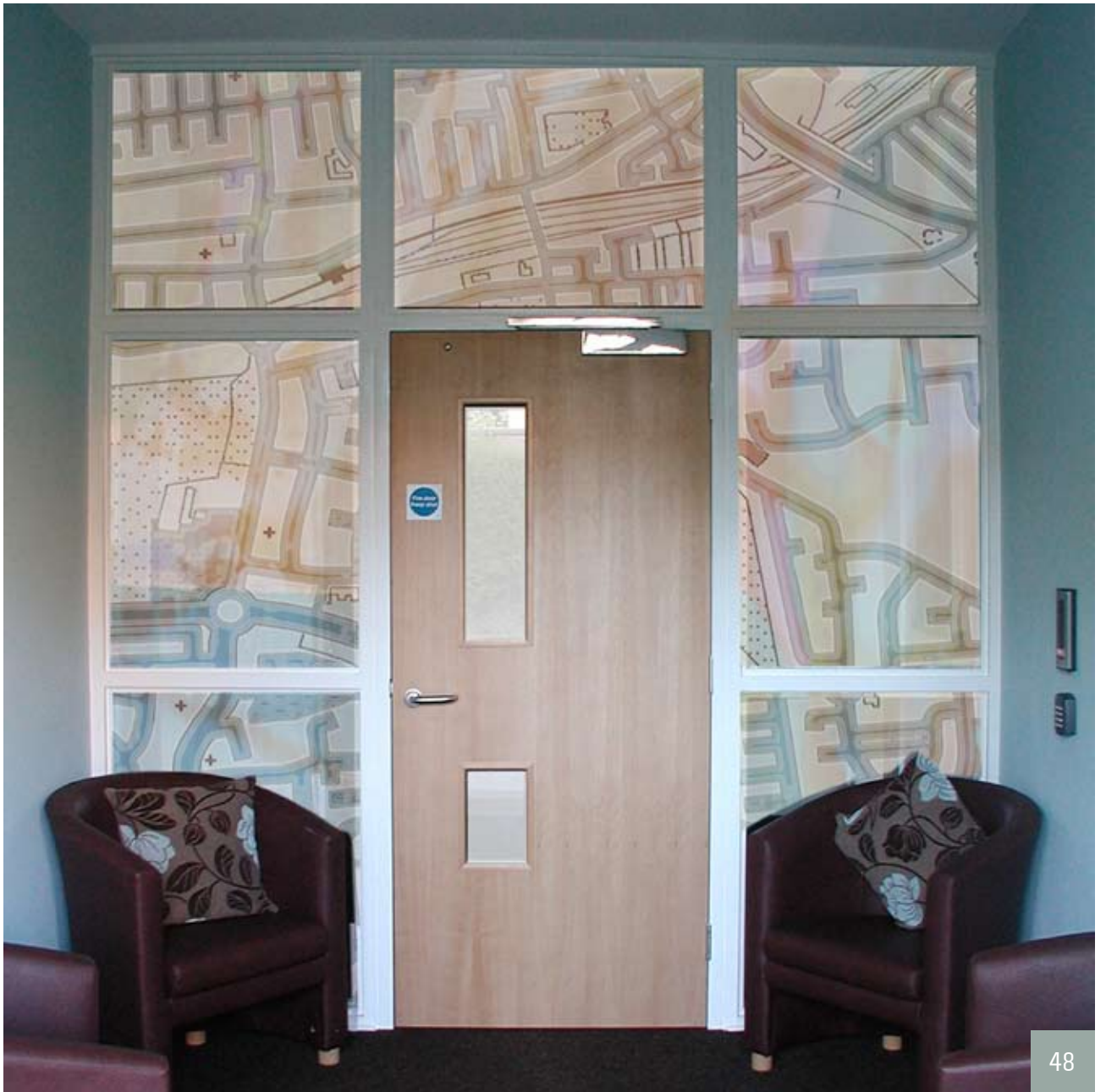
Artist: Gill Hobson

“ Everyone who visits loves the colours, we tell them we developed the scheme with our artist! Carol Fish, Project Leader

The reception screen presented particular challenges, and due to the nature of the refurbishment schedule it was the first artwork installed on site. The glass design responded to conversations with service users participating in the Glass & Light group, talking through ideas of locality, personal pathways and life journeys.

The artwork features an abstracted map of the local area and explores the idea of physical and geographical location as a 'rooting' of personal experience and personal journeys. In presenting this 'map' in a different way it illustrates that even a small change in perception can reveal new routes, pathways and contexts for one's personal journey, suggesting opportunities for seeing one's day to day world in a different way.

Wall mounted artworks compliment the reception screen, proposing the idea that routes and pathways are not fixed, that the established 'map' can be layered upon with more organic and creative thinking, exploring the relationships, intersections and overlaps between natural and constructed systems of thinking and behaviour. As well as enhancing the reception area and addressing a functional requirement, they present a reflective space for consideration of thinking through personal contexts in new ways.



The map and the tree have become key elements throughout the interior. Service users working with the Lead Artist developed these themes together through dialogue, exchange and reflection during the residency. The idea that the future is not fixed and may be developed to some extent according to one's own action, intent and a sense of personal empowerment to address positive change has driven the imagery in the reception and vestibule areas. Using a combination of personal sketchbook work, collaging photography and photocopied elements, the group built on the concept of the tree as a metaphor for personal growth and renewal - a theme continued into the vestibule area. Paint colours to the walls, and co-ordinating flooring and furniture selected by staff and service users complete the space.

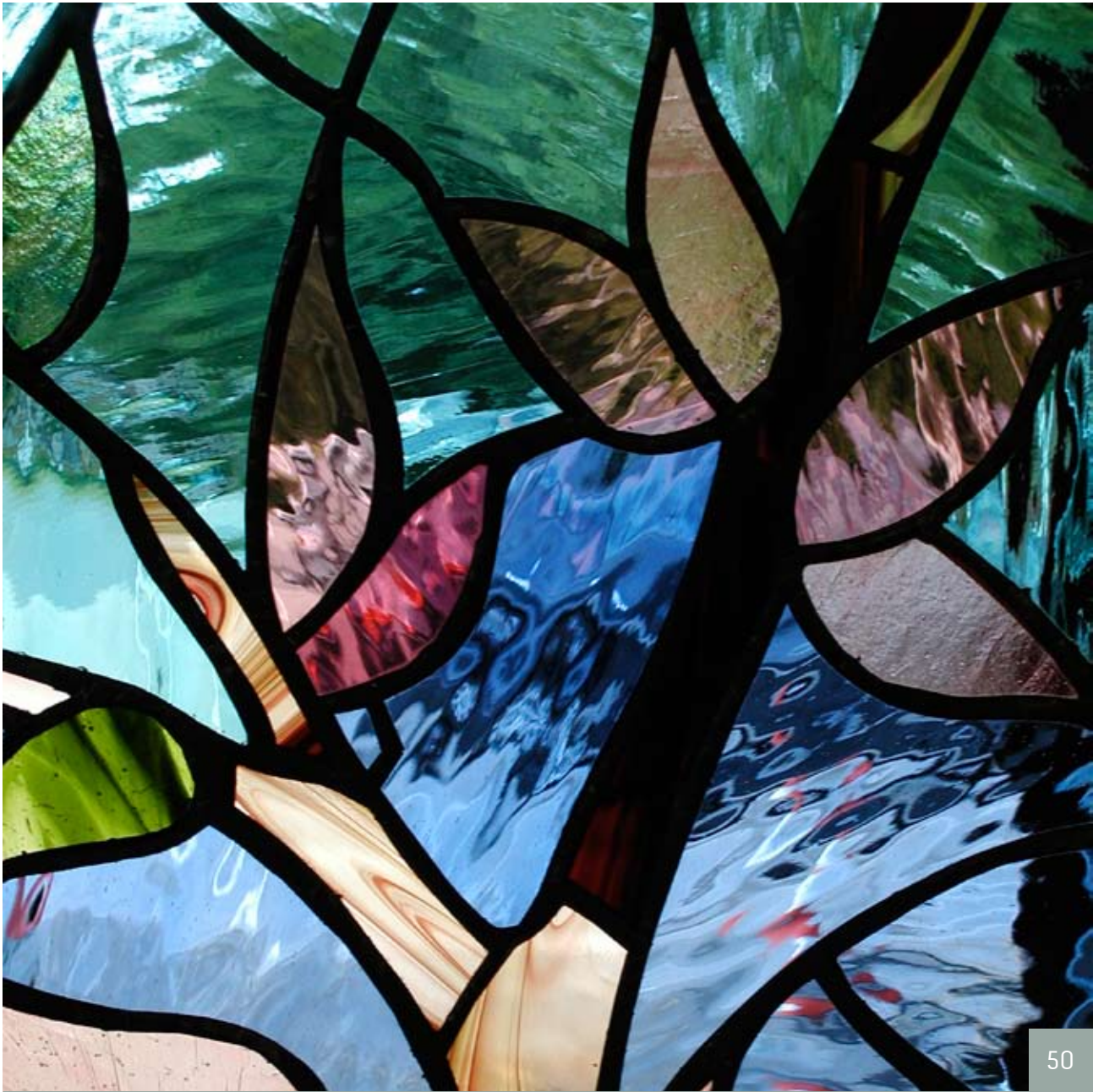
 *Now when you walk in you feel like it's a place where someone cares, like they've taken the trouble to make it feel nice.*

Main building vestibule area

Artist: Gill Hobson

Frosted glass panels echo the imagery of the map and tree motifs featured across the main site, providing effective screening and linking themed artworks between the reception and stairwell. Elements of the tree motif are echoed in other areas of the building as frosted window panels, retaining the integrity of the theme and providing functional screening for private areas.

Although it is a relatively small building, it has been important throughout to link areas together to provide a cohesive artistic theme. The perception of the space for staff and visitors as a positive environment has been a key consideration. Linking areas together using transparency, solidity, colour and light has added a 'spacial thickness' that reflects subtle changes and engages peripheral vision. Enhancing ones positive experience of the space through artistic intervention and functional necessity within this project has provided a foundation for future activity, where elements are not fixed, but form part of an ongoing proposal for richness of experience via a range of as yet unspecified artistic forms.





Compared to the old Sandfield, the new building is a 100% IMPROVEMENT. It no longer feels like a cold soulless institution. Now the place feels really bright when you walk in. When I meet clients now, the lightness and decoration in the building makes the encounters feel more relaxed. I strongly believe that the environment influences the way we feel and act. I love the glass work, it gives the building a really attractive modern air.

Main building vestibule area

Artist: Gill Hobson

Frosted glass panels echo the imagery of the map and tree motifs featured across the main site, providing effective screening and linking themed artworks between the reception and stairwell. Elements of the 'tree' motif are echoed in other areas of the building as frosted window panels, retaining the integrity of the theme and providing functional screening for private areas.

Main building stairwell

Artist: Gill Hobson

Group theme: glass and light Participants: staff and service users

The stairwell windows feature stained glass panels, designed and made with the participation of staff and service users of the glass and light group. Partners identified the tree as a symbol of growth and renewal and embarked upon an ambitious project to develop, design and construct the six glass panels in the scheme. It is testimony to the development of service users confidence, skills, personal ambition and self belief that such a significant artwork was conceived as the legacy of their project. The panels are complemented by frosted glass echoing the design, ensuring the finished artwork is functional as well as beautiful.



Garden area

Artist: Kirsty Champ

Group theme: wood

Participants, staff and artists worked together to identify projects for the outdoor area.

Together they created two permanent garden structures in living willow as focal points for a larger outdoor scheme (to be developed in the longer term). The works comprise an arbour and partitioning to the entrance area and a small sheltered area to the rear left hand area of the site. The entrance arbour denotes a symbolic transition to a quiet, natural space for peace and contemplation: the sheltered area is in the form of a three dimensional arch, embracing the user in private space. As part of the outdoor artwork, participants worked together to design and make a natural oak bench using a range of hand tools and new skills. Input included research and design work and development of practical skills and knowledge in the making of the benches. The bench itself retains the natural features of seasoned wood, with organic edges and fret-worked detailing, and is constructed without the need for nails or screws, each part cleverly slotting together.



distance travelled

Evaluating the action research project

This project has inspired staff and service users to explore their creative skills and created a really interesting space for people to come. It has helped up to promote our overall philosophy of hope and recovery and reinforces our key message that people experiencing a mental health problem are very capable and creative - even though at the time they may not believe it.

Carol Fish, Project Leader

“ *The project has brought hope back into the site, shown that small achievements can develop you as a person. I feel better able to deal with setbacks, overcome difficulties, form good relationships, share a learning journey and work toward common goals. It has made me feel better about myself and what I can achieve. A service user*

As an action research project, the Sandfield House experiences have been a first step toward developing fresh dynamics, energy and inspiration at the site.

Although a great deal has been achieved, we must reflect on distance travelled to date in order to plan the next route of the continuing journey, building on these foundations and laying down the course for future direction.

Our research has given an insight into the potential for creativity at the site and to some extent answered our question of how creativity might work in practice.

As we reflect on our achievements to date, the emerging question is: 'What's next?' How can the staff at Sandfield continue to support strategies that build on successes, embed creativity and promote innovation in practice?

Valuing the impact creativity has on wellbeing and recovery

In a changing world, unpredictability and uncertainty seem to be the only constants. Making a commitment to support creativity in all its forms is essentially a philosophical proposition. It begins with an individual commitment to approach each day as a next step in a journey full of possibilities and potential – the plan for what comes next will be born out of an interconnected series of 'What ifs?' and 'How can I's?'

The range of creative activities at the site have been a pathway into broader impacts, upskilling staff and providing a platform for real experience, engagement and enjoyment for participants.

As the project developed, participants have been able to drive their own learning and contemplate and attempt increasingly sophisticated outcomes. As confidence and has grown, service users experienced the practical benefits of employing creative methodologies and experiences effectively in everyday life. Thinking skills have been continually developed with service users increasingly able to get involved in decision making about what they wish to achieve and how they might go about reaching their desired outcomes.

 *The project has helped develop sustainable and embedded creative learning at the site. It is the first step toward exploring how staff can move toward integrated creative engagements for clients as part of their recovery plan and broader wellbeing.*

This publication, its creation and content are very much part of the wider reflection process, anchoring and contextualising the project experience for all and providing a point of departure for future project development.

Emerging questions

“ I've proved to myself that I can make a commitment, that am able to be flexible, that all work is not just 9-5 and that there are other ways to engage in mainstream work. I've proved to myself that I am able to achieve in small ways and the experience has provided me with a real achievement.

As we reflect further, a number of questions emerge. Of these, sustainability of distance travelled for individuals and organisations is a key issue:

How can this experience be developed to provide regular access to opportunities without becoming a regularised long term engagement for repeat participants?

Which elements can be taken forward and where can participants continue their interests?

Part of the response to these questions comes from the staff at Sandfield who are building on the project experience, timetabling workshops and creative activity independently of practitioner input. The experience has enabled them to model ways to lead activity and support participants, whilst also re-connecting them with their own creativity. In turn, this stimulates their personal interests and promotes a willingness to innovate within their ongoing practice to the benefit of themselves and service users.

Evaluation and reflection

Throughout the project, attention was given to reflection and open and honest discussion. This was an essential tool in the underpinning creative process to maximise the experience for service users, participants, staff and artists. The following comments give an insight to the impact of the project on all those who took part.

The staff experience

“ This project made people evaluate different difficulties and overcome them; achievement and experience has positively underpinned psychological development.

The Sandfield House project provided a flexible framework for staff who participated to support their own learning, enhancing an innovative and fluid set of skills and creatively motivated pro-active sociability.

For the staff participating, it actively encouraged creative self-direction and management. With positive feedback given throughout building staff confidence and self esteem alongside service users, the shared experience and mutual achievement led to visible improvements in the emotional wellbeing of each group as the course progressed.

The project helped to develop sustainable and embedded creative learning by exploring the dichotomy of creativity and practical learning and pushing the boundaries of what is known to be therapeutic.

The staff perspective

The flexible nature of creative working, acknowledging everyone's different learning curves, sharing individual goals and approaches supported by practitioner was a key element in the development of personal skills and enhanced understanding. The creative process provided a positive experience that could be of use in other areas of professional work.

"The practitioner brought fresh and different approaches into the environment which are proving very effective. All activity is within safety margins, but the emphasis is on experimentation, not being too precious about materials and outcomes and promoting a 'have a go and enjoy it' attitude. All have access to text books etc for idea generation but the focus is on originality, self direction and expression rather than 'getting it right' or 'following the instructions'. This is raising confidence and willingness to take risks for all of us."

"Creative practitioners have supported our work by providing models for future creative activity with a therapeutic element. Increased awareness of creative processes and methodologies for staff and service users."

"Staff have taken risks with hosting this type of group work, but it is working well and Health & Safety practices have been well observed. Having a new workshop 'leader' in the environment (practitioners) has been a risk as they do not know the people or environment, but staff and

practitioners have been able to work well together to support a stimulating and positive experience for participants.”

“The experience has helped generate some new ideas and approaches which will support future workshop activity. Staff can model different ways of working and feel confident that they are following proven methods of delivery with measurable impacts.”

“It has been interesting to see how service users responded to the very open frameworks for learning. They have been supported to find new ways to express themselves and confidence and ambition has developed consistently. I feel confident about using these new approaches to independently lead similar experiences for service users.”

“Ongoing reflection has been standard both throughout sessions and at the end of each session, this has been very good in planning for each next session and organising work space and flow.”

“The practitioner has helped us discover the value of sticking with something and seeing it through. The big window project has required commitment from all over a long term and the results of sustained activity and commitment has resulted in an artwork that will be an inspiration for all for years to come.”

“It’s been good to spend time with and observe different approaches; good to share ideas, knowledge and experience with an experienced practitioner – it opened up new horizons which is both inspiring and liberating. Lots of fresh ideas to work with. I can see lots of possibilities to be explored and in turn delivered back into participatory activity.”

The artists’ experience

The Sandfield House project provided a steep learning curve for participants. As challenging as it can be to gauge levels of success and impacts on the client group, the key focus was to ensure all participated as fully as they are able. Working with a new client group and anticipating their specific needs was a considerable task from the outset, which the artists, with their own varied experience, were able to handle more effectively as time went on.

"I think these are a very brave group of people to put themselves in a situation where they have to socialise, work in a group setting and expose their abilities to a certain extent."

"There is a clear indication that, had we been able to continue the supportive relationships that had been fostered throughout the course with minimum facilitation, the positive gains achieved over the lifetime of the course could well have been sustained and embedded even further."

"The staff were able to take on their role as 'class members' in a positive way and responded well to the challenges of the course: staff members were able to pick up on the skills and knowledge and utilise it to the full."

"Staff and practitioners effectively took a back seat and gave the group space to find itself and the individuals within it to express their own views first."

"The sessions created a 'safe-space' and there was a clear level of trust between us that was very important with staff able to encourage and support in subtle, yet highly professional ways."

"Managing my own expectations was a significant step forward – spending a lot of time on preparation and being flexible within a framework, for example, altering the day's programme if necessary."

"We developed a highly effective series of strategies informally as the course went on. In group work if we encountered a problem it often acted as a catalyst for some of the most positive results in sessions."

"In future practice I'd ensure there was some continuation built into any course delivery, at least as an option for a limited period to support participants transition from guided to independent activity."

"Sketchbook/notebook working helped participants gain insights into the process of idea generation, gaining a deeper understanding that ideas don't just materialise from nowhere: that there are tools and methodologies that support creative thinking that can be learned and repeated."

"I feel have taken lots of risks throughout: have continually needed to re-evaluate my expectations of group and workshop staff have been valuable in talking through strategies for future delivery."

The service user perspective

It is only fitting that the final word be given to those service users who took part, taking risks and placing themselves in a position of vulnerability. It is their journey which is the most effective guide to shaping future work in the spirit of the Sandfield House project.

"The social aspect was important, having to make the effort to get here every week. Whether it'll make any difference in the long run, I don't know."

"The end was threatening and it's left a real hole in the week."

*"I've successfully committed to making space to attend once a week to do something positive and constructive – I need to maintain this and need support to do this. The experience has brought new perspectives and broadened minds. No class on a Friday will leave a big hole."
"I have remained well throughout the course"*

"I'll definitely look back at this as a good period in my life."

(Endnotes)

1. Smith, Tom, *An Evaluation of Sorts: Learning from Common Knowledge*, Centre for Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine, University of Durham, 2003
2. *Arts in health: a review of the medical literature*, Arts Council England Publication