

Covid-19 Recovery Arts Programme

Augustus House, 2021

Evaluation Report



'I am better at controlling my temper. I can manage my emotions better as I have gained confidence. It makes me happy seeing people enjoy workshops who have similar issues'

'It's made me think about other options I have in life'

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1. Project Overview and Aims

Overview

The Covid-19 Recovery Arts programme was developed as a short programme of arts activity for people who had offended and were at risk of re-offending in Warwickshire. The model was based on a successful programme run with the Warwickshire and West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) in their HQ in Worcester, where creative arts activities contributed to reducing re-offending rates over 4 years.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, positive discussions had taken place with the CRC about holding activities in their Warwickshire Justice Centres in Leamington and Nuneaton. However, once Covid-19 restrictions were brought in, it was not possible to do this as groups weren't operating. Instead, we approached Augustus House Approved Premises, run by HM Prisons and Probation, which houses a number of male offenders. They welcomed the idea of the project, and together we found ways to make it work during the pandemic. Originally postponed from an Autumn 2020 start date due to Covid-19 restrictions tightening, the project began in April 2021 and ran until October 2021.

The project comprised two blocks of arts sessions, each session being two hours long;

- 8 weeks of film-making with Nicola Prestage of Tigerfeatures
- 8 weeks of creative writing with Holly Winter-Hughes.

The total cost of the project was £5,000, with funds received from:

- Philip Seccombe, Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire (£2,500)
- Leamington Town Council (£2,000)
- Augustus House (£500).

Aims

The overall objective of the project was *'to deliver a series of socially distanced arts interventions at Augustus House, Leamington Spa in order to provide the residents with much needed creative engagement, since Covid-19 has reduced the contact they have with others and with their ability to express themselves'*.

Our target was for 14 people to be referred and attend at least one session and 10 to attend at least half a block of sessions.

Our aims were:

1. Participants attending at least half a block of arts sessions will report improvement in at least one of the following areas: mental health and wellbeing; positive use of time; managing emotions; developing new skills; attitude to crime free life
2. Offender managers will report improvement in those same participants in: better engagement with their order, increased confidence and motivation, improved attitude to job-seeking, training or employment, reduction in offending whilst on arts course or other positive change.

2. Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation of the project was planned and implemented by Debbie Birch of Crave Arts. Debbie managed the arts programme with the CRC in Worcestershire and was therefore able to use similar approaches to evaluating the success of this project.

The impact of the project was explored in several ways:

- Register of attendance to see who attended and who came regularly to sessions, as well as capture of demographics
- Participant led self-assessment, before and after a block of arts sessions
- Offender Manager assessment based on changes they had witnessed
- Artist assessment of change seen during the programme

Participant led self-assessment was captured through use of a Star Chart, based on the Outcome Star for Justice but with a simpler 0-5 scaling score point system. Participants were asked before the arts sessions began to score themselves on mental health and wellbeing, positive use of time, ability to manage emotions, developing new skills and living a crime free life. A score of 0 indicates they don't believe they are doing well at all. A score of 5 indicates they are doing very well. They were then asked to do this assessment again at the end of the 8-week course. Participants were supported by their Offender Manager in doing this assessment. In the final week, notes could also be made to support these scores.

Offender manager assessment was carried out through an electronic survey completed after each block of arts sessions, with questions asked about changes they have seen in participants, based on the aims of the project.

Artist assessment was captured through an online video discussion after the arts sessions had completed and through regular updates from the artists to the project manager and evaluator.

The views of participants and offender managers were also captured during two films made during the sessions and a number of photographs were taken.



3. Film-making sessions

Film-making can be an engaging and stimulating art-form to use with participants of all ages and all backgrounds. Nicola Prestage is an accomplished film-maker and also a workshop facilitator experienced with similar client groups, having delivered film-making courses to people on Probation in Worcestershire and to young people at risk of offending, both in person and online.

Nicola ensures that everyone has a role on the project, taking into account their own interests and confidence levels. Roles include acting, directing, camera-operation, story-boarding, props and lighting, and script-writing. On this project, the whole range of roles were put into practice during the 8 weeks and everyone had a go at something.

3a. Outputs

The film-making project produced:

- One film (5 minutes 30 seconds long) led and made by the participants themselves, based on an idea they chose to explore: [Expectations: How We Feel About Approved Premises](#)
- One film (nearly 4 minutes long with interviews with participants and offender managers) capturing the impact of the project: [Augustus House Feedback](#)

In making the film, participants took all roles: interviewers, interviewees, film directors, camera operators, location scouts and pre-production storyboarding. For example, they planned and story-boarded the way the film would work, they came up with 'interview' questions for Sian Jones, their residential worker, and interviewed and filmed her in the House's garden. As well as learning the practical skills of film-making, they were also able to see Sian's perspective, something they had never explored before. They could spend some time exploring their own emotions about being in Approved Premises and hopes for the future.



3b. Outcomes

6 people attended at least one session of film-making. Of these, 4 sustained their attendance (attended at least half the block of sessions), with 1 attending just under this at three sessions.

All were white male, with 2 being 17-24; 3 being 25-64; 1 being 65+

Participant Assessment

Star Charts were completed at the start and end of the block of film-making sessions by 5 participants (the 4 who sustained their attendance and 1 who attended three sessions in total).

A template star chart can be seen in the Appendices to this report.

This chart shows the difference on the 5-point scale for each category that each attendee felt they had made. Plus signs show an increase and Minus signs a decrease from first star to last. An Equals sign means stayed the same. For example, +3 (2, 5) means the participant scored themselves 2 at the start of the course and 5 at the end for that category.

Participant reference	Mental Health	Positive use of time	Manage emotions	New skills	Crime free life
A2	+2 (3,5)	+1 (4,5)	+1 (2,3)	+2 (3,5)	+2 (2,4)
A3	+1 (1,2)	= (3,3)	= (3,3)	= (2,2)	= (5,5)
A4 (attended 3)	+2 (3,5)	+2 (3,5)	+1 (3,4)	+2 (3,5)	+1 (3,4)
A8	+3 (2,5)	+2 (3,5)	+3 (2,5)	+3 (2,5)	+2 (3,5)
A12	+1 (3,4)	+1 (4,5)	+1 (4,5)	+2 (2,4)	= (5,5)
Total change	+9	+6	+6	+9	+5
Average change	+1.8	+1.2	+1.2	+1.8	+1

All participants scored either the same or an increase in all areas. Each participant scored an increase in at least one area, meeting this aim of the project.

The average change for each category overall ranged from an increase of 1 point to an increase of 1.8 points on a 5-point scale, with mental health and skill development seeing the highest increases.

Participants were asked to comment on these changes they saw in themselves.

Mental Health

'I feel more sociable from attending the course. That has made me happier.'

'Made me more social. I've come out of my room more.'

'I feel less stressed and it has helped me to control my anxiety'

'Improved over the course'

'It's made me be more social and interact with others'

Positive use of time

'I am getting out more in the sunshine'

'It's given me something to look forward to each week'

'Film-making has been really positive for me as I have never done anything like it before. Helped me to adapt to do more positive things'

'Gets me out of my room'

'It's given me something to put my energy into'

Ability to manage emotions

'Much better as I feel happier'

'The group has made me feel more confident'

'I am better at controlling my temper. I can manage my emotions better as have gained confidence. It makes me happy seeing people enjoy workshops who have similar issues'

'It's made me less stressed and therefore I feel better overall in myself'

Developing new skills

'Learning how to make films and talk openly about feelings'

'I've learnt how to use the camera and about the shots used, as well as the A and B roll'

'Controlling emotions. Skills for interviews'

'Meeting new people'

'I can now use the camera and understand how it's all put together'

Crime Free Life

'I feel positive about not breaking the law and finding a job in construction'

'It's made me think about other options I have in life'

'I feel good about this as hearing about the other guys' experiences has made me more positive and hearing how much the staff care from film-making group, I want to not let them down. Sian cares a lot about us, we saw that in our film.'

'It's made me think about using my new skills for work'

Offender Manager Assessment

A survey was sent for completion by Darren Pateman, Approved Premises Manager for Augustus House, and Sian Jones, Augustus House's residential worker who attended all the film-making sessions.

1. How many participants do you feel have increased their confidence or motivation since starting the film-making courses?

Sian said all participants increased confidence/motivation and Darren replied that 4 had.

'It was good to see residents engage positively with an open mind despite being seemingly shy and probably anxious about recently entering the community'

'I've watched all of the residents come out of their shells during this 8 week course. In particular we had one resident who spends almost all of his time in his room but has now got to know the other residents in the course and has started coming out a bit more'

2. How many participants do you feel have decreased their offending since starting the film-making courses?

Sian said all participants decreased offending and Darren replied that 3 had.

We know that some service users reduce their risk factors by increasing their sense of belonging and 'giving something back'. I feel the video has helped with these aspects.

None of the residents have been a part of criminal activity since they started the course. I know a few of the residents have even said that the course gave them something to focus on for a few hours a week and it gave them something to look forward to.

3. How many participants do you feel have engaged better with the terms of their order since starting the film-making courses?

Sian said all participants engaged better and Darren replied that 3 had.

We have recently had 2 of the three main participants move on from the Approved Premises into independent accommodation. This has been a particularly stressful period of adjustment which they have managed really well. The 3rd person is now engaging with another group which looks at creative writing

Again the residents have said taking part in the course has helped them stay more on the straight and narrow as it gave them something to work towards and to look forward to each week.

4. How many participants have sought jobs or attended training since starting the film-making courses?

I am aware that at least one of the participants has since engaged with further meaningful activity. I would say it is early in their releases and covid may impact on the ability for all to engage in further opportunities.

Due to covid at the minute, job searching has been harder for the residents and a lot of training sessions have unfortunately not been running.

5. Further comments

One resident in-particular was shy and didn't interact with other residents but he has played a key role in the actual film. He has since moved on into independent living. He deserves great praise for how hard he has worked to secure move on. He also appeared to have better trust with staff.

Like I've said above, we had one resident who literally said it gave him a reason to leave his room. Another said it has helped him with his social skills.

Thank you too all involved in the group and the film making. This film will be shared with wider Probation Staff and will help staff and future residents feel more confident working and living in the AP.

I thoroughly enjoyed taking part in this workshop and I know the residents loved it as well. Seeing them come out of their shells during the 8 weeks was lovely and seeing how proud they were of the final result was heart -warming! Please come back again soon. A big shout out to Nicky. Her passion and enthusiasm was infectious and the way she interacted with the residents was truly phenomenal, she's a credit to your organisation.

Additionally, at the celebration session, held in the 8th week where the films were shown, Sian said:

"I really enjoyed it, I feel like a proud mum, I feel a bit tearful"

Artist Assessment

Nicola Prestage reported back that, despite not knowing the participants before sessions began, she too had seen changes during the time she was there:

- *Participants told me they could control their tempers better since doing the course*
- *At the start of each session, we had a 'declutter' chat to release issues and then get into film-making. This helped people's anxiety*
 - *One chap only comes out for meals and these workshops*
 - *People gained confidence*
 - *The group has allowed residents to develop social skills, chat and socialise*
 - *It's also built a connection with staff – them filming Sian really helped them understand her and take more responsibility for their behaviour*
 - *I have never worked with a group that was so open about their feelings and experiences right from the start and so open in front of the camera*

4. Creative writing sessions

Creative writing can be a therapeutic way of processing feelings and experiences, or a distracting way of developing new worlds and new characters to escape from difficulties for a time.

Holly Winter-Hughes is an established performance poet and creative writing facilitator, with lots of experience of working with groups of adults, particularly those in challenging circumstances or with mental health issues, and with clients on Probation in Worcestershire. Holly uses tools and prompts to give everyone, no matter their experience or writing ability, the confidence to write and to share their stories through poetry or prose. Holly particularly listens and enables people to convey their experiences through words.

4a. Outputs

The creative writing project produced '[Locked Up in Locked Down](#)' – an e-book of 'conversations with newly released offenders' produced by creative writer Holly Winter-Hughes containing the words of all the creative writing group participants.

The creation of the book involved much discussion and sharing of stories by Augustus House residents.

The book was then shared on-screen at a final event at the end of the workshops.

Darren Pateman, Approved Premises Manager at Augustus House said, of the book,

'It's great and has exceeded my expectations'.



Individual pieces of writing were also written by some members of the group, such as a piece called D-Day by one participant, Daniel.

4b. Outcomes

6 people attended at least one session of creative writing. Of these, 4 sustained their attendance (attended at least half the block of sessions).

5 were white male; 1 identified as Black or Minority Ethnic.

5 were aged 25-64; 1 was aged 65+

Participant Assessment

Star Charts were completed at the start and end of the block of creative-making sessions by 5 participants.

A template star chart can be seen in the Appendices to this report.

This chart shows the difference on the 5-point scale for each category that each attendee felt they had made. Plus signs show an increase and Minus signs a decrease from first star to last. An Equals sign means stayed the same. For example, +3 (2, 5) means the participant scored themselves 2 at the start of the course and 5 at the end for that category.

Participant reference	Mental Health	Positive use of time	Manage emotions	New skills	Crime free life
A1	+1(4,5)	=(5,5)	+2(3,5)	+1(4,5)	=(5,5)
A3	+2(3,5)	+2(3,5)	+2(2,4)	+2(3,5)	+1(4,5)
A4	=(5,5)	=(5,5)	=(5,5)	=(5,5)	=(5,5)
A5	+1(4,5)	+1(4,5)	+1(4,5)	+2(3,5)	=(5,5)
A6	+2(2,4)	+2(2,4)	+1(3,4)	+1(2,3)	+1(3,4)
Total change	+6	+4	+6	+6	+2
Average change	+1.2	+0.8	+1.2	+1.2	+0.4

(NB: A2 only completed an end of course set of scores, scoring 5, 4, 5, 4 and 5).

All participants scored either the same or an increase in all areas. All but 1 participant scored an increase in at least one area.

The average change for each category overall ranged from an increase of 0.4 points to an increase of 1.2 points on a 5-point scale, with mental health, managing emotions and skill development seeing the highest increases.

Participants were asked to comment on these changes they saw in themselves.

Mental Health

'Helped me a lot, got a lot out of my mind'

Positive use of time

'Helped me use my time in a constructive way and received positive feedback'

Ability to manage emotions

'Understanding that my emotional situation is directly connected with my offending behaviour'

Developing new skills

'Having empathy for other people, understanding, having different skill sets and how it could help me to reduce offending'

During the final session of the creative writing group, participants also commented:

'I enjoyed it and found it interesting to hear others stories'

'Good to hear that other people have gone through the same things, It was unburdening for me. In prison you have to put up a barrier and you are reluctant to drop it but being able to talk here was good. You feel you are not alone its a shared experience and helped us to talk to each other outside of the sessions'

'At first I didn't want to talk about my feelings but it helped'

Sian Jones said:

'You see them change in how they are expressing themselves'

Offender Manager Assessment

A survey was sent for completion by Darren Pateman, Approved Premises Manager for Augustus House, and Sian Jones, Augustus House's residential worker who attended all the creative writing sessions.

1. How many participants do you feel have increased their confidence or motivation since starting the film-making courses?

Both Darren and Sian said all participants increased confidence/motivation

They shared experiences and learnt things from each other which would have been a valuable learning process for them. I feel that any learning about life post release will boost peoples confidence because they will be more aware and prepared for what to expect.

2. How many participants do you feel have decreased their offending since starting the film-making courses?

Both Darren and Sian said all participants decreased offending.

I am optimistic that all of the participants will be less likely to re-offend although it is difficult to measure at this early stage. We do know that a large portion of the participants were serving sentences for sexual offences and some of the risk reducing factors that will have been achieved are 'giving something back' and 'feeling part of the community / social integration'.

3. How many participants do you feel have engaged better with the terms of their order since starting the film-making courses?

Both Darren and Sian said all participants engaged better.

During and post group we have had several of the participants move on from the AP into independent living. None of the participants have faced any enforcement action since the group which is extremely positive.

4. How many participants have sought jobs or attended training since starting the film-making courses?

Darren and Sian both said 3 participants.

Three of the participants are now in full time employment and have moved on to independent living. Others have searched for work but have yet to be successful.

5. Further comments

One of the participants was released with an extremely poor record in custodial settings and this created a lot of anxiety about his release. People working with this individual did not hold a lot of hope for him being successful in the community. The writing group has given him an opportunity to feel heard and build trust with staff which has ultimately led to him feeling safe and settled in the AP. This person completed his residency with the AP without any warnings, he has moved into independent living and has gained full time employment - a real success story!

One resident said that he felt calmer and like a weight had been lifted after the sessions as it gave him a place to talk about things he doesn't really have chance to with anyone else.

There were difficulties getting people to attend this group, possibly because people are not so confident with writing. I feel the organisers, lead, and Sian were patient and eventually got the attendance and results we had hoped for.

I know myself and the residents involved in the course thoroughly enjoyed it! I know a lot of the guys liked having somewhere to talk about their experiences as they said talking about feelings etc isn't really something they're encouraged to do a lot. I personally liked seeing them come out of their shells and grow in confidence during the course.

Artist Assessment

Holly provided feedback throughout the project following each session. Several of the film participants left Augustus House following that project and so new people took on creative writing. It took a while to build momentum for attending sessions, and Holly had 1:1s with a couple of people which really benefited them and brought them out of their shells, giving them confidence to write and/or share their stories.

Some comments from Holly:

- *It was useful to talk to X without a group, as he was very open about his experiences. He used to write when he was inside and found it very therapeutic, but always wrote with the intention of ripping it up. He started writing something new today. He's keen to talk about how it is coming out of prison and how hard it is readjusting to society. He speaks very well. Saying things like "Carrying the guilt and the shame... that's the real sentence... one I'll have with me for the rest of my life." And "People assume that after prison you'll be free, but the truth is... I'll never be free again." He struggles to put these thoughts down on paper, so I suggested we record him speaking and I type up his words, combined with his own writing. I've left him with a notebook and pen. He likes the idea that his story could inspire others to not make the same mistake as him. Another interesting angle that came up was how we all felt limited during lockdown, but for people inside it was a whole different experience. The idea of exploring 'locked up in lockdown' went down favourable with X and the staff.*
- *X talked a lot about forgiveness in his session and how he felt like he wasn't treated like a human in prison, but how during our sessions he feels like he is listened to and treated like a human. He also said he found it very therapeutic to talk things through. It was a very moving session and felt like we made some progress.*
- *What was really lovely was how they started to listen to one another and by the end of the session were expressing empathy. Y said that he especially liked being able to talk as a group, as they don't usually engage with one another and it was really good to be able to share their experiences of life inside and readjusting to life outside. They were all very positive about the session and said they were looking forward to next week.*

5. Evaluation conclusions and recommendations

Referring back to the aims of the project, the numbers were close to target:

- 12 rather than 14 people attended at least 1 session after referral
- 8 rather than 10 people sustained their attendance (attended at least half a block of sessions).
- 7 rather than 8 reported an increase in at least 1 area on their self-assessment outcome star between the beginning and end of courses. None decreased in any area.

The quotes in this report from participants and from offender managers demonstrate well the achievement of the key outcomes of the project: better engagement with

their order, increased confidence and motivation, improved attitude to job-seeking, training or employment, reduction in offending.

Key outcomes are:

- The development of trust and stronger relationships/understanding between participants and between participants and staff
- The steps residents made to be more sociable and to grow their confidence
- In 3 cases, participants went on to training or employment and into independent living.
- None have re-offended and, although it is early days, offender managers believe the courses reduced their risk factors.

A significant success factor for this project was the engagement, support and buy-in of Augustus House staff and in particular Sian Jones. Gaining the support of managers and staff at a particular venue is a critical factor for the success of any future programmes of this type – Sian really helped with recruitment of participants and pastoral support to them during and after sessions.

There are only two recommendations for changes in the future:

1. The project was small and self-contained. Future projects may wish to build in more time for warming up participants to the idea of joining the groups, perhaps with short tasters from the artists.
2. Titles of groups may need consideration, especially if they refer to something that would have been carried out at school. For example, 'Tell your story' may be more appealing than 'creative writing'.

6. Project acknowledgements

Arts Uplift would like to thank:

- The Augustus House team – particularly Sian Jones and Darren Pateman – for supporting the project so well and so positively
- Artists Nicola Prestage and Holly Winter-Hughes for their creative energy, empathy and ambition for the project
- All the project participants who shared so much of themselves and so willingly during each project
- The funders – the Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire, Leamington Town Council and Augustus House.

As a result of the film that the participants made with Sian, Sian has been put forward for an award and senior management have been very complimentary about the project and her role in it.

Appendices:

- Star Chart template

OUTCOME SCALING CHART

Which number best shows how you are feeling about different parts of your life?

What number, 0-5, before the arts sessions start?

What number, 0-5, after the last session?

0 = Not doing well at all. 5 = Doing very well.

