

arts and minds

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Arts on Prescription (Cambridgeshire) pilot phase: initial evaluation findings

Note: we are still collecting evaluation forms and other feedback from this project and therefore the statistics below are indicative only. The full report will be available from the Arts & Minds website, www.artsandminds.org.uk before the end of May 2010.

Why Arts on Prescription?

Research has shown that taking part in arts activities can help to promote well-being, by offering a chance to relax and concentrate on something absorbing. Drawing, painting and creative writing can offer a distraction from feelings of anxiety and distress and may open up new ways of looking at life.¹

There are a number of successful Arts on Prescription projects running in other parts of the UK and their evaluations have shown that participants with mental health difficulties including anxiety, depression and stress have found them of benefit.

The aim of the Arts on Prescription (Cambridgeshire) pilot project was to establish a) whether there was a demand for the service in Cambridgeshire and b) whether it would be of benefit to participants experiencing mild to moderate depression, anxiety and stress.

Funding of £60,000 was received from the Transformation Fund, launched by Government to open up innovative informal adult learning projects in England.

What happened?

The Arts on Prescription sessions ran in six locations in Cambourne, Fulbourn and central Cambridge from 31st January – 26th March 2010. The venues were a GP surgery, a community arts centre, a community hall, a museum, art gallery and a mental health drop-in centre.

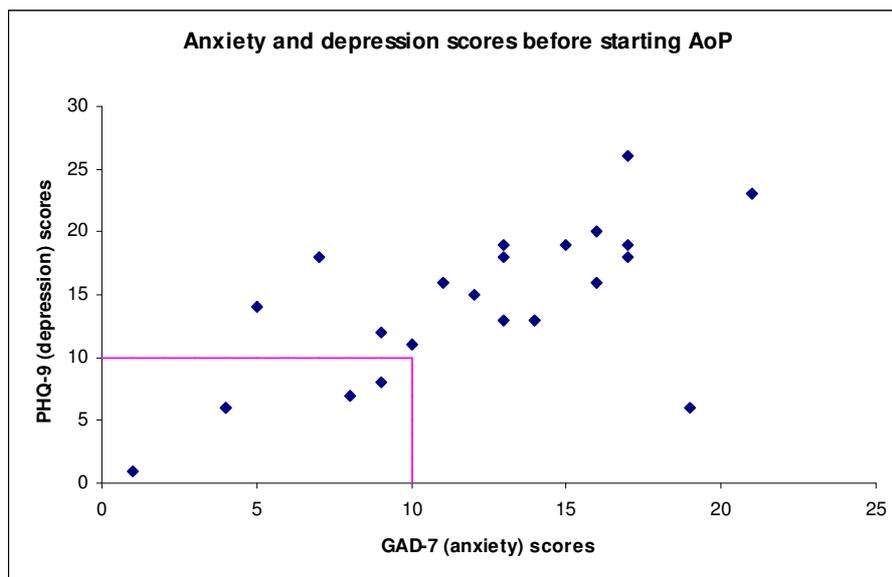
40% of the participants were referred by their doctor or other professional and the remainder referred themselves. Of the self-referrers, the 47% who offered information found out about the project by picking up a leaflet in a GP surgery or counselling service. A total of 37 people were referred to the weekly sessions, with 24 attending at least 2 sessions. The average number of sessions attended was 3. In addition, 14 people attended taster sessions. 55 people who came forward too late to be included in the pilot are on a waiting list pending continuation of the project.

¹ Secker et al, 'Mental Health, Social Inclusion and the Arts: developing the evidence base', Anglia Ruskin University/UCLan Research Team, 2007

About the participants

The majority of participants (75%) were in the 25-49 age band, 78% were female and 66% were not in paid work. 57% had left full time education at the age of 21 or older while 27% had left school at 16. 36% had not taken part in learning for 3 years or more before beginning the Arts on Prescription sessions, and 29% had not received any education since leaving school. 77% who stated their ethnic origin gave it as White British or White Irish.

On referral to Arts on Prescription, participants were asked to self-assess their levels of anxiety and depression using the GAD-7 (Anxiety) and PHQ-9 (Depression) scales commonly used in primary healthcare. As it turned out, far from experiencing 'mild to moderate' depression or anxiety, all but four of the participants referred self-reported as experiencing levels of depression or anxiety above the clinical cut-off (the pink line on the chart below). In other words, their levels of anxiety and depression were moderately severe or severe.



What were the sessions like?

Participants were offered the opportunity to attend sessions in a location of their choice once a week on a weekday and/or Saturday 'taster' sessions held at Kettle's Yard and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge. There was no need to have any previous experience of art in order to join the sessions.

Sessions were led by an experienced professional artist, supported by an art therapist; however, the art and craft activities offered were intended for enjoyment and stimulation and not as therapy. Participants had the opportunity to try a range of activities from conceptual art, to painting, rag rug making and printing, and artists tried wherever possible to tailor activities to participants' interests.

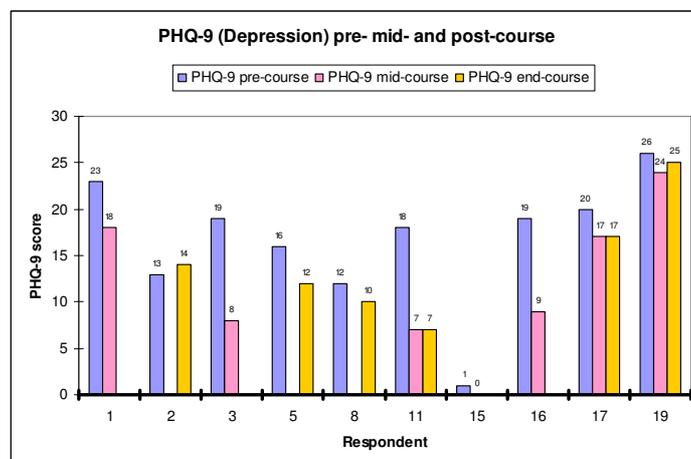
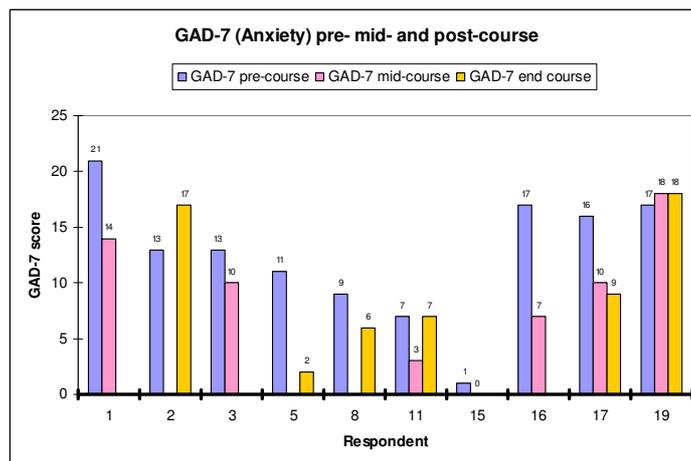
Participants were offered free childcare and refund of travel expenses to the sessions on public transport. The offer of free childcare was enthusiastically taken up by participants in Cambourne in particular, however, at all three weekly groups there were participants who would have found it difficult to attend without the provision of childcare.

What happened at the end of the sessions?

Participants were given information signposting them to further arts and craft activities in the Cambridgeshire area that they could take part in. This information has also been added to the Arts and Minds website. The artwork they made during the sessions was shown at a celebration event at Kettle’s Yard and will in future go on show in the new Arts & Minds premises in central Cambridge.

Feedback from participants

We are still collecting the final evaluation questionnaires; however, the results received so far indicate that those who took part have seen substantial reductions in their levels of depression and anxiety.



Written and verbal feedback has also been strongly positive:

'This is a very friendly creative environment with just the right degree of 'push'. This class has so far re-opened an interest in applied art which I will hopefully pursue to degree level at some point.'

'This week's session was relaxing and with the banter (not too much!) made it lighthearted. May it continue, both the course and the banter!'

'Coming to the Art on Prescription sessions has helped me in that I have been able to talk to artists, discussing both the art in Kettle's Yard and also my own art, in a supportive atmosphere. This has been of great value, especially as I have difficulty in social situations. Having the space to create larger works of art than I could create at home was also tremendously freeing. I have appreciated the opportunity immensely.'

'Very positive experience. Great atmosphere. Super teachers.'

Clarissa Cochran, one of the art therapists who have been helping to support the sessions writes:

'The poet Kathleen Raine said: the purpose of art is to heal the soul. In this respect I see no difference between art and craft. Functional craft has the added dimension of a practical use but the exquisite baskets of Zimbabwe or Mali do more than satisfy the need to carry things. Art heals and inspires us and enables the expression of something deeply personal.

The NHS may not like talking about the soul because you can't measure it but Arts therapists have known for many years of the value of encouraging creativity for those of us beset by more than the usual helping of life's set-backs.

We may all have our own reasons for enjoying being creative and for those of us for whom it is a way of life we know how it can nourish the soul. For those whose self-belief has taken a battering it may well be a crucial turning point.'

For further information about the evaluation of this project, please contact:

Josie Aston, Research Manager, Arts and Minds
josie.aston@gmail.com