

BRIEF REPORT:

Evaluation of the impact of a pilot art intervention on the wellbeing of women who have experienced sexual violence



JUNE 19 2020

Authored by: Pippa Grace, Nicola Holt & Emma Halliwell



Workshops

Express yourself: Surviving to Thriving

In 2019 Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support (SARSAS; www.sarsas.org.uk) received an Express Grant of £4,300 from The Quartet Foundation (www.quartetcf.org.uk) to run a pilot project offering creative workshops to women who have experienced sexual violence. Many of these women were experiencing mental and physical health issues, including social isolation, anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms, chronic fatigue and chronic pain. Several of the women had a 'mental health diagnosis'. The pilot project, 'Express Yourself: from Surviving to Thriving' ran at St Werburghs' Community Centre, Bristol, from November 2019 – March 2020. Two groups of women received a series of four mixed media workshops designed by artist Pippa Grace Robinson to provide a safe, secure, gentle environment to help unlock and nurture their creative potential. Pippa was supported throughout by Georgina Huntley, an art therapist working with SARSAS.

All participants received an entrance and exit interview with SARSAS and were supported by SARSAS with any issues that arose during the workshops. The workshops aimed to:

- Create a safe, secure, gentle environment.
- Be mindful to use non-triggering language.
- Set clear parameters around confidentiality and respect.
- Create an inspiring space with a range of creative materials and activities accessible to help unlock people's creative potential and a playful response to 'making'.
- Use simple exercises to help people warm up and feel safe, and encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings if they wanted to.
- Encourage an atmosphere of positive support, respect and empathy.
- Respond creatively and sensitively to the needs of each participant as they presented at each workshop.
- Adapt to any changes and challenges as necessary.
- Monitor and evaluate the progress of the workshops as they took place and make any changes needed week by week.
- Document the workshops by taking photographs.
- Improve the health, well-being and confidence of participants through creativity.

We ran two groups, each comprising the same four creative workshops. The four workshops including the following activities:

- Workshop 1: **Personal Relationship to Creativity**. Vision Mapping exercise using collage with images and words from inspiring magazines, and other craft materials.
- Workshop 2: **Animal Qualities we Identify with**. Clay workshop to create an animal friend / soul animal, based on these qualities.
- Workshops 3 & 4: **Personal response to Safe / Calm Spaces**. Mini mixed media project over two weeks to find a creative response to this topic. Using: textiles, sewing, knitting, collage, clay, cardboard boxes, paint, felt.



Evaluation

Participants

Twelve females took part in the evaluation of the art workshops, five in Autumn 2019 and seven in Spring 2020. The average (mean) age was 41, participants ranging from 24 to 57 years of age. The average (mean) wellbeing score at the start of the workshops was 36.85 (scores ranging between 18 and 63), suggesting that, on average, participants' scores were in a range indicative of 'probable depression' (below 40).

Questionnaires

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) consists of 14 questions that enquire about psychological wellbeing in the previous two weeks, such as feeling connected to others, experiencing positive emotions, being able to think clearly and having high self-esteem. A minimum 'meaningful change' in scores has been defined as an increase of three points, and a score of 40 or less has been associated with depression, and of 44 or less with possible depression.

The Short Mood Scale (SMS; Wilhelm & Schoebi, 2007). A six-item scale that measures: hedonic tone or contentment (feeling content and happy rather than sad or depressed); tense arousal (feeling anxious, tense and stressed rather than relaxed or calm); and energetic arousal (feeling alert and energetic rather than sleepy and sluggish).

End of course evaluation scale (Wilson, Secker, Kent & Keay, 2017). A six-item scale enquiring about the impact of arts for wellbeing course on aspects of wellbeing, including art skills, motivation, positivity, confidence and relationships. It has a 4-item response scale ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 4 = "yes, very much".

Method

All participants were invited to take part in the evaluation and were able to read about what this would involve in a Participant Information Sheet. Participants gave informed consent for their data to be used for the evaluation. The evaluation received ethical approval from UWE's Ethics Committee. Participants were invited to complete a questionnaire at the first and final workshop that asked about their general wellbeing (WEMWBS). Additionally, at the start and end of each individual art workshop, they completed a mood scale (SMS) (following Holt, 2020).

The image shows two mood scale forms, one for the start of a session and one for the end of a session. Each form includes a date field, a personal number field (with instructions to use the first two letters of the mother's first name and the first two letters of the birth date), and five mood categories with corresponding colored lines and markers. The 'Start of session' form has a red square for 'Tired', a yellow triangle for 'Agitated', a blue circle for 'Unwell', a red square for 'Content', and a yellow triangle for 'Full of energy'. The 'End of session' form has a red square for 'Awake', a yellow triangle for 'Calm', a blue circle for 'Well', a red square for 'Discontent', and a yellow triangle for 'Without energy'. Both forms also include a blue circle for 'Relaxed'.

Start of session At this moment, I feel...
(Put a cross somewhere on each the line)

Date: Personal No:
Write the first 2 letters of your mother's first name. (e.g. Carol = CA) Write your birth date (e.g. write '11' for 11th May)

Tired ■
Agitated ▲
Unwell ●
Content ■
Full of energy ▲
Relaxed ●

End of session At this moment, I feel...
(Put a cross somewhere on each the line)

Date: Personal No:
Write the first 2 letters of your mother's first name. (e.g. Carol = CA) Write your birth date (e.g. write '11' for 11th May)

Tired ■ Awake ■
Agitated ▲ Calm ▲
Unwell ● Well ●
Content ■ Discontent ■
Full of energy ▲ Without energy ▲
Relaxed ● Tense ●

Quantitative outcomes

Multi-level modelling was used to assess change in wellbeing and mood over time, since this method allows for nested data, where, in this case, different measurement points (e.g. up to eight mood reports) are nested within twelve individuals.

Wellbeing change

There was an increase in wellbeing on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, from week one to week four. The average (mean) wellbeing score at week one (week 2 for one participant) was 36.85 (SD = 12.88) and at the end of the programme (week 4) the average wellbeing score was 43.05 (SD = 9.92). The average wellbeing scores have increased by a meaningful amount (six points) for a short intervention. Average scores are out of the range of probable depression after four weeks, but are still in the range of possible depression. This increase in WEMWB scores was statistically significant ($F_{(1,9.28)} = 12.35, p = .006$).

It is worth noting that there is variation between individuals in wellbeing scores – with small (3) to large (18) points of increase – and for one participant there was a decrease in wellbeing (-3). Hence, not all participants appeared to benefit equally from the intervention. One factor that might impact upon the efficacy of the intervention was attendance, since the change in wellbeing was significantly predicted by attendance, $B = -7.625, t = -2.221, p = .047$, where lower levels of attendance was associated with lower increases in wellbeing.

Mood change

In addition to assessing longer-term wellbeing, the immediate impact of taking part in the workshops was assessed by tracking mood. There was a significant improvement on all three dimensions of mood after taking part in the art workshops: a reduction in tension so that participants reported feeling more relaxed ($t = 6.64, p < .001$); increased energy and alertness ($t = 6.24, p < .001$); and increased contentment ($t = 4.82, p < .001$). All of these changes in mood were statistically significant and mean changes are depicted in Figure One.

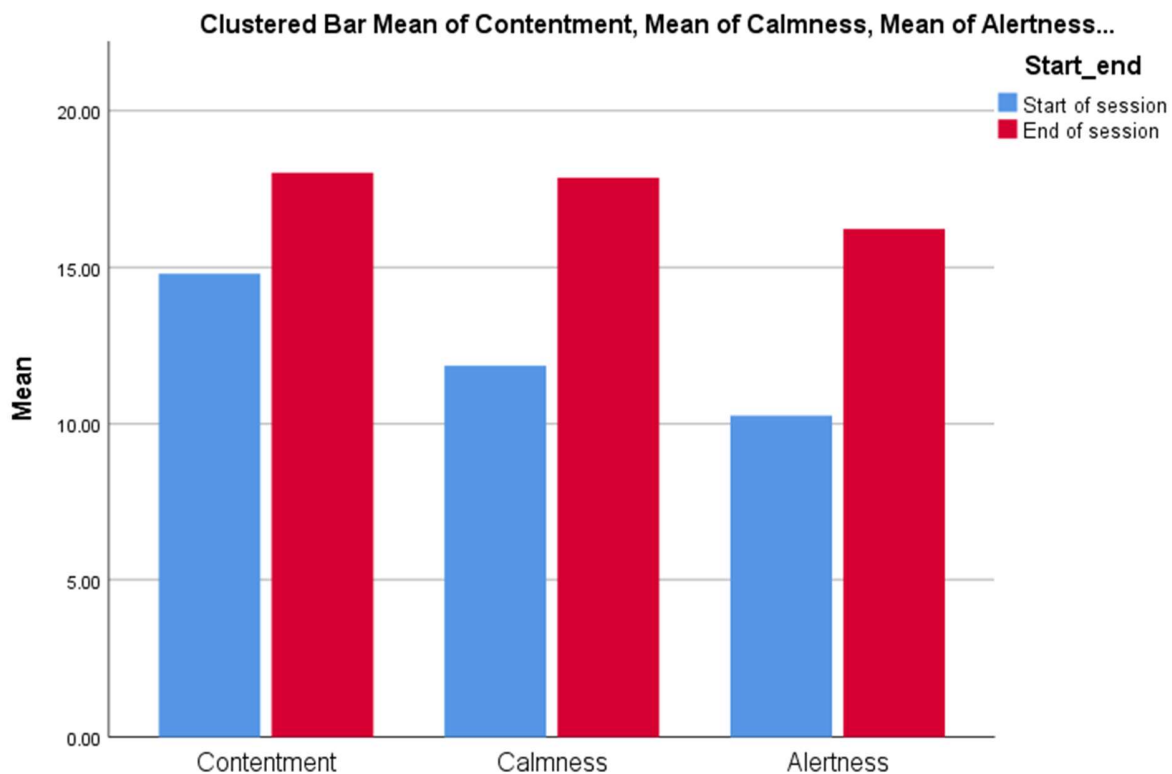


Figure One: Mood scores before and after taking part in the art workshops

Does mood change in the art workshops predict wellbeing change across the four-week intervention?

An important question was to test whether any changes in mood during the art workshops predicted longer term changes in wellbeing on the WEMWBS. Indeed, this was the case, the extent to which mood improved during the art workshops, predicted the extent to which wellbeing scores changed from week one to week. These relationships are illustrated in Figures 2-4, below. In these figures, the green lines, which represent participants with big increases in wellbeing, are steeper, showing that these participants had larger improvements in mood after taking part in the art workshops. This was the case for all three dimensions of mood, with statistically significant outcomes: reduction in anxiety and feeling calmer ($B = .379, t = 3.02, p = .004$), as illustrated in Figure Two; feeling more content ($B = .282, t = 2.84, p = .006$), as illustrated in Figure Three; and feeling more alert and energized ($B = .360, t = 2.91, p = .005$) as illustrated in Figure four. These findings suggest that responses to the art

workshops can explain some of the change in wellbeing scores across the weeks, and suggests that the art workshops directly impacted upon wellbeing.

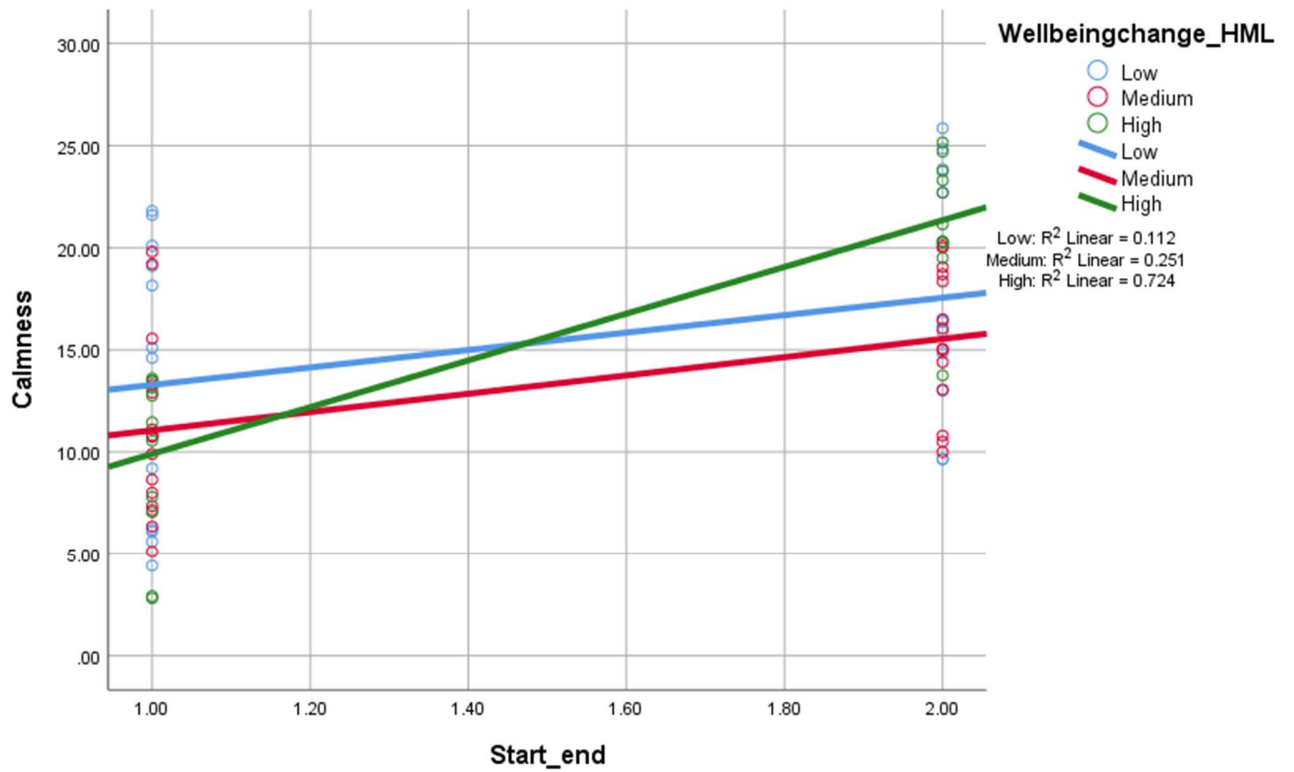


Figure Two: Cross-level interaction plot, showing the change in calmness before and after art workshops according to levels of wellbeing change across the programme (low, medium and high increases in wellbeing)

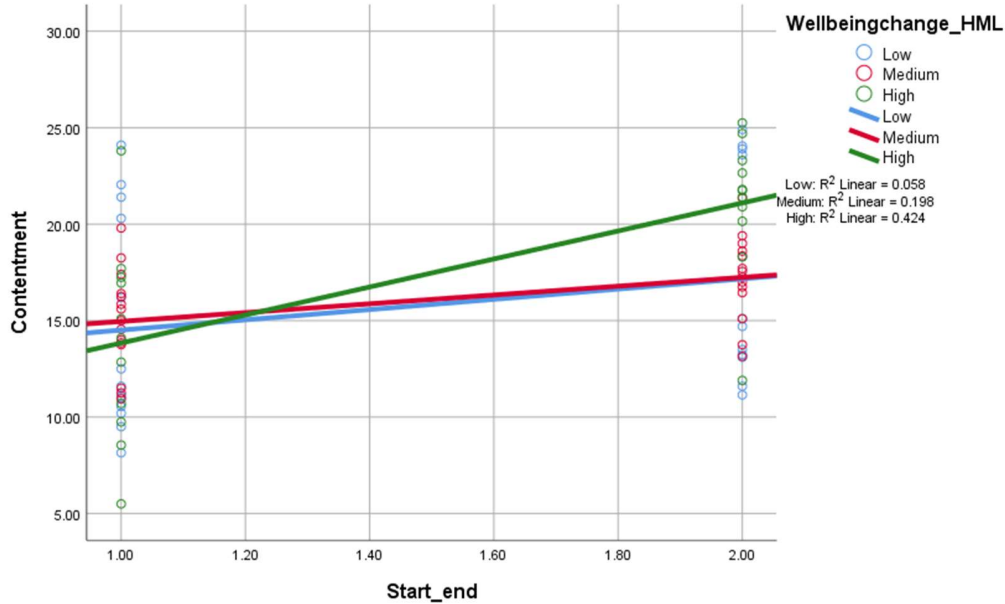


Figure Three: Cross-level interaction plot, showing the change in contentment before and after art workshops according to levels of wellbeing change across the programme (low, medium and high increases in wellbeing)

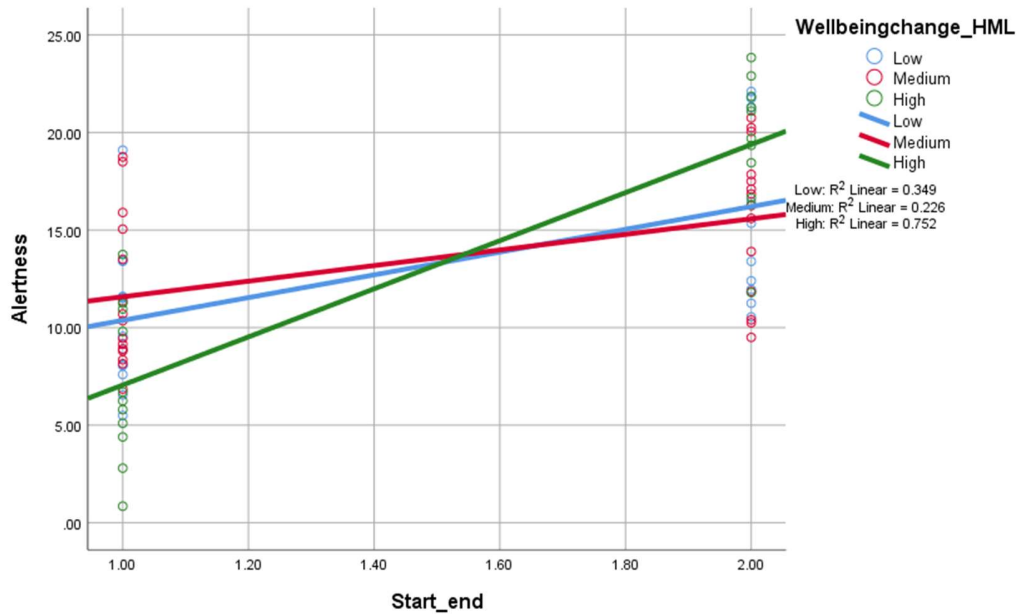


Figure Four: Cross-level interaction plot, showing the change in alertness before and after art workshops according to levels of wellbeing change across the programme (low, medium and high increases in wellbeing)

Perceptions of impact of the art workshops on wellbeing

The final analysis related to participants' evaluation of how the art workshops have impacted on their everyday life: art skills, confidence, motivation, positivity and relationships with others. The mean scores are illustrated in Figure 5, and show, on average, participants concurred that the art workshops had positively impacted on these factors (especially motivation to do artwork).

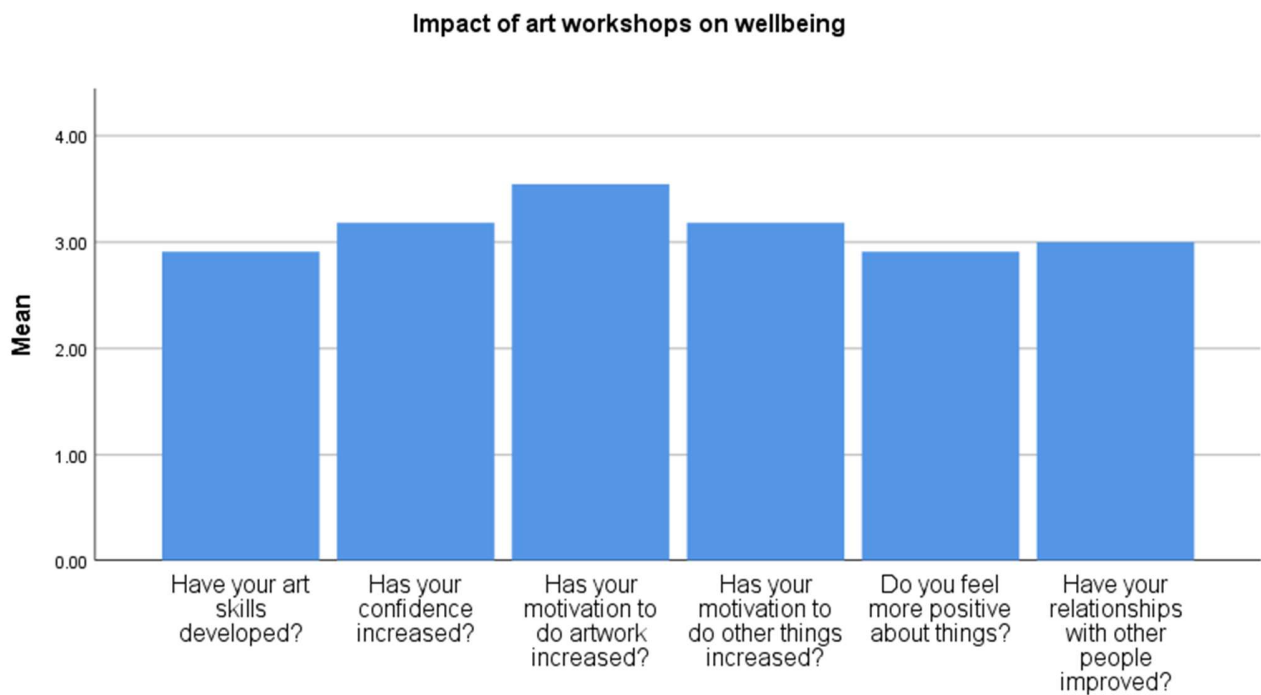


Figure Five: Participants mean responses on the art workshop evaluation scale

Qualitative outcomes

1) Many women reported enjoying feeling connected to other women in the group, and becoming less socially isolated as a result:

" I have been struggling with depression and anxiety for several years. I have been isolated in my flat & become so lonely. Need to make friends in a safe space. [...] (the group) was organised with safety in mind and I need this reassurance to be able to attend something. Talking has helped and I know I'm not the only person going through a hard time".

"Meeting new people is difficult but I wanted to try and socialise with people like me"

"A safe space to come to has helped me leave the house on my own"

2) Participants benefitted from the opportunity to be creative and to bring the freedom of this creativity into their lives:

"Freedom to be unique and CREATE! After years of being forced to be who I'm not. Being able to create with freedom and validation is MEGA."

"Freedom to create. Being given an idea but being allowed to explore and experiment. There were no right or wrongs so I felt more relaxed"

"I feel an empty place inside myself where I have no creativity any more but just fear and despair. (I enjoyed) having materials just put out in front of me that I can play with and not be judged."

3) There was no pressure to talk or share experiences, but participants found the creative process could be cathartic.

I have found it helpful ... "not talking about things but at the same time feel my time here had a cathartic affect on me [...] It was a very good experience, the start of a new journey"

4) Participants found it helpful to identify with other women's experiences, and to understand they were not alone in their life challenges and struggles:

"I'm longing to know that I'm not alone (not just that there are some lovely people who care but also to be with others who – without saying anything – REALLY understand because they KNOW – they've BEEN THERE!"

Conclusions and future directions

The quantitative outcomes suggest that the four-week long art intervention improved participants' self-reported wellbeing, with a meaningful mean increase of 6 points. This wellbeing change was linked directly to the art workshops, since it was predicted by the extent to which participants reported feeling more calm, content and alert at the end of them.

These findings are extremely encouraging as they suggest that just four-weeks of arts workshops can improve wellbeing. It is important to note that, although improved, at the end of the intervention, participants wellbeing scores were indicative of possible depression. However, it is impressive to see a meaningful change in just four weeks and we would expect that a longer programme would lead to greater change. Therefore, future research should examine whether a longer arts intervention can lift people out of the possible depression band of wellbeing scores.

The intervention was very well received by participants, who rated the impact of the intervention very positively. There was clearly variability in impact of this arts intervention on women, with some women experiencing more dramatic benefits than others. Attendance played a role in this. In addition, the responses to each individual session was important. The extent to which individuals benefited from each workshop predicted the extent to which they

benefited across the intervention as a whole. This is important because looking at changes experienced across each session can help identify, early on, which participants may need additional support to maximise the impact of the arts intervention. Future research should explore this possibility.

Overall, this research demonstrated that a short arts intervention can have a meaningful positive impact on women's well-being. Moreover, participants enjoyed these sessions and felt that they had benefited from taking part. This is encouraging and indicates that arts interventions are a relatively low cost, acceptable and effective intervention for this group. The findings also support further development of this work to deliver longer interventions and to consider using self-report tools to help maximise the benefit of arts interventions.

References

- Tennant, R., Hiller, L., Fishwick, R., Platt, S., Joseph, S., Weich, S., ... & Stewart-Brown, S. (2020). The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 5, 63.
- Holt, N. J. (2020). Tracking momentary experience in the evaluation of arts-on-prescription services: using mood changes during art workshops to predict global wellbeing change. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 140(5), 270-276.
- Wilhelm, P., & Schoebi, D. (2007). Assessing mood in daily life. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 23(4), 258-267.
- Wilson, C., Secker, J., Kent, L., & Keay, J. (2017). Promoting mental wellbeing and social inclusion through art: six month follow-up results from Open Arts Essex. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 19(5), 268-277.

