

SURVIVING TO THRIVING:

Impact of art interventions on the wellbeing of women who have experienced sexual violence



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Dedicated to Emma Halliwell (29th June, 1973 – 3rd October, 2021)



Somerset & Avon
rape & sexual abuse support



Project summary

This evaluation report describes a series of art workshops designed to support the wellbeing of people who have experienced sexual violence, run through Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support (SARSAS; www.sarsas.org.uk), led by socially engaged artist Pippa Grace (OneStory; www.one-story.co.uk) and evaluated by Drs Nicola Holt and Emma Halliwell from the University of the West of England.

41 females participated in a programme of art workshops ('Surviving to Thriving'), eight of whom took part in a subsequent programme to develop their art practice further (INSPIRE). The impact on their wellbeing was evaluated using mixed methods: 1) a pre-post evaluation using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) at the start and end of programmes; 2) a process evaluation, examining the impact of each workshop on mood, attention and social connection; and 3) qualitative questionnaires and focus groups to examine the meaning of the programme for participants.

The evaluation outcomes suggested that the art-based interventions were effective at improving the wellbeing of participants. During art workshops participants' anxiety and loneliness decreased, while happiness and alertness increased. Participants with the greatest improvements in mood during art workshops were also those who reported the greatest wellbeing benefits over time. A thematic analysis resulted in three themes, indicating that participants felt a special bond with others in the group with whom they felt a sense of understanding and of being understood ('Social Connection'); this safe space allowed opportunities to relax, explore art and become absorbed in the process of making ('Time for Self-care'). Through this process participants described a new sense of identity, feeling empowered, confident and creative ('New Identities').

Future work is required to build on and replicate these findings, and to examine the sustainability and longitudinal impact of art workshops. However, these findings support the use of art interventions to help improve the wellbeing of women who have experienced sexual violence.



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Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO; 2013) estimated that one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) in their lifetime. IPV and NPSV are associated with significant health outcomes, immediate and long-term, including increased rates of depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, phobias, gastrointestinal problems, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, and alcohol use disorders (WHO, 2013; Bacchus et al., 2018; Jina & Thomas, 2013; Stöckl H et al., 2021). A study using art-based research methods (using clay and poetry) further reported a loss of self-identity, feelings of social isolation, and reduced trust in others (McGarry et al., 2017).

Trauma-focused cognitive-behavioural interventions are a common form of treatment for these long-term impacts (Jina & Thomas, 2013). This approach focuses upon modifying upsetting beliefs and attributions related to traumatic experiences (e.g., challenging intrusive thoughts), and helping people to cope with everyday stressors. However, this approach has been criticised for various reasons, including: pathologising experience and not accounting for the sociocultural context in which violence occurs; and focusing on symptoms of post-traumatic stress, at the expense of any co-occurring issues, such as depression or substance abuse (Brown et al., 2019). Broader psychosocial interventions have focused on specific outcomes, such as empowerment, confidence and self-esteem, feelings of safety, and reduction of shame and stigma. These include approaches such as acceptance and commitment therapy, art therapy, sensory-motor therapy, family-systems therapy, and peer support groups (Brown et al., 2019). Reviews indicate that both broader psychosocial approaches and ‘cognitive clinical approaches’ can lead to positive outcomes for people who have experienced sexual violence, especially for the reduction of symptoms of anxiety and depression (Hameed et al., 2020; Trabold et al. 2020). Nevertheless, gaps remain in understanding and identifying the most effective ways to improve long-term health outcomes and support people who have experienced sexual violence (especially in cases of multiple trauma). Given that people differ in their characteristics, experiences, and health outcomes, an individualized approach may be required (Jina & Thomas, 2013), offering approaches to best meet the needs of individuals. To enable this, building of the evidence-base for psychosocial interventions is required, including art-based interventions.



Art interventions for the promotion of wellbeing

As a form of psychosocial intervention, art for health interventions involve engaging in group art-making, led by a trained facilitator, with the expectation that this will lead to health outcomes, such as reduced symptoms (including anxiety, depression or chronic pain) and improved wellbeing, such as social connection and life satisfaction. These interventions differ from 'art therapy', which is "a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of expression and communication" (BAAT, 2022), since the aim is not to use art as a tool to express and explore emotions and experiences, which can then be focused upon psychotherapeutically (in talking therapy). Rather, the aim is to use the process of art making in a 'safe space' to build psychosocial resources, such as self-esteem, empowerment, and social bonding (Daykin et al., 2020; Stickley &

Eades, 2013). The creation of a 'safe space', where participants feel able to make art without judgement and feel cared for and supported is a crucial component of the intervention (Hughes et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2022). Social elements associated with the creation of a 'therapeutic alliance' and social bonding with other members of the group may help to support and improve wellbeing (Daykin et al., 2020). However, additional psychological factors associated with art making may also play a role, such as a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy through 'making' and sharing creations with others (and the development of non-stigmatized identities such as 'being an artist') (Stickley & Eades, 2013). Further psychological factors include: reductions in anxiety and increases in positive emotions, through engagement with art-making (Holt, 2020); entering the 'flow state', where attention is absorbed in an activity, helping one to forget about health symptoms and promoting a sense of meaning (Holt, 2018; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997); and through play, being able to explore and 'make mistakes', increasing problem-solving and creativity in everyday life (Fredrickson, 2014). A qualitative review of sixteen research papers that used the arts to help with recovery from sexual trauma (Rouse et al., 2022) summarised further ways in which arts-based interventions might be useful in this context. In addition to the creation of a 'safe space', themes across the studies included: 'connection and empowerment', where through sharing stories with others (e.g., blogs, artwork or poetry) a sense of belonging and validation arises; 'reconnecting and integrating', where new meanings or narratives of self and experience can emerge through the creation of artwork; and 'agency and new possibilities', where engaging with the artwork and group can help participants to imagine new paths and possible future directions.

Reviews support the efficacy of arts for health interventions for the improvement of psychosocial wellbeing and mental health (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Tomlinson et al., 2020). Research with people who have experienced sexual violence, although limited in nature, supports the efficacy of art psychotherapy (with reduction of trauma symptoms and symptoms of depression) (Schouten et al., 2014), and therapeutic dance (with improvements in affect and relationships) (Lee et al., 2022). However, there are numerous methodological problems with the evidence base, such as heterogeneous outcome measures, a lack of controlled studies, problems with attrition rates, and a lack of research focusing on specific health outcomes and with targeted populations (Holt et al., 2022; Schouten et al., 2014). There is insufficient research and evaluation of arts for health interventions working specifically with people who have experienced sexual violence. However, extrapolating from the research on arts interventions for



mental health with broader populations, it is possible that art interventions could help to improve the emotional, cognitive and psychosocial wellbeing of people who have experienced sexual violence.

Background to project

Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support (SARSAS; www.sarsas.org.uk) has over 15 years of experience supporting people who have experienced sexual violence and is the leading independent agency in the field across Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES), North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Somerset, having developed a range of specialist skills and service access modalities. Staff are experienced, skilled, and receive regular clinical supervision and training to ensure services remains at the cutting edge of best practice.

Across their area 63 women a week are raped or seriously sexually assaulted (VOSCUR, 2018). The impact of sexual violence on survivors and their communities is devastating, affecting mental health, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychosis, substance abuse, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide (Itzin, 2006). In 2017-18 SARSAS provided trauma informed support to 285 survivors of rape and abuse across the region, but they had a 35% increase on their waiting list in the same period. Survivors described feeling isolated and stigmatised by their experiences and unable to speak out about them (VOSCUR, 2018). In 2015 SARSAS commissioned a review on group work options and determined that groups, including art/creative therapies, would allow SARSAS to support women with skills, techniques and therapeutic activities to explore issues, tackle isolation and provide a broader peer support network. This led to the development of the current project, designing and delivering an arts-based programme for SARSAS.

In 2019 SARSAS 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. The pilot project supported two groups to each participate in a course of four creative workshops between 2019 and 2020 (Grace, Holt & Halliwell, 2020). After the pilot, SARSAS funded four more groups, each of whom participated in a longer course of six workshops, which took place between autumn 2020 and winter 2022. Many of the participants 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'.

Following these initial programmes a further project was developed to help women consolidate and develop their creative practice: INSPIRE. SARSAS invited participants who had taken part in the first series of workshops, held before summer 2021, to get involved in this extended creative project. INSPIRE ran from autumn 2021 to spring 2022 and took place as a series of ten workshops, spread out over the course of six months, with an exhibition and celebration event at the end. The workshops were designed to ignite, develop and sustain creativity. They were designed to help participants learn a range of new creative skills, sustain a home practice, work through creative blocks, develop resilience, show their work publicly and support each other as a group throughout the process. INSPIRE was funded by Bristol City Council and run by Pippa Grace in partnership with SARSAS and Knowle West Media Centre (www.kwmc.org.uk).

Aims of the project evaluation

The project sought to offer art-based creative workshops to women who have experienced sexual violence, with the expectation that this would improve their wellbeing. To this extent, the evaluation focused on assessing the impact of the workshops on psychosocial wellbeing, using a pre-post design to assess changes over the course of programmes. It was expected that subjective wellbeing (feeling satisfied with one's life and able to function well in it) would increase over the course of the programmes (Tennant et al., 2007). This approach is well established in research on arts on prescription, where significant wellbeing change has been reported over time (Crone et al., 2018). However, given that qualitative research has detailed more specific ways in which the arts may help with recovery from sexual trauma (e.g., Rouse et al., 2022), additional outcomes were evaluated. The immediate impact of the art workshops on wellbeing was examined, measuring changes in: a) mood (for example, anxiety reduction); b) attention (absorbed attention, or the 'flow state'); and c) social connection (social bonding and feelings of isolation). It was expected that after engaging with the art workshops participants would feel less anxious (happier and more alert) and would enter an absorbed attentional state, and feel less lonely. It was also expected that participants who had such positive experiences during the art workshops would be those who had the greatest wellbeing benefits across the programmes. Finally, as part of a mixed-methods approach, participants were asked open questions about their experiences in a qualitative survey, so that they could use their own words to describe the import of the programmes for them.





Evaluation and delivery

Participants

Forty-one females took part in the evaluation of the art workshops. Five took part in Autumn 2019, seven in Spring 2020, five in Autumn 2020, eight in Spring 2021, six in Autumn 2021 and ten in Winter 2022. The average (mean) age was 39, participants ranging from 24 to 60 years of age. The average (mean) wellbeing score at the start of the workshops was 35.59 (scores ranging between 18 and 63), suggesting that, on average, participants' scores were in a range indicative of 'probable depression' (below 40) (Tennant et al., 2007).

Eight participants who took part in these initial programmes participated in the extended programme (INSPIRE). These women had an average age of 32.5 (ages ranging from 27 to 58 years of age). Five described themselves as White British, one as White Irish, one as Mixed (White and Black Caribbean) and one as Bangladeshi. Five described themselves as having a long-term health condition (physical or mental) and one described themselves as disabled. The average (mean) wellbeing score of participants at the start of the INSPIRE programme was 37.81 (scores ranging from 34 to 59).

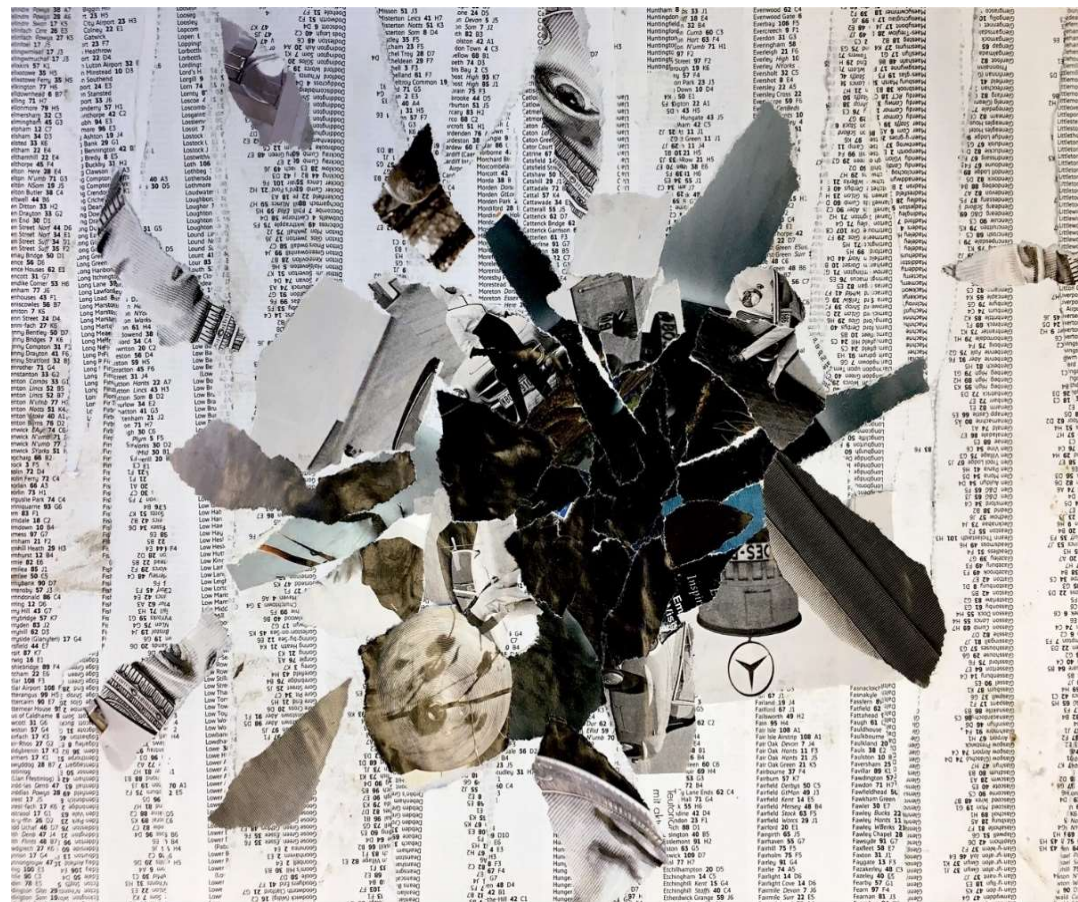
Workshops

Express yourself: Surviving to Thriving

The pilot project, 'Express Yourself: from Surviving to Thriving' ran at St Werburghs' Community Centre, Bristol, from November 2019 – March 2020. The programme consisted of four mixed media workshops consisting of the following themes and activities:

- Workshop 1: **Personal Relationship to Creativity.** Collage-based vision mapping exercise.
- Workshop 2: **Supportive / soul animals.** Working with clay to create a supportive animal figure.
- Workshops 3 & 4: **Safe / Calm Spaces.** Mixed media exploration.

Pippa Grace 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.



Surviving to Thriving

From Autumn 2020 to Winter 2022 the project continued as ‘Surviving to Thriving’, consisting of six workshops. The first three programmes took place at St Werburgh’s community Centre, in Bristol, and the final one ran in Hedley Hall in Bath. SARSAS

provided a support worker at each session. The workshops consisting of the following themes and activities:

- Workshop 1: **Personal Relationship to Creativity:** Collage-based vision mapping exercise.
- Workshop 2: **Supportive / soul animals.** Working with clay to create a supportive animal figure.
- Workshop 3: **Seasonal Exploration:** Textiles-based activity.
- Workshop 4: **Word Play:** Using words, poetry and lyrics in collage.
- Workshops 5&6: **Calm Spaces:** Mixed media exploration.



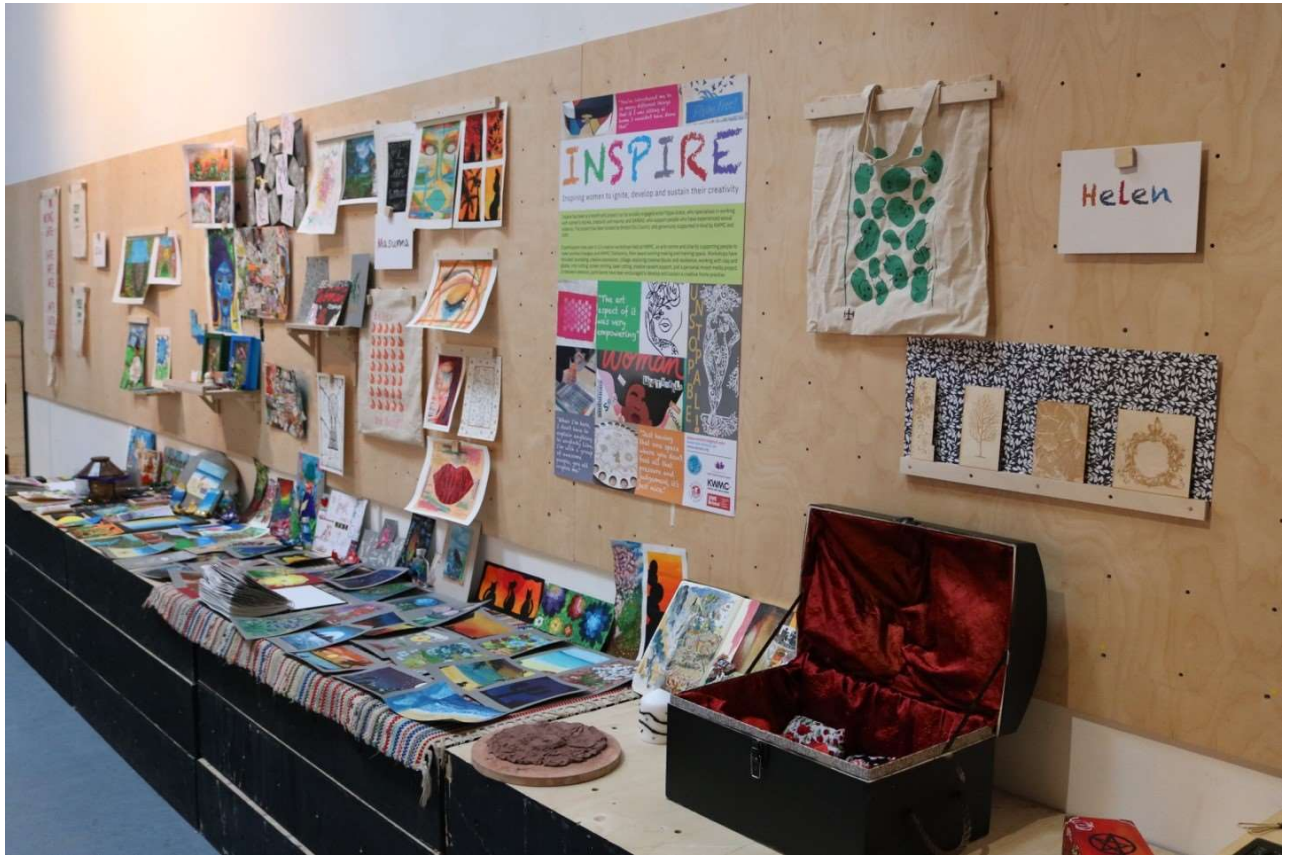
INSPIRE

The INSPIRE workshops were run over a period of six months and took place at Knowle West Media Centre and KWMC: The Factory, both in South Bristol. At the end of the

programme an exhibition and celebration event were held at Knowle West Media Centre. There were ten workshops, consisting of the following themes and activities:

- Workshop 1: **Creative Journaling**: written and visual journaling exercises.
- Workshop 2: **Creative blocks and Resilience**: creation of an inspiration box.
- Workshop 3: **New Technologies**: Introduction to facilities at KWMC: The Factory, laser cutting earrings and keyrings.
- Workshop 4: **Developing confidence**: vinyl cutting and screen-printing exercise at KWMC: The Factory.
- Workshop 5: **Creative Grounding**: Working in clay.
- Workshop 6: **Creative connections and Inspirations**: Group mural exercise and starting to research personal projects.
- Workshop 7: **Mixed Media**: Laser and vinyl cutting.
- Workshop 8: **Creative Careers**: Visit from Karen Stoton, Careers mentor at Bristol City Council (BCC).
- Workshop 9: **Mixed Media**: Laser and vinyl cutting.
- Workshop 10: **Creative Endings**: Finish projects, reflect on process.





Additional days were spent as a group to put up the exhibition, attend the exhibition opening and group celebration and reflection, and take down the exhibition.

All of the workshops aimed to:

- Create a safe, supportive group setting where survivors could recognize, access and develop their creativity.
- Provide a space dedicated to creativity and self-healing, supporting participants to take time for themselves.
- Create an inspiring space with a range of creative materials and simple activities designed to encourage a playful, process-led response to making that encouraged participants to experiment and let go of self-criticism.
- Provide materials and methods that helped self-expression, allowing expression of feelings and thoughts that may feel difficult, stuck, not allowed or shameful.

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- Support participants to express themselves visually, without the need for words, helping where people may have been silenced or not believed, or when memories and feelings may be non-verbal.
 - Create an experience of containment to help with experiences of fragmentation, by providing: exercises including collage where fragmented elements are pieced together, a journal to contain creative thoughts and process, a box containing art materials.
 - Create a space where participants could experience a state of creative flow, getting lost in the art, calming the mind and nervous system.
 - Encourage creative resilience by exploring themes and practices that could offer continued comfort and support, including: the natural world, the seasons, animals, calm spaces, visual journaling and simple creative skills.
 - Encourage a creative home practice as a means of sustained resilience between the workshops and after the course, by providing a box of materials and ideas for simple activities.
 - Create a non-judgemental, calming space based on acceptance and respect (being mindful of individual triggers and avoiding triggering language).
 - Support the participants' sense of agency and trust in themselves by recognising and respecting each individual as their own expert, with an ability to heal and set their own boundaries (encouraging participants to take breaks when needed, ask for support if wanted, and to follow their own creative ideas).
 - Encourage an atmosphere of positive support, respect and empathy with clear parameters around confidentiality, inclusion and respect.
 - Create a space that allows for identification, camaraderie, solidarity, mutual understanding and support within the group, relieving social isolation and the sense of being the 'only one'.
 - Provide an opportunity for participants to witness, recognize and celebrate their own and other survivors' deep reliance, tenacity and many strengths.
 - Respond creatively and sensitively to the needs of each participant as they present at each workshop.



- Continuously evaluate everyone’s needs, and the group dynamics, making adaptations where necessary throughout the programme.
- Improve the health, wellbeing and confidence of participants through creativity.

In addition, the INSPIRE project aimed to:

- Provide support and creative inspiration over a longer time period to allow participants to relax into the process, develop a visual journaling practice, and see themselves as ‘artists’ or ‘creatives’.

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- Support participants to have a regular creative home practice to sustain them beyond the INSPIRE project as a form of support and resilience.
 - Create supportive connections between group members to sustain them beyond the INSPIRE project as a form of support and resilience.
 - Encourage participants to try out new creative skills and environments, including laser cutting, vinyl cutting, etc.
 - Inspire participants to develop their creative practice in new ways and to consider setting up small creative businesses.
 - Provide participants with support for their careers, creative skills development and signposting to potential funding streams and supportive projects.
 - Enable participants to exhibit their work in a public, safe, supportive environment, taking pride in their achievements.



Questionnaires

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.

Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool, CtELMT (2019). This scale has been co-designed with a range of groups with the aim of producing a scale that uses appropriate and positive language to reduce distress or embarrassment when responding to items. It is a three-item scale with a 5-point response scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree that asks about satisfaction with social connection and relationships: 1) "I am content with my friendships and relationships"; 2) "I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time"; and 3) "My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be". Possible scores range from 5 to 15, where people with scores of 5 to 8 are thought to unlikely to be experiencing loneliness, and people with scores of 12 to 15 to be experiencing intense loneliness.

Direct Measure of Loneliness, DMoL (Office for National Statistics, 2018). A single item measure of loneliness with a five-point response scale: "How often do you feel lonely?".

Single-Item Measure of Social-Identification (SISI; Postmes et al., 2013) asking for agreement with the statement: "I identify with members of this SARSAS art group", with a response scale ranging from 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("completely").

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".

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).

State loneliness. A single-item that has been used to measure loneliness in the moment: “How lonely do you feel at the moment?” with a visual analogue scale, where a slider can be moved from “lonely” to “not at all lonely” (Reissman et al., 2018).

The Flow Short Scale (FSS; Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008) is a 10-item scale designed to measure phenomenological features of the flow state, including absorption and experiencing a balance between challenges and skills. Four items were chosen from the scale, in order not to overload participants with too many state questionnaires (these were chosen based on the four items that correlated most highly with total scores on the ten-item scale in an existing data set; Holt et al., 2019). The four items were: “My thoughts/activities ran fluidly and smoothly”; “I had no difficulty concentrating”; “I was totally absorbed in what I was doing”; and “The right thoughts/movements occurred of their own accord”. Items are responded to on a 7-point Likert scale, from 0 (“not at all”) to 6 (“very much”). Scores could range from 0 (indicating not being in a state of flow) to 24 (being in a state of flow).

The image shows two visual analogue scales (VAS) for mood assessment. The left scale is for the 'Start of session' and the right is for the 'End of session'. Both scales use a 7-point Likert scale with anchors for Tired, Agitated, Unwell, Content, Full of energy, and Relaxed. The right scale also includes anchors for Awake, Calm, Well, Discontent, Without energy, and Tense. Instructions include writing the date, personal number, and mother's name.

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

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

Personal No: [][][][]

Write the first 2 letters of your mother's first name. (e.g. Carol = CA)

Write your birth date (e.g. write '31' for 31st May)



Evaluation method

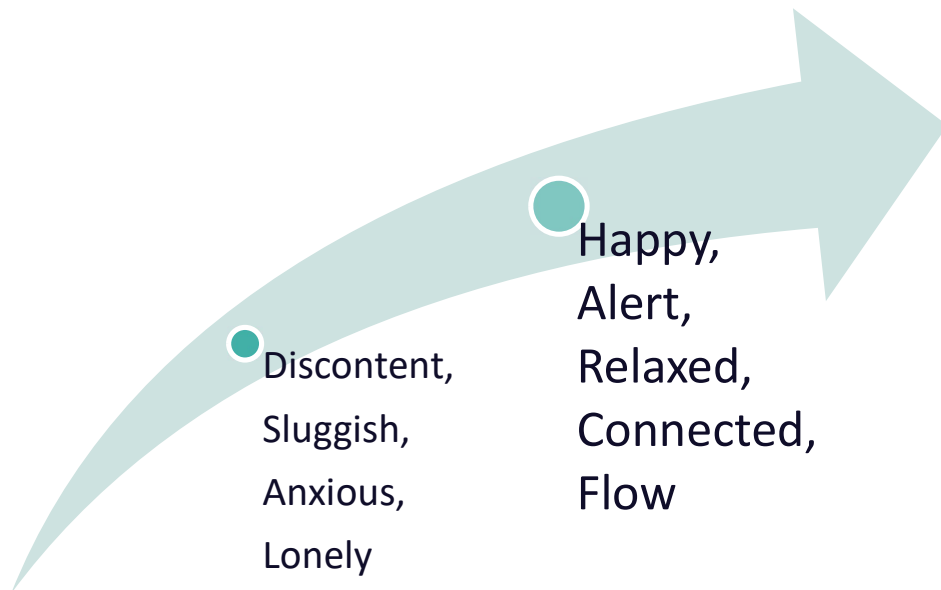
All participants were invited to take part in the evaluation and were able to read about what this would involve in a Participant Information Sheet. If they wished to take part in the evaluation, they gave informed consent by signing a consent form. The information sheet described how their data would be used and gave a link by which they could withdraw data anonymously. All data was collected anonymously and cross-referenced with a code that participants created in response to two questions on each questionnaire. The evaluation protocol received ethical approval from the University of the West of England's Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number: HAS.17.07.197).

Participants were invited to complete a questionnaire at the first and final workshop that asked about their general wellbeing (WEMWBS). In the final workshop they could also complete the 'End of course evaluation scale' and respond to some open questions about their experiences of the course. Additionally, at the start and end of each individual art workshop, participants completed a mood scale (SMS) (following Holt, 2020).

Like the programmes themselves, the evaluation strategy adapted over time, so that additional measures were added at different stages. For the six-week-long programmes (Surviving to Thriving), participants also completed the Campaign to End Loneliness questionnaire at the start and end of the programme, and the measure of social-identification at the end of the programme. Participants also completed flow questionnaire at the end of each workshop. For the final two groups of Surviving to Thriving participants completed the ONS loneliness measure at the start and end of the programme and the single item of state loneliness before and after each workshop (along with the six mood items). For INSPIRE the evaluation was conducted in the same way as the final two programmes detailed above and the results were analysed separately.

Quantitative outcomes

The quantitative analysis had three parts: 1) an analysis of how engaging in the art workshops impacted in the moment wellbeing; 2) an analysis of how engaging with the programmes impacted longer term wellbeing (e.g., over a period of six weeks); 3) assessing whether experiences reported during the art workshops (e.g., finding them relaxing) influenced how successful they were at improving longer term wellbeing. This latter analysis links experiences within the art workshops directly to wellbeing change and helps to understand the active ingredients of art workshops that lead to improved wellbeing. 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., 317 mood reports) were nested within 41 individuals.



Improved mood and social connection after the art workshops

Experiences during the art workshops

The immediate impact of taking part in the workshops was assessed by tracking mood and feelings of loneliness in the moment. The mean (average) changes are depicted in *Figure One* and show that after taking part in the art workshops, participants reported feeling less lonely, more content and well, more relaxed and calm, and more awake and alert.

All of these state changes were statistically significant. 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 ($F_{(271,1)} = 147.76$, $p < .001$); increased energy and alertness ($F_{(271,1)} = 119.86$, $p < .001$); and increased contentment ($F_{(268,1)} = 114.86$, $p < .001$). Further, reduction in feelings of loneliness after taking part in the workshops was also statistically significant ($F_{(87,1)} = 87.46$, $p < .001$).

Participants were also asked about their state of flow after taking part in workshops. The mean (average) flow score was 16, scores ranging from 4 to 24 (SD = 3.57). The

average flow score was significantly above the mid-point on the scale, of 12 (indicative of a neutral response) ($t = 7.36, df = 24, p < .001$), suggesting that, on average participants were in a moderate state of flow, endorsing each flow item (but not strongly).

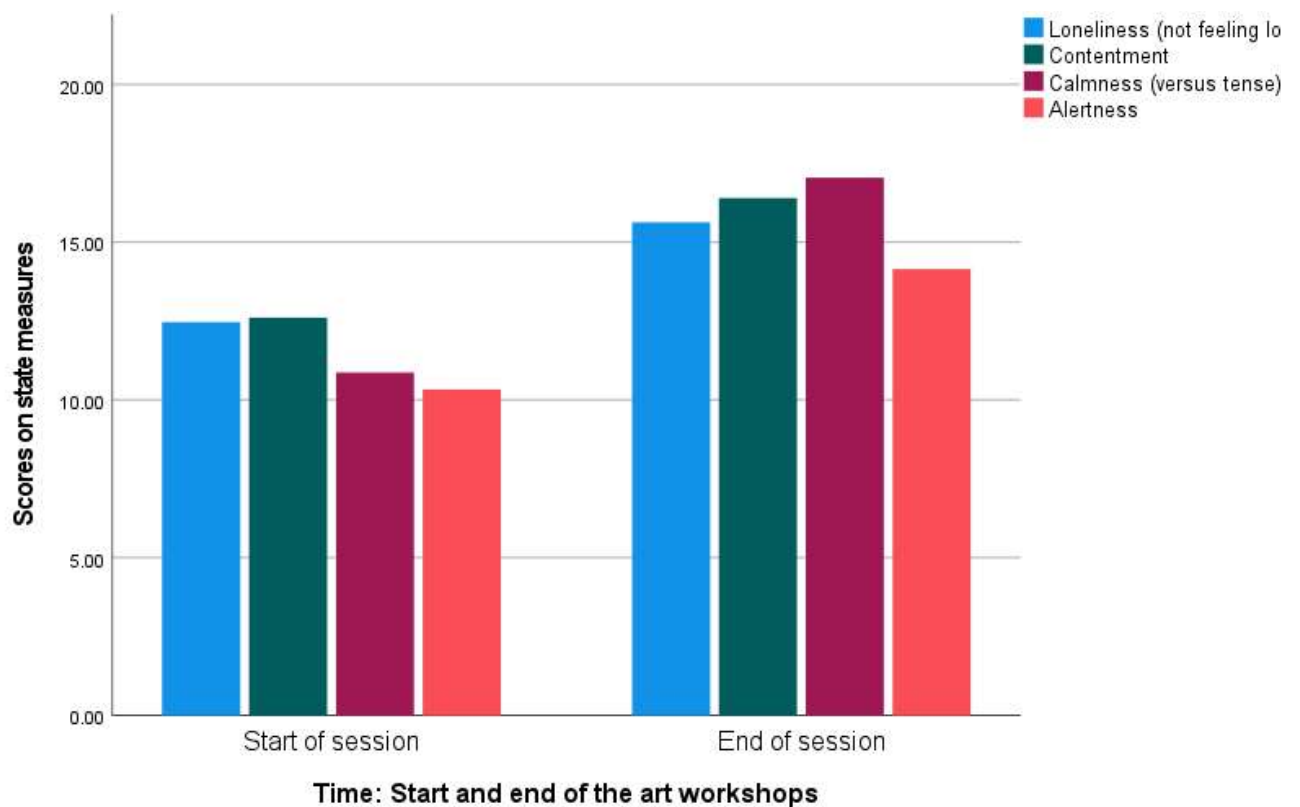


Figure One: Mood and loneliness scores before and after taking part in the art workshops

Changes in state measures across the programme

In order to assess whether people’s mood and feelings of loneliness, in the moment, changed across the programme, Time (from week 1 to 6) was used to predict momentary wellbeing. For mood (contentment, calmness and alertness) and state loneliness both Time (week number) and measurement point (start and end of the

session) were used as predictors (so that the interaction could be assessed to see if there was an increased improvement in mood and social connection during the workshops as the weeks progressed). Since the flow questionnaire was only completed at the end of the workshops, only Time (week number) was used as a predictor. Analyses showed that there were improvements in all state variables across the weeks of the programme, but these were only statistically significant for reductions in anxiety (calmness) and the flow state. Participants reported being less anxious as weeks progressed ($F_{(300,5)} = 2.91, p = .014$) (but the amount of reduction in anxiety each week was constant over the weeks). Pairwise contrasts showed that this was mainly because of the higher calmness scores in weeks 5 and 6 compared with weeks 1 to 4 (illustrated in *Figure 2*). Participants were also more likely to enter a flow state as the weeks progressed ($F_{(86,5)} = 2.32, p = .05$). Pairwise contrasts showed that this was mainly because of the higher flow score in week 6 compared with weeks 1 to 4 (illustrated in *Figure 3*). These findings suggest that over the course of programmes, especially after four weeks, participants were reporting feeling less anxious and in a deeper state of flow.

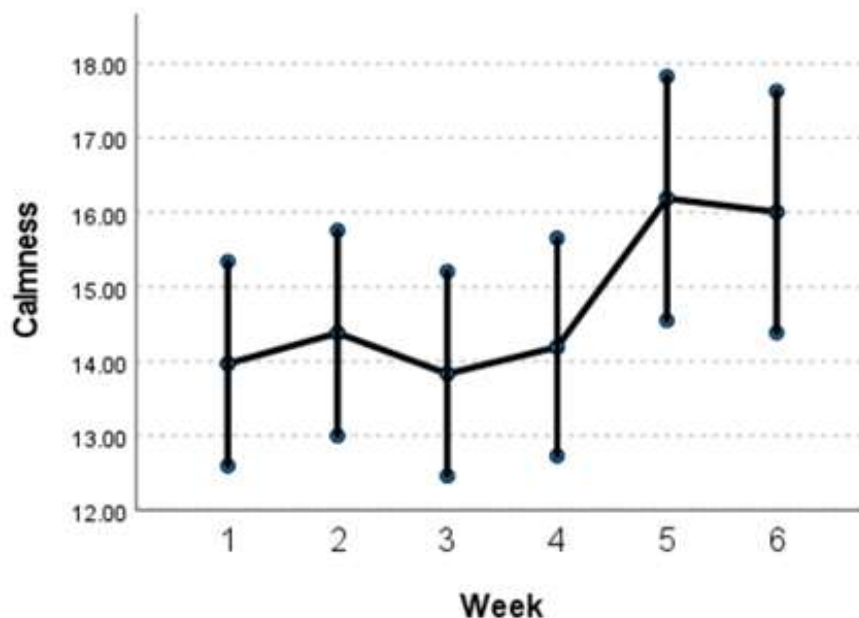


Figure Two: Average calmness scores during the workshops plotted over time

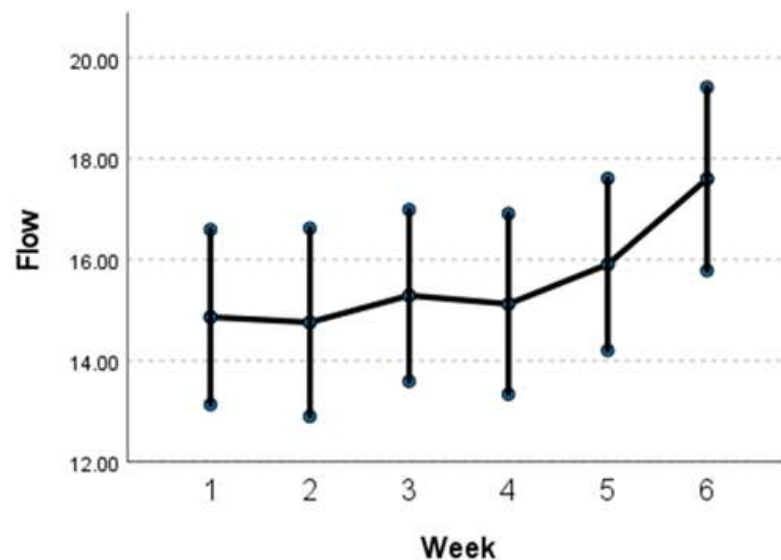
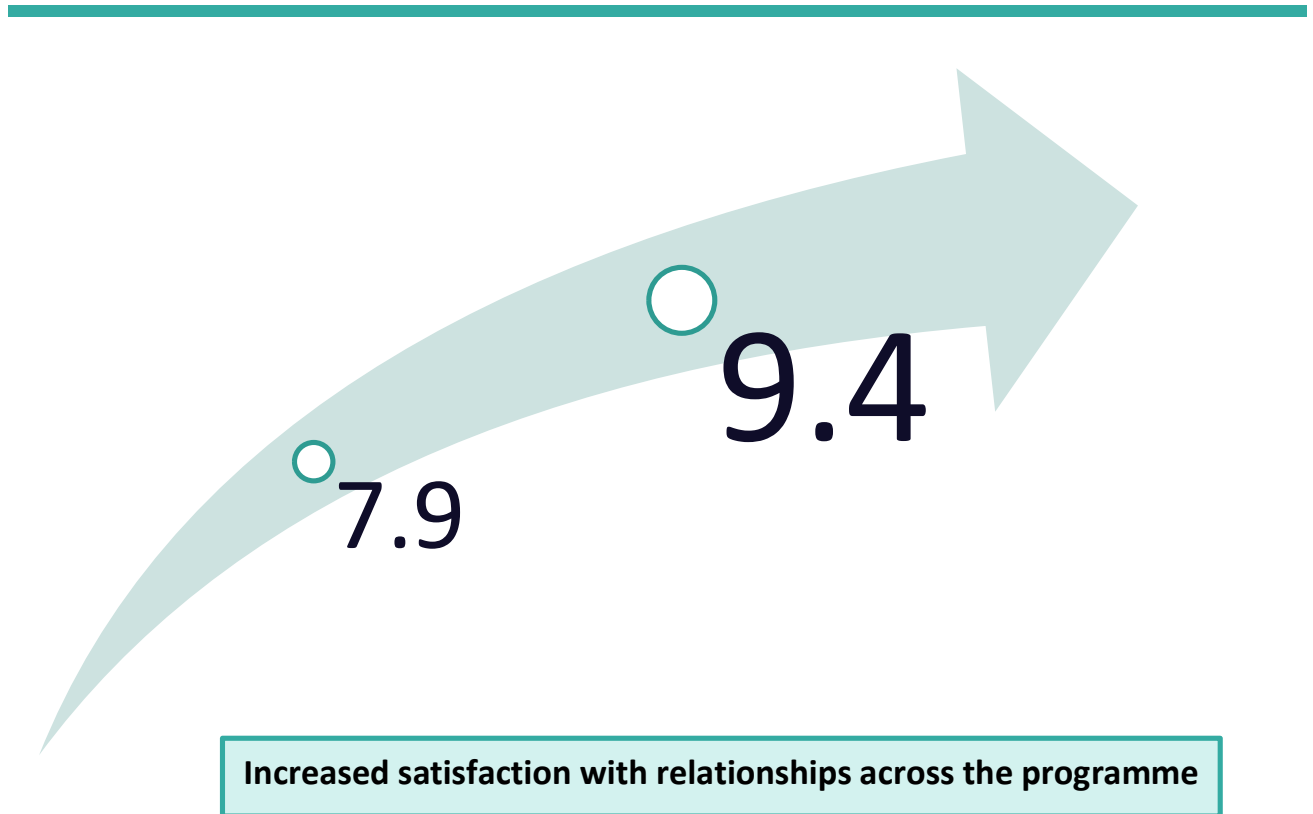


Figure Three: Average flow scores during the workshops plotted over time

Loneliness change across the programme

This analysis examined change across the programmes (4-6 weeks, rather than change during art workshops). There was a small reduction in feelings of loneliness assessed with the DMoL, with a mean score of 3.09 ($n = 11$, $SD = 1.14$) at the start of the programme, and a mean score of 2.60 ($n = 5$, $SD = 1.51$) at the end of the programme. Likewise, there was a small increase in satisfaction with relationships across the programmes measured with the CtEL tool. There was a mean score of 7.86 ($n = 11$, $SD = 2.03$) at the start of the programme, and a mean score of 9.4 ($n = 5$, $SD = 3.64$) at the end of the programme. With such small numbers of responses (only five completed responses at both the start and end of the programme) these outcomes support the idea that the intervention helped with social connection, but the sample size is too small for statistical analysis.

On the group identification item, asking to what extent people identified with the group at the end of the programme, the mean score was 5.21 ($SD = 1.83$) (with possible scores ranging between 1 and 7). This suggests, that, on average there was a high level of identification with other members of the art workshops at the end of the programme.



Wellbeing change across the programme

There was an increase in wellbeing on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), from beginning to end of the programmes. Wellbeing scores were available for 39 participants at baseline, and for 28 participants at follow-up. The average (mean) wellbeing score at week one was 36.19 (SD = 7.40) and at the end of the programme the average wellbeing score was 45.41 (SD = 7.75). The average wellbeing scores increased by 9.22 points. This is three times what is described as a meaningful amount of change for a short intervention (three points). At the start of the programme, participants' average wellbeing scores were indicative of depression, but by the end, the average scores are out of the range of 'probable depression' (40, and, out of the range of 'possible depression' (44). This increase in WEMWB scores across the programmes was statistically significant ($F_{(29,1)} = 50.88, p < .001$).



It is worth noting that there is variation between individuals in wellbeing change – with small (-3) decreases in wellbeing to large (23) points of increase. Hence, not all participants appeared to benefit equally from the intervention. We can see this variation in scores plotted in the ‘spaghetti plot’ of *Figure Four*, where, overall, there is a general increase in wellbeing from the start to the end of the programme, but some participants have a steep (large) increase and others no increase.

It was examined whether number of sessions missed (attendance) predicted this variance, however, this was not statistically significant ($B = .303$, $t = .324$, $p = .748$). This is possibly because attendance levels were high and participants who had not completed the end of programme questionnaires were also those with low attendance (hence their wellbeing change was not computable). The average number of sessions missed was .94 (SD = 1.30), the median (mid-point number when ranked) was zero (ranging from 0 to 5 sessions missed).

It is possible to see if other factors than attendance can help to explain these wellbeing benefits (e.g., experiences during the art workshops) which will be reported on next.

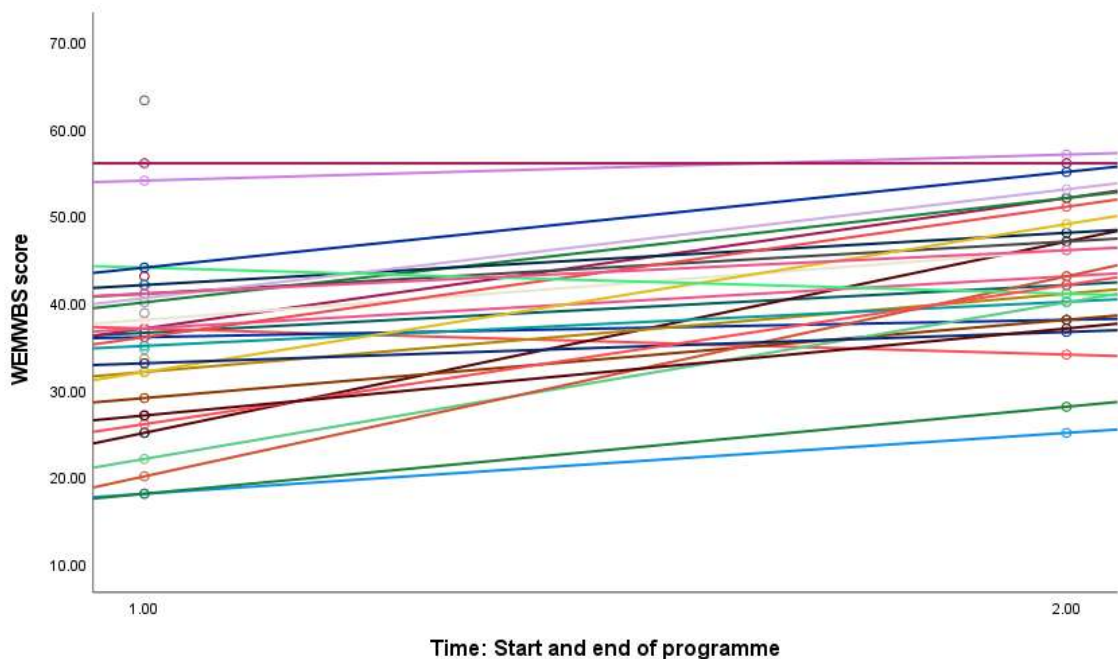


Figure Four: Spaghetti plot: Wellbeing scores at the start and end of the programme (plotted for each participant)

Do experiences during the art workshops predict who has the greatest wellbeing increase across the programmes?

An important question was to test whether any changes in mood during the art workshops predicted longer term changes in wellbeing on the WEMWBS. This can help to understand what the ‘active ingredients’ of the intervention are.

Indeed, it was found that people who reported feeling in a better mood after engaging with the art works were those who had greater increases in wellbeing across the programmes. The extent to which mood improved during the art workshops, predicted the extent to which wellbeing scores changed from week one to week six. These relationships are illustrated in Figures 5-7, below. In these figures, the red 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.

The extent to which all three dimensions of mood improved during the art workshops was a significant predictor of wellbeing change across the programme: feeling more

calm after making art predicted longer term wellbeing change ($F_{(220,1)} = 10.08, p = .002$); feeling more content after art workshops predicted longer-term wellbeing change ($F_{(219,1)} = 13.04, p < .001$); as did feeling more alert after taking part in art workshops ($F_{(222,1)} = 4.53, p = .034$). These findings suggest that responses to the art workshops can explain some of the change in wellbeing scores across the weeks. They also suggest that the art workshops directly impacted upon wellbeing.

It was further analysed whether additional variables helped to explain the variation in wellbeing change across the programme, looking at the flow state ($F_{(16,1)} = 2.88, p = .109$), identification with the group ($F_{(14,1)} = .113, p = .742$), and feelings of connection with others after art making ($F_{(7,1)} = .175, p = .688$). None of these variables were statistically significant predictors. However, there was less data available for these analyses, meaning that the analyses lacked statistical power.

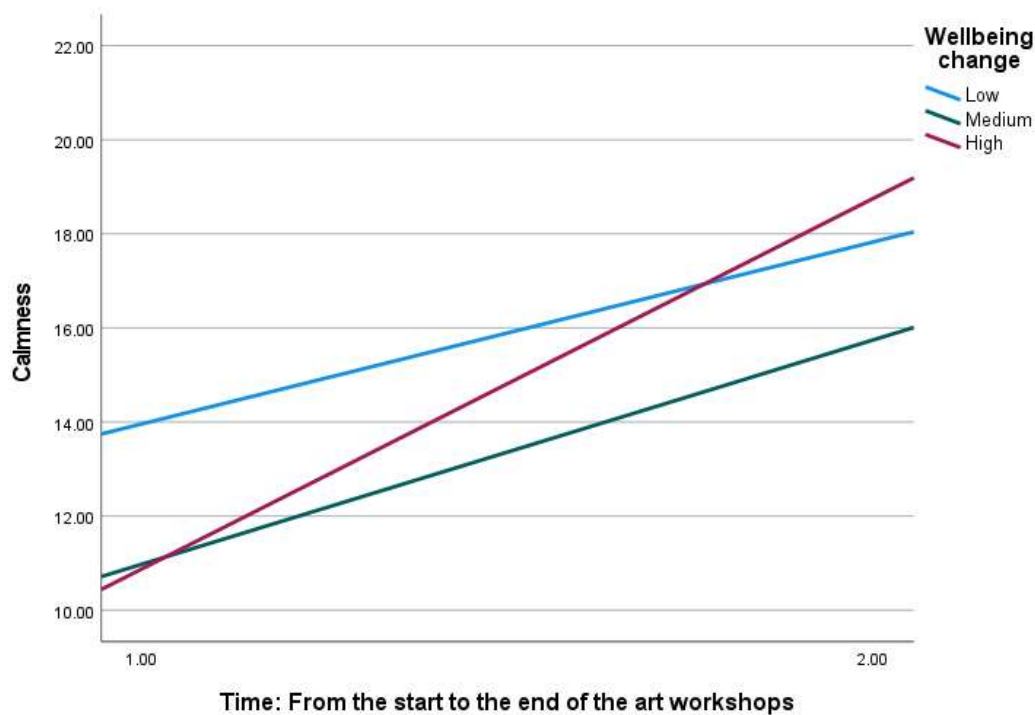


Figure Five: Cross-level interaction plot, showing the change in calmness before and after art workshops according to levels of wellbeing change across the programme (low, medium and high increases in wellbeing)

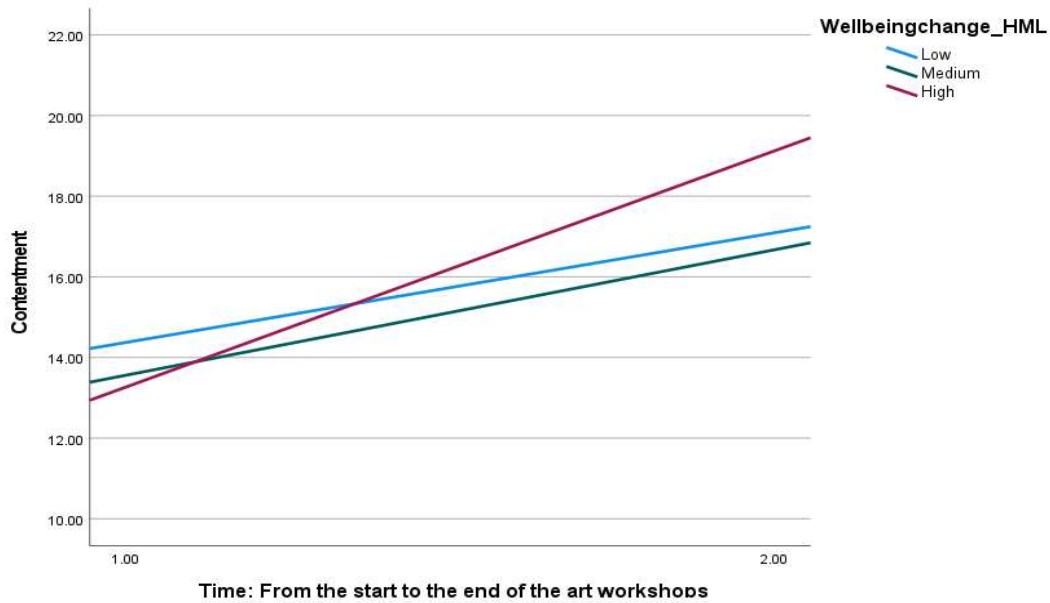


Figure Six: Cross-level interaction plot, showing the change in contentment before and after art workshops according to levels of wellbeing change across the programme (low, medium and high increases in wellbeing)

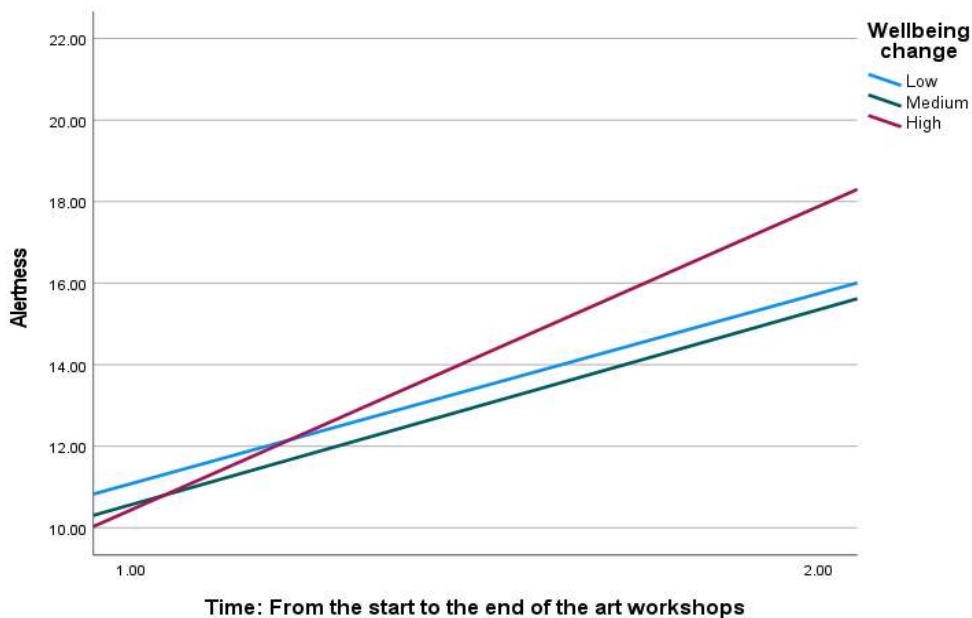


Figure Seven: Cross-level interaction plot, showing the change in alertness before and after art workshops according to levels of wellbeing change across the programme (low, medium and high increases in wellbeing)

Perceptions of the impact of the art workshops on wellbeing

The final analysis related to participants' evaluation of how the art workshops impacted on their everyday life: art skills, confidence, motivation, positivity and relationships with others. The mean scores are illustrated in *Figure 8*, and show, on average, participants concurred that the art workshops had positively impacted on these factors (especially motivation to do artwork) (3 indicates 'agree').



Figure Eight: Participants' mean responses on the art workshop evaluation scale



Summary of quantitative findings

- Wellbeing improved across the programme: increasing by nine points and moving out of the range of 'possible depression'
- Mood improved after taking part in the art workshops (anxiety reduced, happiness and alertness increased)
- Feelings of loneliness reduced after taking part in the art workshops
- Participants reported being in a moderate state of flow after the art workshops
- Anxiety decreased and depth of the flow state increased over time (especially after four weeks)
- Improvements in mood during the workshops predicted improvement in wellbeing across the programme



Qualitative outcomes

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out on the qualitative data from the feedback survey. Three themes were identified, which focused on how the art workshops had helped participants. These are detailed in *Table One*. The main theme was ‘social connection’, in which participants described various ways in which the group had helped them through working with others (for example, finding a space where they felt understood and had built a sense of solidarity with others). The second two themes were entitled ‘time for self-care’ (articulating ways in which participants felt that the art workshops helped them to become calm and focused) and ‘new identities’ (articulating ways in which participants experienced changes in their sense of self, such as improved confidence and creative self-efficacy).

Table 1: Themes and example codes

Themes	Example codes
Social connection	Safe space Reassurance Feeling less alone Listening to others Solidarity Identification Understanding
Time for self-care	Permission to focus on art Finding calm through making art New coping skills Getting absorbed in the process (‘flow’) Being able to express one’s feelings
New identities	Finding a creative self Identifying with the group Sense of agency Discovery through self-exploration Self-confidence

Social connection

In their feedback participants described how forming relationships with other members of the group was a crucial aspect of the programme, being able to connect with others, with “people like me”, who had had similar experiences, in a safe space, where there was a lack of judgement.

“I found it helpful whilst doing the art work to be able to talk in a safe environment. No judgement.”

“ I have been struggling with depression and anxiety for several years. I have been isolated in my flat and 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”.



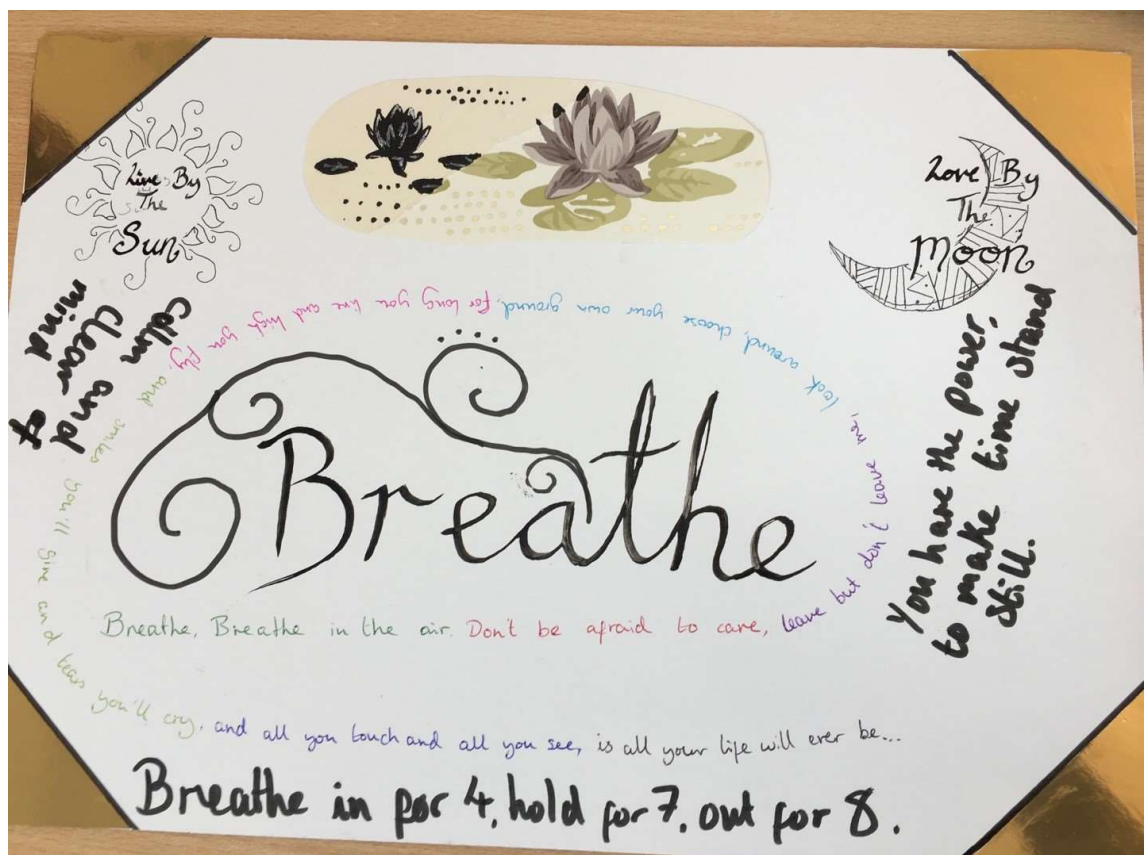
"Meeting new people is difficult but I wanted to try and socialise with people like me"

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

I "found it helpful to feel less alone, admitting to myself/feeling less in denial about my own assault"

"I have enjoyed listening to others and their experiences and how they are progressing"

The social space was described as one where care and understanding was fostered, but where, since art was the focus, there was no need or pressure to talk about personal experiences. Just having a space to spend time with others who had a shared understanding of life experiences, was described as therapeutic. It was also described as fun, allowing laughter and new friendships to develop, enabling new experiences, even if as simple as 'leaving the house'.



Time for self-care

Participants described how the safe space and the art activities provided in that space helped them, they reported being able to relax, 'get lost in art', that the art workshops 'provided headspace' and taught them to use art as a coping resource. The art workshops also played a role in giving people 'permission' to have this experience and to make art, providing both the opportunity for, and new methods of, self-care.

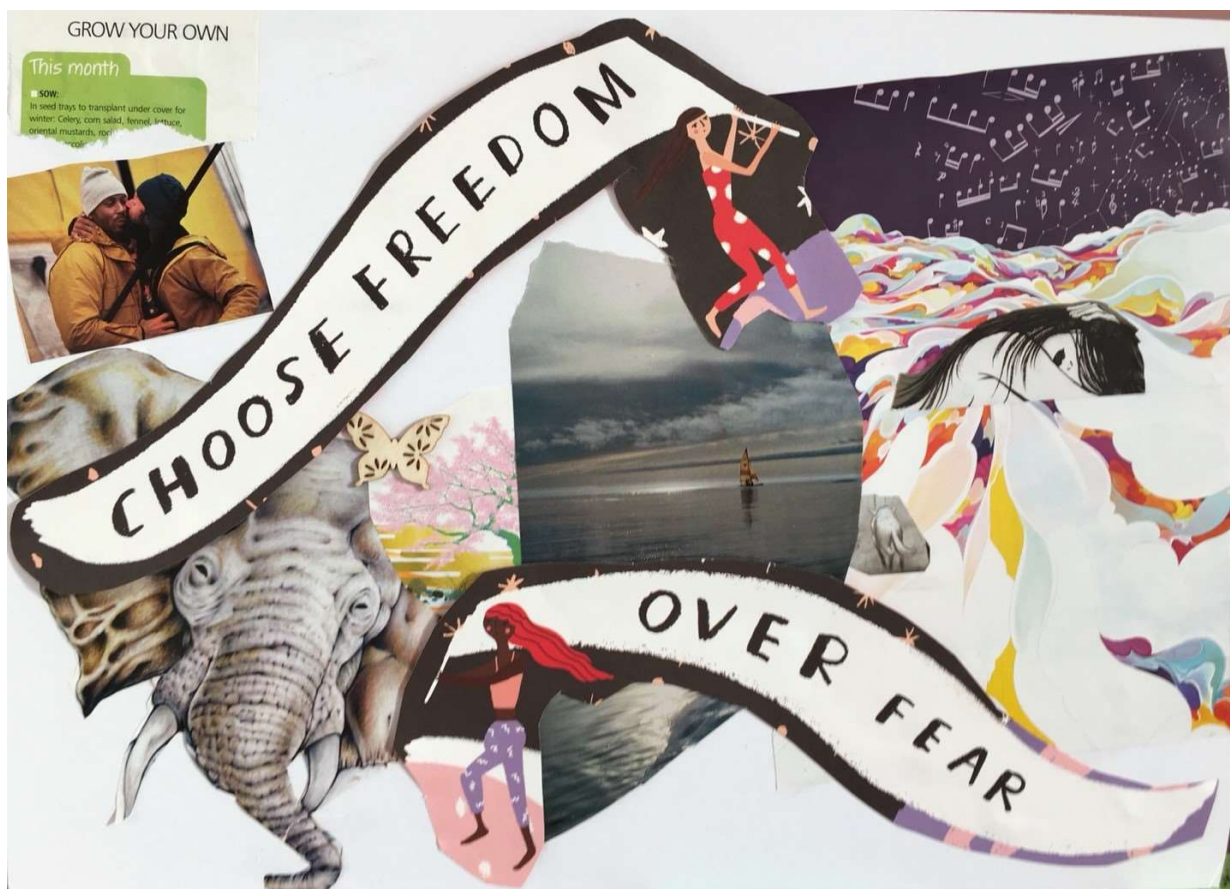
"I wanted to take time for myself and exercise my creative side"

"I find it helpful to give yourself that headspace through art"

"I wanted permission to take care of myself including by feeling validated"

"I enjoyed the clay work – very calming – an new ongoing outlet"

"I enjoyed getting lost in art"



“I found it helpful to explore different ways to express myself, I haven’t been able to do it much in home or in life. Also learning how to communicate feelings via new and varied means”

“I wanted to try to develop different coping skills”

The art workshops provided access to experiences and states of consciousness that were resources for wellbeing, such as relaxation and deep absorption in the process of art making. They opened the use of art for emotional regulation, both for expressing feelings and to help manage emotions, developing the use of art as a coping skill.

New identities

Participants described how the programme of art activities changed aspects of their identity, ways of being or senses of self. This was expressed in numerous ways, for example, feeling that they had tapped into, discovered or re-discovered a creative part of themselves or had become more self-confident.

“I enjoyed exploring new/different, materials, ways of working and tapping into parts of me that I thought were gone forever”

“I found it helpful being part of something, having fun – laughing”

“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.”

“I wanted to feel solidarity (a united feeling) where we could identify with each other”

“I found it helpful building my confidence”

Some described this new identity as involving a sense of identification with the group, “being part of something”, something that was positive and affirming, having developed a sense of solidarity with others. Hence, new identities were experienced in different ways (intrapersonal and interpersonal), all of which were self-affirming and positive.

Inspire programme

Analysis of the inspire programme focused on the changes across the programme and workshops. There were 117 sampled moments of immediate experience (before and after art workshops) and 15 pre-post programme wellbeing reports, the data being nested within 8 participants.

Wellbeing change

There was an increase in wellbeing scores from the start to the end of the INSPIRE programme, from a mean WEMWBS of 37.81 (SD = 2.97) at the start of the programme to 43.36 (SD = 9.24) at the end of the programme. This represents a meaningful increase of 5.55 points (greater than the minimum increase of three points, thought to be indicative of an improvement in wellbeing across an intervention) (Tennant et al., 2020). Due to the small sample size ($N = 8$), this increase was not statistically significant ($F_{(1,7)} = 3.19, p = .117$).



The wellbeing scores of participants was compared with their wellbeing scores on the first programme (Surviving to Thriving). The mean WEMWBS scores are plotted in *Figure Nine*. For this subset of participants average levels of wellbeing rose from 33.57 (SD = 5.47) at the start of Surviving to Thriving, rising to 42.7 (SD = 5.10) at the end of the first six-week-long programme. There was a dip in average wellbeing scores by the start of INSPIRE (37.81; SD = 2.97), across which there was an increase in wellbeing scores to 43.36 (SD = 9.24). Hence, for these participants, there was an average increase of 9.79 units on the WEMWBS across the two programmes, and this was statistically significant ($F_{(1,7)} = 6.84, p = .002$). While this is extremely positive it is worth noting that the final wellbeing scores are still below 44, scores below which are thought to indicate possible depression. Further, there was variation in participants' wellbeing scores at the end of the INSPIRE programme. As illustrated in the spaghetti plot, *Figure Ten*, which shows the wellbeing trajectory of all eight participants, we can see that most participants had a clear upward trajectory in wellbeing scores, but not all.

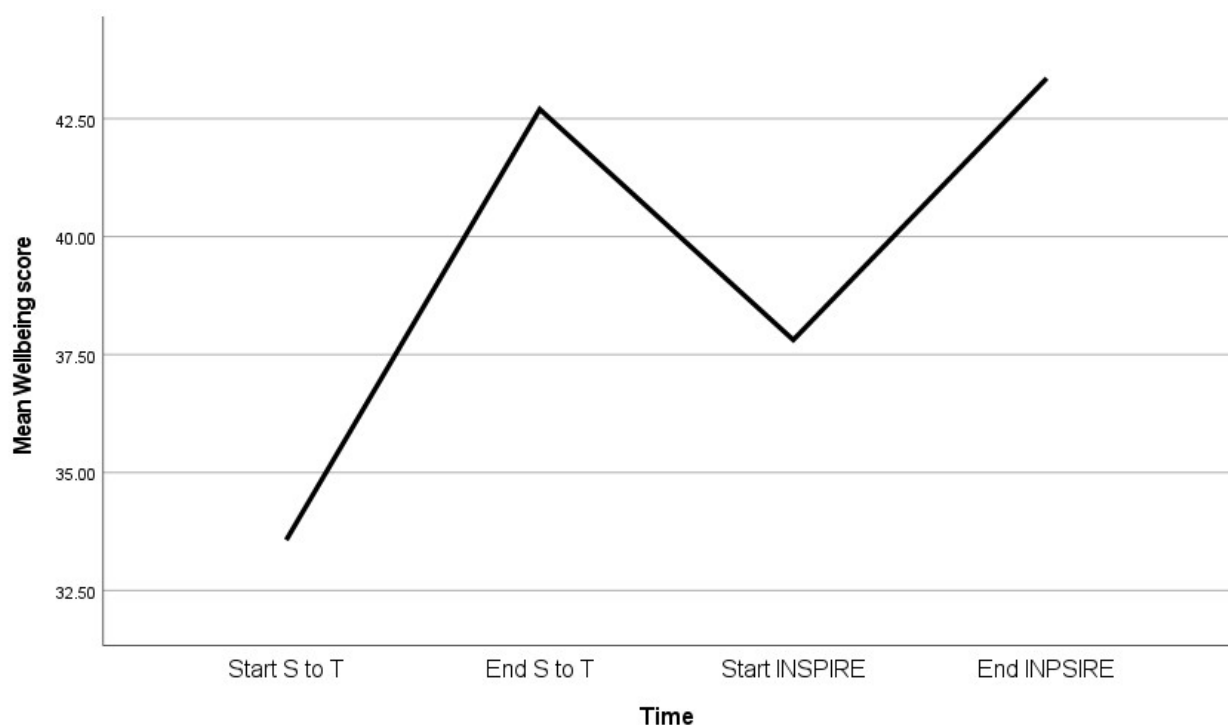
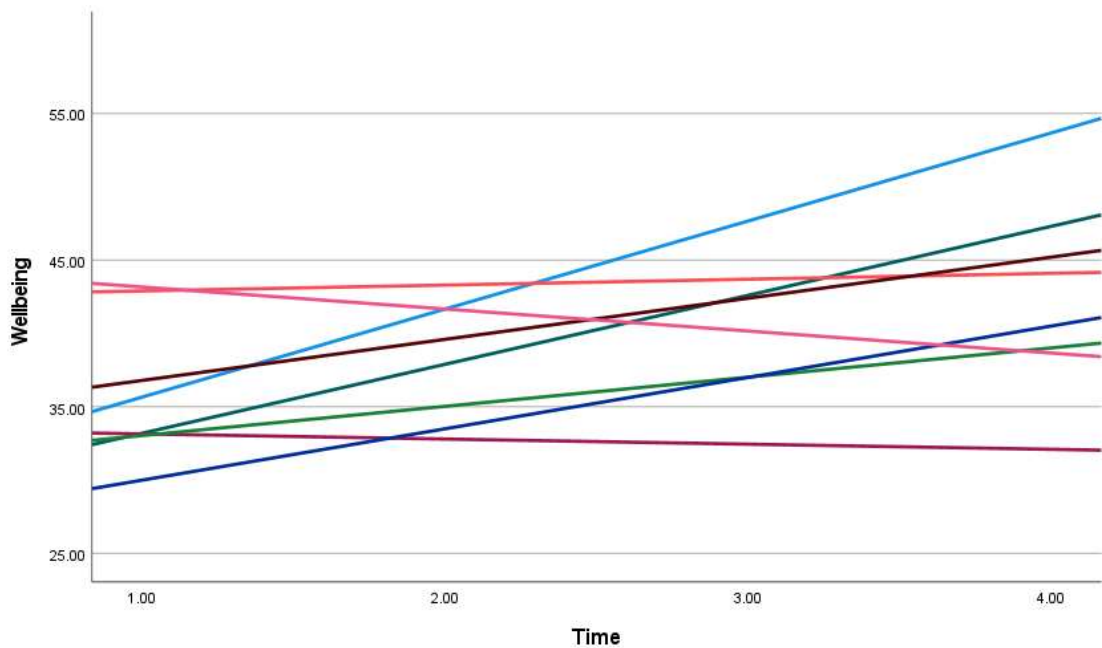


Figure Nine: Participants mean wellbeing scores across two programmes (Surviving to Thriving [S to T] and INSPIRE)



Note: Time denotes four chronological time points across the two programmes, from the start to end of each.

Figure Ten: Participants mean wellbeing scores across two programmes (Surviving to Thriving (S to T) and INSPIRE)

Social bonding

For INSPIRE, there was a small reduction of feelings of loneliness assessed with the DMoL, with a mean score of 3.63 (SD = .74) at the start of the programme, and a mean score of 3.43 (SD = .98) at the end of the programme. Likewise, there was a small increase in satisfaction with relationships across the programmes measured with the CtEL tool. There was a mean score of 8.13 (SD = 3.30) at the start of the programme, and a mean score of 10.21 (SD = 3.87) at the end of the programme. With such small numbers of responses ($N = 8$) these outcomes support the idea that the intervention helped with social connection, especially satisfaction with relationships, but the sample size is too underpowered for statistical analysis (ONS: $F_{(1,6)} = .80, p = .403$; CtEL: $F_{(1,6)} = .3.26, p = .117$).

On the group identification item asking to what extent people identified with the group at the end of the programme, the mean score was 6.17 (ranging from 5 to 7; SD = .90) (where possible scores range between 1 and 7). This suggests that there was a very high

level of identification with other members of the art workshops at the end of the programme.



Experiences during workshops

The immediate impact of taking part in the workshops was assessed by tracking mood and feelings of loneliness in the moment. The mean (average) changes are depicted in *Figure Eleven* and show that after taking part in the art workshops, participants reported feeling less lonely, more content and well, more relaxed and calm, and more awake and alert.

All of these state changes were statistically significant. 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 ($F_{(109,1)} = 24.28, p < .001$); increased energy and alertness ($F_{(109,1)} = 19.02, p < .001$); and increased contentment ($F_{(109,1)} = 23.74, p < .001$). Further, reduction in feelings of loneliness after taking part in the workshops was also statistically significant ($F_{(110,1)} = 26.40, p < .001$).

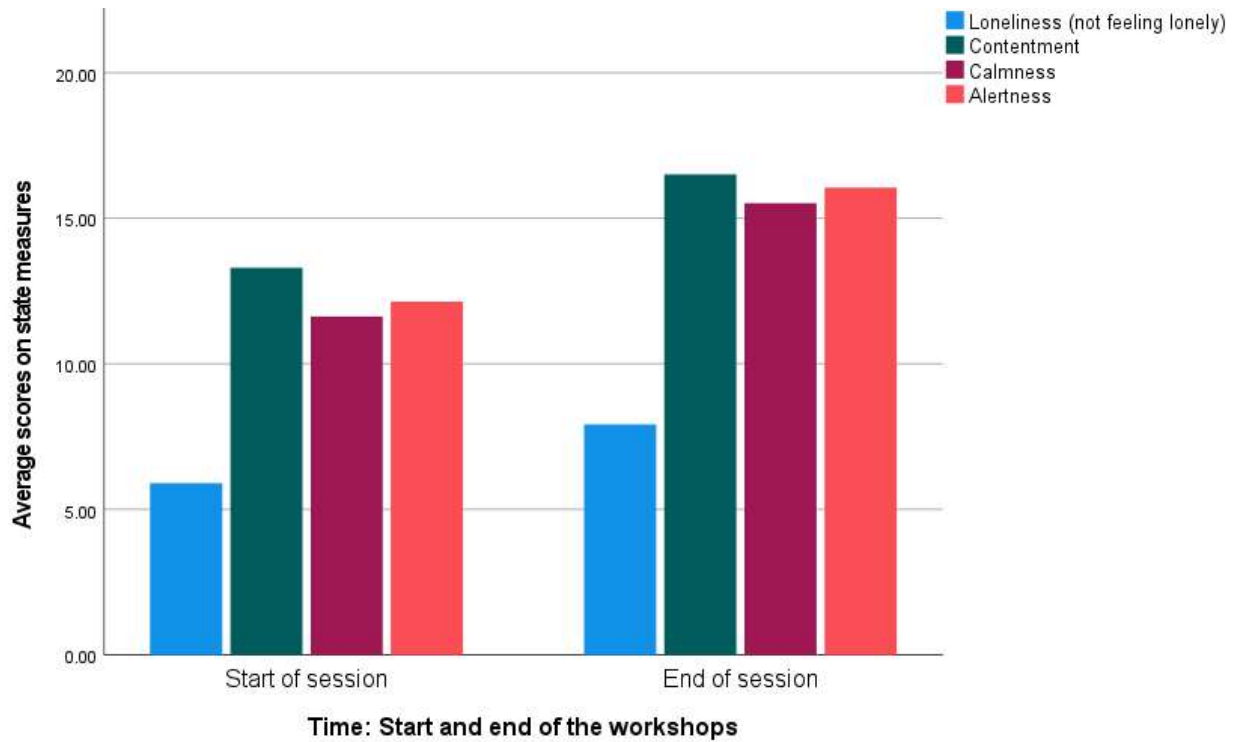


Figure Eleven: Mood and loneliness scores before and after taking part in the art workshops



Qualitative analysis

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted with comments made on qualitative questionnaires and final group reflective discussions. Four themes were developed to illustrate the participants' experiences of INSPIRE. These were: 1) 'safe space' (describing the supportive psychological features of the group); 2) 'social connection' (describing the social bonding and group identification between group members); 3) 'creative development' (describing awakening creativity and new artistic skills); and 4) and 'resilience' (reflecting increased confidence and coping skills over the course of the programme).

Table 2: Themes and example codes

Themes	Example codes
Safe space	Feeling supported Relaxing environment Lack of judgement Acceptance
Social connection	Support Companionship Understanding Identification
Creative development	Unlocking the artist Learning new skills Creative self-efficacy Self-expression
Resilience	Empowerment Confidence Self-regulation Trying new things

Safe space

This theme articulated how participants felt that the group was a “safe environment”, a space where they felt supported and accepted, and included comments such as “I feel safe and supported in the group”. The space was

described as a “calm and friendly atmosphere”, without stigmatisation or judgement, where participants could relax, share and explore.

“The safe environment ... feeling safe to have and share good days and bad”

“So just having that one space where you don't feel all that pressure and judgement, and it's just nice.”

“Pippa facilitated an atmosphere of acceptance”

“A destigmatising atmosphere, [that allows] making despite difficulty”

“The space felt wonderfully safe and the other women in attendance made me feel very welcome and supported.”

“There's been a lot of times during this, where I haven't wanted to go and do anything else, like, like, I don't want to leave the house, I don't want to be seen by anyone, but I feel okay coming here.”



“A very safe place for the silenced to discover their voice through creativity and friendship”

“A space “to try things without fear of failure or judgement”

“It was wonderful, and in a small way a form of self-care, to be able to set time aside for myself. It is hard to do so at home, as home life can be difficult and stressful, so having a space where I could go and do things that bring me comfort and allow me to express myself is incredibly helpful.”

This safe space was held by Pippa as the artist facilitator, but was also enabled by mutual respect and consideration from other group members. The space was somewhere to retreat to, a space that brought comfort, where play and exploration were possible, and where friendships grew.



Social connection

This theme articulated the social bonding between group members and the benefits of meeting and working together, developing companionship and sharing time and artistic experiences. Participants described feeling understood by others and this provided a sense of support, kinship and belonging, “friendship and sisterhood”.

“The beneficial aspects of being with other females with roughly a similar outlook/creative mind”

“Comfort and understanding and the friendships made in the workshop”

“The PEOPLE. Trust, hope, a kinship without having to explain ANYTHING.”

“Lovely to bond with the group and learn from them.”

“We've been sort of like, a supportive group. And you know, that even when you're not meeting up, that there are people out there that still sort of know what you're doing and are interested in you, and I think that's been really useful.”

“The connections that we have formed, an understanding of each other and feeling like I belong here, I feel good every time I go back. Even though I had a crappy week. Like yeah, like I hung out with awesome people. And like it I like it, you know? That's the thing that makes it, you guys are awesome. That's why I come back.”

“The sense of together ness and understanding without necessarily having to be too blatant is precious/valuable.”

“Being around with a group of people who understand each other without having to explain anything. That's really helped.”

Participants described a strong sense of identification with the group, a feeling that they understood each other and didn't need to explain themselves or their past experiences. This solidarity and support and 'sense of togetherness' was described as a fundamental part of the success of the programme for participants. The sense of shared understanding, without having 'to explain themselves' or 'be too blatant' formed part of this sense of solidarity.



Creative development

This theme illustrates participants journey through artmaking that led to feelings of being more creative, becoming or ‘unlocking’ an artist, and developing new skills throughout the programme. Participants reported feeling more confident in their art practice and the process of art making, placing value in their own creativity. They enjoyed learning new artistic techniques and mediums and described being inspired by this. In addition, they discussed having learnt how to use art for self-expression, which was empowering and beneficial.

“Encouragement to create and to unlock the artist in me who was forcefully silenced.”

“Creativity – trying to loosen up and just play, experiment and try to place more value in the doing, not just (or so much) the end product”.

“I now think of myself as a creative person. The challenges of using different mediums has helped me become more sure and passionate about the ways I personally like to create.”

“I’ve learnt that I’m more capable than I realised of executing ideas”

“I’ve sort of tried to integrate my creativity into sort of home life trying to improve my mental health and what that looks like at home. I do still have problems but like, it’s changing our approach and doing things slowly not to be super perfectionist about things, find creative ways of doing things in whatever weird wonderful way. And yeah, mixing the creative expressions as well. Whether it’s song, dance, music, paint, everything, how everything’s sort of smooshes together.”

“It has definitely given me confidence and helped me learn to express myself through art”

“Being able to express myself in an artistic way has been wonderful in this time. I have created what I would consider to be some very dark or intense work at this time and being able to release the emotions in that way has been so important to me.”

“I have my own art room at home now thanks to the inspiration I got from the group. It has changed so much. My creativity is non-stop where I just let myself go. Without the workshops this wouldn’t have happened”

“I very much enjoyed exploring different art forms and equipment. Screen printing at the Factory was wonderful, it gave me a finished item I was proud of.”

A sense of developing as an artist , and identifying as being an artist, had important ramifications for participants’ identities, with ramifications in everyday life, such as using art to express emotions and continuing artistic pursuits at home and beyond.



Resilience

This theme illustrated how participants reported feeling more confident, empowered, and accepting of themselves. Participants described feeling braver and as having greater self-esteem, feeling able to try new things in their everyday life, such as new courses or career opportunities. Participants described being

better able to manage and cope in their everyday lives as a result of being on the programme and working with each other. For example, they reported feeling better able to manage their health symptoms, such as chronic pain or negative emotions and thoughts, since they could use involvement with art and making as a form of distraction from these.

“Able to manage my pain through creating something. Just doing the artwork”

“To be courageous when lacking courage. A different creative awareness which inspired more outside the group.”

“Over the course of the group my mental health has been on the decline due to life circumstances. I’ve become more anxious and depressed. The group has helped to pull me out of negative pits, the people and projects have kept me distracted.”

“Accepting my womanhood and being proud of myself. I’m able to face myself more.”

“The programme has developed my courage. I have joined an improv. course and begun engaging in the world again - just for fun”

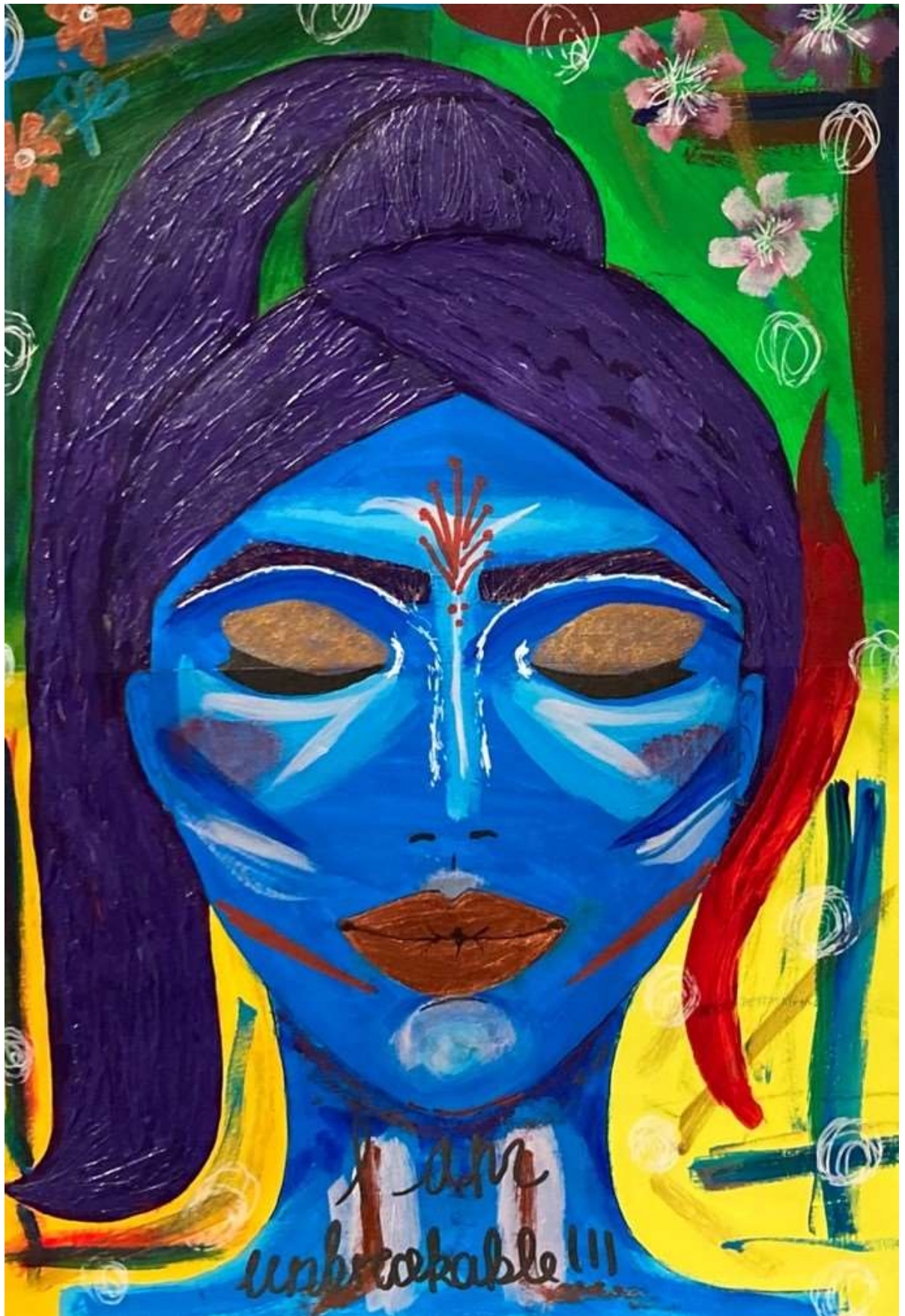
“It has reconnected me with what matters in the world and developed a sense of where I want to go: occupationally, with my home and relationships. The programme has helped me build up being me through the power of shared creativity across a period of time.”

“It has boosted my self-esteem and given me bravery to try new things.”

“I definitely feel more comfortable and confident in my artwork. For a long time I didn’t like sharing my work that didn’t fit what I thought those around me wanted to see, whereas now I really don’t mind sharing my more unconventional works, like my main piece and my collages.”

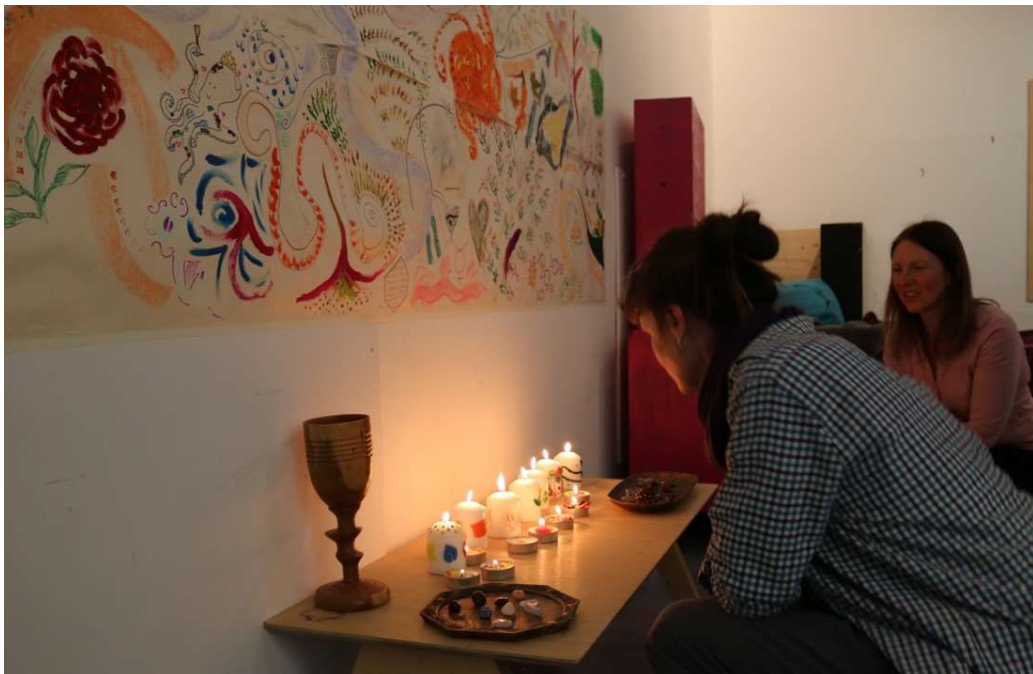
“I have been looking towards a career in 3D art and creating 3D assets, I still have a lot to learn for it but the course has given me a great boost of confidence.”

This final theme illustrates some of the outcomes on participants’ wellbeing at the end of the programme, including self-efficacy, feeling able to cope with health symptoms though the use of art, feeling proud, courageous, confident in their abilities, providing a sense of optimism and resilience going forward and able to explore new opportunities.



Exhibition

As the INSPIRE project progressed and developed, participants were asked if they would be interested in sharing some of their work at an exhibition held at Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC). By this point the participants were working on their personal projects and an exhibition offered them an end point to work towards. There were mixed feelings within the group about publicly sharing their work and, in the end, the group decided to call it a 'Celebration of Work' rather than an exhibition. A poster and invitations to view the work were created by designer Bart Blazejeski.



Two weeks after the course of ten workshops was completed, the group, Pippa and one member of the arts team from KWMC met for the day on Friday 4th March, 2022. Working together they prepared the space and put up the artwork. Two members were unable to attend due to health reasons and the other group members supported them by putting up their work. The group then met again that evening at an event to celebrate their work. The event was supported throughout by KWMC who gave the space and staff support, in kind. The event comprised of six of the group members, Pippa, two staff members from SARSAS and two staff from KWMC. We were also joined

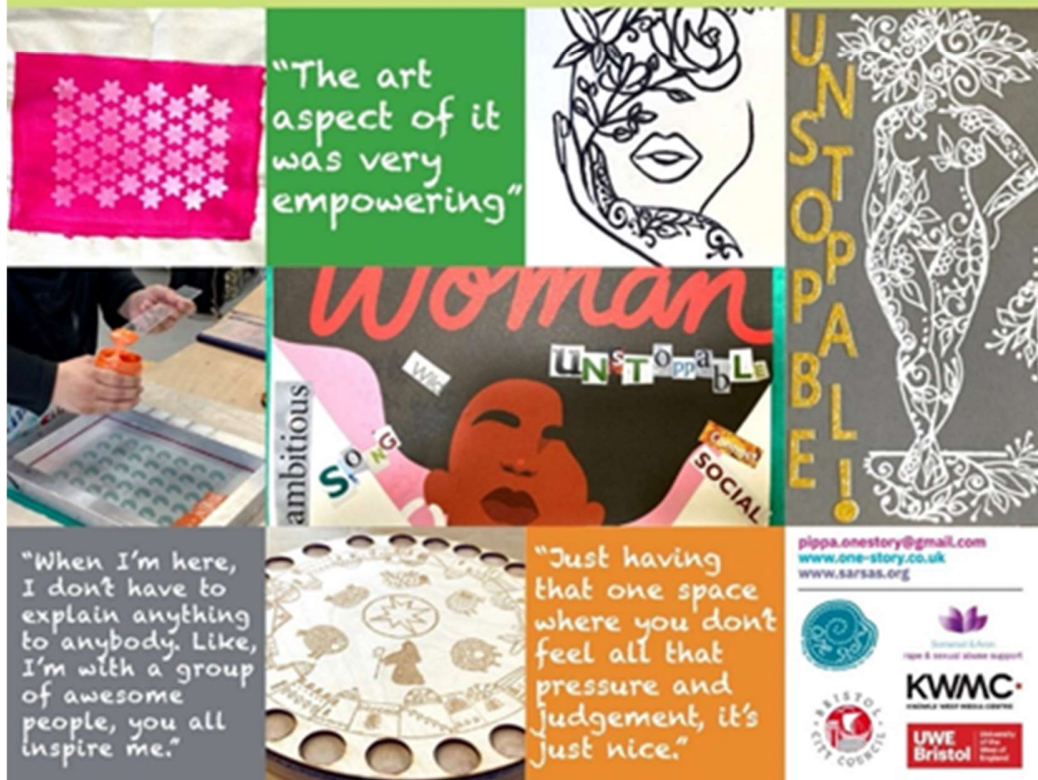


INSPIRE

Inspiring women to ignite, develop and sustain their creativity

Inspire has been a 6 month arts project run by socially engaged artist Pippa Grace, who specialises in working with women's stories, creativity and trauma; and SARSAS, who support people who have experienced sexual violence. The project has been funded by Bristol City Council, and generously supported in kind by KWMC and UWE.

8 participants took part in 10 creative workshops held at KWMC, an arts centre and charity supporting people to make positive changes; and KWMC:TheFactory, their award winning making and training space. Workshops have included: journaling, creative expression, collage, exploring creative blocks and resilience, working with clay and glazes, vinyl cutting, screen printing, laser cutting, creative careers support, and a personal mixed media project. In between sessions, participants have been encouraged to develop and sustain a creative home practise.

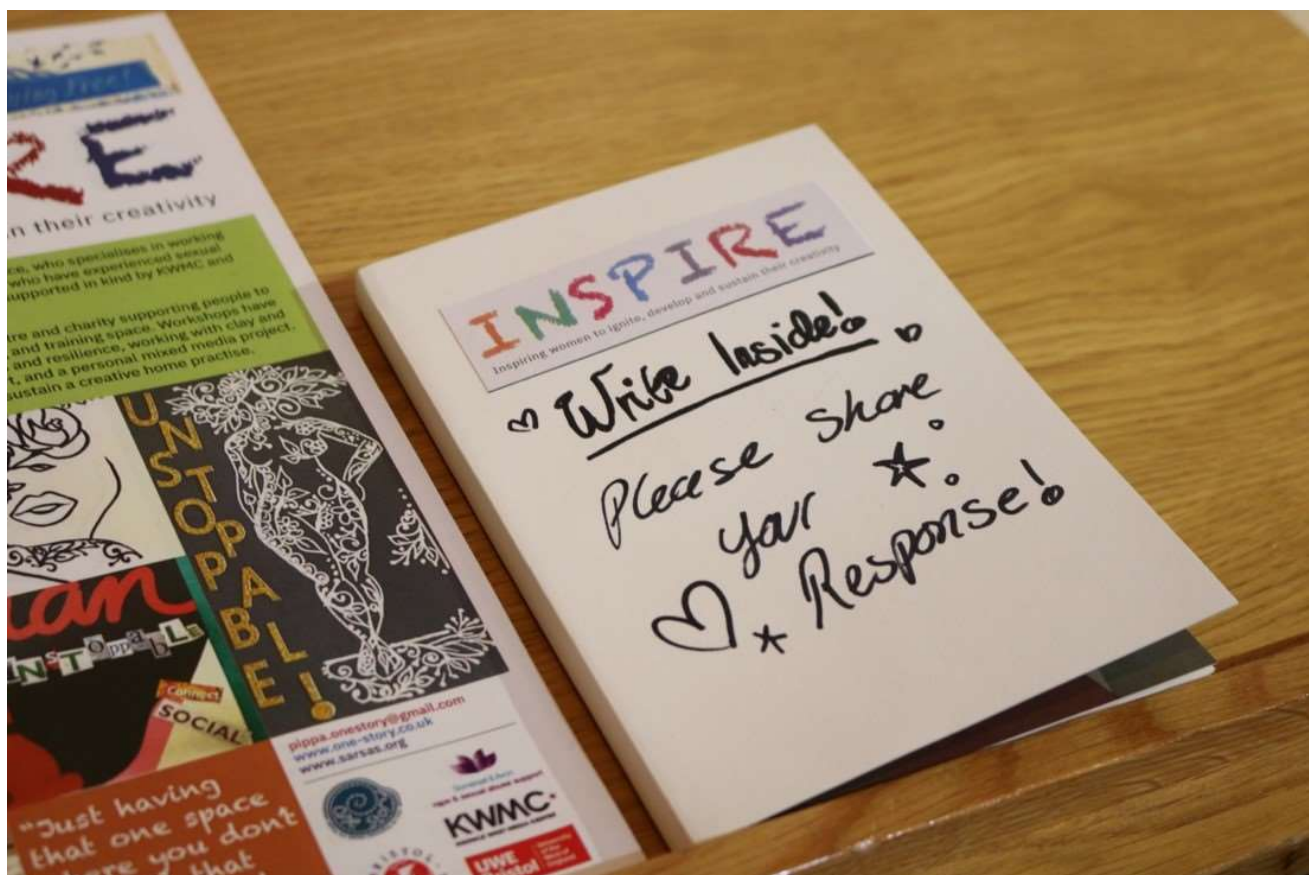


at points in the evening by one of the members' four children, and two of the member's partners, which added a joyous, supportive family aspect to the event. It was a very touching, heartfelt event, where the women were able to share their work and stories,

celebrate their creative journey over the last six months, and support each other. Food and drink were shared, visitors took part by decorating candles, and everyone lit a decorated candle and made an intention or wish for the future.

The Celebration of Work then remained up at KWMC for a week and the participants were able to invite any friends, family and colleagues to visit it. It was also open to members of the public and all staff and visitors at KWMC. There was a visitors' book to collect comments. The group then met again on Friday 11th March to take down the exhibition.

Comments left in visitors Book



“Wow! What an incredibly beautiful and powerful display. I am moved and empowered by the detail, the messages and the talent! Thank you for sharing your incredible work and your inspiring journey together.”

“I love it! Seeing what we all have achieved, everybody’s awesome! Thank you for all the inspiration, love, joy and comfort, it’s all fantastic.”

“Wow! Amazing display with such detailed and expressive pieces. Thank you for all the inspiration. Brilliant!!”

“Beautiful, strong, empowering work. I can only guess at the strength that comes from being in this group – but what shines through is an incredible process of expression and support.”

“This International Women’s Day, I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude to your group for holding on to your creativity and working through your traumas to openly share your experiences with others.”

“I am grateful and inspired by your courage, individually and collectively. More power to you. More power to us all! Thank you”



“I’m sorry that people experience such tough events, but the power and trust and creativeness shines through each piece of art. Hope it’s helped all the students. Thank you for being inspiring and take care (words are not easy to find!)”

“What a beautiful testament of freedom, possibility and beauty after the most horrific events. Such an inspiration, so soothing, thank you.”

“So moving and inspiring and such a range of different creativity. Brilliant ideas for expressing what’s internal. Thank you for sharing and allowing us to bear witness.”

“Thank you for allowing us into a glimpse of your journeys, beautifully expressed, moving, inspirational. So good to see such a healing process available, may it continue.”



Art-based feedback

Our Safety Hot Air

Balloon

*Up Up and away
I never thought I would feel this way
I thought I would always feel
That I would always wear my heavy frown*

*Yet here I am, not alone
Because of our group my spirit has grown
Solidarity and clarity within
Our group helping me to begin
To live my life again*

*All feeling are welcome here
Where our true selves appear
And in this haven of honesty
All the darkness can disappear*

*Up Up Up in our safety balloon
Where we get the chance to release all of our doom
United, survivors, together as one
Fuck you to all assholes
No more shit
We're done*

*To begin again on our own terms, this is true
We are here in our safety balloon
No drama
Just to enjoy the view.*

My Journey

Inspire Workshop

I had no idea in the beginning of the 6 months workshop that I would end up feeling the way I do now. Like how when someone has help from medicine for their pain, I have benefitted for my mental health.

I have experienced new forms of art which led me to discovering new way of expressing myself. I have met the most strong, lovely, inspiring and wonderful group of ladies, who I will not forget! Going somewhere you don't have to worry about being judged and just being yourself is awesome! I can proudly say I AM BRAVE, BOLD, UNSTOPPABLE, STRONG, UNBREAKABLE, POWERFUL, BEAUTIFUL AND I HAVE VALUE! I AM WOMAN!!!
THANK YOU!

Conclusions and future directions

The outcomes of the evaluation suggest that art interventions can be useful to help improve the wellbeing of people who have experienced sexual violence. The quantitative evaluation showed a significant increase in wellbeing, both across programmes, and during individual art workshops. Qualitative analysis of open responses suggested that participants found the programmes useful and meaningful, improving social connection through group bonding and improving wellbeing through new identities and confidence and resilience through art making and self-care.

Evaluation outcomes

The quantitative outcomes from the pre-post design found that wellbeing increased significantly across the course of a six-week-long arts programme, with a large mean increase of nine points (increasing from 36.19 to 45.41 on the WEMWBS). Participants began with an average wellbeing score indicative of 'probable depression', which rose to a score above the threshold for 'possible depression'. These findings are extremely encouraging as they suggest that just six weeks of arts workshops can improve wellbeing.

This wellbeing change was linked directly to the art workshops, since wellbeing change was significantly predicted by the extent to which participants reported feeling calmer, happier and more alert at the end of each art workshop (compared to the start). This links the wellbeing change to experiences occurring during the art workshops (rather than broader contextual effects in the everyday lives of participants). These findings also help to understand the active ingredients of the art workshops – what factors contributed to wellbeing improvement. Best outcomes were achieved when participants felt able to relax (anxiety and tension reduced), when they were able to experience contentment (feeling happy rather than sad during art workshops) and when they felt alert and energized by the art workshops.



Further process-level findings showed that participants felt less lonely after taking part in the weekly art workshops, indicating that social bonding was also occurring within the group. Participants also reported being in a moderate state of flow (on average) during the workshops. Flow is an attentional state characterized by intense absorption in the activities that one is doing at any moment, so that there is a lack of distractibility, reduced rumination or worry. Attention is held entirely by the activity at hand, self-consciousness fades away, as does a sense of time passing. The flow state has been associated with wellbeing and a sense of having a meaningful life (Holt, 2018). As the six-week-long programmes progressed, participants' experiences of flow during the workshops deepened (and their anxiety also reduced), which provides support for the role of attentional absorption as a therapeutic outcome of art workshops. That depth of the flow state builds over time suggests that this needs to be considered when designing the length of weekly programmes.

For the eight participants who took part in the subsequent INPSIRE programme, designed to help embed and develop artistic practice, the same impacts on wellbeing (across the programme) and within art workshops were observed. It is important to note that the average wellbeing of participants had dropped slightly in the interval between the end of the initial programme and the start of INSPIRE, but then rose to the highest average level at the end of INSPIRE. This suggests that consideration about how to sustain the group connections made and continue to support participants after the initial six-week-long programme is important for long-term wellbeing and development.

The qualitative outcomes illustrated how meaningful participants found the programme and the opportunities it provided. The importance of the social connection that the groups provided was salient, a space where participants felt understood and built a sense of solidarity with others. This 'safe space' allowed further exploration through art making, helping participants to use art to manage emotions, develop creativity and an artistic practice and to access the flow state. This process was described as leading to 'new identities' (feeling empowered, confident, self-efficacious and open to new opportunities going forward), consolidating their sense of identity as artists.



These findings provide support for the speculations and literature discussed in the introduction to this report, where it was proposed that the arts could help with recovery from sexual trauma (Rouse et al., 2022) through the creation of a ‘safe space’, ‘connection and empowerment’, and ‘agency and new possibilities’, where engaging with the artwork and group can help participants to imagine new paths and possible future directions. However, the current report provided important quantitative data to support the efficacy of art interventions for people who have experienced sexual violence. It suggests that, akin to art on referral programmes run to help with adult wellbeing and mental health (Crone et al., 2018; Holt, 2020), art interventions have the potential to improve wellbeing, and can reduce anxiety, improve attention (flow) and facilitate social bonding.

Limitations

While 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. 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.

The positive outcomes of the evaluation must be balanced against limitations of it. For example, there was some missing data at the end of programme stage, meaning that the experiences of all participants were not reflected in the quantitative and qualitative data. However, this does not impact upon the utility of the findings for helping to understand why the intervention worked for people who had complete data sets. A further limitation was that the evaluation method evolved over the two years in which programmes were run, adding additional measures at later points (such as flow and loneliness), meaning that some analyses had less statistical power. Future research could build on the outcomes reported here and collect further data with a larger sample size.

Reflections on the programme

The qualitative data for both ‘Surviving to Thriving’ and ‘INSPIRE’ suggests that multiple and wide-ranging benefits have arisen from these programmes of creative workshops. The holistic nature of Pippa’s trauma informed approach to running the workshops is one that encourages the healing potential of each individual in all its facets, potentially leading to multiple benefits. It is not a prescriptive ‘one method suits all’ approach, but rather is honed to support each individual’s unique creative, healing journey within a supportive group setting, meeting people wherever they are currently at. The non-judgmental, playful approach, within a safely held space, allows each individual to develop their agency and a sense of freedom and potential. This was illustrated through participants’ quotes focusing on the lack of judgement in the ‘safe space’, such as: “a calm, quiet, free speech, free emotion place with no judgement. You can be who you are when you walk through the door and that was OK. A safe space where you can be yourself and not be judged”.

Sustainability and future possibilities

It is interesting to note that the average wellbeing scores of those women who, having finished the initial group then took part in the INSPIRE programme, had dropped by the time INSPIRE started. This is the only information we have about the longer-term effect of the arts workshops after the programmes had finished. It would be interesting in the future to check in with participants 3-6 months after the programme to see if they had sustained any longer-term changes in their wellbeing.

The ongoing effects of sexual violence on a person’s physical and mental health appear to persist over a sustained amount of time, often many years and, potentially over a lifetime. The workshops that we offered were not a crisis intervention, but rather a means of offering a longer-term creative practice for those beyond the crises phase, dealing with the day to day impacts of sexual trauma on their lives.

INSPIRE offered women a longer-term intervention, with creative activities and support over a six-month-long period. The average wellbeing scores at the end of six months were slightly above those at the end of the 4-6 week-long programmes (despite the

drop in wellbeing between the programmes), suggesting that longer term support can be beneficial.

A useful plan going forward could be to have between two to six 'Surviving to Thriving' programmes running each year – enabling between 16 to 32 new participants to take part in arts workshops each year. And to run a six to nine month-long INSPIRE project, every one to two years, for women who have completed the six-week-long programme and who would like to develop a more sustained creative practice.

The exhibition/celebration at the end of INSPIRE was well received and it could also be interesting to run a longer programme with the specific intention of publicly sharing work created at the end. Ideally this would be at a more central venue than KWMC with a higher public footfall. Such an exhibition could serve to increase the confidence of participants, give them a platform to share their stories and (if it was created as a participatory exhibition) could encourage members of the public to share their own artwork and stories. This could highlight the prevalence of sexual violence and show the benefit of a creative response. It could be impactful to also use such an exhibition to visually display quantitative and qualitative data from this and future reports on this area of work.

Overall, the outcomes of the evaluation are positive and support the use of art interventions to improve the wellbeing of people who have experienced sexual violence, showing that the safe space, group bonds formed and creative practice, can help to reduce anxiety, allow absorbed attentional states, and lead to a more confident and empowered sense of identity.

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Tribute to Emma



We would like to pause to remember our dear friend Dr Emma Halliwell, who passed away during the time in which this programme ran, and whose warmth, kindness and brilliance will always be remembered.

Emma was fundamental in initiating the partnership between herself, Pippa Grace and Nicola Holt. She supported the set-up of the project and the early stages of the collaboration before she became too ill to be involved. Emma died on 3rd October 2021 and is sorely missed.

We are deeply grateful for all the work and inspiration Emma put into this project and dedicate the findings of this report to her memory.

You can learn more about Emma's career in psychology here: [Emma Halliwell 1973-2021 - The British Psychological Society \(bps.org.uk\)](https://www.bps.org.uk/emma-halliwell-1973-2021)

