

# Art of Living Creatively

Apex Arts in Collaboration with Plymouth Mind

Newsletter 3 Summer 2017



Apex Arts working in collaboration with Plymouth & District Mind are now three-quarters of the way through delivering a two-year singing/song-writing, creative arts and performance project in Plymouth entitled The Art of Living Creatively (ALC). Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Explore and Test grant the bi-weekly project is aimed at people who experience anxiety and social isolation which may inhibit them from leading a creative and fulfilling life. The grant is looking to see whether participation in and ease of access to the arts makes a difference to their lives. The project is being evaluated by Operation Emotion.

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## **Resume**

The end of the first half of the project saw the ALC participants performing informally to friends and colleagues working at Plymouth Mind. For some this was a huge achievement as it was the first time they'd sung in front of an audience. Supported by the Apex backing band they presented four of their self-penned songs, singing, dancing and smiling through all eventualities and gaining valuable performance experience and confidence.

## **Moving Forward**

The group started the new year by watching some of the performance footage taken by Operation Emotion. Apex learnt a lot from the feedback and

performance including how better to support the singers and the best ways to encourage the group to move forward.

Work was started on the look of the band for future performances with everyone working collectively to design a representation of Robinson Bay. This was achieved using images that had already been collected from a previous group



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visualisation session. The colour scheme, incorporating a spectrum of rainbow colours for both the T-shirts and the banner, was decided by group discussion and a final vote. The outcome was then digitally compiled, coloured and printed to be used as a large stage backdrop. The group's performance name was also discussed and then decided upon as 'The Robinson Bay Band' with the Robinson Bay they had created emerging as a place of particular significance for all of them, representing a safe haven where they could feel whole and express themselves freely without any judgement.



With the first of two summer performances being planned for the end of May work also began on the melodies for the final two songs written from the lyrics for calm and anxiety. With the latter the participants discussed and described openly what anxiety physically felt like and then directed the band to play music that depicted those sensations.

***"I'm in a crossroad,  
breathless scratchy maze  
Frozen, paralysed,  
hypnotised haze  
Twisted shapes that form  
a face  
My pumping heartbeat  
searching for grace"***

Performance T-shirts were also designed and printed by the group at one of the sessions using pre-chosen images from the banner.



## **Attendee changes**

This quarter saw one of the previous core members struggle with health and personal issues and be unable to commit to regular workshops and performances. It was agreed by the participant and rest of the group that she would be welcome to return whenever possible .

January also saw two new potential participants, one of whom decided to join the group, the other declining as she she didn't want to sing but enjoyed the art and company.

New Year to the Summer crystallized this group as participants made a real commitment to the workshops and summer performances - some people changing trips to make sure they'd be available. Back to a core of seven, including the new participant, and incorporating our Artist in a Participatory

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Setting meant there were 4 high and 4 low harmony voices.

To ensure continuity and professionalism it was decided to keep numbers the same and not open the group up until after the summer performances.

Participants' ages maintain a range from mid-twenties to sixties with a ratio of 3:4 female to male. All participants experience social isolation and anxiety due to either having mental health issues or being on the Autism Spectrum.

## **Feedback from attendees**

Feedback remains an integral part of the project, at one point being written into a warm-up 'appreciation exercise'. At this, new participant, Helen, feedback how after the second session, she'd gone home and written some song lyrics. She said she 'was already feeling the benefit in confidence'. She liked the fact that the group 'had a laugh and made light of things' - nothing was too 'loving'. Another participant whose goal at the start of the project was to 'improve well-being' talked about how he felt the (small) size of the group was beneficial to him. He had been to many large groups where, whilst he was allowed to talk, nothing he said was 'acted upon'. He was amazed that his creative ideas had been at the forefront of the project and he felt that his sense of self-worth was growing. This was reinforced by his mother, who came to both performances, to





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appreciate her son and the group's performance and feedback to the facilitators.



During an art session one of the evaluation films made by Operation Emotion was shown to participants individually and points raised were then discussed providing 'feedback on feedback'. The filmed participant had mentioned that it was a shame that the group didn't meet weekly and the feedback verified that all the group felt similarly. This has subsequently been acted upon and a solution found.



Written feedback collected after the performances included: "I have enjoyed every attendance and workshop at Plymouth Mind with Apex and The Robinson Bay Group. I would love for this to continue and develop. The whole experience has helped me immensely with my depression and now I have something to look forward to and have achieved a lifelong ambition to sing and perform with a group"; "This project has

introduced me to new people. Working as a team and creating songs has been very rewarding"; "I've enjoyed writing the songs out of thin air and meeting new friends"; "I've really enjoyed it, friendly people and it has made me more confident".

### **Anecdotal progress from attendees**

All attendees noticed that the group bond had strengthened after the first performances together - reinforcing community cohesion. At the start of May all participants were invited to one of the attendees birthday parties in Plymouth. Apex were pleased to hear that most of the group attended and that they all sang songs together.

This led on to some attendees arranging to meet inbetween sessions to rehearse and learn lyrics for the shows. Talk was also relayed of one attendee buying a P.A. and the group going out busking the songs and a backing CD was requested.

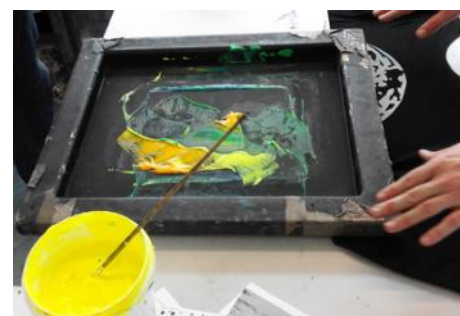
A second parent attended the performances to verify the positive effect the project was having on her daughter - particularly with confidence and commitment, enabling her to put her name forward to be filmed by the evaluators - her care team commenting "she's in a very good place at the moment".

### **Skills learned**

Screen printing was introduced to the group at a session where everyone had the chance to print their own T-shirt. With support participants made stencils



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of their chosen images and were individually guided through the printing process. All images were primarily printed with white opaque ink before colours were picked from the pre-chosen palette of inks for the second print. Finally attendees dried and cured the T-shirts ready to wear at the first performance.



Preparation for the performances involved everyone learning all the lyrics and tips were shared on how best to do this alongside facilitators allaying some anxieties by sharing their own performance experiences. Participants were also taught some presentation skills alongside basic microphone and stand handling, stage and song choreography, song introductions - written individually by the group between sessions, projection and audience engagement.

### **Next steps**

After two very successful, vibrant and entertaining performances the group are ready to record their songs after a short summer break. It is anticipated that the group will make a music video to

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accompany one of the songs and possibly a promo video using animation and green screen techniques.

Apex have also arranged for the group to start meeting at Mind inbetween sessions - this will be guided by Apex with the intention of the group writing their individual stories, possibly linked to the songs, which may be included in the video.

### **Lessons learned by trainers**

The trainers learnt about boundaries and the importance of avoiding making

themselves indispensable to the group's future and welfare. This would be achieved by planning for a form of sustainability and giving the right attention to ensuring the success of the inbetween meetings. A couple of participants had, over the course of the project, shown leadership capacities and it was decided to encourage this if possible.

The trainers were very pleased and impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm shown by the group up to

and during the performances. However, one attendee mentioned that she felt deflated after the performance as she didn't want 'the fun to end'. With this in mind an interim group session was arranged before the Autumn for planning and to encourage people to continue to meet-up, write and socialise.

### **Contacts**

The Art of Living Creatively can be contacted by email: [info@apexarts.org.uk](mailto:info@apexarts.org.uk) or by calling Jacqui on 07789 020948.



Plymouth  
and District

