

# Art of Living Creatively

Apex Arts in Collaboration with Plymouth Mind

Newsletter 4 Winter 2017



***“Happiness is defined as having something to look forward to and I look forward to the Art of Living Creatively workshops and so I have happiness”***

Apex Arts working in collaboration with Plymouth & District Mind are now at the end of 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 was aimed at people who experienced anxiety and social isolation which inhibited them from leading a creative and fulfilling life. The grant was looking to see whether participation in and ease of access to the arts could make a difference to their lives. The project was evaluated by Operation Emotion.

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## **Resume**

The end of the third-quarter of the project saw the ALC participants reflecting on their vibrant and successful performances at two large community festivals in Plymouth - Freedom Fields and Funky Llama. Full of newly-found confidence in themselves, musically/creatively and personally, they were experiencing a stronger community bond after performing together and had agreed to keep meeting together during the summer break.

## **Moving Forward**

The group started the final quarter of the

project by recording vocals on all six songs. Due to a number of factors including time and financial restraints, it was decided that the most effective and stress-reducing way to record would be to construct a makeshift studio in the workshop space. This would provide a real recording experience without the additional anxieties studio recording can



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bring. With equipment being provided by the facilitators, two sessions were dedicated to recording high and low parts and harmonies, with some lead and



additional parts being recorded during the animation workshops. All participants were given separate vocal tracks and were able to experience the sound of their own amplified voices through headphones.

The animation workshops consisted of participants individually animating



elements from their t-shirt designs to interact with and provide background action for the pop-video. A drop-in mindful-music area was also set-up for people who were waiting to complete or had completed their animation and solo vocal recordings to calm and counteract the busy and excitable atmosphere.



It had been discussed and decided at previous workshops that the pop video would feature participants actually being in Robinson Bay, some having ideas of interacting with their animations. To be able to place the group inside their digital world a large green screen area was created in the workshop.



After some choreographic improvisation highs and lows were filmed separately in groups with everyone dancing and singing along to the Robinson Bay song both in front of and behind the cameras to keep up the energy levels. All the footage was captured by 3 cameras in two takes for each group.



The completed video was shared with participants and Mind's Financial Controller at a final celebratory session in December. The songs were also presented as an Xmas gift on a CD. Both video and songs were also uploaded to YouTube and SoundCloud.

## Attendee changes

There were no attendee changes this quarter with 7 participants making a regular commitment to the bi-weekly

workshops. There were a number of enquiries regarding potential new participants but the progression of the project and it being in it's final quarter meant that they could not be integrated at this late stage.

Participants' ages maintain a range from late-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

Programming-in time for feedback has been a regular part of session planning from the project onset. In this quarter participants fed back on the individual creative processes:- *"Love the experience of recording - always wanted to do this and very grateful for the opportunity, thank you!"*

- and also the whole project including comments inside a thankyou card specifically chosen to reflect the collective community spirit of the group: *"I'd like to say thank you very much from the bottom of my heart - I've had a tremendous journey that I was not expecting to be on - it's been absolutely brilliant - I never thought I'd be part of a band even - it really has helped my confidence - and even though I have a work commitment now I've spoken about Tuesdays and so I'd still like to be able to*



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*come to the group - it has helped make my mind my own really and be confident in my singing – I now feel I can sing LOUDER and have a voice”*

*“So look forward to coming every other week and exploring new things, it’s really great and there’s always a warm, supportive feeling I get when I leave. All good friends and jolly good company”*

## Anecdotal progress from attendees

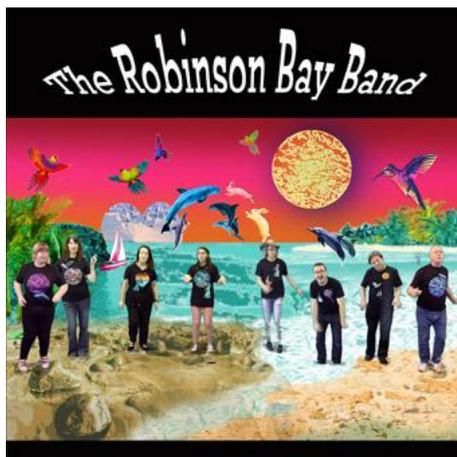


The attendees have been acknowledging the fact that they all get on very well and that they are also there to support each other inbetween sessions - for example, one participant helped another move house. At one session a participant didn't arrive and there was genuine concern from the other attendees. After a further text prompt the person arrived reporting that his eczema had really flared up and he was very tired after not being able to sleep. During the break people were offering advice, such as removing dairy from his diet, along with



sharing their own stories of eczema within families. The person's mood really lifted with the support being

shown and trainers heard participants passing on to him 'how important it was to come to the group when you feel down - it makes you feel happier'. At a later session this same person was passing on the same piece of information himself in response to someone saying their heart felt cold *“that’s why I come to this group, it warms my heart and makes me feel better”*. Another participant arrived mentioning she was feeling “very sensitive/fragile” as she'd just heard a friend of hers had passed away but she'd decided it would be beneficial to come to the group. Later she was laughing and encouraging others with positive comments.



Alongside stories of wellbeing, trainers in this last quarter have seen some people have the confidence to attend interviews, with two getting jobs, also joining and recommending other activities to each other like tai chi and table tennis that are social and beneficial to wellbeing. Two participants also travelled to Redruth to see an art exhibition and connect with previous Apex participants.

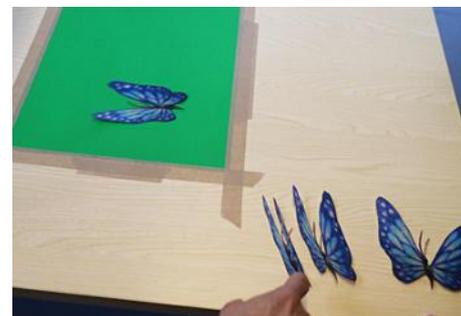
## Skills learned

In many respects all of the above reflect skills learnt as participants feel confident in taking control of their lives and are able to experience The Art of Living Creatively.

In terms of artistic outcomes, the main focus of the project in this quarter has

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been recording, animating and filming the creativity that has emerged from the group. Even though all the processes



were unfamiliar to the participants:- *“It was a bit nervewracking to start with but have enjoyed it as we have progressed with the recording and filming. I liked animating the butterfly taken from my tattoo”*

- everyone took part in all processes:- *“It’s been fantastic, going through the process of making a music video from start to finish, with animation and green screen and recording a song - seeing, understanding and being part of the whole process”*



*“I’ve been on an incredible journey and never once anticipated doing the things that we’ve been doing together and it’s definitely built my confidence and self-esteem to feel able to express myself*



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*creatively and to be listened to and to be heard and to discover things about myself I didn't know I would ever do, or could do and I really hope it's not the end of this journey"*

*"If music had been taught how Apex teach it then I would've loved music at school"*



Participants also started to learn how to work as a group independent of Apex. Facilitators organised an interim workshop in August, in response to the requests from participants, to support their desire for independent creativity. Arrangements were made for two participants to lead and coordinate a workshop at Mind and guidelines were given to be followed.

## Next steps

At the interim workshop, one participant presented a complete song - both lyrics and melody - reporting that she had written it in her dream and remembered it in its entirety on waking, entitled The Colour of Love. The participants met independently two weeks later at the end of August, practised the songs and

explored the emotions behind the words. This information was stored ready to be used at a later date. This practise session has meant that the group intend to keep meeting at Mind, to sing together, learn how to use musical equipment and continue to create their own stories. The first session has been set for January 9th. It was noted that the creative animation, recording and mindful music led to an opening up of creative ideas – participants started talking creatively about doing art / having ideas for CD covers - as if they had completed the first part of a course and were preparing for the next.

## Lessons learned by trainers

The trainers have been constantly reminded that their ethos is to respond to the need of the group and to follow the direction their creativity takes. Although interim weekly sessions had initially been requested by the group and had begun to be arranged, when reminded, participants mentioned they

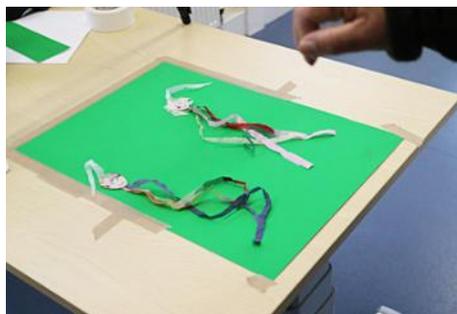
were too busy to attend every week now as they were doing other beneficial activities. Trainers realised that this was an important outcome and that the project had enabled this and so reorganised accordingly. With regard to the new enquiries in this last quarter this showed us that it can take up to 18 months for the word to get around about projects – some people only just receiving the recruitment fliers - it highlighted the importance of local acceptance, knowledge and networking. The trainers also recognised the importance of the group singing together at every session - even when other creative activities were taking place - singing together was the glue that kept them cohesive - that and the chance to socialise and pass on information to each other at tea-breaks.

## Contacts

The Art of Living Creatively :  
[info@apexarts.org.uk](mailto:info@apexarts.org.uk) or call Jacqui Callis  
Apex Director on 07789 020948.

You can see the video directly at: <https://youtu.be/veu580VuY8U>  
Or on the Apex YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/VoiceOutside/>  
Or on the [apexarts.org.uk](http://apexarts.org.uk) website homepage or videos page

You can hear the songs on SoundCloud:  
<https://soundcloud.com/apex-the-creative-brain/sets/robinson-bay>  
Or on the [apexarts.org.uk](http://apexarts.org.uk) website albums page



Plymouth  
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Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation