



Commissioning case study

Creativity Works: co-production for better mental health in Bath and North East Somerset

co-production # mental health # peer-led service development # sustainability # community empowerment

The headlines

- The Mental Health Creative Support Service provides people experiencing mental health issues with an opportunity to join a variety of free weekly creative groups.
- Creativity Works is helping participants who want to continue the creative groups to take the steps to independence, supporting the longer-term goal of creating a sustainable network across Bath and North East Somerset.
- Although Creativity Works has a track record of delivering work for Bath and North East Somerset Council there is still a need to provide the evidence necessary to convince commissioners to provide funding.

“ We use the power of the creative process to make a real difference to people’s lives; inspiring and empowering them to explore, develop and grow. ”

Philippa Forsey, Creativity Works

What is the context?

Creativity Works is a charity that was founded in North East Somerset 30 years ago and works with a range of partners to deliver positive change through creative projects. The charity has a strong track record of working with Bath and North East Somerset Council, having delivered a range of projects funded from the council’s annual grant round.

The council is in the process of redesigning its mental health services with people, rather than services, as the starting point. Central to this new approach is a desire to offer people experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health issues a chance to build confidence, learn new skills and make new friends. The previous model was reliant on people having to adapt to fit with

services provided by the council or other organisations. However the new approach recognises that people themselves develop the best approaches to improve their own mental health. This idea of co-production underpins the work of many arts organisations, including Creativity Works, whose work to empower people to design their own services chimes well with commissioners’ priorities. Creativity Works uses creativity as a catalyst for personal and social development, with people of all ages, from all backgrounds.

What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

In 2010, the council switched to a commissioning model to improve outcomes and provide stronger value for money. Creativity Works responded to a tender for mental health services and was awarded a three-year commission to deliver a Mental Health Creative Support Service. The commission was initially let for a period of three years but was recently amended and renewed for a further two years.

The service provides people experiencing mental health issues with an opportunity to join a variety of free weekly creative groups, ranging from ‘photography and rambling’ to ‘writing space’.

In line with a commitment to co-production, a key design aspect of the service is helping participants who want to continue the creative groups to take the steps to independence, for example by assisting them with the practicalities of budgets and planning. The Creativity Works team remains on hand to provide support, but the longer-term goal is for the groups to operate independently, thus providing a sustainable network of creative activities that can engage and support more people across Bath and North East Somerset experiencing mental health difficulties.

The best recent example of this co-production approach is the Wellbeing College, which is a new delivery model that brings mental health services into the community and hands power to service users. ‘The emphasis is on self-management and prevention,’ says Basil Wild, a commissioner in adult social care and

housing at the council. 'We talk about wellbeing, rather than mental health—we want to mainstream it so we deliberately didn't call it a recovery college. Anybody who wants to improve their wellbeing can take courses—it's breaking down the barriers I suppose.'

A number of existing providers, including Creativity Works, offer a variety of courses and groups designed to help people develop confidence, live independently, and maximise wellbeing. These self-support groups and peer-led networks are very much in tune with the council's priorities around mental health.



What Creativity Works does is very much in line with how we want services to be run. We want to hand the focus back to people, rather than commissioners. We want lots going on in the community that people can go to—activities using their mind, their social networks and their support networks.

Basil Wild, Commissioner,
Bath and North East Somerset Council

Who are the key partners?

The Mental Health Creative Support Service fits within St Mungo's Building Bridges to Wellbeing programme which works to support people with low to moderate mental health needs in Bath and North East Somerset. The aim of this programme is to enable people who experience mental health issues to lead more independent and fulfilling lives by developing peer-support networks and groups.

This wider programme has enabled Creativity Works to strengthen its work in partnership with a range of organisations including St Mungo's Broadway and the independent, not-for-profit provider Sirona Health & Care. Team members also attend the Mental Health Provider Forum which has enabled partners and service users to influence the design of mental health services, including the creation of the Wellbeing College. From a commissioner's perspective the forum and partnership work evident within the Building Bridges to Wellbeing programme has supported the process of market shaping and of identifying opportunities for future collaboration to deliver high-quality, person-centred mental health services.

What has been the impact?

The Mental Health Creative Support Service is commissioned on the basis that a number of key outcomes will be met around increasing availability and awareness of activities and widening access. These outcomes are demonstrated by the delivery of certain tangible services, including:

- providing a range of taster sessions;
- supporting the development of two new groups each year as co-facilitated groups;
- establishing five independent groups each year led by peer tutors; and
- hosting five celebration events each year

Participation is a key objective. Commissioners are looking for evidence that more people are being supported to participate in local groups and activities

and are able to express issues through different art forms. Commissioners are also looking for evidence of sustainability with peer tutors empowered to lead their own groups. Regular feedback is sought from participants and stakeholders to evidence the impact of the service:

‘ Creative Links is an invaluable service, it builds self-esteem and develops motivation and focus within service users’ lives. These groups have more effect than some anti-depressants because over the weeks people build upon confidence and can see their achievements which enable them to see progression within themselves. ’

Heather Bonsey, Community Options Team,
Bath and North East Somerset Council

The Creativity Works team identified a need to promote the opportunities to participate in groups and activities in different ways to people experiencing mental health issues. Although the council had launched a ‘Well Aware’ online resource, providing information on health and wellbeing services, support organisations, activities and groups, feedback from participants identified that this approach was failing to reach many people in need of support, largely owing to difficulties with internet access. As a consequence the council has produced The Hope Guide, which is printed in hard copy on a quarterly basis and disseminated widely across Bath and North East Somerset. This approach has helped to improve awareness of and access to local support groups and activities for people with mental health issues across the area.



In 2013/14, Creativity Works ran 194 project sessions reaching an audience of 561 people. Four creative peer-to-peer groups were supported involving 37 volunteers who combined donated 722 hours to the programme. A total of 23 artists were commissioned through the Creativity Works programme to work with people experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health issues as part of creative activities. As well as these numerical outputs, Creativity Works collects subjective feedback from participants in the groups. Its 2012/13 report into the Mental Health Creative Support Service claims that 96 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of the service.

Anecdotal feedback in the report from group participants supports the art-led approach. ‘I come to this group because it’s an art group,’ says one participant. Another explains that ‘doing something with your hands takes off the pressure. It’s therapeutic without feeling like therapy.’ One participant describes how the service ‘has helped letting go of the cognitive and thoughts and coming back to sensations and feelings.’

‘ I wouldn’t go to a group where there was a specific label of mental health. I don’t want to be labelled. ’

Participant

What have been the key elements of success?

Creativity Works project manager Philippa Forsey sees building good relationships with commissioners as key to Creativity Works' success. Proactivity is required to keep those relationships current. 'The key is listening, making sure you're on the various strategic forums, the health and wellbeing networks, so you understand where people are coming from and what they need to achieve.'

In Bath and North East Somerset, says Philippa, 'commissioners have very open relationships with providers—we sit on forums that are very democratic. They take time to find out what we think, what we would do about something, our approach'. Ideas from the Mental Health Provider Forum can develop into fully-funded initiatives, like the Wellbeing College. Sometimes commissioners and providers work together to develop projects, which are discussed and tweaked to suit both sides before being commissioned. As Basil explains, 'it's a waste of everybody's time to commission something for three years and find out a year in that it could be done better.'

The process of moving from annual grant funding to commissioning services with longer-term funds has provided a range of benefits. From the perspective of Creativity Works, longer-term security of funding enables capacity to be directed towards empowering the network of peer tutors as well as exploring opportunities and ideas with partners as part of local networks and forums. In contrast the annual grant funding model generated considerable uncertainty for the organisation. This in turn limited the level of support that could be provided to people interested in leading groups and activities.

Who can I contact?

Philippa Forsey, Project Manager, Mental Health Creative Support Service, Creativity Works, telephone **01761 438 852**
email: philippa@creativityworks.org.uk
Twitter: [@CW4everyone](https://twitter.com/CW4everyone)

What has been learnt?

Although Creativity Works has a track record of delivering work for the council there is still a need to provide the evidence necessary to convince commissioners to part with funding. 'If they're uncertain of a project's value you need to assure them over a period of time that this approach works', explains Philippa Forsey.

'There are many layers to what we do. We specialise in delivering outstanding creative projects, targeted at specific communities in areas of health and wellbeing. Our Co|Create programme delivers training and support to artists, health and social care professionals and volunteers in the field of socially-engaged arts practice to equip them with knowledge and skills to deal with challenging situations,' she adds.

‘It’s about reputation as well, a good track record as an organisation where commissioners can see meaningful results over time. We’ve got that.’

Philippa Forsey, Creativity Works

Other useful information

<http://www.creativityworks.org.uk/>

A copy of the latest Hope Guide can be accessed at <http://www.newhopebanes.org/#!hope-guide/cb7v>