

the creative connection

bazooka arts and the
north lanarkshire connections project

by Zoë Brook and Bryony Murray

The Creative Connection
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North Lanarkshire Connections project

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“It has been a life saver for me. I feel like I deserve to be here now, when before I felt that I was worthless.”

The 21st Century Social Work Review highlighted that it was not the responsibility of Social Work to meet every support need. Family, friends and wider society have a significant role to play in ensuring that people with additional support needs take their place as citizens in community life.

But not everyone has family, friends or links to the wider community.

The risk is that some people remain invisible, marginalised and excluded, or end up needing input from statutory services - involvement that could have been avoided with earlier, different approaches.

More choices and options beyond “services” need to be available to people who require limited, low level support to re-engage with community life.

Through funding provided by the Big Lottery Fund, North Lanarkshire Council together with partner organisations Bazooka Arts, Life, Employment and Friends (LEAF) and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire (VANL), delivered a 5 year project – ‘The NL Connection’ using participation in community arts, volunteering and a range of other community based opportunities to make sure that people were connected, and had the chance to make friends and explore local community life without the need for statutory service interventions.

All of the partner organisations were delighted by the success of the project and the impact that it had, not just on the people who used the project, but on the wider community too.

This book details some of the activities that took place, as well as inspiring personal stories and journeys.

Morris Howat

Senior Officer (Younger Adults),

North Lanarkshire Council
Housing and Social Work Services

“ The picture I did at the beginning was grey and black, that was how I felt then, but now I feel colourful. I got into the work, my medication has decreased and I feel happy.”

This book is a celebration of the artwork created by the arts participants of the North Lanarkshire Connections project. This five year Big Lottery funded project was created and delivered as a partnership between North Lanarkshire Council's Housing and Social Work Services, Bazooka Arts, VANL and LEAF.

The principle aim of NL Connections was to create a range of opportunities for North Lanarkshire residents at risk of isolation to connect to other people in their community.

Arts and Health specialists Bazooka Arts were responsible for delivering the participatory arts strand of the NL Connections project.

As well as creating opportunities for social connections, the arts programme aimed to build positive mental health and well-being through arts participation. The project ensured the inclusion of adults affected by mental ill health, disability, and older age ill health in community based arts projects.

The theme of connecting ran through all aspects of the project.

Through the process of learning new creative skills and using imagination within a group setting, people were encouraged to connect to new possibilities in terms of their own potential.

As participants explored the world of arts and imagination, they connected to various themes for inspiration: to personal stories, memories, places of importance, the environment; to passions and interests, to works of art, poems, films and stories.

Exhibitions and performances provided participants with the opportunity to make wider social connections and to inform, entertain and inspire others.

Throughout the project, the participants have written, performed and made beautiful, meaningful and informative art that tells their stories in words and pictures.

In this book, we celebrate what has been made: the events, the friendships, the fun, the laughter, and the positive effects this has had on the people taking part. It shows the many art forms that have been involved and the themes that have been explored.

You will see the process, the artwork created, the people taking part and their comments on their experience. This record of the project is the story of our journey together and is dedicated to all the people that have taken part.

Zoë Brook and Bryony Murray

March 2013

“ It has helped me realise I’m not alone, I’ve tried things I would never have done before, met people, made friends and I feel better about myself. I feel more confident and able to do more.”

ARTS

for health and wellbeing

We have a vision for mental health in North Lanarkshire. We want to see a North Lanarkshire where we all understand that there is no health without mental health; where we value our mental health as a precious resource for all of us, and know how to look after our own mental health and well-being, as well as the mental health and well-being of others, and by doing so making North Lanarkshire a better place for all.

The key challenge we have is to create the conditions for people to flourish and enjoy positive mental health and well being, and that requires North Lanarkshire Council, NHS Lanarkshire, our voluntary sector partners and the wider community themselves to create the conditions for that to happen.

When we reflect on what those key conditions are, we draw upon the evidence from the New Economics Foundation in London, which defines five key elements of mental health and well-being. These key elements are right at the heart of what the North Lanarkshire Connections project set out to achieve.

The five key elements are: connecting to others, staying active, taking notice, learning new things and taking opportunities to give.

Participating in arts projects gives people the opportunity to simultaneously achieve all of these health promoting actions while making art, making friends and contributing to the culture of their community.

Kevin O'Neill

Public Mental Health & Well-being Development Manager NHS Lanarkshire

Bazooka Arts is an artist led organisation, specialising in participatory arts for health and wellbeing. The organisation was founded in 2001 by Bryony Murray (Visual Artist and Designer) and Zoë Brook (Dramatherapist and Theatre Artist).

At the heart of Bazooka Arts is an understanding of the profound effect participating in the arts can have on people's lives. We have a person centred approach to working which is built upon principles of equality and empowerment. We are passionate about making high quality arts accessible.

Through our work in health, education and community settings we have witnessed how arts participation can make people feel good, bring people together and improve quality of life for individuals and communities. This has driven our commitment to promoting the vital role that arts participation has to play in improving health and wellbeing, and has focused the development of our practice.

We aim to create an environment in which people can flourish. We believe that everyone has the potential to be creative, and it is our role as arts facilitators to support and encourage participants to access their imagination and to develop creative skills.

Our workshops are supportive, relaxed and fun, providing participants with an opportunity to get to know one another, work as a team and make friends. Our approach to structuring workshops aims to ensure that each participant gets the most personal, social and artistic benefit from the experience.

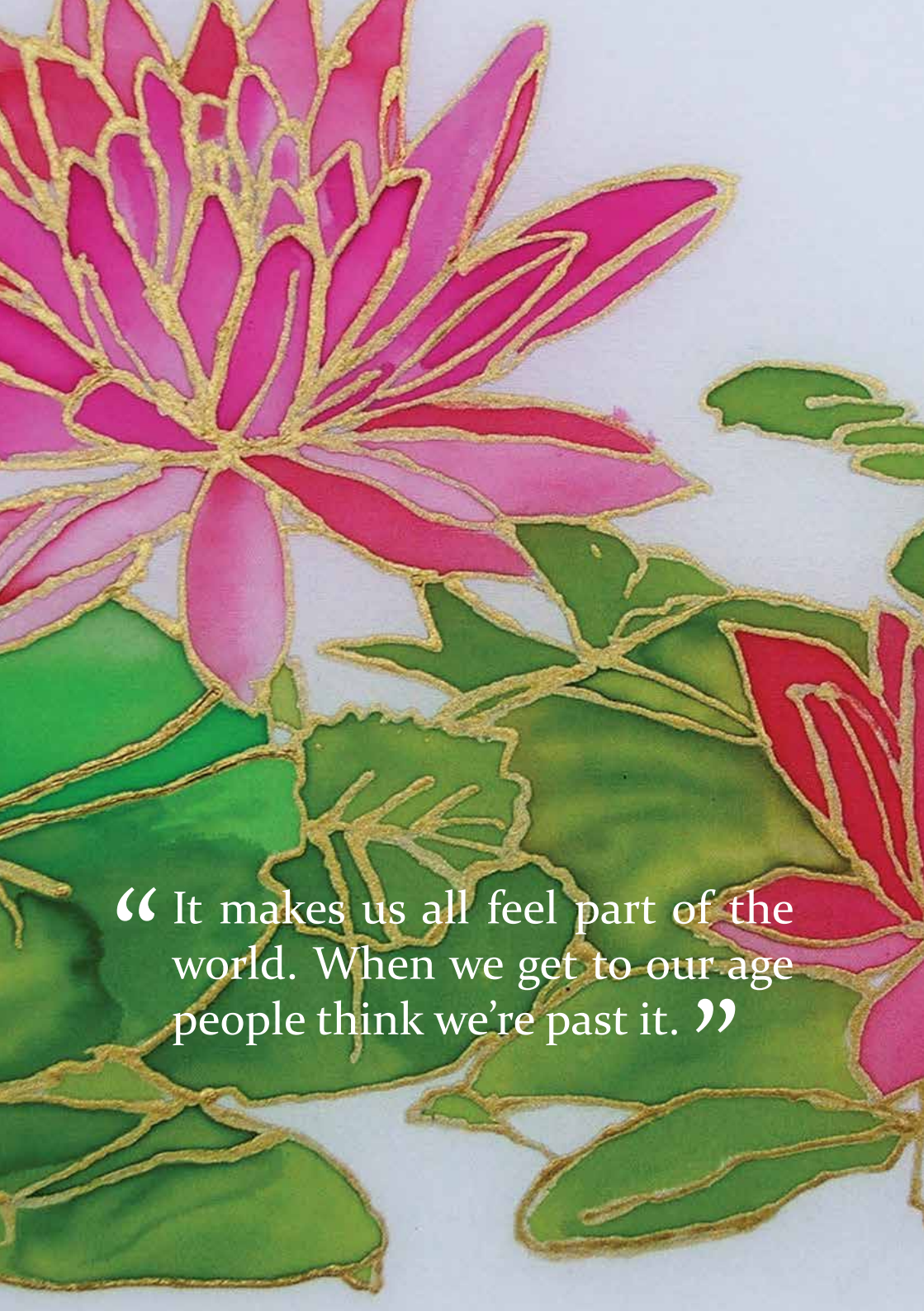
Through the projects we deliver, we involve people in many different art forms, from theatre and film making to ceramics and silk painting. All participants create works of art and have the opportunity to share their work with family and friends through exhibitions and performances.

The NL Connections project has allowed us to engage many other professional artists to work alongside us, enabling us to offer an even wider range of artforms. The following chapters will explore some of the projects in more detail.

“ When I heard about Bazooka Arts and the projects they were running I was nervous and apprehensive about coming along. I wasn't sure if my art skills were good enough....I was reassured when I spoke to Bryony when she told me that there were people with different levels of art skills, and Bazooka Arts was also about socialising and the therapeutic side of art. I realised then that this would help with my depression by getting me out of the house and mixing with other people whilst doing arts and crafts which I loved. I was involved with the drama workshops which helped build my confidence. I was also involved in the jewellery making workshops and printing workshop, and I found that taking part has helped me build my confidence when socialising with people. I found it relaxing and it has built up my confidence in my arts skills. I feel proud when I look at my art work, that I have created something so good. I have met lovely people through the projects, and we have enjoyed the groups together ”

silk painting





“ It makes us all feel part of the world. When we get to our age people think we’re past it. ”

The Bazooka Arts silk painting course is an excellent introduction to arts participation for even the most artistically shy of our participants. It has been an effective way of building artistic skills and confidence quickly.

The workshops offer the participants the opportunity to work at their own level and with their own style. Some choose to paint freehand onto the silk and others choose to use prepared designs as a guide. The combination of high quality materials, carefully selected design inspiration and the supportive guidance of an artist ensures that each person, regardless of their ability, is able to participate and create an artwork which they are proud of.

Taking part in silk painting can be incredibly relaxing, and many participants have commented on how therapeutic they have found it.

The workshops have been particularly popular with older people living within sheltered housing complexes throughout North Lanarkshire. The classes have provided an opportunity for the residents to invite local people from the wider community to join the groups. These classes have been important socially for many of the participants, bringing them together not only to be creative but also to meet new people, build friendships, have fun and to feel connected to their own community.

North Lanarkshire Council Locality Link Officers have been instrumental in helping to create connections between the complexes and the community, and in supporting the participants to continue silk painting once the course has come to an end.

“ It’s better than bingo and TV! ”

“Bazooka Arts’ choice of artists goes beyond choosing them for their artistic abilities. I firmly believe that the way the process of silk painting is calmly and engagingly explained to participants encourages those who have some skills and those who declare “I will never manage that” to have a go. I have on many occasions witnessed the coming together of people with a range of difficulties, round a table fully engrossed in the process of producing their own work ”

Sheila Russell, Locality Links Officer





“ Bryony and Zoë have assisted the older people to get back their independence and friendships by reuniting them back into the community that they were once fully active in. It has created positive experiences and connections for these people through their participation. One member who was recently widowed told me how much the group has meant to her. Before her husband’s death she was a full time carer for him and was very isolated. This group has been invaluable to her, re-engaging her with the community and in helping to alleviate her loneliness. ”

Sandra Basu, Locality Links Officer

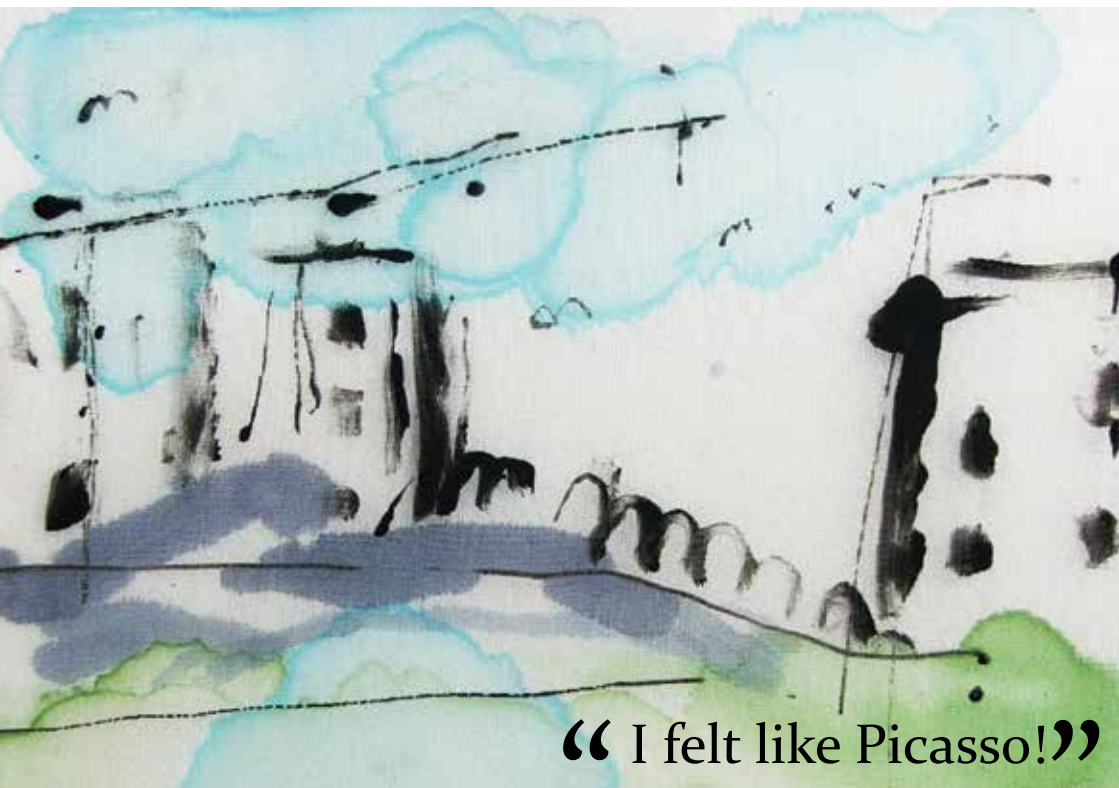
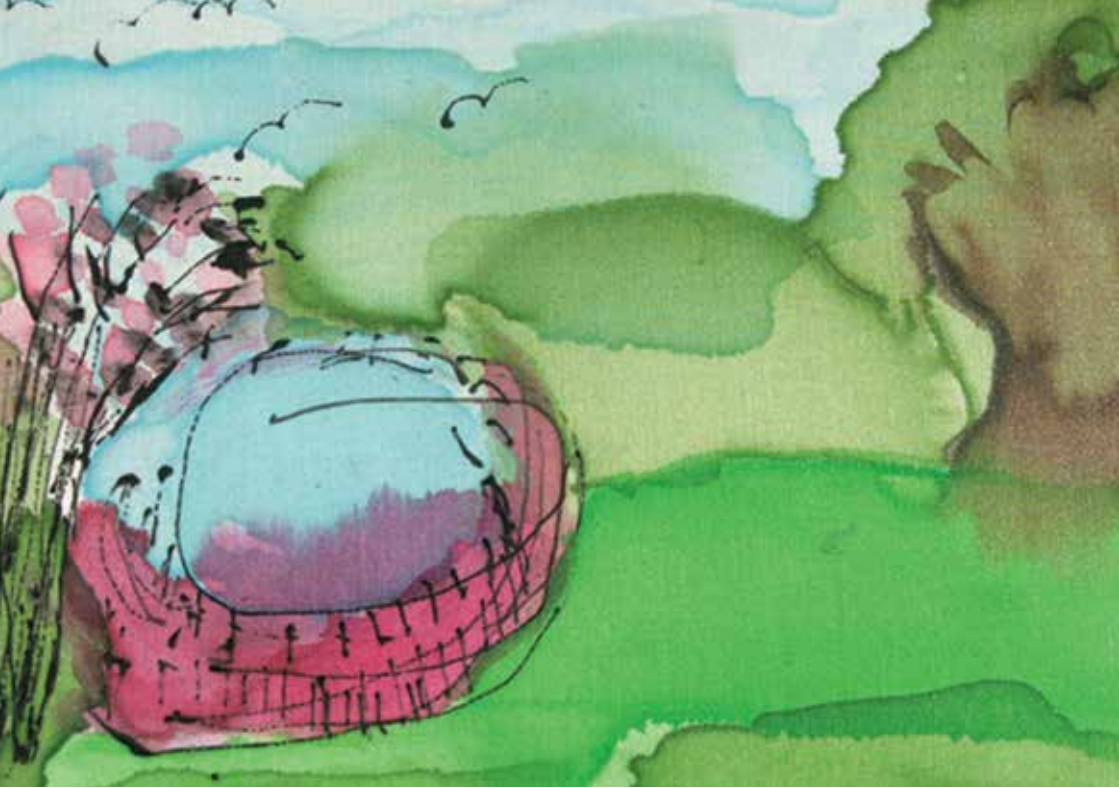
Ellen Black came to the silk painting workshops keen to have a go. She had been very creative when she was younger but was now registered blind and doubtful that she would be able to take part.

Her blindness was incredibly frustrating for her as it deprived her of many activities she had formerly enjoyed. Ellen took part in the silk painting, but found it very difficult at first and was ready to give up.

Through encouragement and support from the artists she began to experiment, painting free hand onto the silk. She had a natural affinity for colour and painted abstract paintings of flowers, which she at first assumed looked a mess. However, people around her were impressed, which encouraged her to continue her work. She began to form very definite ideas for paintings from memories: a skyline of high flats and cranes, a garden full of flowers, a local park.

She asked for very little artistic assistance, but did need practical help to select colours, and to guide her brush over to the silk. Ellen's artistic flair along with her determination and her consistent individual style led her to develop an impressive series of paintings. Her work received a great deal of attention, and to her astonishment she sold four paintings at her first exhibition!

“ I was particularly impressed with Ellen Black's work. It was very beautiful, and all the more amazing given that she is registered blind. ”



“ I felt like Picasso!”



“ I’ve enjoyed it so much, it’s let me meet friends. I look forward to coming every Tuesday. It’s changed my life because when my husband was ill I didn’t meet any company. ”

“ I thought I’d be hopeless at it but I’ve really enjoyed it and I find it very relaxing. I’m quite proud of myself, with what I’ve achieved. It’s the fact that no-one expects you to be perfect, there’s no pressure on you, which brings you on. ”

collage & mixed media

'a place to be...'





A place to be inspired, a place to be creative, a place to be relaxed, a place to be accepted, a place to be safe, a place to be equal, a place to be yourself.

For many of our participants coming to the project can be a valuable 'place to be'. The project not only offers a place to be creative and to learn new skills, but essentially a place to feel safe, valued and equal, as well as somewhere to meet new people and make new friends.

We have worked with the theme 'A place to be...' in several of our projects, and these workshops began by exploring the theme to generate ideas for creative work.

The artists encouraged the participants to think of places that made them feel good or that held a special significance for them. For some this was a landscape or seascape, and for others a place from a memory, or from their imagination.

This process led to the sharing of stories and memories, which not only helped to generate visual stimulus for artwork, but also to build relationships within the group. As conversations grew, the participants got to know one another, often discovering shared interests and experiences.

Over a period of several weeks the groups developed their ideas and explored a range of creative techniques guided by the artist.

Using a combination of printed and handmade papers, photographs, text, gold leaf, pressed leaves and other mixed media each person created their own collage, the layers of which held their personal story.

For many of the participants the experience of immersing themselves in the artwork and in their own story was quite a therapeutic process, and in some cases quite cathartic.



For one man who had lost his grandfather, the process of creating an artwork about their relationship helped him to deal with the pain of bereavement. He enjoyed sharing funny stories of their holidays in Blackpool, and of times that they spent together racing pigeons. The process of creating the artwork led him to look out family photographs from his childhood and opened up reminiscent conversations with his family.

Another man shared the story of his child who was born extremely prematurely, and the time they spent in hospital with her waiting for her to be well enough to go home. Using delicate materials he created a very sensitive artwork entitled 'Hope' which reflected his emotions surrounding the fragility of this time in his child's life.

He had come to the project initially as a support worker, not expecting to become involved, and commented on what an moving experience it had been.

Another man who attended the project had been the victim of an attack leaving him with a brain injury and memory loss. This once confident, sociable man had become reclusive, withdrawn and disengaged from family and community life.

His wife referred him to the project in the hope that he would benefit from it, and over the course of several weeks he gradually opened up. He began to tell stories about himself and his childhood, taking part in creative activities and building relationships with other group members.

For his creative project he chose to work on a story about a place close to his heart, where as a child he had lived on a farm. His face lit up when he told this story, and he described in great detail the landscape, the flowers and animals that were part of his childhood.

His wife also became involved with the group and together they immersed themselves in their artwork, both during workshops and at home. This was greatly significant as before attending the arts workshops they had not been engaging with each other at home. They both exhibited their artworks at the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival and brought their daughters to the exhibition to see their work.

On seeing his artwork he declared “I am an artist!” His daughter said she was very proud. She also posted a message to her friends saying “My dad is an artist!”







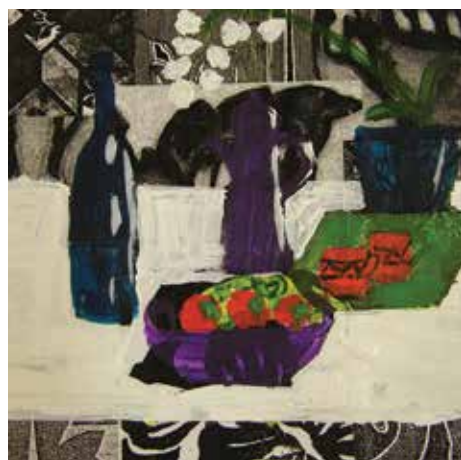
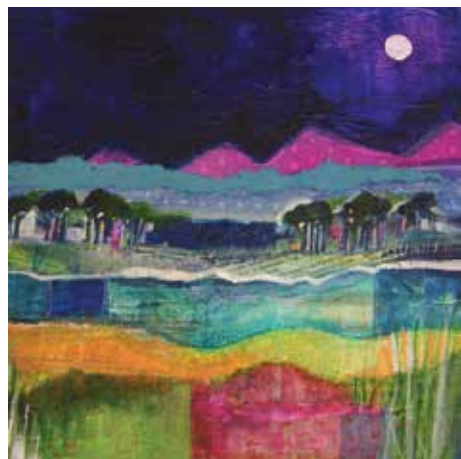
“I can’t believe what I’ve done, you know I’m not arty, I’ve never painted before. I’m really pleased with that, I didn’t think I could do it. I’ve really enjoyed today, It’s taken me away from all my worries - I haven’t thought about them. It’s made me feel good. ”

Bazooka Arts invited the Scottish artist Emma Davis to deliver a one off project in Coatbridge as part of their 'Mind, Body and Soul' programme for the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival 2012.

Emma delivered a very successful two day workshop sharing her working method. Her work is inspired by the colours of the Scottish landscape and she incorporates elements of collage into her paintings. She demonstrated to the group how to work with colour, pattern and texture to create their own artwork inspired by the theme 'A place to be...'



'Love Birds' - Emma S Davis, RSW



ceramics



There is something inherently peaceful about working with clay and slowly forming it into a beautiful object with your own fingers. The tactile nature of clay alone is quite therapeutic and it lends itself perfectly to the work that we do.

The ceramics project was delivered in partnership with Pather Artworks, which is a fantastic ceramics studio in Wishaw run by North Lanarkshire Council.

Bazooka Arts invited ceramicist Tracy Gorman to deliver the project as a summer school which ran morning and afternoon sessions. It allowed participants the option of attending a half day taster workshop to experience working with clay, or to commit to a full week for a more in-depth creative experience.

Over the course of the project a fantastic array of ceramic birds, bowls and vases were created, each with their own unique design. Some pieces incorporated inspirational words to promote positive thinking such as *inspire*, *dream* or *create*.

The techniques used in the workshops allowed participants to easily create beautiful pieces of work very quickly, offering instantly satisfying results. For those who wanted to explore the medium more fully, it was also possible for more in-depth, intricate work to be created.

The ceramics, once made, were displayed in The Art Stop pop-up shop (see page 162) which provided the participants with a venue in the heart of their community to exhibit as artists and to sell their artwork.

This project had a large number of referrals from services supporting people with complex disabilities and severe and enduring mental health problems. The informal, relaxed delivery of the workshop combined with the versatile nature of the clay made it possible for each person to work at their own pace, in the way that suited them best.

For several of the participants the project provided the enthusiasm and the confidence boost that they needed to start attending the regular community classes held in Pather Artworks. This was a very positive outcome for the project.

One participant had moved back to Scotland to care for her ill father. After he died she became quite depressed and reclusive. She no longer had a connection to the area that she was living in, she didn't know anyone or have any friends around. The project offered her a place to come to, to talk to other people and alleviate her loneliness. After the project ended, she continued to attend classes in the centre, making connections with more people and beginning to feel like part of the community.





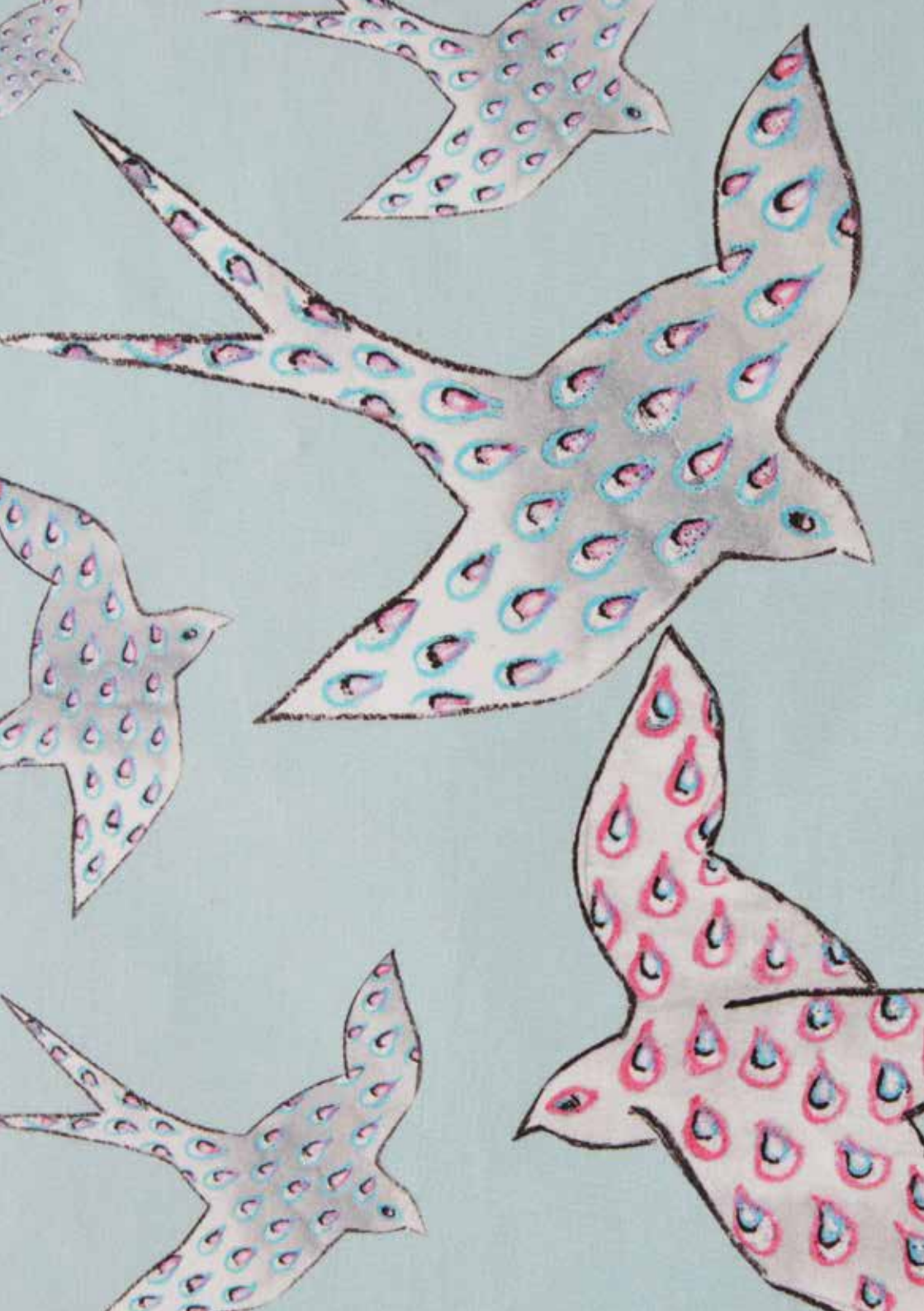
“ I loved taking part in the ceramics workshops. I feel really proud of what I made. It’s made me want to do more – I think I’ll join a class. ”





“ It’s exciting knowing my hands are making something. I can’t believe it. I thoroughly enjoy it, it takes me away from my mundane life. ”

textiles






Bazooka Arts have worked with artist Jenny Olley throughout the NL Connections project, delivering a wide range of textile based projects. The projects have been very popular and have explored the exciting possibilities that working with textiles can have to offer. There is a great sense of achievement to be found in creating something with your own hands that you can wear, admire or use in your everyday life.

“ I feel so proud when I wear my scarf. People ask where I got it and they can't believe it when I tell them that I designed it myself! It reminds me of a happy time when I wear it, it makes me feel good ”

The projects have included designing and making scarves, cushions, bags and accessories as well as patchwork panels. All of the projects began by working with a theme which not only inspired creative work but also encouraged positive thinking. Themes included favourite places, favourite things, dreams and memories.

The groups were guided through the whole design process, which began by experimenting with watercolours, pastels and pens to create a 'bank' of painted papers which conveyed a mood or emotion. The next stage was to work on individual projects which reflected the theme. Some chose to work with childhood memories, others with dreams, and some chose to work with things that make them feel good.





“I’ve been looking forward to this all week, I’ve been bursting to come! I’ve been thinking about it all the time. I’ve done some work at home. ”



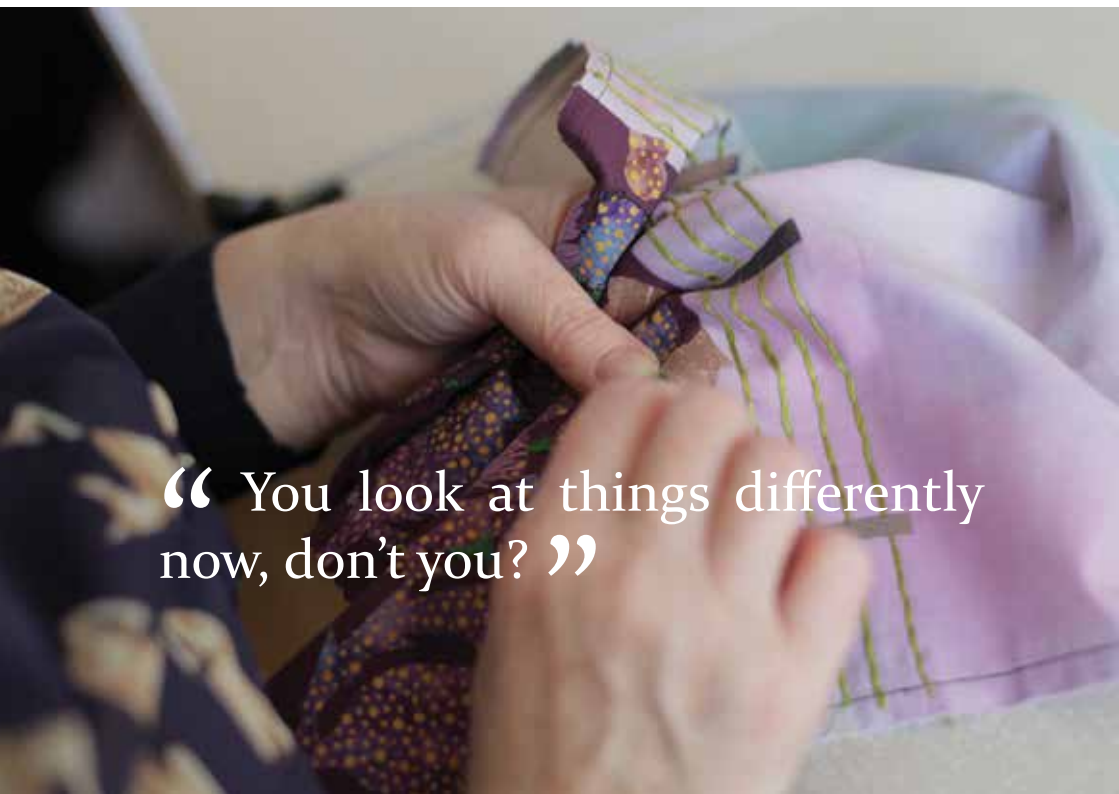
The paintings were collaged together to form unique designs which were then photographed and finally completed using digital imaging software. The finished designs were sent to Glasgow School of Art's Centre for Advanced Textiles where they were printed onto fabric using state of the art technology. For one project the designs were printed onto silk to make beautiful scarves, and for another they were printed onto cotton to make cushions. The group were quite overwhelmed when they saw their finished pieces. The pride in their smiles was evident!

There was always an air of tranquillity in the textile workshops, making them very relaxing to be in. Conversations flowed as people worked on their designs, and as the weeks passed friendships began to form. Some of the participants arranged to meet up to come to the group together, and some began to meet socially outside of the group.

The scarves and cushions that were made were exhibited at events during the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival (SMHAFF). This included exhibiting at the Well Factor in Motherwell and the Art Stop pop-up shop in Coatbridge where many of the cushions were sold.

Another textile design project 'Patchwork Dreams' was delivered as part of the "Mind, Body and Soul" arts programme during SMHAFF in 2012. The project was based on the theme of dreams. At these workshops, the participants explored quilting and applique techniques to create patchwork panels, quilts and cushions which were inspired by their dreams and passions.





“ You look at things differently now, don't you? ”



“ I went to textiles thinking I’ll never be able to do anything with that, but I’ve made two different wee things that I think are just absolutely gorgeous. I’m really pleased with myself, it has given me a bit more confidence in myself and I’ve thoroughly enjoyed it. ”

feltmaking





Within their series of textile workshops Bazooka Arts explored the traditional technique of feltmaking. This fascinating process uses just three simple natural materials: wool, water and soap. Raw dyed carded wool is massaged with water and soap between layers of net to change the structure. The fibres interweave to form felt fabric.

Several workshops were delivered within sheltered housing complexes, where the participants created beautiful felted pictures inspired by their favourite landscapes. The participants commented on how relaxing they found the experience of massaging the wool to make their felt.

In August 2011 felt artist Liz Brown was invited to work with the Cornerstone Art Group to create handmade felt accessories to exhibit in the Art Stop pop-up shop. During the workshop the group perfected the techniques and had fun exploring striking colour combinations. By the end of the sessions, they had produced a selection of beautiful felt flower brooches embellished with bead and wire work.

“ I thoroughly enjoyed it,
it was very therapeutic. ”

jewellery
and accessories





In August 2011 Bazooka Arts invited jewellery designers Wing Mun Devenney and Donna Lynn to deliver exciting workshops designing and making jewellery and hair fascinators.

There was a great sense of fun as participants explored the colourful array of beads, feathers, buttons and fabrics to create their own unique designs.

Over the course of the workshops, the group produced an impressive array of jewellery and accessories, which were very popular items in the Art Stop pop-up shop.



“ I loved it, I thought it was brilliant - there was a really lovely relaxing atmosphere, I was really amazed by how it turned out. ”



print
making





Printmaking techniques are often used in Bazooka Arts projects as it is such a versatile medium to work with. Prints can literally be made from any surface or object, creating endless possibilities. There is always an element of surprise, and some of the most unlikely objects can create the most interesting prints. It differs from other artforms as it allows the artist to create multiple images, which offers a sense of security, as all of your artistic endeavours don't rest upon one piece of work.

Scottish printmaker Gayle Robinson was invited to deliver a series of printmaking workshops during the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival. Gayle's work is inspired by her travels and in particular it celebrates her love of the Scottish landscape, often incorporating trees, fields and houses into her prints. Gayle specialises in collography, which involves creating printing plates using layers of recycled papers. The varying textures in the papers create very interesting prints when they are inked up.



'Winter Fields' - Gayle Robinson

The first stage of the project was delivered through workshops in The Art Stop, a disused shop in Coatbridge which Bazooka Arts temporarily transformed into an exciting creative arts venue. The participants worked with a selection of textured papers to create their own unique printmaking plate, each one incorporating an element of story or a memory which held personal significance.

For the second stage of the project Bazooka Arts arranged for the group to work in Glasgow Print Studio for a day to print their collographs.

This enabled the group to work within a professional arts environment, where many of Scotland's leading artists work today.

There was a buzz of excitement and creative energy in the print studio as the group got to work. They were amazed to see their paper plates transform into beautiful, professional looking prints. Several of the participants enquired about taking out membership with the Print Studio so that they could come again to continue printmaking.

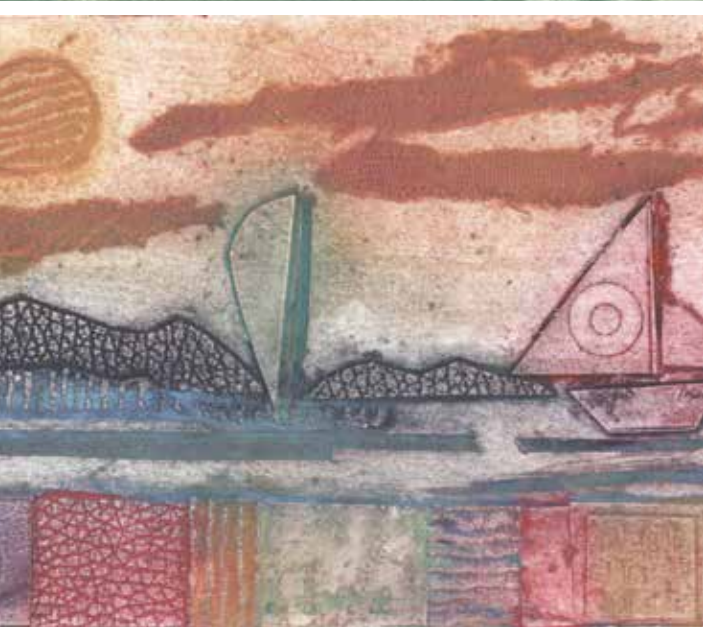
“ I feel very surprised that I was able to do something that was so skilful and it made me feel worthy of myself and that I could turn my hand to anything. ”





“ I felt fantastic as soon as I came to the workshop. It’s like a safe wee haven. ”

“ It was very relaxing, and a great chance to meet new people - everyone was very friendly. ”



screen printing



Artists Ciara Phillips & Michael Stumpf were invited by Bazooka Arts to deliver a two day screen printing project as part of the Art Stop summer programme 2011.

The workshops were inspired by the work of artist Corita Kent (1918-1986) who used a distinctive style of bold text and strong colours to create screen prints combined with messages of peace and love. Working with this bold graphic style in mind, the participants created striking contemporary poster designs using their own evocative words and symbols. Using a collaborative approach, the group worked together on each of the different pieces.

Bazooka Arts also incorporated screen printing into a one day event to create work for the Artstop. Textile Artist Jenny Olley worked with Bryony Murray to deliver an exciting workshop based on the theme 'A Few of My Favourite Things'. The participants created designs based on the things that make them feel good. The screen prints were created firstly by drawing out a design, which was then carefully cut out to create a stencil. The stencils were applied to silk screen frames and printing ink was pushed through the screen to print a design onto the fabric bags. The group had a great deal of fun in the workshop and managed to create a lovely colourful range of designs in one afternoon. There was a fantastic feeling in the workshop that day as they worked like bees in a hive printing bag after bag. By the end of the day the shop was full of colourful bags which hung like bunting on washing lines as the ink dried. The finished bags were sold when the Art Stop opened to the public.

“ I’ve enjoyed it so much - I’ve learnt new skills, it’s boosted my confidence. It’s been good generating new ideas. ”



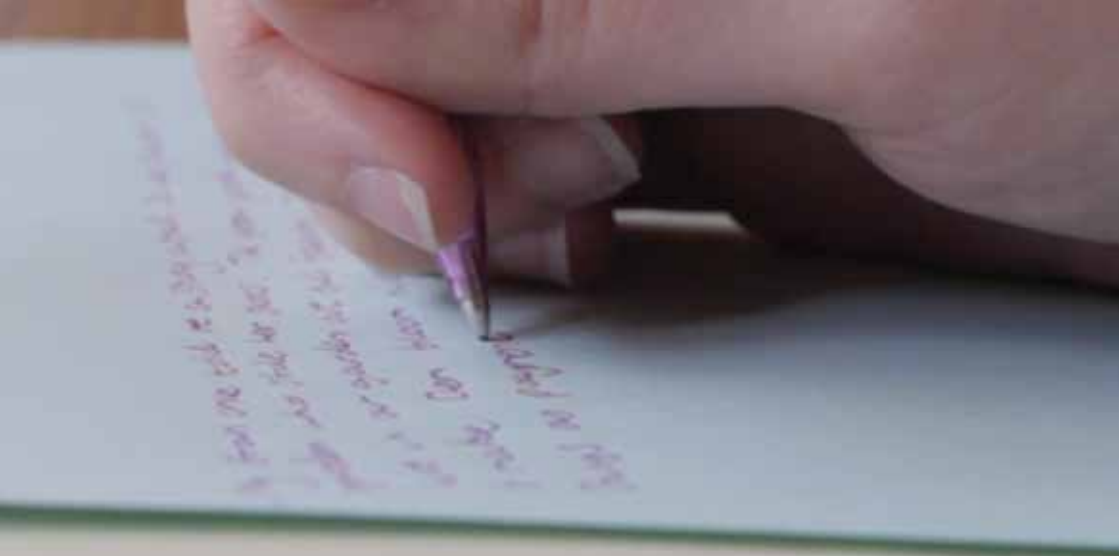


“ It would be great to have something like this to pop into when you need a wee pick me up. It boosts your self-confidence and gives you another avenue to express yourself in. I think everyone should have a go.”



creative writing

inspiring words



Handwritten text on lined paper, mostly illegible due to blurring. Some words like "I" and "the" are faintly visible.

Throughout the project, creative writing workshops have taken place in hospitals, sheltered housing complexes and community centres.

Participants have built friendships, shared stories, poems, dreams and real life dramas. There has been lots of laughter, some tears and many wise words to remember.

The workshops have been about expressing the ideas, stories and thoughts that are inside everyone, making their work original and unique.

We used objects, pictures and themes to inspire prose, poems, stories, letters, postcards and plays. If a person was more comfortable to speak their ideas aloud, we were happy to record them in written or audio form.

Please hear me
through my soundproof barrier
Please comfort me
when the rest of the world is cold and sharp
Please see my pain
although the masks try to cover it
Please listen to the words
behind my actions
Please help me to heal
despite the hopeless messages
Please don't throw me away just
because I'm broken.

Lindsay Loudon

“When I was invited to join the writers group I was quite apprehensive and a bit scared, but when I was asked to write, I put my mind to it, and I surprised myself at how you can do anything if you don't think too much into it. Before I knew it I was using my imagination, and liking what I was doing. I feel it has opened doors in my brain I never knew I had. I have also met some really nice people and made new friends.”

“I was surprised at the different ideas that came out, from a prop or a word. It was amazing, different words all creating different stories and some of them were so funny!”

“I thoroughly enjoyed taking part, it took me away from everything going on in my head. It has given me a bit more confidence in myself and it has definitely made a big difference to my mental health.”

What I wanted to be when I grew up

In short, I wanted to be everything under
the sun that wasn't me.

I knew deep down
that I couldn't possibly be everything
so I had to come up with a solution.

I would write.

I would write everything and anything.
It was the perfect solution to all of my problems
I could be whoever I wanted
and go wherever I pleased.

Madeeha Parveen

Believe in yourself and have the faith
to follow your dreams.

Don't put yourself down.
You don't know unless you try.
Have the courage to give it a go.

Gillian Dobbie

Postcard to myself

I am so relaxed, lying on my hammock.
The colour of the water is such a gorgeous
shade of turquoise, I cannot believe it is real.
The sky is amazing, and I feel I could lie here
for the rest of my life. Nature is so wonderful.

Elizabeth Cornelius

Letter from my 80 year old self

Go to Vegas!! Spend a fortune on the
roulette machines and remember to
use your pension money to do it!
Go hill walking and ski down the
Cairngorms in your pyjamas.
Make as much time to have afternoon
tea with your friends, make sure you
add a little whisky.
And keep fit, don't use the car, it'll be fun.
Paint, and sell your artwork on e bay!

Niran Al-Hilli

“ Initially when I heard about the class being held I thought it was some sort of fancy calligraphy, and I thought, I’ll never be able to do that. When I went along I discovered that it was something that everybody could do. ”

One of the creative writing projects centred around the theme of “Inspiring Women” for International Women’s Day 2012.

Participants were asked to think of women they would like to invite to dinner: they could be real or fictional, alive or dead, famous personalities or people that they knew. Some people invited family members; mothers and grandmothers that had died, and others invited guests including Wonder Woman, Jade Goody, and Annie Lennox.

Wonder Woman was a dream figure to me when I was younger. I wanted to be like her, I wanted to do the things she did. She was very glamorous, she could do anything and she helped everybody. If I was Wonder Woman for the day, I would change the world, there would be world peace; no hungry people, no wars, just a peaceful world.

Ann Reilly

Margaret Lochrie chose to invite suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst “your original women’s libber”.

Dear Emily,

Your inspiration has had a great effect on women today. Like you a lot of young women (not everyone) are not scared to speak out. We can voice our opinions and put them across very strongly. We have more working women than you could have imagined. Men now stay at home and look after kids, and do daily chores around the house. It’s a total turnaround from your days. In some ways your strong will and determination has worked.

Margaret

Madeeha Parveen invited her primary school teacher.

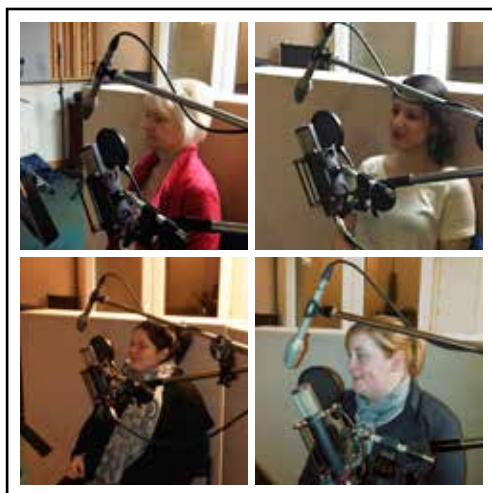
Dear Mrs Mitchell,

Of all the women I have known in my life so far, it is your lessons that have stayed with me and helped me remain true to myself. To this day the words you said to me on the day of my leaving party echo in my mind: "Don't ever let anyone tell you you're not good enough, because you will always be the best at being you". I want to thank you for having a faith in me I seldom have'.

Gratefully yours,

Madeeha

The project resulted in a recording being made of the group's writings which was played at an exhibition for International Women's Day 2012.



creating confidence

exploring issues and building
confidence through drama



As part of the NL Connections Project, Bazooka Arts developed a programme which used drama to help people build their confidence. It was delivered as a 6 week course and as a series of single workshops.

The first course was called 'Creating Confidence' and it attracted a high number of referrals from organisations supporting people with mental health problems and learning disabilities.

Participants were encouraged to identify the ways in which they wanted to become more confident. Games and exercises were used initially to help people lose their inhibitions as they played, relaxed and had fun. This also helped people build connections with others in the group, sharing information and stories about themselves. Everyone was encouraged to focus on their positive attributes and skills, and given the opportunity to identify what they perceived as their barriers to being more confident.

The group explored ways of using their bodies and voices to rehearse new ways of acting in real life situations. Each person recreated a scene from their own lives that contained a barrier to them becoming more confident.

Job interviews and finding work was a common issue: one man who attended the course was experienced in computing but was debilitated by nervousness at interviews. In the group he was able to practice interviews and watch other people offering different ways of approaching them. It was really important for him to share how he felt with others and hear that other people also felt nervous. Working it through together helped everyone try to find new ways of dealing with interview situations.

One woman attending the course had started voluntary work at a charity shop but her shyness was making it hard for her to chat to customers. The group helped her rehearse situations by playing the role of many different customers, and compiled a list of conversation starters for her.

Another woman was unable to go out on her own. She identified “dizziness, vertigo, anxiety, fear of open spaces, a lack of motivation and self-belief” as the obstacles to achieving her goal. She came to the group with a support worker, and used drama to practice doing things on her own, whilst being supported by the group. This helped her gradually become more independent in real life.

“ I’m doing much more on my own now. I’ve been able to get on the bus, which I haven’t done for a long time. ”

The supportive group environment provided peer support and an audience to practice in front of, as well as opportunities for participants to build friendships, and practice new ways of being with people.

Everyone left the course with goals for further improving their confidence, having started working towards them on the course. All of the participants reported feeling more confident at the end of the project. Strong friendships were formed - some people went on holiday together, one person joined a drama group and two people started going out with each other.

“I feel that the drama workshops have been good for my health ... it has increased my confidence and made me aware of my strengths, and I have a great sense of achievement from the whole experience. ”





“ I found I had strengths that I didn't realise I had - like speaking out without feeling shy, and I felt very confident. It has doubled my confidence and makes me feel better in myself. I've enjoyed meeting people, pulling the script together and having a laugh with everyone. ”

Confidence through Drama began as a taster workshop, delivered as part of the SMHAFF 'Mind, Body and Soul' programme in 2012.

During the initial workshop, group members performed scenes that explored situations in which they would like to be more confident, including a job interview, and being a patient in hospital. At the end of the workshop they talked about how useful they found it and about the potential to explore many issues through drama.

Bazooka Arts facilitated a further eight week drama programme to work with the group on creating a play. The workshops introduced more drama games and exercises, acting techniques, theatre styles, movement, singing and creative writing.

In one of the early workshops the group took the traditional story of Little Red Riding Hood and placed it in a modern day setting. The group improvised their initial scenes to camera; this was then transcribed into a script.

On a weekly basis the group chatted about their lives and their concerns; proposed changes to the benefit system were causing stress for most members of the group. They developed the play further to include these issues. As the play took shape, the group were encouraged to record their work as an audio play. In the workshops that followed they experimented with sound effects, radio drama technique and worked on their voices. One of the participants brought along a song he had written to include in the play.

Bazooka Arts invited two professional actors to perform in the play alongside the members of the group to fill roles and encourage the natural talent that was flourishing. They went into The Foundation Music Lab on the 11th of February 2013 and the play was recorded during that day. The whole project was also recorded on film to document the journey.



“ I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience, especially the recording studio. Now that’s something you don’t do everyday! I found the whole experience to be thrilling and fun. If I could sum it up in a word it would be **WONDERFUL!** ”



“Seeing Red”, Scene 4a: Gran’s House

Door opens, James enters

James: Good afternoon, I work for the government. Your door wasn’t locked so I let myself in.

Gran: What are you doing in my house?

James: Well I saw your granddaughter earlier and she seems to think you’re having trouble living independently.

Gran: Where is she? What have you done with her?

James: She’ll be along shortly. If I may return to my enquiries, how many bedrooms does your property have?

Gran: Can’t you see I’m lying on the floor? I fell!

James: That isn’t my concern at the present time. I want to explain the changes that are happening to the benefit system and how they will affect you.

Gran: I don’t believe you people! Have you not got a compassionate bone in your body? I’m lying on the floor!

James: Look, no need to worry about lying on the floor just now. Do you receive payment for home help?

Gran: What??!!

real life drama

'my life my dreams'



My Life, My Dreams was developed and delivered by Bazooka Arts, Leaf and The Advocacy Project, and involved adults supported by Motherwell Locality Support Services (Disability).

The purpose of this project was to enable participants to express their interests, hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future. Creative group work and drama workshops were used to explore how group members felt about their present lives and to help them identify what they would like to happen in the future.

A particular issue for group members in relation to their current lives was anxiety around their 'personal reviews'. These official meetings can be intimidating for people, as many professionals attend and talk about the person's life.

The drama workshops enabled the group to role play different review scenarios, practicing expressing themselves and taking on the role of parents, support workers, health and social workers. It helped the group to express their anxieties, to gain a greater understanding of the whole process, and to practice being assertive in expressing their own desires and opinions.

The workshops progressed to focus on the future, and as the group explored their dreams and aspirations, some common themes appeared. Most people wanted to get married or go on holiday, some people wanted to do both.

The group developed and rehearsed scenes that honoured their dreams; a church wedding, a reception, a honeymoon in Benidorm - one group member sang his favourite song at a club in Spain.

The scenes were filmed, along with documentary footage of the group talking about their lives, on location in Strathclyde Country Park in Motherwell on an amazing sunny day and in a wedding shop called Panache in Glasgow.

Through the course of this project, the participants enjoyed

the chance to explore their hopes and aspirations - and for one participant, a marriage proposal from her boyfriend brought her dreams closer to reality.

The film 'My Life, My Dreams', was shown at the Well Factor Showcase event at Motherwell Civic as part of the SMHAFF in October 2009.



“ My Life, My Dreams has been absolutely magnificent. It was so funny and exciting and I just love to have a laugh. ”

“ I love line dancing and crafts, getting my hair and my nails done. If I could do any job I'd be a model. ”

“ I'd love to get married, I'd get my hair done and make up, I'd wear a white dress, not too long or I'd trip. I might go to Benidorm on honeymoon....”





the

all stars

community

theatre company





“ I love acting. It’s what I do. ”

The All Stars are an all ability group that have evolved from a day centre drama group for adults with learning disabilities into a self-led, vibrant theatre company that regularly create and perform their own shows.

Bazooka Arts have worked with the All Stars throughout the NL Connections project, encouraging group members to undertake this transformation, to open the group to the wider community and make it about theatre, not ability. The project resources have given the group access to support from professional performers, training, and professional theatre venues, costumes and lighting. They have worked with drama specialists, actors, choreographers, writers, musicians and theatre technicians to create great quality shows.

The All Stars meet on a weekly basis to develop performance skills, create and rehearse shows and drink tea! When they work on shows, everyone is involved in devising, storyboarding and writing as well as designing costume, props and set. The creative process is dynamic and democratic, and benefits from the fabulous ideas that come from many minds. Drama specialists and actors from Bazooka Arts, support workers, and students work and perform as part of the group. The result is an entertaining ensemble that produces good quality popular theatre. The group have great bonds on and off stage and embrace every opportunity to entertain.

The All Stars have become a theatre community, a collection of people that come together to do what they love, and to enjoy the close friendships that have formed through working together.

Their aim has been to entertain, to make people laugh and to show the power that drama has to bring happiness to performers and audience members alike. They have also been a practical example of what people can do regardless of learning and physical disabilities, and through this have helped to challenge audience preconceptions.





“ There will be a dark sky tonight,
all the stars were on the stage.”





hollywood dreams

staging a play



The All Stars have collectively devised, written, developed and staged a number of plays since their inception, including *Country Star Cinderella*, *Dancing with Wolves*, and *Sleeping Beauty meets Snow White*. They have staged three full theatre productions during the NL Connections project, and have been a part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film festival since it began in 2007.

During the course of NL Connections, they have worked on several collaborative projects with a primary school, a youth drama group, Coatbridge College and with many other performers and artists in the Well Factor show case events.

Their latest production, *Hollywood Dreams*, was performed by the All Stars at the newly reopened Motherwell Civic Theatre on Tuesday 23rd of October 2012, to an audience of over 200 people. The play was created by developing a story around songs and characters that group members wanted to perform. The setting for the play was a retirement home for old actors, performers and impressionists.

In the play, *Hollywood Dreams* retirement home is run by failed actress Isa Green, who spends most of her time pretending to be the witch from *The Wizard of Oz*. Isa is determined to punish those who succeeded in show business by making the remainder of their lives miserable. When Isa takes a holiday Mrs Doubtfire replaces her and everything changes. With help from the residents, Mrs Doubtfire gathers information for the Care Commission to get Isa Green the sack. Residents of the home include Gene Kelly, Frida from *Abba*, Roger Taylor from *Queen*, Olivia Newton John, Mary Quant, Bette Davies, Elaine Paige and Barbara Dickson and a couple of James Bonds.

“Excellent comedy performance – the All Stars shone! And didn’t they enjoy themselves!!”



“ The show was an absolute blast, I had tears in my eyes with laughter. And the hard work that people put in was worth it, it exceeded expectations! ”



“ All Stars you have done it again made me laugh, cry and enjoy myself. You do what medicine should do – make you feel better. Bottle it and sell it! ”

“ I love it! I love it! A good laugh and good company! ”





“ I feel proud of myself, the show was really good. ”



shooting a movie

'the gangster and the showgirl'



This all singing, all dancing, gangster style, custard pie in the face comedy was inspired by an original story outline by All Stars member Marion Rae Caven.

Set in a fictional era of cake prohibition, the film action centres around gangsters Ma and Pa Baker, cake making hero Shortie Valentine, and their clandestine cake baking activities.

The Diet Police led by Captain Apple and his trusty assistant P.C. Plum try to bust the “cake wars”. At the centre of the battle is the Kitty Kat Cabaret Club, a front for illicit cake deals, full of singing and dancing girls who dream of making it big. They soon do, but not in the way they anticipate, as they are slowly consumed by illegal cake habits.

VOICE OVER (New York accent)

Self control had dropped like a lead balloon, and waist lines had ballooned like a...a... an even bigger balloony thing. Something had to be done; but how do you fight something you've never known before? So the city fathers sent out a call to where it all began Scotland. - and the Scottish responded in spades. They sent over an elite force of Diet Police to help the local cops, and so began 'The Pastry Prohibition'.....

The screen play was created by The All Stars through improvising scenes to camera, storyboarding, research into the 1920s and watching Bugsy Malone.

For filming the cast were joined by students and professional actors. The final script was written and directed by Charles Donnelly and was filmed and edited by Helena Ohman McCardle, with costumes, drama support and production by Bazooka Arts as part of the NL Connections project.

The Lanarkshire Recovery Network contributed most of the costs for filming and editing the film and Tunnock's gave us a small contribution, to keep us in tea cakes during the shoot!

The film premiered at The Vue Cinema in Hamilton in October 2010 as part of The Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival, with a behind the scenes documentary shown at the same time.

The film received fantastic feedback from the audience and has been screened many times since.

**“ I loved making the film,
it was so much fun.”**



“ The film was brilliant! ”



“ Excellent comedy performances ”

“ I couldn't stop laughing, it was so funny! ”



“ The All Stars shone! ”







“ I just can't wait to see it in the cinema! ”

“ Everyone’s different, everyone’s got their own personality, everyone is here to learn and gain experience. This group are so passionate and hardworking, and they want the best outcome. ”



inside story

the princess'
blankets





The *Inside Story* project took place over a four month period. It began with taster art and drama workshops based on the story ‘The Princess’ Blankets’ by poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy.

The aim of the project was to create a play and art work inspired by the story, and to present the work at Cumbernauld Theatre as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival in 2010.

More in-depth work followed the taster workshops, including a summer school at Palaceriggs Country Park, where participants used the natural environment in the outdoor spaces to help design and make the princess’s blankets, which in the story are created from the sea, the mountains, the forest and the earth. It also provided a peaceful environment to write and explore ideas for the play.

Participants created outdoor artwork inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy, and gathered natural materials to use in their designs for costumes and the blankets. They made miniature costumes, blankets and stage sets, and experimented with lighting effects. The story’s themes were explored, and the participants wrote monologues for their characters.

“ I feel stimulated, enlivened,
happy, warm and relaxed. ”





After the summer school, work on the play continued indoors, where the group improvised scenes which led to a final script. Professional actors then joined the cast and the show was rehearsed ready for performance.

Film artist Helena Ohman McCardle used the original artwork created by participants to make an animated film of the princess's blankets which was projected as part of the stage set.

One of the women involved in the project was a very talented visual artist. She had moved to Cumbernauld to be close to her family as she needed their support to help her manage her illness. She had previously attended an art project that she had loved, but on moving to Cumbernauld she had not found anything to replace it.

The Inside Story project provided an opportunity for her to get back to her artwork and to meet new people, and with other group members she went on to set up a permanent art group with the support of Cornerstone in Cumbernauld. They continue to meet for art sessions twice a week, and the new group has grown in size.

“ It’s amazing to think how far we’ve come. When we started we were terrified and didn’t think we could do anything. Look at us all now! We’ve exhibited our artwork and performed on stage - I never thought I could have done that. We’ve made good friends and are keeping it up (the artwork). It really is quite something, it’s made a real difference. ”

“ A princess lived once
who was always cold...”





the

well factor

connecting to the community

SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH ARTS & FILM FESTIVAL



The Well Factor was a large scale celebratory arts event which showcased the wealth of creative talent in Lanarkshire and demonstrated the role the arts can play in building positive mental health and wellbeing.

Bazooka Arts coordinated this popular event in partnership with the Lanarkshire Recovery Network in 2008 and again in 2009, as part of Lanarkshire's arts programme for the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival.

The events were held in Motherwell Concert Hall, the largest arts venue in North Lanarkshire. The first event took the form of a variety show with music, dance, drama and comedy performed by local groups and performers, hosted by comedian and TV personality Fred MacAulay. In 2009 the event, hosted by comedian Des Clarke, grew to include an arts market place filled with creative stalls, performers and live musicians. The on-stage performance had new and exciting acts including an acrobatic rope and trapeze act by young people working with professional aerial artists from Spinal Chord.

The NL Connections participants were central to the event which provided a platform to perform and exhibit their creative work to family, friends and the wider public. Importantly it offered the opportunity for the participants to be regarded as artists, performers, poets, dancers or musicians, and to identify themselves as such.

Connecting to the wider community has been an essential part of the NL Connections project. Sharing work through performing and exhibiting at public events has been of great benefit to the participants and to their audience. Positive feedback from audience, family members, and friends has helped participants see themselves in a new light, as people with genuine talent and creative ability. Presenting work in the community has also challenged stigma around mental health and disability and has helped place the focus on "gifts, capacities and strengths".

The Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival is the largest European festival celebrating the role of the arts in promoting positive mental health. The Well Factor was the largest event within the festival in Lanarkshire. Each event involved over 65 performers and over 70 artists exhibiting artwork. Both shows were filled to capacity, attracting audiences in excess of 450 people each night. The Festival became a main focus for the NL Connections project for showcasing work, as it connected the project to the national festival as well as the North Lanarkshire community.

Bazooka Arts have been an integral part of the Lanarkshire festival committee since it began in 2007. The partnership work of the committee and the dedication of all the people involved has ensured the success of the programme over the last 6 years and has created a strong arts-for-health network in Lanarkshire.



“ Thank you for the experience,
it was magical. ”











“ What a fantastic night - such warmth and great atmosphere. Well done to all concerned for all the hard work put into this. ”

the art stop

pop up shop





In July 2011 Bazooka Arts leased an empty shop unit in Coatbridge and transformed it into an exciting arts venue. We ran an extensive programme of arts workshops, inviting project participants to create artwork to exhibit and sell in a pop-up shop.

Contemporary artists and designers who specialised in printmaking, ceramics, jewellery and textile design delivered a exciting series of workshops. This led to a fantastic array of jewellery, posters, bags, cushions, accessories, cards and ceramics to exhibit in the shop. The space was transformed from its previously shabby, grey interior into a vibrant, contemporary, welcoming shop, gallery and studio.

After three months of preparation, The Art Stop pop-up shop was officially opened by MSP Elaine Smith to coincide with the SMHAFF in October 2011.

The Art Stop brought the NL Connections project to the high street, raising awareness of the project and the role the arts play in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. The project's visibility on the high street attracted people not formally in contact with mental health services, that were living stressful lives and needed to find something to do to keep them well. Throughout the duration of the festival Bazooka Arts ran a programme of taster arts workshops for new participants within The Art Stop.

For the project participants the shop provided a platform to exhibit their work and to be regarded as artists within their community. It also provided the opportunity for the wider community to engage with the arts, and to purchase artwork created by local people at affordable prices.

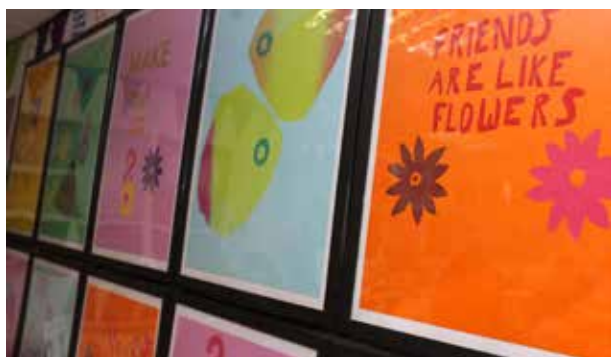
“ Every shop should look like this and the world would be a nicer place. ”

The Art Stop also offered the opportunity for customers to pick up mental health information and advice leaflets. The artists were thoughtful in their presentation of the shop to ensure that this information could be accessed if desired, but it was not imposed upon them. This subtle approach to providing mental health information was also apparent throughout the artwork on display.

The location of the shop and its welcoming shop front encouraged a high number of visitors. People were able to walk in and easily access information about the NL Connections project, and the stories of the participants who had made the works of art. This opened up many conversations about mental health and disability, and led to enquiries from people interested in joining the project or looking for mental health information and advice. The shop helped many people to connect to the project who would not otherwise have done so.

The Art Stop provided an accessible arts venue within the heart of the community which served as a hub for inclusive creative participation and arts sharing, ultimately contributing towards making a healthy, creative, vibrant community.

“That was a lovely moment when someone bought my vase; it stunned me that someone would spend money on something I had crafted.”









“One particular project that stands out in my mind was the Art Stop. It really impressed me how it was done, the branding was very open and unintimidating. For the people who had participated in the NL Connections project, selling their work helped them to see that what they had created was of significant value. I purchased a few things from the shop - one of those things was a plate that had been created by someone, and on that plate it said ‘Life is a Journey.’ That plate’s pride of place in my living room and it really hits home a great deal to me in terms of what the NL Connections project was all about. ”

Kevin O’Neill, Public Mental Health &
Wellbeing Development Manager,
NHS Lanarkshire

The arts projects delivered through the North Lanarkshire Connections project welcomed over 1300 participants, and over 40,000 people attended exhibitions and performances of their work.

The pages of this book illustrate the many art forms used and the themes that have been explored. Each part of the project has been unique in its delivery, but with the same fundamental aim: to improve the lives of the participants.

The North Lanarkshire Connections project has given Bazooka Arts the opportunity to work closely with many organisations in the arts, health and social care sectors in North Lanarkshire, working towards local and national strategies. The strength of this partnership approach has enabled us to work more effectively for the people we aim to help.

We have connected to major cultural organisations and national arts events, and the project artworks and events have contributed to Scotland's cultural landscape.

For everyone that participated, the project offered an experience of taking part in the arts. For some it reduced loneliness and isolation, and for others it has been a lifeline.

“ I definitely think there should be more opportunities to take part in arts projects like this. It gave me a lifeline - I don't know what would have happened if Bazooka Arts had not come into my life when they did. ”



Bazooka Arts would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the following;

The arts participants of the NL Connections Project, it has been a privilege to work with you all.

All of the artists who have worked with us delivering the project, especially Jenny Olley, Helena Ohman McCardle, Charles Donnelly, Beth Marshall and Tracy Gorman for all their hard work over the course of the last five years.

Our project partners, North Lanarkshire Council, Life Employment and Friends, and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire.

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Arts Administrators: Jane Dixon and Emma Green

To our family and friends who have helped and supported us, and everyone else who has worked with us along the way.

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For further information visit the Bazooka Arts website

www.bazookaarts.co.uk

The project film, radio drama and audio clips

are available online at

www.bazookaarts.co.uk/nlconnect

