



# Other Ways of Telling



## An Evaluation Report April 2013



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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# 1 A Summary

In 2012 St.Helens Council's Arts Service were awarded funding from Arts Council England to develop a Cultural Connections programme. This was a programme of work which explored how the arts can improve the lives of people who are accessing or who are at risk of needing to access Adult Social Care and Health Services. Part of this programme was a commission which explored how the performing arts can be used to explore mental health stigma and the positive effects of taking part in creative activities. This commission was called *Other Ways of Telling* was delivered by Collective Encounters a theatre company specialising in theatre for social change.

*Other Ways of Telling* aimed to:

use theatre to engage people at risk of accessing or currently accessing St.Helens Adult Social Care and Health services, and to platform and raise awareness of their experiences.

The seven-month project enabled 116 people to participate in outreach activity in mental health support settings, community settings and within St.Helens Central and Thatto Heath Libraries and a further 40 to take part in arts-based outreach activity. For 91% of these 40 participants it was their first experience of participating in the arts. The workshop programme culminated in a 45-minute performance entitled *Break Free*. This was devised and performed by 10 people who attended regular workshops and was directed by Collective Encounters' facilitator, Aidan Jolly. *Break Free* was performed at St.Helens Central Library on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013 and took the audience on a creative journey through the various stages of mental health.

*Other Ways of Telling* was recognised by Mental Health professionals as an interesting and innovative way of engaging people with mental health issues, and as a project that should be built upon. All stakeholders recognised that it containing several elements of good practice including:

- the partnership model
- the research and development process
- the ability of the project to engage those who never or rarely participate in the arts
- the ability of the project to respond to the needs of individuals
- the ability of the project to work directly with the Mental Health Service support team

St.Helens Council has now secured a small amount of funding to continue the project to December 2013. Collective Encounters is hoping to secure funding to extend and develop the arts provision for people with experience of the mental health system living in St.Helens and the surrounding area in the longer term.

This evaluation report has been drafted by Collective Encounters following feedback from all stakeholders.

*"If St.Helens played like that, like we did tonight, they'd be top of the league!"*

Feedback from participant performer following *Break Free* performance on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

## 2 Context

### Collective Encounters

Collective Encounters is a small professional arts organisation based in north Liverpool, specialising in using theatre as a tool for social change. Since 2005, we have employed a team of professional artists working with a variety of communities across the north end of the city, using drama as a tool to develop new skills, explore ideas and enable participants to use theatre to platform their ideas and concerns. Our participants have performed to local, national and international audiences, tackling issues such as NHS reform; poverty and inequality; human trafficking and the pensions crisis.

### St.Helens Council

St.Helens Council developed an internal partnership working arrangement between its Arts Service, Adult Social Care and Health Services; Library Services; and in 2012 they sought to develop a project that would:

- use new and innovative ways to engage adults accessing their Adult Social Care and Health Services and individuals at risk of needing to access their Adult Social Care and Health Services.
- offer people in St.Helens, who do not normally participate in the arts, the opportunity to participate in the arts
- use libraries as a hub for arts activity.



Alex, David and Wendy perform in *Break Free*, 15<sup>th</sup> March, St.Helens Central Library  
Photo: Pete Carr

### Rationale behind the work

The specific aims and objectives were discussed with St.Helens Arts Service, Collective Encounters' artists, and representatives for the Adult Social Care and Health Services, and the following was agreed. The aim of the project was to use theatre to engage people at risk of accessing or currently accessing St.Helens 'Adult Social Care and Health Services, and to platform and raise awareness of their experiences.

The **outcomes** were as follows -

1. For 80 people, accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens' Adult Social Care and Health Services, to participate in arts activity.
2. For the communication skills of at least 10 people, accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens' Adult Social Care and Health Services, to improve.
3. For the mental well being of at least 10 people, accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens' Adult Social Care and Health Services, to improve.
4. For at least 10 people, accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens' Adult Social Care and Health Services, to continue to be motivated to take part in arts activity once the project has drawn to a close.
5. For the experiences of these people, accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens' Adult Social Care and Health Services, to be platformed and for awareness to be raised.

This would be achieved through the following **outputs** -

- 20 x **outreach workshops** delivered in health and social care settings.
- 10 x **taster workshops** in a library setting.
- 25 x workshops for a **core group** to take place in a library setting.
- 80 x people accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens Adult Health and Social Care Services to **take part** in an outreach activity or an arts based taster workshop.
- 10 x people accessing or at risk of accessing St.Helens Adult Health and Social Care Services to attend the core group workshops on a **regular basis**.
- 1 x **performance**.

Working within the following **timescale** -

October	Agree evaluation model; undertake outreach workshops in mental health settings and taster workshops in library; gather material for production from workshops; regularly blog about the development of the project; identify additional artist; timetable rehearsals.
November	Continue to deliver outreach events and taster workshops; set up for regular provision in libraries; continue to develop digital content; make contact with local arts providers to offer shadowing/placement opportunities.
December	Evaluate success of outreach workshops; review meeting with arts service; start regular provision in library service; develop material for final performance with mental health service users attending regular provision.
January	Run regular provision in library with mental health service users; prepare and perform sharing for world mental health day; continue to develop digital content; continue to rehearse for final performance; final performance take place; evaluation session led by lead artist
February	Final evaluation report submitted to St Helens Council.

**Evaluation:** The project was delivered in line with Collective Encounters' Evaluation Policy and Quality Framework. The lead artist and Collective Encounters' Creative Producer led on agreeing the evaluation activities with all stakeholders as well as carrying out evaluation activities.



Photo: Pete Carr

Participant Steve and Aidan Jolly performing at *Break Free*, 15<sup>th</sup> March, St.Helens Central Library

*"I love the fact that I feel so comfortable in the group that I can be myself. It is helping to build my confidence".* Other Ways of Telling Participant

## 3 The Project

**Research and development phase:** In summer 2012 Collective Encounters recruited Aidan Jolly as the lead artist for the project. Aidan has 20 years performance experience and extensive experience of using theatre to engage people with mental health issues.

The research and development phase was extensive. Outreach workshops took place in 13 different Adult Health and Social Care settings including Together Group; Social Inclusion Network; Mind Ladies Group; World Mental Health; Hope Centre Choir; O'Connell Close Group; Mental Health Network Meetings; MIND Parish Hall Group; Photographic Minds; MIND Mens' Group and Saints Group; Thatto Heath Library and St.Helens Central Library. The aim of these initial creative interventions is three-fold: it is to generate participants for the second half of the project; to research, identify and/or generate material which can be used in the final performance; and to develop trusting relationships and build the confidence of people with mental health issues. In total 116 different people took part in the project; 40 people in arts based outreach activity; 10 people as part of the core group and the remaining through discussions in outreach settings.

Information about the project was also distributed to Making Space; Age UK; Stonham Housing; St.Helens Social Inclusion Team; MARK Day; Addaction; SHAP; Bi-Polar Self Help Group; Chrysalis Women's Group and the local general practitioners.

A project steering committee was established and the first meeting held in October. At this meeting it was established that the location and timing of the outreach and taster workshops was crucial, and that more lead in time and rehearsal time might be needed. The steering committee was made up of representatives from St Helens Arts Service; Adult Health and Social Care Teams; Library Service; Collective Encounters and participants of the project and five meetings were held from September – April.

**Developing the performance:** Once trusting relationships between the lead artists and the participants had been developed, the participants from the outreach sessions were invited to attend the regular workshops based at St.Helens Central Library. Between November 2012 and March 2013 twenty-one workshops were planned to take place with the core group. Unfortunately, two had to be cancelled due the bad weather (January 2013). At these regular workshops the subject matter for the final event was identified and artistic material developed. Creative work in progress was made available to participants and to the general public through the use of online platforms such as sound cloud. For those participants not wishing to take part in the final event, material they had contributed was incorporated into the final piece where permissions allowed.

On average, these sessions were attended by twelve participants. 91% of people who participated in Other Ways of Telling had never participated in an arts activity before. 60% of the participants were aged between 35-54 and 99% declared their heritage as white British. Only 5% of the participants identified themselves as disabled.

**The final event:** The final event was called *Break Free* and it took place at St.Helens Central Library on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The performance took the audience on a journey through the various stages of mental health. These stages were called, Breakdown, Breakout and Break Free. The audience experience began the minute they entered into the library setting. Audience members were given a mental health diagnosis by way of choosing from cocktail snacks, which were labeled with different diagnoses such as 'borderline personality disorder' and 'psychosis'. The set included a large screen, on which were projected images and words relating to mental health services and experiences.

The performers used the space in a promenade way, asking the audience to move into different areas of the library in order to watch the performance. The central protagonist in the play was, Mark the Herald Angel. This character was a representation of the different social workers and Adult Social Care and Health Service workers a person with mental health problems will meet along their journey.

The music, which was used throughout the performance, was contemporary compositions created and performed by the group with the support of professional musicians. 45 people attended the final performance. The performance was followed by a questions and answer session.





Audience at *Break Free*, 15<sup>th</sup> March, St.Helens Central Library

Photo: Pete Carr

## 4 Achieving its objectives and outcomes

**To use theatre to engage people at risk of or currently accessing St.Helens' Adult Social Care and Health Services:** within the research and development phase of this project Collective Encounters worked with over 116 people currently accessing or at risk of accessing the Adult Health and Social Care Services.

*"It's great to see people acting, singing and showing those of us who do have a mental illness should be understood, not shunned".*

**To offer an opportunity to those who do not participate in the arts to do so:** 91% of the participants in Other Ways of Telling had not participated in any arts activity prior to attending a workshop. One audience member said :

*"Great. It has inspired me to do drama myself".*

**To use theatre to platform and raise awareness of adult mental health issues:** the final performance of *Break Free* provided people with experience of the mental health service system, with an opportunity to tell their stories, and experiences and increase understanding and awareness of their position and plight. Audiences of the show said:

*"it gave a good insight into mental illness"*

All ten participants who performed in the final show -

- felt the drama process had been of a very high quality.
- reported a strong sense of ownership over the work.
- recognised they had increased in confidence and self-esteem by the end of the project.
- had a huge sense of achievement and reported the project far exceeded their expectations.
- felt the production would be extremely useful in educating people about mental health issues.
- would like to continue to participate in the arts.
- reported an improved sense of health and wellbeing.

During the evaluation the group also commented on the supportive atmosphere created and promoted by the individuals in the group, and how this had really helped give confidence at each and every step. When one of the participants attended the first session she felt she was far too nervous to sing. However during the final performance she performed a song she had specifically written for the piece. Another of the participants was very withdrawn at the beginning of the process but by the final performance had acquired terrific movement skills and also performed as a narrator.

*"Amazing performance, inspirational, brilliant, please perform it again!"*

Audience member of *Break Free* at the question and answer session, which followed the performance.

In the middle of the project, one of the participants was hospitalized and sectioned. When she explained to her specialist that one of the only things keeping her going was participating in the arts she was allowed to continue to attend. Taking a taxi from the hospital to the library for each workshop and taking part in the final performance.

After the final performance, and during the post-show evaluation session, all of the participants articulated that they very much wanted the drama provision to continue and hoped either St.Helens Council or Collective Encounters would help them take their agenda forward.

*"It was one of those where you go home really knowing what you are doing is making a difference to people's lives".*

Cath Shea, Arts Development Manager, St.Helens Council

There was a tremendously positive response from the audience watching the performance of *Break Free* in March. The audience was made up of local people; people involved in Adult Social Care and Health Services provision; the project stakeholders; people with experience of Adult Health and Social Care and those with an

interest in the arts. One audience member found the performance particularly moving and broke into tears when relating the issues to her own experience.

*"I really connected with the performance. I felt a whole lot of different emotions as I suffer from mental health issues myself. I now feel there is light at the end of the tunnel"*

The partnership with the library had gone particularly well. The library staff very much enjoyed and welcomed the arts provision being based within that setting and started to develop individual relationships with group members. A number of library staff attended the final performance.

*"It was as good as any of the professional performances we have had in the library".*

Kathryn Boothroyd, Libraries Development Manager, St.Helens Council

## 4 Conclusion

### Recommendations and next steps

- The group are very keen to find ways in which the weekly drama provision can continue and ways in which they can revive the *Break Free* production and also start to develop new productions.
- Following a full evaluation session with the group and all stakeholders, a project continuation is to be jointly drawn up and negotiated between Collective Encounters and St.Helens Council.

#### **A Cry for Help**

Anxiety, isolation, a helpless tear

Crisis, passion, panic, fear

There must be someone there to hear

This cry for help, this cry for help

Attacked from within, my mind inside

The fear I feel I cannot hide

Is no one there to be my guide

To help me here, to help me here

Comfort, love and to belong

These are the things for which I long

These are the things to make me

strong

The need is there, the need is there

I must breakout from this dark despair

I must find someone, someone there

Someone to hear my silent prayer

And help me here, and help me here

**D E Goldsmith      01 May 2013**

## 4 Acknowledgements

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**The artistic team:** Aidan Jolly, Simon Murray, Jack Oxtan.

**For Collective Encounters:** Annette Burghes, Abi Horsfield, Amanda Redvers Rower, Anna Rymer, Sarah Thornton

This evaluation is written by Collective Encounters drawing on evaluations conducted with participants, audiences, stakeholders and staff.