Birmingham Centre for Arts Therapies

supporting Arts in Health in libraries

www.bcat.info
This report evaluates the current work undertaken jointly between Birmingham Centre for Arts Therapies (BCAT) and several Birmingham libraries.

BCAT are a registered charity that has been providing support for adults and children with mental and physical disabilities; and supporting community arts in health for the last 25 years.

The report is an evaluation of work carried out with 13 libraries.

**Background**

BCAT has developed a partnership with several Birmingham Libraries in some capacity since April 2016. The community partnership began by BCAT providing a handful of arts based workshops to a couple of libraries for free. This was made possible by community fundraising.

Since April 2017 we have:

- provided ad hoc arts based workshops when required
- delivered an arts programme each year supporting the Summer Reading Challenge
- delivered BCAT’s in-house community groups - BCAT STARZ for 4-12 years and STEP ON for adults

This work has remained largely unfunded and remained free for the local community. This has been made possible by:

- BCAT’s community fundraising
- Birmingham libraries paying for sessions when grants or spare money has been obtained
- The Hilden Charitable Fund kindly funding the Summer Reading Challenge 2018
Purpose

With the increased awareness of isolation and loneliness in adults and the elderly and the fall in literacy within younger people, this partnership aims to tackle social issues right in the heart of the community by introducing creative arts workshops. The workshops are a mere activity that exists to bring people together in a safe, comfortable and friendly environment rather than teaching to be better at a certain art, or promote the arts, although skills are gained. Workshops are there primarily to help improve mental health and well-being.

The partnership is successful because:

- libraries are a trusted resource in our communities
- libraries create a safe community space where people feel relaxed
- libraries are a place where people know and a pinnacle focus point
- libraries are the new community centres that have remained in situ whilst many community centres have closed, but they also have their own financial and funding pressures
- libraries have access to other local services that can create wider networks of support for local people
- libraries have the resources to combat loneliness, isolation and cohesion but are restricted to what they are able to deliver because of funding
- BCAT has 25 years of experience of working with communities in an arts capacity, working with all levels of mental and physical health
- BCAT can offer an array of arts based workshops around art, dance, drama, music and play disciplines
- BCAT utilises volunteers as part of a Volunteer Development Programme that offers shadowing and eventual paid sessions in order to develop careers
- BCAT’s outreach arts in health work takes the benefits of engagement to the community rather than expecting communities to travel outside of their postcode
- BCAT and Birmingham Libraries have an existing community partnership that is strong and compliments each others services and goals
- BCAT and Birmingham Libraries have trialled many variations of workshops since April 2016 and have gathered evidence to support our work together.

Overall the partnership has created a win win for all parties because:

- libraries are able to increase their offer to their local communities by creating an array of social benefits. Importantly they are bringing people through the doors to access a number of other local services and groups
- BCAT is achieving its own charitable outcomes in delivering community arts in health and well-being programmes and creating development opportunities for volunteers careers
- local people have the benefit of free local arts workshops thus finding out about new hobbies, developing skills, improving their friendship networks, reducing isolation and developing cohesion in our communities
What has been achieved?

**LIBRARIES ENGAGED**
Druids Heath, Weoley Castle, Kings Norton, Kings Heath, Northfield, Frankly, Small Heath, Sutton Coldfield (through Folio Community Group), Kingstanding (through Witton Lodge Community Association), Perry Common (through Witton Lodge Community Association)

**NO OF SESSIONS - April 2017 to 27 September 2018:** 76

**NO OF ENGAGEMENTS - April 2017 to 27 September 2018:** 910

**ADHOC SESSIONS**
One off sessions consisted of providing anything from BFG dream making bottles, glass painting, Christmas sing a long to providing games sessions for families.

**FILM CLUB**
A week long film club was delivered at Northfield library which was very successful. This was the only session that a £5 charge was made. Throughout the week 20 children attended. They were able to learn about film skills and produce 3 short films which were created from conception to production.

**STEP ON**
STEP ON has run at Northfield, Kings Norton and Frankley libraries and has been equally successful, attracting 242 engagements since April 2017. The arts clubs are centred around a lunch where everyone has a hand in making lunch, alongside engaging in an arts activity. Beneficiaries have been on a virtual jewellery cruise - creating jewellery from around the world, created memory freezes, enjoyed games, poetry, clay making, weaving and joined a choir as part of the activities. Sessions last for 5 week blocks.

**BCAT STARZ**
BCAT STARZ welcomes children of all abilities and cultural backgrounds who come together to have fun, make new friends and enjoy and learn about arts activities based around books and literacy. Alice in Wonderland and Roald Dahl books are just two of the arts projects we have delivered over the 5 week blocks.

**SUMMER READING CHALLENGE**
Three month long arts projects have been delivered around the August Summer Reading Challenge since 2016. The project assists young people to look at books in a creative way using art, dance, drama, music and games to explore stories and encourage them to read. The 2018 Challenge was the busiest yet with 42 sessions ran in 31 days with 585 engagements (kindly funded by the Hilden Trust).
Beneficiaries

No adult or child is turned away from sessions and if issues are identified they are consulted about possible arts therapies intervention. Workshops accept people of all mental health and physical ability that allows barriers to be broken down and creates diversity in every group. This helps create a more cohesive community. We have had beneficiaries with no issues to those with schizophrenia, depression, isolation, wheelchair users, alcoholism, Autism, ADHD and anxiety etc.

We believe because of BCAT being an arts therapies charity, workshops are likely to attract people with issues who are looking for help, who are not receiving any outside intervention.

AGE RANGE:
3 to 86

ETHNIC DIVERSITY:
African British
Pakistani/ African
Kurdish/ British
Chinese/ Vietnamese
Indian/ Turkish
Romanian/ Jamaican
Asian/ Syrian/ Irish
Black British/ Mixed
Ethnicity/ French
**What local people want**

The following feedback is a summary of requests and sample comments from adults and children.

**Would you like libraries to do more free activities?**

114 people said yes

**What would you like to do?**

- More STEP ON sessions
- Arts and Crafts
- Quizzes
- Music and singing
- Games
- Book club
- Exercise
- Drama
- Poetry
- Talks
- History of area
- Language club
- Clay and Modelling
- More family activities
- Story-time
- Comedy
- Gymnastics
- Jewellery making
- Dancing
- Film club
- Computer chip making
- Flower arranging
- Knitting/sewing
- Egyptian Writing
- Aromatherapy
- Dads and children
- More of these sessions

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**Evaluation**

All sessions are evaluated and an attempt is made to obtain feedback forms from every participant. However, this is not always possible due to many different circumstances. It also needs to be noted that due to the nature of beneficiaries and cultural sensitivities this does add to the difficulty in collecting evaluative feedback. Evaluation figures should be viewed as a guide only.

BCAT’s evaluation methods were changed at the end of 2017 to make it easier to collate information. An ‘All About M&E’ booklet is completed for workshops over 5 weeks, single forms are used for ad hoc sessions, and comment notes are collected to support feedback.

**NO OF FEEDBACK FORMS - April 2017 to 27 September 2018**

226

46% indicated a one step increase in their well-being between the start and end of workshops

17% indicated a two step increase in their well-being between the start and end of workshops

1% indicated a three step increase in their well-being between the start and end of workshops

36% indicated a maintained positive state of well-being between the start and end of workshops

This indicates that 100% of participants maintained positive mental health or increased their heath and well-being having attended a BCAT and Birmingham Library workshop.

44 indicated a good to excellent session based on the old evaluation system.
Feedback

‘Activities like this help isolated people help build communities...so many Day Centres have closed there is nowhere to go where you are understood’

‘achieved the activity with style’

‘great welcome, smashing time’

‘Council to stop closing libraries down’

‘I enjoyed the interaction with people and learning new skills, great’

‘more craft during holidays, story time, rhyme time for younger children’

‘What an amazing 5 weeks...feel like I have gained some confidence’

‘It was very touching to hear people’s stories from their lives. I was moved’

‘I am still enjoying sitting and listening to the chatter around me’

‘I love this group. I can be ‘me’ just relax into it. Nothing expected other than to be myself’

‘...the activity got me thinking about making craft pieces to sell commercially at a local market’

‘I have familiarised myself with the local area, made friendships and pushed myself to try new things. My mood has slightly improved as a result’.

‘It was really challenging...but it was a good challenge, as I’d never try to do it otherwise.’

‘I surprised myself with what I achieved. Thank you.’

‘I’ve learnt a lot about myself’

‘It encourages families and develops an expressionist character in children. It is fab therapy for all members of the family’.

‘My son and I both had a lovely session. A focussed/relaxed activity during a long summer holiday was very welcome’

‘As a family we would LOVE more creative opportunities locally and centrally...we really recognise the benefit for our children’
Looking Forward

BCAT and Birmingham libraries will be delivering the following over the next 6-12 months:

- 3 x 5 week workshops (BCAT STARZ) for young people between January and July in the following libraries: Northfield, South Yardley, Ward End, Handsworth, Sutton Coldfield, as part of BCAT’s Supporting English as an Additional Language project to encourage recently arrived immigrant children to increase their network and communication within their communities
- a 5 week BCAT STARZ project at Kings Norton library ends Nov 2018
- a 5 week STEP ON arts lunch club in Northfield library starting in January
- an arts programme based around the Summer Reading Challenge in August 2019
- BCAT will be working with the following libraries in the future as part of our commitment to deliver community arts in heath sessions in deprived communities: Erdington (through Witton Lodge Community Association) Glebe Farm (through Welcome Change Partnership), Smethwick. This brings the total number of libraries engaged to 13.

What is required?

With the recent announcement by central government regarding the increase use of Social Prescribing as an alternative to medical intervention, BCAT and the mentioned Birmingham libraries believe we are in a strong position to deliver the required services for local people to be referred on to - the reasons are stated within this report. But of course, funding this work is an issue.

There is a great desire from all parties to tackle the increasing issues of loneliness and isolation amongst adults and improve the literacy and creative ability in young people. A recent application to the Lottery’s Building Connections fund has been rejected, so we are looking for alternative funding to be able to deliver this important work that will strengthen our libraries and communities.

We value our partnership, and it is now a case of convincing funders to support this necessary community work.
Our offices are located near the city centre
2 minutes walk from Joseph Chamberlain College
1 minute from Highgate Fire Station
On the 50 bus route - Moseley Road stop
Limited parking available

find us on Facebook and Twitter
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