

YSBRYDOLI. GALLUOGI. CREU.

RADIATE ARTS CIC

INSPIRE. ENABLE. CREATE.



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From top left: True Colours' stone carving, True Colours' pottery throwing in Stoke, Creating Connections' creative journaling, Creative Health programme with University of Chester nursing students – journal and clay, Sculpture workshop from recycled materials at Llanelli Links with veterans, True Colours' Pride Banner sewing, True Colours' coil pot making, True Colours' messenger bag sewing, Creative Health programme with University of Chester nursing students – masks and emotions.

Section 1: Introduction

Who are we?

Radiate Arts CIC is an inclusive, not for profit social enterprise working with local community groups, schools, libraries, charities, and wider organisations.

We facilitate creative workshops and experiences that promote positivity, connection, and wellbeing throughout local communities in Chester and Mid-Wales.

As well as hosting workshops for the wider community, we also deliver social prescribing workshops as part of our ongoing projects.

Providing creative experiences has enabled us to support LGBTQ+ groups, Armed Forces Veterans, families who are victims of domestic abuse, women experiencing perinatal depression, people in recover from addiction, older people who are isolated, and young people who are managing their anxiety and depression.

Our goals are driven by the people that we support however, with all our projects, we are also creating exciting opportunities for local organisations, volunteers, and creative individuals who contribute their talents to benefit our communities.

We also relish opportunities to partner with likeminded groups, sharing our successes and supporting mutual goals through collaboration - maximising our offerings and therefore providing our audience with exceptional workshops which inspire/encourage creativity and reduce isolation.

Our vision

We create an environment for marginalised groups to lead and participate in projects which foster artistic, visual, and non-verbal forms of expression. Our vision is to:

Harness the power of artistic expression

Every day, together within our community groups, we will all use our joint capabilities, our inspiration, and our experiences to harness the power of artistic expression.

Realise the benefit of arts into our lives

We will deliver projects with those who would not usually experience art as part of their everyday life, providing a much-needed resource to realise the benefit of the arts into our lives.

Promote personal awareness, self-worth, and mindfulness

Our projects will promote personal awareness, self-worth, and mindfulness, enabling individuals to interact in a positive manner and create a cohesive sense of achievement, experiences of well-being and belonging.

We will make a positive difference in society

We will make a positive difference in society, we collaborate with a wide range of groups within our communities, we promote inclusion, and celebrate diversity.

Expression of creativity is a basic human right

We see the expression of art as a basic human right, and our imaginations are what defines and drives human society.

Helping Others Through Our Experiences

We work with a broad range of people. For our participants to get the best possible outcome from their creative experiences with us, our projects are hosted by professionals, peers and volunteers with lived experience directly related to the groups we are working with.

As the managing director, I have recovered from domestic abuse and the effects of alcohol addiction on the whole family. I have a 16-year-old daughter who is autistic and a 19-year-old son who is transgender. The other directors are also living in recovery of addiction amongst family members and other challenges around mental health. This is the core driving force behind our ethos and from my own experience, I understand how the practice of being creative and being completely 'in the moment' goes a long way to restoring a balance with the state of our mental health. We have the determination to succeed in providing tailored opportunities for creativity as a practical way to improve mental health.

Involving mentors and workshop leaders or volunteers with lived experience is key to an improved sense of hope, empowerment, and social inclusion for those accessing our creative workshops. It is this connection that benefits interpersonal relationships and contributes to a sense of positive culture and belonging - trusting someone who has overcome similar experiences can provide a living example of hope to those currently facing challenges.

What we do

Creative workshops are co-designed to foster collaboration and friendship, in aid of reducing isolation and loneliness, improve people's health and mental well-being, include residents and communities at its heart and strengthen learning skills. It is an inclusive solution to improve local relationships and enable people to participate in community events.

Through our collaborative workshops, Radiate Arts provide a scaffold for these crossovers to develop a path of progression as the project is taken over and evolves in the hands of supported communities, empowering individuals to add value and direction to their project and beyond.

We are currently working with women who are victims of domestic abuse, women who are experiencing perinatal depression, Armed Forces veterans who are living with PTSD, addicts on their journey to recovery, LGBTQ+ groups, older people who are isolated, neurodiverse groups and young people who are managing their anxiety.

Radiate Arts offers guidance and support to empower these groups in our community with quality creative experiences that have lasting positive results, without our help, our beneficiaries would be dependent upon a support structure that is based around primary care with no opportunity for personal input and expression.

How we do this

We primarily work via referrals either from NHS social prescribing pathways or from charities and organisations who are working directly with our participants as peer mentors or facilitators. We empower community groups to lead their projects with the guidance of experienced artists.

Radiate Arts is committed to the facilitation and delivery of long-term artistic and practical workshops for those who would not usually experience art as part of their daily lives. We provide the framework for relief and reform in people's lives. Our projects are structured to nurture positive self-worth, mindfulness, and positive mental health, building resilience to develop skills for long-term positive change.

Where we do this

The communities we serve are not defined just by a geographical area, they are specific groups of people who have come together with a common need or interest. They are faces and language, they are the people, the conversations, the support, the creativity.

Our base in Chester city centre supports the surrounding areas of Cheshire, and our connections in Wales offer outreach support through rural Mid- and North-Wales. Both have a different, but very strong sense of community. Both have identities that are more than just location, they are connections that hold principles and values brought together by the people who have joined together to form invisible bonds. With our community-led projects and events, Radiate Arts endeavour to strengthen these bonds, encourage growth, inclusivity, forward-looking, and expansion.

Experience

We have experience of facilitating and delivering inclusive projects working with a diverse range of groups within society. We have worked with older people, homeless families, victims of domestic abuse, LGBTQ+, neuro-diverse and-typical people, young carers, children, armed forces veterans, communities where there is evidence of isolation, and local authorities to celebrate the arts.

Our projects have worked with women who are victims of domestic abuse, women who are experiencing perinatal depression, armed forces veterans who live with PTSD, people who are recovering from addictions, older people living with dementias, children and young people including young carers and supporting schools with curriculum-based creative activities.

We have worked closely with libraries and county councils in 6 boroughs within Wales and England. We work closely with our established community partnerships, learning and sharing together to deliver the best possible outcomes for participants, developing a robust referral process that delivers individual, ongoing support.

Through the West Cheshire Mental Health Alliance, we are part of a network of like-minded groups, all connected through organisations and charities that strives to serve our community together through collaborations and best practice.

The expression of art is a basic human right, and our imaginations are what defines and drives human society. We enable the expression of art, mindfulness workshops, digital technology to support the arts sector.

Co-production

Whatever group we work with, creative projects are based on continual consultation and collaboration, addressing challenges positively and adapting to changes. Radiate Arts and our freelance creatives offer help to support idea development, articulate thoughts, and issues, facilitating group and individual social interaction and expression.

Target Outcomes

- Reducing isolation and loneliness, connecting people in society
- Developing personal and group skills so people can thrive, not just survive
- Overcoming social and economic barriers to creative expression and group identities
- Nurturing acceptance and inclusion amongst people with protected characteristics who feel marginalised or live with fear
- Developing individual and group resilience, giving people the opportunity to build their own toolkit that will better help them deal with the stressors of the modern world



Our Offer

Preventative Service for Positive Mental Health

Radiate Arts CIC specialises in delivering co-developed creative workshops and experiences to people living with mental health problems, to create positive change in lives.

Our community workshops are targeted towards people experiencing mental health problems and isolation. We primarily work via referrals either from NHS social prescribing pathways or from charities and organisations who are working directly with our participants as peer mentors or facilitators.

Working with the University of Chester, Radiate Arts offers supported work placement to students who are in their final year Art Therapy MA course. This means members of our community can get quick access to group or 1-2-1 Art Therapy sessions when they need it.

We also deliver in-person module support in Creative Health to first year nursing students.

Building Creative Thinking into Every Child's Life

With creative experts, we support and guide student-led projects within schools and community groups for children and young people. We **ask** them questions about what issues they are experiencing. We **listen** to what they say. We **act** to help them move forward their ideas with guidance and support. We involve children and young people in each part of the decision-making process. We want them to feel valued and listened to, building their own personal voice for the future.

As an Artsmark Partner, we also offer support for teachers to build confidence in artistic expression, linking this within their schools' priorities, whether it's reaching out into the wider community, empowerment with progression of skills, quality outcomes for teachers and students, overcoming barriers to positive mental health within schools, developing an informed identity with respect and empathy for the world beyond their classroom.

Section 2

Our People

We currently have 3 directors who have a background in working with Visual Arts, NHS Healthcare and Business Development. We have 1 full-time and 3 part-time staff members, plus specialised freelance artists, creatives, and practitioners who are employed for specific projects.

Pam Bellingham Managing Director

Pam is a degree educated Artist with over 25 years extensive practical experience in many mediums, including her primary passion of stone carving. Pam has extensive experience in management of business in the context of the art sector, including human resources, training, recruitment, and networking.

Pam's focus is to engage with groups, listening to their needs, collaborating to develop creative artistic ideas, and help them to participate in our projects which foster artistic, visual, and non-verbal forms of expression.

Ian Bellingham Business Director

Ian is a degree educated Civil Engineer with over 27 years extensive practical engineering, project management and business development experience with multi-million-pound infrastructure related projects.

Ian's focus is to utilise his extensive skills and experience with Radiate Arts to promote activities which help those in society outside the mechanism of corporate for-profit enterprises.

Julie Davidson Director

Julie's experience comes from within the NHS, responsible for management of Ultra-Sound delivery teams.

Julie's focus is to deliver projects for those who would not usually experience art as part of their everyday life, providing a much-needed resource to integrate the benefit of the arts into our lives.

Section 3

Our projects 2023-2024

Chester

- TRUE COLOURS – creativity and wellbeing within our LGBTQ+ community
- VISIBLE VOICES – creativity and wellbeing with pan-disabled people
- CREATING CONNECTIONS - creativity and wellbeing for women
- Art Therapy
- Social Prescribing
- Artsmark provider in schools

Wales

- CREATIVE FREEDOM – sculpture workshops with veterans
- STORIES OF THE SEVERN – creative heritage



Section 4

Evaluation and Learning

We develop a simple Theory of Change for our project which describes:

- the issue we are trying to address
- where the evidence comes from that supports this
- what the purpose of the project is
- how our lived experience can help participants
- the goal we are trying to achieve
- the activities we will undertake
- the outputs and outcomes that are required
- the progress indicators that we use to stay on target
- the target resultant impact we are trying to achieve
- how we will capture data on long term participant benefits

We use a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF) throughout the project to measure progress against indicators and outputs. Objective and subjective measures are evaluated. The steps in development of the MEF are:

- Finalise Theory of Change ready for use as a MEF planning tool
- Describe Outputs (Extract from ToC) and indicators
- Describe Outcomes (Extract from ToC)
- Agree indicators for Soft Outcomes
- Develop Impact statements
- Process Monitoring
- Data Collection Method
- Finalised Monitoring & Evaluation Framework Plan
- Measure, Monitor, Report and Evaluate
- Learn, feedback, adapt and continuously improve what we are doing
- Publish and celebrate our achievements
- Share learning and best practice
- Regular updates and consultation within our community groups

We will provide Return on Social Value metrics.

We will continually improve our approach to ensure we meet our targets.

Section 5

Our Organisation Plans

High-quality cultural activities where creatives and community groups will connect, give, share & flourish. We will explore and celebrate the expression of creativity as a basic human right, our imaginations are what defines and drives human society.

We are developing collaborative relationships in both Cheshire and Mid/North-Wales centred around connecting communities. We will take an active part in networking and a collaborative approach that will enable communities to thrive.

We target projects to develop, design and deliver creative activities with local community groups and collaborative stakeholders.

We will explore the programme themes:

Exploring our communities lived experience, challenging traditions, develop innovative ways to shape our future.

Taking responsibility for the impact we have on our planet, through empowering our communities to develop climate change solutions.

Training and developing young volunteers, creative volunteers, and beneficiaries we will then engage in projects at a wider local and regional level, building up to the large celebration events which will embrace technology and lighting.

In Cheshire we are working closely with Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire West Voluntary Action, Chester Pride, University of Chester and other community organisations.

In Mid-Wales we are working closely with Adferiad, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, and Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust and other community organisations.

Core Organisation Resources

Radiate Arts have successfully secured funding from 25 different funders over 7 years, delivered powerful projects, evolved our delivery through lessons learned and continuous improvement.

Up to this point it has been possible by self-delivery of all workflows within the organisation, directly by our Managing Director, Lead Artist and volunteers. Radiate Arts has evolved through targeted growth, taking action to realise our vision, and it is realistic to target further growth as there is a real need for projects which deliver social, welfare and community support.

Radiate Arts is at a point where we cannot realise further growth to help more people in our communities or maintain sustainable delivery of projects without increasing our core resources. Our funding applications need to fully recover our overhead, generally our costs in funding proposals do not permit this.

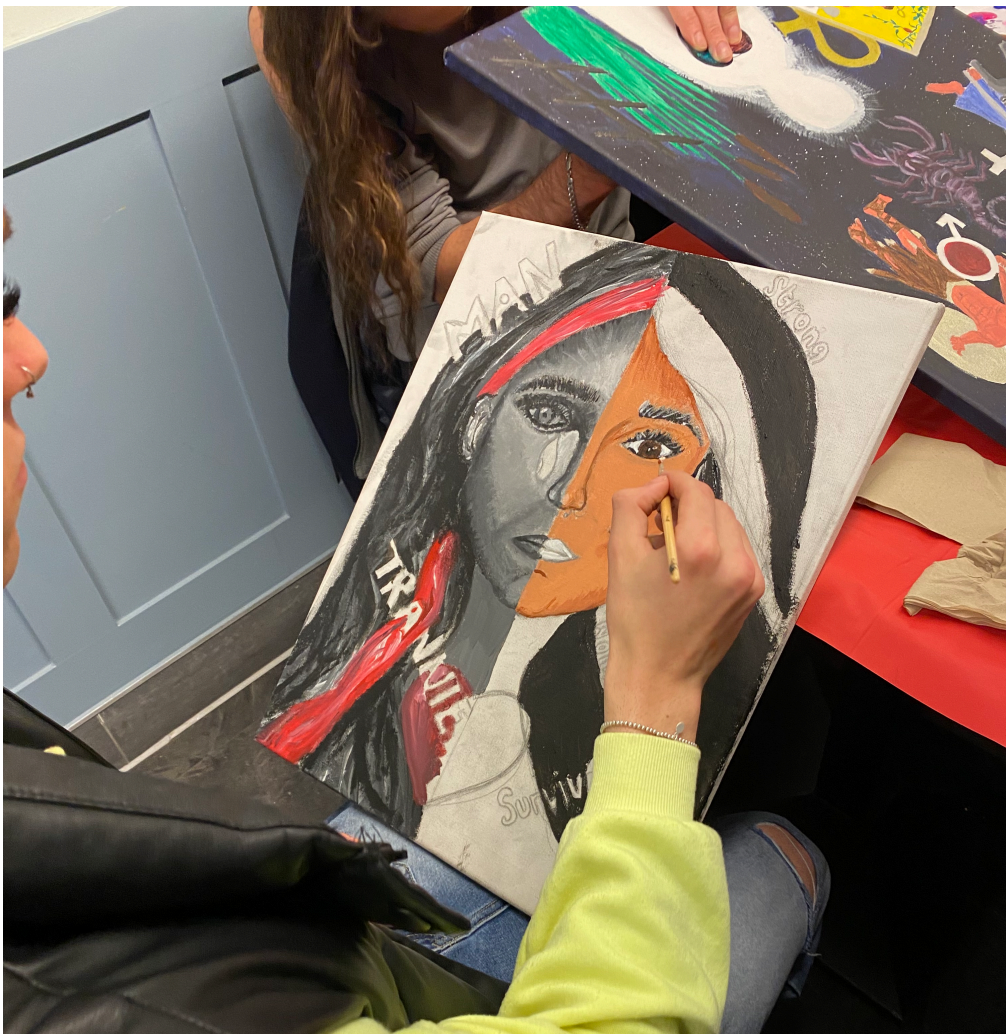
The organisation needs core resources to solely focus direction, development, and management to drive the vision forward. It is unsustainable to carry out these core activities, self-deliver the projects, and meet personal financial needs from multiple sources outside Radiate Arts to cover the troughs in delivery.

We have reached a point where a step change in approach is required to meet the current growth of the organisation and safeguard a sustainable approach moving forward.

Radiate Arts critical management objective is to secure grant funding to support the core cost of running the organisation, including salaries and day-to-day running cost. At this time, a time of transition, covering core costs would allow Radiate Arts to embed sustainable growth within the organisation.

We have recently moved our creative base to:

Radiate Arts Hub,
10 Nicholas Street,
Chester,
CH1 2NX.



Section 6

Governance

Introduction

Radiate Arts operates under policies and a business management system, which is approved by the Board of Directors, stating the requirements for legal and best practice operations and activities within the business.

Make up of Radiate Arts Board

Radiate Arts CIC is a company limited by guarantee governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 28th September 2017, latest review dated 2nd December 2019.

The Board of the organisation is made up of 5 company directors which follow the governance requirements defined in the Articles of Association of Radiate Arts CIC 10986315.

Subject to the Articles, the Directors are responsible for the management of the Company's business, for which purpose they may exercise all the powers of the Company.

The Directors have appointed the Managing Director to be the chair of the Board of Directors.

Frequency of Meetings

The Board hold a quarterly meeting to govern the operation of all aspects of the business which must be quorate for proposals raised as part of the agenda to be voted on.

Financial Management

The Managing Director is responsible for the day-to-day financial management of the organisation. The Board authorises the Managing Director to hire and supervise staff and independent consultants, pay bills, receive funds, and maintain bank accounts.

The Managing Director is authorised to sign checks up to £3,000. Checks for amounts greater than £3,000 require authorisation by two members of the board.

Sub-Groups

As part of the agenda for each meeting the Board are presented with tender/funding proposals for proposed projects which require their approval. Part of their determination may sanction the request for creation of a Project Steering Group (PSG) which act as a sub-group of

the Board. The Board will determine a Limit of Authority of the PSG and one member of the Board will be represented on a governing Project Leadership Team (PLT).

The PLT will be represented by members of all agreed key Project Stakeholders as set out in a Project Agreement, which may include collaborative third-party partners. The PLT will meet once a month to review progress and key issues stated by the PSG and adjudicate on any matters which cannot be resolved within the Project Team.

The Board may create Special Projects specifically to undertake activities to support the wider business and these will be governed by the requirements of the organisation.

Areas of Delegation

Subject to the Articles, the Directors may delegate any of the powers which are conferred on them under the Articles or the implementation of their decisions or day to day management of the affairs of the Company. If the Directors so specify, any such delegation of this power may authorise further delegation of the Directors' powers by any person to whom they are delegated.

Member Representation

The only official members defined within the articles of the organisation are the Directors.

However, at a project level we form Project Steering Groups.



CASE STUDY: True Colours Pilot, July 2022 – March 2023

Rowan Jane

My Experience as Project Co-Ordinator for True Colours Creative Workshops

As Project Co-Ordinator for True Colours, I was tasked with helping to organise the workshops, creating content plans for each session, and being there as Lead Artist to deliver the activities at each session.

I wanted to effectively fulfil the goals of the True Colours workshops, which are to enable LGBTQ+ individuals in West Cheshire the opportunity to express themselves creatively and to encourage positive mental health and wellbeing. I personally find the accessibility of art to be extremely important for all people. Allowing participants to access a variety of different art practices has been essential in sparking and rekindling participants interest in visual arts. The workshops have also been an avenue for the creation of a regular safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals of a variety of ages and lived experiences, allowing them to momentarily step back from potentially stressful daily life.

The True Colours workshops have allowed participants to engage in activities such as collage, sculpture, pottery, and mixed media portraiture. As lead artist, I have used my personal knowledge and connections with other artists working with Radiate Arts in our workshops – Eight Art Therapy and The Art Bus Chester – to guide participants through the activities in each session.

In planning sessions, I have drawn attention to famous and historical artists who are also LGBTQ+, such as Claude Cahun and Keith Haring. I found this helped participants not only to learn about LGBTQ+ art history but also to develop ideas about how they can express LGBTQ+ issues through art.

I have found my role as Lead Artist to be very personally rewarding. It has helped me to consider my role as a young LGBTQ+ artist in the local community. Within the group, I have learned from the enthusiastic conversations that participants engage in each session and have had the opportunity to meet local LGBTQ+ individuals that I never thought I would be friends with.



"I never thought I'd be a creative type of person. It's great to meet people who have lots of talent to share. Who knows? I may be creative after all!"

Quote from a member of our
 Rainbow Tearooms
 Tuesday evening group



**Cheshire West
 and Chester**



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Radiate Arts CIC is a not-for-profit company. We are committed to bringing art to communities that might not be able to otherwise access it. The proceeds from our workshops and our own funding initiatives enable us to provide free and subsidised workshops. Here is an example of someone who has benefited:

True Colours - Sewing Workshops 2023

Radiate Arts is a community interest company that aims to bring about positive change in people's lives through providing creative activities in social spaces to promote better mental health, wellbeing, and foster community connections.

This project has provided free sewing workshops for LGBTQ+ individuals in Chester at our premises on Nicholas Street. The aim of these workshops is to create a space for LGBTQ+ people living in and around Chester so they can gather, be creative and make social connections to help minimise loneliness and promote wellbeing through creativity. The workshops aim to provide participants with new or developed skills and greater confidence in their abilities and self. Also, it aims to provide a space to be creative and provide a relief from the stresses of daily life.

Using sewing machines made available through funding from The Cheshire Community Foundation and sewing tuition funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, we aim to produce a quilt made and led by contributions and ideas from the participants of the workshops. This will be exhibited at Chester Pride 2024 as a celebration of the achievements of participants with the opportunity for them to march with it during the parade.

Prior to our workshops, access to free tuition and equipment for LGBTQ+ individuals in Chester were unavailable or not aimed directly at this community. By providing a space solely for this group, the project aims to facilitate a growing visibility of the community to minimise loneliness and feelings of ostracization in Chester as well as promoting self-expression and personal identity.



"As an older gay man, I can often feel like I'm growing invisible in the community. So, attending classes like this and being able to talk to other gay people really means a lot to me."

Quote from a member of our True Colours Sewing Group



CHESHIRE
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION



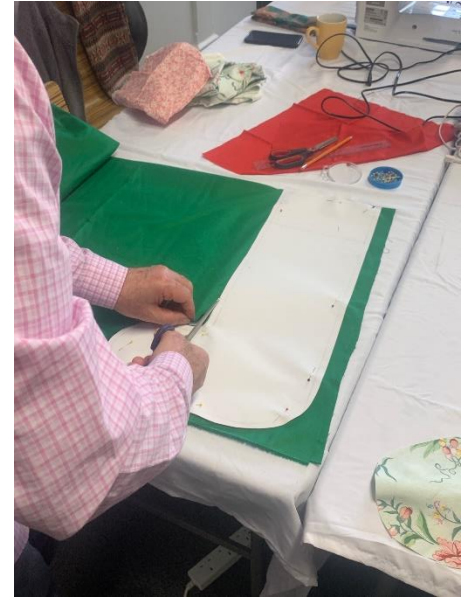
Cheshire West
and Chester



Over the course of the sessions provided from October until December, we have provided 10 sewing workshops, equaling 30 hours of sessions. These have been attended by a wide scope of the community, with a wide range of experience and age. We have also had 2 volunteers help with the running of the sessions.

During this time, we have provided tuition and materials for participants to learn or develop a few sewing skills, these have included:

- Learning how to use a sewing machine; how to fill a bobbin and thread the machine.
- Create a variety of bags, with a focus on individual style.
- Provided personalised tuition on altering garments with the aim of promoting gender affirmation through clothing.
- Created personalised cushion covers celebrating LGBTQ+ pride.
- Provided assistance and skills in developing and completing personal sewing projects.
- Explored personal relationships to ideas of pride in LGBTQ+ identity and how these can be translated into quilt blocks to be displayed and celebrated at Chester Pride.



"I learn a lot at these sessions, it's really nice to be able to meet new people and be inspired by all the creativity."

Quote from a volunteer of our True Colours Sewing Group

Through providing this space and these skills, participants have been able to freely explore and develop their personal tastes and identity in a safe and social space, regularly meet members of the community, and discuss LGBTQ+ issues and history. So far, these sessions have had an accumulative total of 37 participants, with 12 individuals attending and a core group of regular attendees making use of the sessions.





Veterans' Sculpture Workshops – Links, Llanelli – Winter 2023

Radiate Arts offer creative outdoor activities to veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress, providing them with the opportunity to learn new artistic skills, to develop self-worth, and relax amongst their peers in a safe environment.

Following a networking day with Veteran Support Organisations, we were asked by Links, Llanelli (Mid-Wales) to deliver a series of veteran-led creative workshops. With funding from the Veterans Foundation, our Sculpture Workshops helped bring creativity and community to Veterans, giving an opportunity to learn new skills and make new connections in a community setting as we create a collaborative sculpture led by artist and veteran Joe Wilson. Our project helped to promote and develop self-confidence and self-esteem by providing a space to chat and relax with peers whilst learning and developing new creative practices in a safe and supportive environment.

At the end of the 10 weeks, participants produced a sculpture with support from Joe, and enjoyed the space and time to relax and bond over mutual experiences.

As a former Royal Marine, Joe knows the value of teamwork and bonding within the veteran community: "Having fun, making things that are good quality is important because this is about people showing what they make to their friends and family and being proud of it. The mindfulness benefits of art are wrapped in the bringing of people together, in a project which takes your attention enough to stop you thinking too much, but also has enough in it to occupy yourself."

The sculpture will be on display in the local Tesco store to help raise awareness of the veterans' club and raise funds for future events at Links.



"The art class sang me 'Good bye, Farewell' from the sound of music. I left the lads really excited about their input in finishing it off. It was so good to see them bashing around ideas - A real success"
- Joe Wilson on leaving the constructed sculpture for the group to paint.



"On behalf of everyone at Links, I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to Radiate Arts for providing a 10-week creative workshop with Joe Wilson. Joe's skill, experience and professionalism were evident for everyone to see. The warm encouragement offered gave our veterans the confidence to create such a wonderful sculpture of a slinger. It really was from their hearts. It was great to see our veterans working together to make such immense weekly progress. We are looking forward to showcasing the finished sculpture in the community. Hopefully we can look forward to working with Joe again on another exciting project in the future."





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Veterans' Art Therapy

In addition to our creative workshops and residential retreats, Radiate Arts delivered 1-2-1 online art therapy with an internal referral process within the V4P partnership.

We provided an online presentation of the service to V4P partners with opportunity for Q&As throughout.

A 48-year-old, male client was referred to the service via a member of TGP Cymru. The client's referral documented that he was suffering from PTSD, from childhood trauma and being bullied out of his position in the Army. The client struggles with negative, intrusive thoughts and suicidal ideations.

1-2-1 Sessions were held online, and art equipment was provided and posted out to the client. After 13 sessions the client agreed that he had been able to understand his emotions better and he had gained skills to improve his mental health. Possible ADHD and/or autistic behaviours were recognised in the session and the client was supported by Radiate Arts to complete a neurodivergent pre-assessment form to access a formal assessment via his GP.

During the time of therapy, the client has also been referred to the adult mental health team via the support of TGP Cymru and he requested to access the veterans residential facilitated through Radiate Arts.

This client expressed feeling safe and secure during art therapy sessions, and this was acknowledged as an important aspect of his therapy.

He is continuing to receive free 1-2-1 art therapy sessions with Radiate Arts.



"It's been nice to talk to someone and be able to be myself. I have discovered things about myself in art therapy I've struggled with my whole life."

"I was able to talk about the real me and being listened to without any judgment."

- Veteran Art Therapy client.



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Veterans' Stone Carving Workshops – Cheshire – Spring 2023

Radiate Arts offer creative outdoor activities to veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress, providing them with the opportunity to learn new artistic skills, to develop self-worth, and relax amongst their peers in a safe environment.

Funded by the Veterans Foundation and Anne, Duchess of Westminster Foundation, our Stone Carving workshops took place in April, May and September amid the beautiful and serene Mount Pleasant Gardens and Sculpture Trail in Kelsall, Cheshire. Veterans came together to learn how to sculpt soft Maltese Limestone with local artist and sculptor Andrew Worthington.

After discussing sculpting ideas and a demonstration on tools and sculpting techniques, the veterans enthusiastically started chipping away at their block of stone. Covered in dust, the veterans began openly discussing their military experiences and subsequent mental trauma. The workshops became in essence therapeutic sessions, giving them an opportunity to clear the air and reminisce about their time in service. When not chiselling away, the veterans took the time to explore the lavish gardens, taking in the colourful sights, floral scents, and natural sounds.

The process of sculpting the stone does require focus and at times delicacy. Overzealousness and heavy handedness did lead to a change in design on a few occasions. Thankfully, with Andrew's guidance and artistic eye, all veterans completed the workshops proud of their limestone masterpiece.

Hosting the Stone Carving workshops at the Mount Pleasant Gardens was an overwhelmingly positive sensory experience and the veterans left Kelsall with a huge smile and a sense of achievement.

We celebrated the veterans' creativity with a month-long display of the stone carvings at Ellesmere Port Library in August 2023. There is a fortnightly veteran's drop-in here that is open to all veterans.



*"It's a very different creative project compared to other activities on offer".
-Veteran who attended the workshop in April 23*



"It is nice to focus on the task and forget about life's troubles." -Veteran who attended the workshop in May 23



Arts and Mental health – What About Men? Radiate Arts' creative work with Veterans

Radiate Arts CIC is a social enterprise that specialises in delivering creative workshops and experiences to people living with mental health problems, to create positive change in lives. Established in Chester in April 2017, we have now expanded our services across the Northwest. In 2020 we established Clywedog Creative Hub in Powys, Mid Wales. We are currently a partner organisation in a collaboration of Armed Forces veteran support organisations in Wales, funded by The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme.

Our part in this programme delivers creative and outdoor activities to veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress, isolation, and poor mental health, providing them with the opportunity to learn new artistic skills, to develop self-worth, and relax amongst their peers in a safe environment. Involving peer mentors, workshop leaders and volunteers with lived experience is key to an improved sense of hope, empowerment, and social inclusion for those accessing our creative workshops. It is this connection that benefits interpersonal relationships and contributes to a sense of positive culture and belonging - trusting someone who has overcome similar experiences can provide a living example of hope to those currently facing challenges.

Joe Wilson, formerly a Royal Marine, has attended our creative workshops and retreats for 4 years. In that time, he has achieved a distinction at Aberystwyth Art College and a first-class BA(Hons) degree in ceramics at Carmarthen School of Art. Joe is now a sculptural ceramicist and visual artist, leading creative workshops for veterans with Radiate Arts. I have spoken to Joe regarding his journey with Radiate Arts, and felt it was appropriate to write this from Joe's own perspective:

"I first came to Radiate Arts through a veterans' charity called Change Step about four years ago when I joined a photography and hill walking course. The effect of that one meeting was quite incredible. First, I managed to mix with other veterans in a safe environment and secondly it was great to get out for a walk as well, a proper walk with like-minded people. Walking or any kind of activity like that is a really good way of opening up so you tend to talk, and you tend to enjoy each other's company."



Photography and Hillwalking Residential, Radiate Arts, Mid-Wales.

*I said,
 Dark and silence,
 worrying but sad,
 One big system,
 that said we are all crazy.
 Aggression, guilt, sadness,
 self-harming cry for help.
 Loosing purpose in life,
 all because the system let
 you down.
 Once a soldier always a
 veteran,
 Once a number always a
 number.
 Take some medication,
 that's what the doctor
 prescribed.
 I said aggression, guilt,
 sadness, for what?
 All the words I said,
 I meant mental health in
 veterans.*

*Poem by BR, veterans
 creative workshop
 participant*



Arts and Mental health – What About Men?

Radiate Arts' creative work with Veterans

Joe recently attended our residential as a representative of Radiate Arts, sharing his experience with newcomers.

"It's so lovely when people finish a residential, and they don't want it to finish, if that makes sense. I can remember when I first came along if anything was more than one night or two nights it would be too much for me because it felt almost like an entrapment. So, I wouldn't have volunteered for it if it wasn't for Change Step. This first step can never be underestimated because it means travelling, it means meeting new people, being in different venues and situations, under pressure at times with deadlines. I was becoming more confident, and this is life changing. And now I'm coming in as a helper with Radiate Arts, not only am I passionate about veterans but I think I get where they're coming from and it's a very fine balance between being supportive but also giving space."

"Now I'm delivering a sculpture course which has been co-designed and led by the veterans who are taking part. Having fun, making things that are good quality is important because this is about people showing what they make to their friends and family and being proud of it. I'm going to be using all my skills that I've built up over the years so we can produce something that everybody will find quite interesting and rewarding."

"It's about the safe environment. I don't necessarily want to go into Tesco's and talk to somebody about my military career and I don't particularly want to go in there and talk about things that are personal, so if you're in a safe environment, i.e. with other veterans, male or female, and you trust each other, these things can be very constructive, where you kind of 'get' each other. So, once you've got over the initial guarded responses and when people start to realise that you're all in the same boat, it's the time then to open up. Of course, we are all reactive to our surroundings and the beauty of things which should be accentuated by veterans because to some degree if you've seen some horrible things, the beautiful things will stand out even brighter."

"The mindfulness benefits of art are wrapped in the bringing of people together, in a project which takes your attention enough to stop you thinking too much, but also has enough in it to occupy yourself. With the stone carvings workshops that Radiate Arts delivers, it's absolutely brilliant the effect that stone carving has on everyone, it's just very important how that works for positive mental health. It works mindfully, which a lot of art does. Once you taste it, once you look at your sculpture, once you start sketching and realise that your sketches are quite similar to your sculpture, then you see the process of making art, and you think about how you can formulate your work and how it becomes applicable."

Radiate Arts are continuing to deliver mindful and supportive creative experiences for Veterans in Cheshire and Wales. You can read more about Joe and our creative workshops at <https://www.radiatearts.co.uk>.

