Creative Connections Programme

Evaluation Report October 2024

HAMPSHIRE CULTURAL TRUST

BEAR FACE THEATRE

Ministry of Justice

Evaluation Report Contents

1. Background

Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) was established as a charity in 2014, running museums, galleries and arts centres with the core purpose of 'changing lives through culture'.

BearFace Theatre (BFT) is a Community Interest Company, delivering tailor made arts programmes which aim to lift the voices of those who feel unheard and foster self-exploration and growth.

HMP Winchester is a small Victorian men's prison and young offender institution that serves the courts in south and central England. Most people there are unsentenced and spend only a few months at the prison. BFT, supported by HCT, have delivered an applied theatre programme at HMP Winchester since 2018.

The theatre programme uses creative exercises to forge togetherness, question narratives, and develop content, which is then shared with the wider prison community, to challenge perceptions and encourage debate. An external evaluation of the theatre programme is being conducted by a researcher in conjunction with the HMPPS National Research Committee.

2. Creative Connections Overview

Hampshire Cultural Trust and BearFace Theatre secured additional funding from the Ministry of Justice to develop and deliver Creative Connections at HMP Winchester. The programme was a pilot of creative taster workshops run by guest artists supported by BFT.

The purpose of the workshops was to:

- Foster creativity and positivity
- Provide participants with a sense of hope and belief in their own abilities and future
- Develop teamwork and communication skills
- Enhance wellbeing and encourage self-expression
- Promote an inclusive learning culture within the prison

The hope was that participants would progress on to BFT's applied theatre programme having had a taster of working creatively.

From an organisational perspective, Creative Connections was a trial of bringing artists into the prison environment, to test procedures and explore potential for future 'through the gate' programmes which pick up with ex-prisoners in the community.

3. Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of the programme was conducted in-house by Hampshire Cultural Trust's Monitoring and Impact manager and drew on the experience of the applied theatre programme researcher. The purpose of the evaluation was to:

- identify what worked or did not work within the pilot for the stakeholders: participants, prison, artists and delivery partners,
- measure and communicate the value of creative work in the prison
- inform the development of future programming

The following logic model was developed to represent how the programme would produce its outcomes. BearFace Theatre aim to build a supportive, inclusive environment for officers, artists and participants alike to facilitate both creative and personal development.

Creative Connections – Logic Model

Rationale: art taster workshops delivered in HMP Winchester will promote positivity and creativity in prisoners

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Recruitment of artists • briefing and training • development of risk assessments • inventory of equipment • development of session plans • creation of promotional posters Recruitment of participants, 10-12 for each workshop. Targeted at 18-25 yr olds and neurodivergent prisoners. Six 3 hour taster workshops including intro and final reflection: • learning through creativity • differentiated learning • building rapport and trust	Inclusive learning culture. Positive group dynamic. Participants acquire personal skills including team working and communication. Participants acquire new creative skills. Personal portfolio of artwork Displays of artwork around the prison. Artwork shared through newsletters and events.	Participants experience increases in: • creativity • positivity • self-expression • wellbeing • feeling connected • sense of hope • belief in their abilities and future Participants want to go on to join applied theatre programme Prison staff notice a positive impact on participants and the prison environment.

The prison environment precluded some evaluation methodologies, with participants having no online access and being likely to be leave the prison before any follow-up could be done.

A brief, informal, in-session approach was adopted for participant evaluation, with demographic data and feedback being captured by the delivery team. Areas of investigation were limited to immediate responses to the workshops and measurements of skills acquisition and self-development were ruled out due to the brief nature of the intervention.

An online artist's survey and process reflections by the project team completed the evaluation framework, which is summarised below:

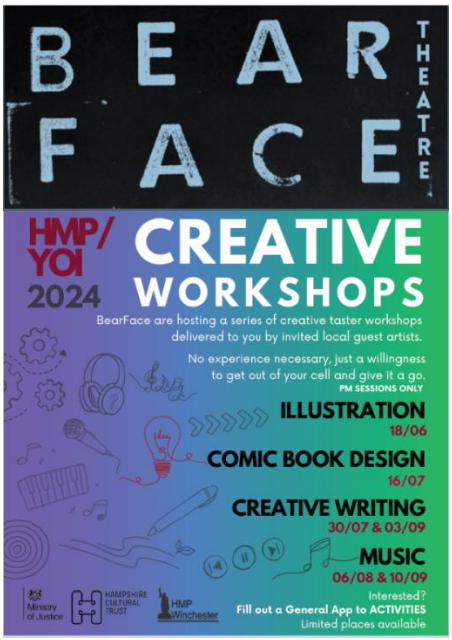
Creative Connections – Evaluation Framework

Data capture	Delivery evaluation	Outcome measurement
Enrolment data • participant demographics - age, neurodiversity • what prompted them to take part • enabling factors / support needed to attend • number then enrolling in theatre programme	**Participant feedback** • feedback on delivery • shaping of future offer • consent to share quotes and artwork	**Participant feedback** • mood at end of workshop • perceived value • future intentions
Attendance data • number of unique participants • number at each workshop	**Artist survey** • evaluation of induction • feedback on experience • shaping of future offer • intention to continue working with prisoners	**Artist survey** • changes observed in group dynamics • perceived impact on participants • benefits for self and participants
	Delivery team process review • successes and issues • feedback received from prison staff	

4. Programme Delivery

The artists were recruited by BearFace Theatre, and all were new to prison work. They were supported with initial conversations and facilitated to build workshop plans and conduct risk assessments. BFT provided them with a pack of relevant information regarding processes and policies.

The workshops were advertised within the prison by means of the flyer below. The programme aimed to target young men and support those with neurodivergent needs.



Six two-hour workshops ran at the prison between June and September '24. Four artists offered four different artforms: Harriet Riddell - illustration, Russell Olsen - comic book design, Gary Lee - creative writing and Louis Duarte - music. Within the sessions the artists offered different exercises and entry points to creativity, for example:

<u>Illustration workshop</u>

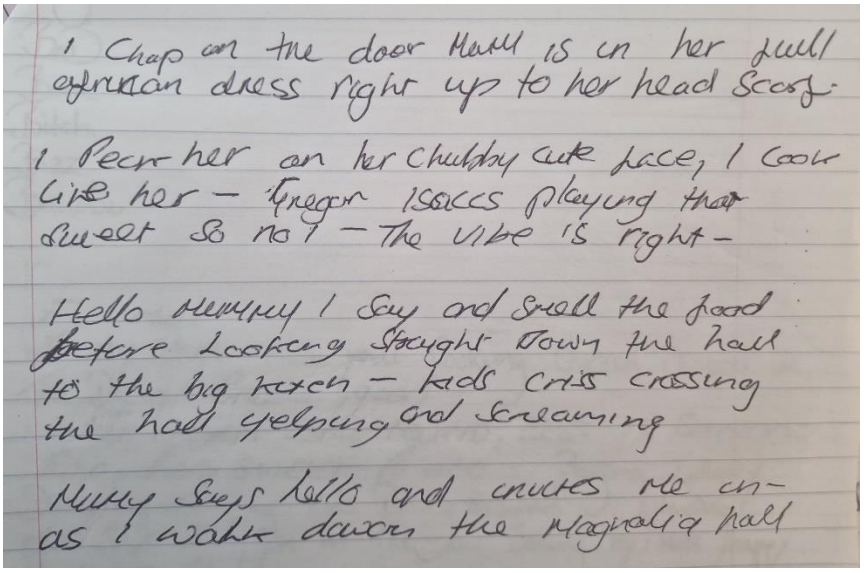
- One line sketched portraits of each other
- Overwriting words from happy memories of being in nature
- Still life drawing of plants on the table
- Hiding words, feelings and thoughts in the drawings
- Drawing emotions using marks, colours and words

<u>Music workshop</u>

- Body percussion warmup
- Improvised group jam and instrument swapping
- Introduction of songwriting theme, discussion and mind mapping
- Individual/in pairs lyric writing with practitioner support
- Integration of lyrics to musical context
- Performance and recording of pieces

The sessions included introductions and reflective exercises run by the BFT team. The BFT also facilitated group and individual dynamics where needed.

The output from the Creative Connections workshops included these examples from the creative writing and music lyrics workshops (for which consent to share has been given):

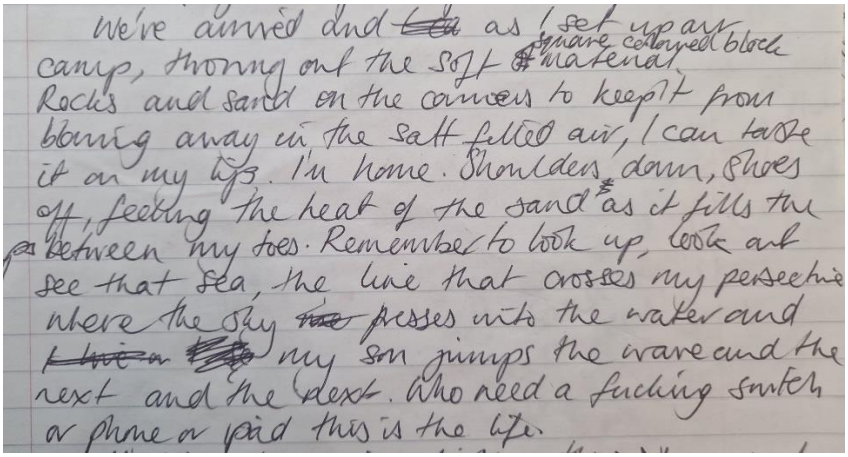


I Chap on the door Mum is in her full
afternoon dress right up to her head Scarf.

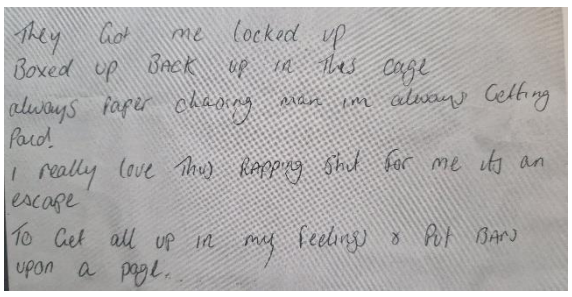
I Peer her on her Chubby cute face, I Look
Like her - Gregor Isaacs playing that
sweet So no? - The vibe is right -

Hello Mummy I Say and Smell the food
before Looking Straight down the hall
to the big kitchen - kids criss crossing
the hall yelping and Screaming

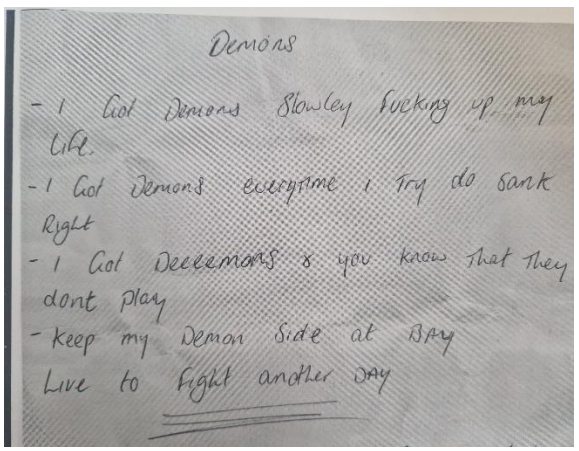
Mummy Says hello and cuddles me in -
as I walk down the Magnolia hall



We've arrived and ~~the~~ as I set up our square coloured block
camp, throwing out the soft material
Rocks and sand on the corners to keep it from
blowing away in the salt filled air, I can taste
it on my lips. I'm home. Shoulders down, Shoes
off, feeling the heat of the sand as it fills the
between my toes. Remember to look up, look out
see that sea, the line that crosses my perspective
where the sky ~~meet~~ presses into the water and
~~I live in the~~ my son jumps the wave and the
next and the next. Who need a fucking switch
or phone or ipad this is the life.



They Got me Locked up
Boxed up BACK up in this cage
always paper chasing man im always Getting
Paid
I really love this RAPPING Shit for me its an
escape
To Get all up in my feelings & Put BARS
upon a page.



Demons

- I Got Demons Slowley fucking up my
Life.
- I Got Demons everytime I try do sank
Right
- I Got Deeeemons & you know that they
dont play
- Keep my Demon Side at BAY
Live to fight another DAY

5. Delivery Learnings

The BearFace Theatre team, artists and participants were asked to evaluate the delivery of this pilot programme to identify successes and process learnings for future projects.

BFT Team

- The project elevated BFT external practitioner procedures and support documents for working in a prison environment which were communicated clearly and received as helpful.
- Having a presence in the jail during the months BFT are usually absent helped to keep project traction active, going some way to sustaining relationships with the often transient officers and staff teams.
- Progressing and evolving the delivery options showed further commitment to the prison community and work.
- Ensuring the wider prison community were aware of the project and the difference between this and the Applied theatre project during the Summer months was more of a challenge than expected.
- Engaging the group quickly with a warm-up worked well with some groups where other groups were able to go straight in. Sharing of examples of creative outputs was received positively.
- Having a rapport with some of the prisoners already helped the first session as their endorsement of BearFace eased others who weren't so sure.
- The artist giving constructive support set a positive example and encouraged the group to also compliment each other.
- Offering flexibility and alternative activities maintained the energy in the room.
- Getting the trigger warnings right involves ongoing reflection and conversation. It is important to get the balance between allowing artists to be themselves and trusting their experience in their own delivery whilst holding and letting go of the space at the same time for them and the prisoners.
- Keeping communication channels open with the artists enabled quick responses to pre and post session questions and reflections supporting a sense of confidence and feeling safe.
- It was frustrating for the team to have lost some of the younger guys due to behaviour when clearly the sessions were a positive mental health support for them at the time. However, the team is aware that they do not have all the information here regarding their block from security.
- It was refreshing and inspiring to collaborate with other artists and support them through this experience.
- Sharing and celebrating the work needs to be better considered. Some of the work was experimental and therefore would need context. It was important to make sure the guys had their work to keep as they were proud of it. We could have been more intentional about photocopying more of the work.
- In future stronger direct communication from a BFT and HCT perspective to ensure the prison SLT were aware of the project may strengthen support.

Artists

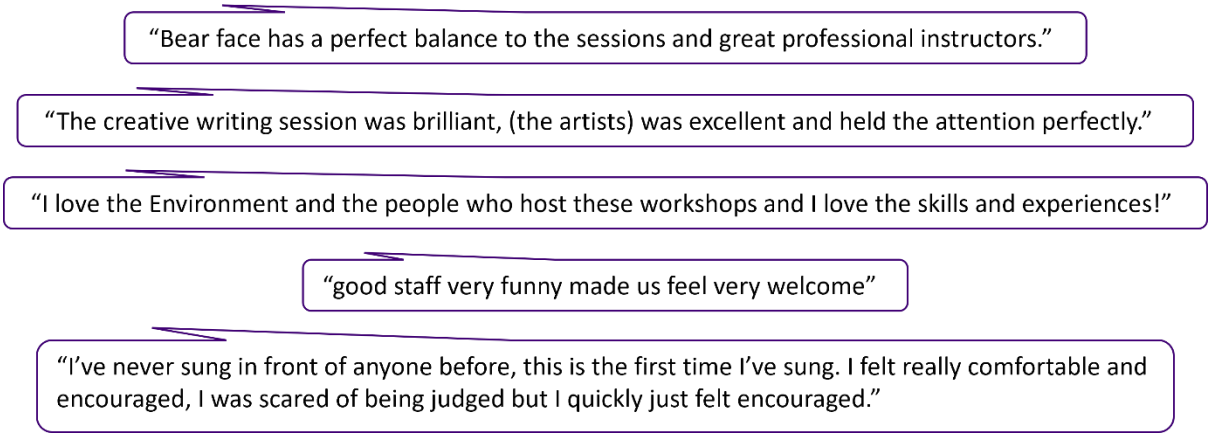
- Asking participants what artists they liked and what they wanted to get out of the sessions gave a clearer idea of who was in the group, promoted participants' voices and ownership and helped keep the session relevant.
- Ice breakers helped the group break down social barriers, come together and relax, and smoothed the transition from social time to session time. They put participants in a more comfortable space ahead of the creative activities which required some emotional vulnerability and openness.
- Having a defined finish to a session was also important for easing the transition back.
- It was beneficial to start with exercises that engaged the hand, eye, and ear, encouraged letting go and eliminated the idea of perfection from the start.
- Inclusivity and participation was maximised by giving people the freedom to sit wherever they liked in the room and the choice to work privately or with others.
- Creating a group mood board provided a resource to refer to if anyone felt stuck or needed content inspiration for the individual activities.
- Asking participants to give their artwork to someone else to continue with encouraged them to register its transience and see how they could add value to each other.
- Working out how to use the time effectively is a challenge, with the need to balance social and creative exploration time while moving the session forward.
- When a participant is asked to try something has an impact, too soon it can cause them to step back and too late the session can run out of time.
- It was satisfying and useful for the artists to run two sessions. Challenges from the initial session could be highlighted and discussed, and relevant tweaks made, developing a more structured smooth-running session.

"There were a lot of positive factors that resulted in a good workshop: good educational space; great communication from BFT; excellent in-class support from BFT team; clear outline for workshop delivery with stated aims communicated to participants."

Participants

- The participants' evaluation was positive, many had not known what to expect and had found the sessions balanced and helpful.
- Most suggested no improvements and just requested more – more sessions on a regular basis, sessions happening more often, and longer sessions which "would allow time to get into the creative headspace."
- Some responses suggested additional activities or requested additional materials: "to make cartoons that move on film," "singing," "more instruments," "have more pens, colouring."
- The main other response to "What could we do to make the workshops better in the future?" was "biscuits"!

- An important observation from the participant feedback was the appreciation of the BearFace team and artists for their professionalism and the welcoming and fun environment they created; this environment was the prime enabler for participation.



6. Levels of Participation

The programme targeted the recruitment of 10-12 people per workshop and these figures were achieved, with **an average of 11 on the list for each session**. The BFT team spread the word around the prison in person, talking one to one with inmates and encouraging them to sign up. Recruitment was also boosted by attendance at the Spurgeons Charity's 'Let's Connect' events which brought opportunities to engage with men who do not get visits.

	Illustration	Comic Book Design	Creative Writing 1	Music 1	Creative Writing 2	Music 2	**Total**
On list	10	12	10	13	11	11	**67**

The workshops achieved **37 full attendances in total**, with 55% of people on the list for a session turning up and completing it. This is slightly below the completion rate for the previous theatre programme. Non-attendees included those refusing to come, people who were sick, those blocked for security issues, and those who went to the work or gym instead.

	Illustration	Comic Book Design	Creative Writing 1	Music 1	Creative Writing 2	Music 2	**Total**
Completed	6	9	5	5	4	8	**37**

There had been low staffing levels during the summer period due to unexpected suspensions, staff holidays and sickness, and the regime lockdown for much of August affected recruitment, unlock and free flow.

On the afternoon of July 30th, the date of the first Creative Writing workshop, there was a serious incident on C Wing so 3 people were unable to attend, and the start was delayed. Similarly there was an issue with the regime on the morning of September 3rd, which meant that participants were slow to arrive, needed to be chased, and various other commitments and needs took priority over the second Creative Writing workshop that afternoon.

Not everyone who turned up completed a full session: two individuals joined creative writing from another class because they were curious, completed the first exercise and went back to revising for a test, another person had to leave the music group to take his phone call as he had been trying to make contact and was nearing release.

In total **17 different individuals participated** across the Creative Connections programme. They attended between 1 and 3 of the workshops, averaging 2 each.

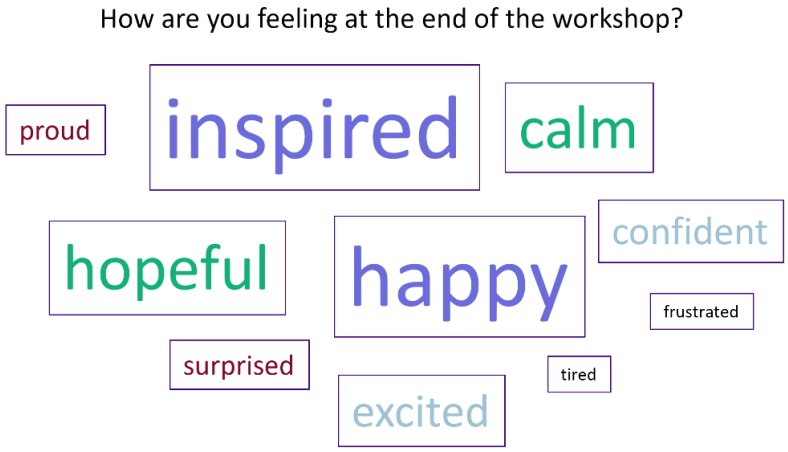
Demographic data was incomplete and contained some duplicates, but indications are that the targeted groups were not attracted over others. Only **13% of demographic form completions said they were aged 18-24**, with more falling into the 25-34 (30%), 35-44 (26%) and 45-54 (22%) age bands. Similarly data on neurodiversity was partial, 22% recorded that they had a disability, with ADHD and autism being mentioned within this.

Further work is needed to effectively recruit these target groups, finding other routes in addition to relying on prison staff to initiate connections. Previously the support of the learning and skills manager, and forums held by the Inclusion Team and Safer Custody helped. Getting the young men through security may also be part of the problem, with one returning participant being taken off the list due to behaviour.

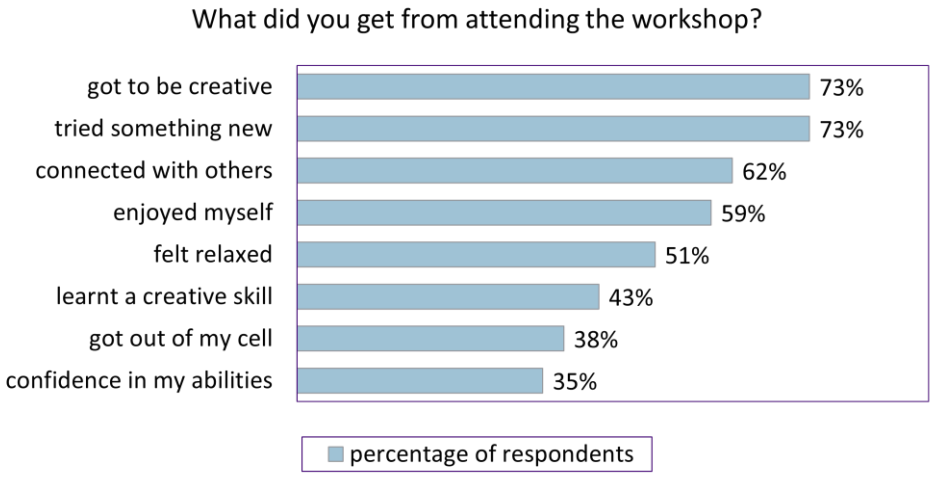
7. Impact on Participants

The Creative Connections workshops were **successful in fostering the creativity and positivity** they aimed for. Participants were asked "how are you feeling at the end of the workshop?" and given a list of words as prompts, 68% of them chose 'inspired' and 65% of them 'happy'.

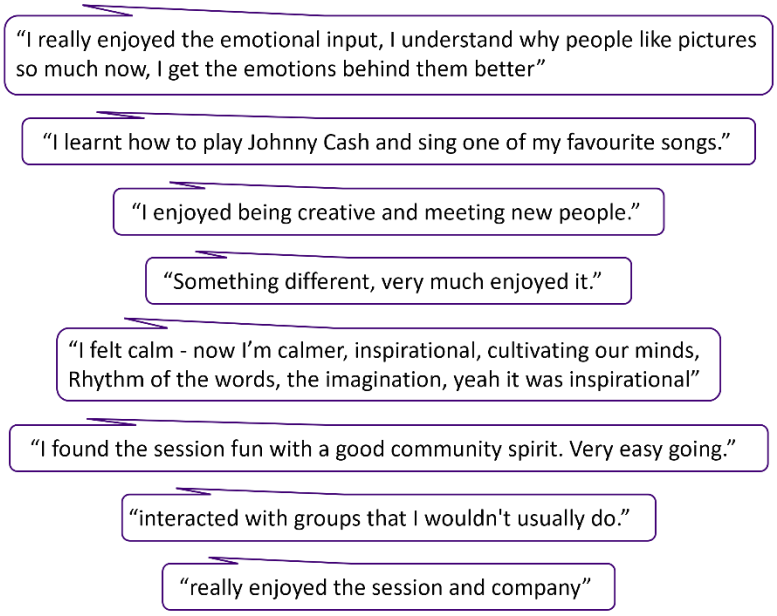
There was also evidence that participants had been provided with the intended sense of hope and belief in their own abilities and future, with many choosing the words hopeful (49%), confident (30%) and excited (35%) to describe their post-session feelings.



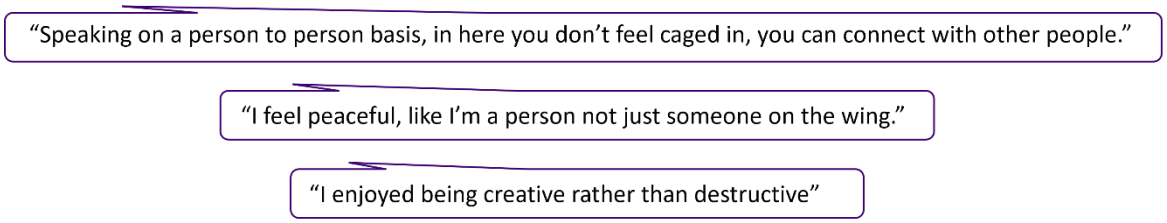
Participants were asked what they had got from attending the workshop, with a list of prompts provided. Three quarters of respondents felt they had had the opportunity to be creative and try something new. There was also evidence of wellbeing benefits from Creative Connections in terms of positive mood and social connection.



The verbatim feedback from participants highlights similar areas of positive impact, with people **enjoying learning something new, being creative and interacting with others.**

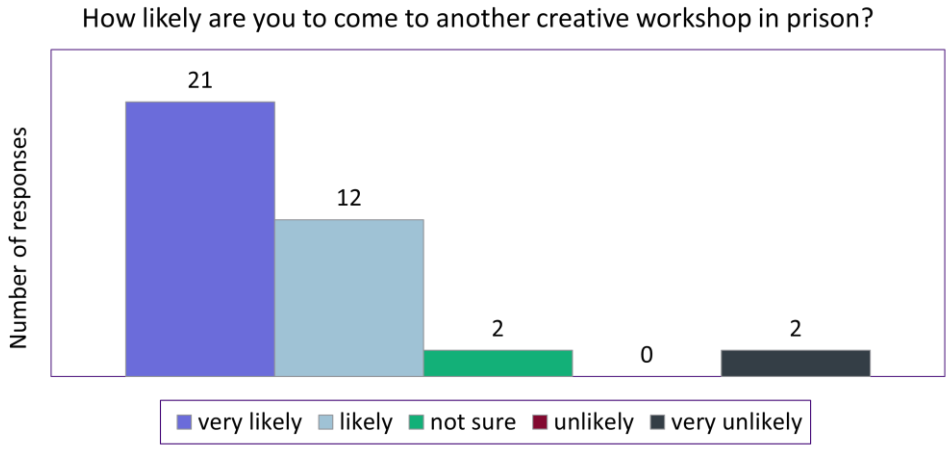


The evaluation has not extended to measuring any impact of the workshops on the wider prison community, but notes that respondents felt calm, relaxed and more connected with others after their taster of creativity, which is likely to have had wider benefits.



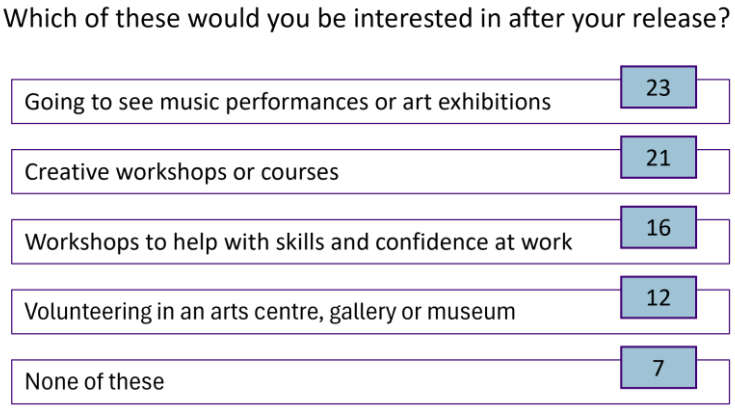
8. Participant Progression

Having sampled the taster sessions **89% of participants** said they were likely or very likely to come to another creative workshop in prison.



Six participants from Creative Connections joined the full applied theatre programme working creatively in a group with BFT on a weekly basis. Two young men who attended workshops and wanted to come to the theatre programme were blocked by security due to erratic behaviour towards staff. With the remaining participants having left HMP Winchester the conversion from the taster workshops to the full programme was therefore 100%.

The other ambition for the pilot was to investigate the **appetite for creative programmes post-release**. Participants were offered a range of options and creative workshops were popular, as was going to see cultural events. This supports the idea of developing 'through the gate' programmes which offer people opportunities both in the prison and the community.



9. Participant Case Study

Written by Jennifer Walmsley BearFace Lead.

At first AP was reluctant to join the Comic Book workshop because he wasn't sure what he was going to get out of it, he wanted qualifications not art to add to his CV. I explained a bit more about the BearFace ethos, who we were and what we were about, AP took a risk and stepped through the door. He stayed for the full session and got stuck in despite his initial concerns. He went on to sign up for the Creative Writing workshop the following month and despite struggling with literacy he was supported to write his own story. Using his senses as a stimulus he rekindled memories about his energetic and colourful family home kitchen. Conjuring up smells and noises AP reflecting on how nice it was to escape there for a bit.

A month later he joined the Music workshop and brought a friend from the wing along. Slowly coming out of his shell able to share on his own reflections using his creative writing skills to go further and rhyme song lyrics together. The progression I witnessed was tangible, from the man I met in the education corridor unable to see the benefits a creative workshop might bring him to this man who was playing all sorts of instruments, less afraid of 'getting things wrong' and allowing himself to experiment and have go's at things.

AP and the friend he brought along both went on to join the Applied theatre programme, clear that this was never something they thought they would be doing. In all the time they had been coming to jail this was something completely different. Both men were fully engaged and respected members of a cohort of 9 men, 6 of whom came through the Creative Connections programme. AP was a star keen to perform and lap up the creative joy the programme had to offer.

AP attended three Creative connections and 95% of the Applied Theatre programme sessions. His final reflection:

> "I don't think I would have gone onto doing the bigger project if I hadn't done these other sessions. It helped me build a bit of confidence in myself and trust in other people, in other guys I'd never met before. The whole thing has been a real positive experience that's taken me out of my comfort zone in ways I hadn't really thought of before. Everyone's effort was inspiring, you've all helped me to progress on. I realised that you all needed me as much as I needed you and that's powerful so thank you."

10. Artists' Evaluation

All the contributing artists were positive about the experience of working on Creative Connections in their responses to the survey. They felt **the induction process had fully prepared them** to deliver the workshop: "the pre-chat over Zoom was good and answered all my questions."

Working with co-facilitators from a different organisation was a new experience but a positive one for the artists. The artists felt they benefitted from BearFace Theatre's integration with the prison and perspective on the work. Having practitioners who could **assess the group dynamic and knew when to step in and provide support** allowed the sessions to unfold and enabled successful outcomes.

"There was a sense of uncertainty but as soon as everyone came in I felt completely relaxed and I haven't changed that feeling since then."

"It was a good experience and learning opportunity to learn from another. Particularly when it came to facilitating a group they were familiar with, allowing me to benefit from their experience."

"Loved having Jenny and Kate take part in the workshop. I felt safe, in control and especially enjoyed when everyone relaxed and spoke about their work which led into conversations with everyone taking part and talking about their lives."

The artists felt that that the programme's aims of building trust and rapport, creating a positive group dynamic and **delivering an inclusive workshop** that provided for all learning needs had been achieved in their sessions. This latter goal provided some challenge, with the artists finding themselves having to be "adaptive and reactive" to the group:

"Not a challenge per se, but an at-the-moment pivot to be more flexible with the workshop outline. It was clear thirty minutes in that some of the participants wanted the full structure of the workshop outline while others were happy to dip in and out of the plan and explore other avenues within the instruction."

"Getting an accurate grasp of each participants needs, interests and limitations within the timeframe. Balancing my area of focus so as to deliver as inclusively as possible."

"One learner who had difficulty with literacy I felt I could have empowered the learner more. This is something I would like to do better."

"Something I need to work on as a workshop teacher is being able to pick someone up who might not quite be 'in it' like the others, suggest another task, or direction. Equally, not taking their reluctance personally and maybe I can't help and to just sit with that."

The artists referenced the delayed starts and staggered arrivals but felt like the groups settled quickly and made the best of the time. Most of the artists, like the participants, wished to have had more time together, so that individual interests and creative impulses could be explored, maximising the positive impact on mental health. One artist found the need for concentration slightly intense and would have appreciated a mid-session break.

The artists all noticed a positive impact on participants from attending the workshop, with an improved mood and more intent to participate in the future being the most observed options.

That Creative Connections had been a positive experience for the artists was affirmed by the fact that **all said they would work with prisoners or offenders again in the future.**

"The session was a success. Throughout I've felt supported, communicated to and informed by Bearface. I was happy with the outcome of the session and what the participants were able to achieve. I also realised a personal dream of my own to work within this setting."

"I was impressed how the group supported and applauded each others success. And of course I felt good that the group not only gave me the privileged of working with them and giving me an opportunity to impart some skills but that they enjoyed it."

"This is an extremely well run and beneficial programme for participants and practitioners. I've felt supported and communicated with. My only hope would be more opportunity to work with these participants, strengthening bonds, deepening understanding and providing time for participants to create to their full potential."

11. Evaluation Summary

To summarise the findings from the evaluation of the Creative Connections pilot:

- Recruitment went well for the programme, but attendance was impacted by factors including staffing pressures and prison regime changes.
- There were 67 people on the lists for the workshops and 37 completed attendances.
- 17 different individuals completed a workshop, averaging two sessions each.
- Young men and those with neurodivergent conditions were hard to recruit and were not always able to attend, more efforts are needed to reach them.
- The workshops had a positive impact on mood and creativity, with participants feeling inspired and happy at the end of them.
- People valued the opportunity to be creative, try something new, and connect with others.
- The welcoming, fun and professional environment created by the BearFace team and artists was appreciated. Positive engagement by the team prompted supportive interactions between the participants.
- Trying out one of these taster afternoons was successful in encouraging progression. Participants said they were very likely to come to another creative workshop.
- All Creative Connections participants who were still at HMP Winchester signed up to the applied theatre programme.
- Participants showed interest in post-release creative workshops and cultural opportunities. This suggests that a programme running both in prison and the community would be worth exploring.
- The artists felt fully informed and supported by BFT and appreciated the safety and support the co-facilitation brought. Their learning needs were around adapting to meet individual differences.
- The pilot of bringing external artists into the prison was operationally successful and rewarding and all the artists wanted to work with prisoners or offenders again.

In conclusion this pilot has had favourable results for all involved. Creative Connections successfully brought artists into the prison to run taster creative workshops, generated project learnings around recruitment, delivery and future opportunities, and facilitated a positive experience of creativity, experiment and connection for the participants. The welcoming atmosphere promoted positivity and togetherness and was the foundation for the programme's success.

Final words from the participants:

"Thank you for coming in, bringing out our confidence, bringing us out of our comfort zone."

"Feeling optimistic about this and the warmth from you guys has really made it."

"Everything teaches me something and I feel like I learned something here. I haven't ever met any people like you before. "