

BowHaven report for the Beer Harris Memorial Trust - October 2019

We are very grateful at BowHaven to have received funding from the Beer Harris Memorial Trust and would like to thank the trustees for supporting our important work. BowHaven is a mental health charity that provides mainly peer-led group support for people with enduring mental health symptoms. The average number of people supported by BowHaven at any one time is 85 (53% BME / 63% female). We provide approximately 26hrs of group support per week.

The fact that the bulk of support comes from people with lived experience of similar mental health symptoms is really important in helping to provide safety and often to redress unhelpful and pathologizing experiences at the hands of psychiatric services. BowHaven runs therapeutic groups for people experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety and agoraphobia, hearing voices, paranoia and self-harm. We also run activity groups including Art, music, healthy lifestyles, handicrafts, and a women's group. These groups help provide an expressive outlet, as well as giving members the opportunity to learn new skills. The funding from Beer Harris went to support our Art+ group.

The Art+ Group has had a successful 2019 so far. We meet for 3 hrs on a Thursday afternoon, and the group has had average attendances of 13 over the past year. Our members include people with a range of artistic abilities, but the emphasis is always on supporting creativity and providing a safe place for people to experiment.

This year we have placed an emphasis on cultural inclusion and have aimed to give members the opportunity to learn more about Art, history and culture by visiting galleries and exhibitions in London. In March we visited The Tate Modern, in June, The British Museum and in August, The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.

These opportunities are important and give members, many of whom have never visited an exhibition before, the chance to understand more about Art and creativity. This influence has directly fed into their own creative confidence. Understanding their own Art more and having confidence in what they do is bolstered through learning and cultural experiences.

We have continued to invest in each member's creativity and well-being. In Art+, our ethos has always been to focus on the individual journey and support each member with their Art. This is in comparison to Art Therapy or a traditional Art class. Each member is different and expresses themselves in a unique way, some are abstract painters, whilst others enjoy painting animals and drawing.

We have begun to develop a portfolio program within the group that gives members the opportunity to develop a portfolio of their artwork. This is based on the unique achievements of each member. One example of this is TJ, who started attending BowHaven in April. TJ really enjoys the group and attends every week and he was the first member to begin building his portfolio. For this process we choose one completed work which we then photograph, exhibit on our gallery wall and then encourage the member to reflect on the process of making it. Both the challenges and achievements are reflected upon, and the portfolio is created in the form of a PDF file, featuring an image of the artwork, the artist's reflections upon it, and the things that they have learned. Whilst the portfolio reflects the process of making the work of art, it also relates it to their mental health recovery and the benefits they receive from attending the group.

We have continued to focus on our gallery wall at BowHaven (situated just outside the centre and viewable to the public) which gives members the opportunity to show their work, and also offers members of the public the chance to view the group's work. We believe this is important in reframing conversations around mental health, and many people have stopped by to look at and engage in conversation about the artwork. Our exhibitions help promote confidence and well-being in Art+ members as well as raising awareness of mental health.

Members have also found new ways of showing their artwork work via our social media accounts and our quarterly newsletter, which features profiles of members and pictures of their artwork.

All the skills and achievements attained in the group are celebrated in our annual Art+ Awards Ceremony, which takes place in October. We honour each member for their accomplishments, from exhibiting work to overcoming a creative obstacle, and each member receives a certificate and a small gift of Art materials.

Moving forward we are looking to make links with local colleges and organisations, so that Art+ members have the opportunity to learn more about Art outside of BowHaven if they choose to. This type of opportunity is something members have enquired about, and it is part of the reason we have developed the portfolio program. Overcoming and better managing mental health difficulties through tangible opportunities may benefit members greatly, and we are excited to see how we can deliver such a scheme.

Richard Blades
Art+ Project Worker

Some examples of clients' artwork can be found below:









