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How an NHS Trust uses creativity to support recovery:

South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust's Creative Minds programme

'Never underestimate the power of the paint brush', says Debbie Taylor; 'that's what's changed my life'. It was attending a Creative Minds arts class that helped Debbie to recover from a mental health crisis and gain the confidence, self-worth and life skills she needed to manage her mental health. After over 20 years on medication, Debbie had been told by mental health professionals that she would never work again. As a result of Creative Minds, Debbie says, she has been medication free for four years, and she is now working full time for Creative Minds.

About Creative Minds

Creative Minds is an [award-winning](#) project delivered by South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with local voluntary and community organisations and service user-led groups. The Trust's Chief Executive Rob Webster says Creative Minds is 'changing the way we deliver care across the whole Trust'. In an environment of tightening resources, he sees Creative Minds as an effective way of supporting people to fulfill their potential and live well in their communities. Rob's aspiration is that Creative Minds becomes mainstream within the Trust, being directly commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Group.

'Creative Minds changes the conversation and the possibilities. It helps people fulfill their potential, and can change the way clinically trained staff think.' – Rob Webster



Image: Creative
Minds

South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust provides community, mental health and learning disability services to over one million people across Barnsley, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield. Its mission is to help people reach their potential and live well in their communities by providing high quality care in the right place at the right time.

Creative Minds has a broad [definition of creativity](#) as 'anything that uses a creative approach to achieve better health outcomes', including arts, sports, physical, recreation and leisure activities. Examples range from creative writing, photography and DJing, to life story work and dance, to walking and football.

Since its launch in November 2011, Creative Minds has delivered more than 250 creative projects in partnership with over 120 partner organisations and groups, to over 20,000 people. It provides half of the project funding, and partner organisations secure match funding from other sources, which brings additional resources and helps to secure sustainability.

Creative Minds supports mental health service users, including people who have taken part in Creative Minds activities, to set up and run their own creative projects. Debbie's role is to provide this support by helping new groups to establish a constitution, set up a bank account, and apply for funding both from Creative Minds and, over the longer term, from other sources. 'We want the peer projects to be self-sustaining', she says, 'and we want people to continue to feel well, get better and progress.'

The project also provides training to healthcare professionals through Huddersfield University, and speaks nationally about the benefits of creative approaches to healthcare.

The Trust provides around £200,000 for Creative Minds projects every year. Creative Minds has received additional funding from Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Groups, and all partners have brought 100% match funding from community funders such as Big Lottery and Arts Council England. An additional staffing budget from the Trust funds the Creative Minds strategic lead, four development workers across the Trust's four geographic areas, and Debbie's role as peer Project development worker.

Creative Minds recently became a charity, which gives it greater flexibility and a degree of independence from the Trust.

[The benefits of creative approaches to mental and physical health](#)

Creative Minds has found that creative approaches to mental health can increase self-esteem, help people develop social skills, provide a sense of purpose, and help people move towards recovery:

'The sense of achievement found in creativity gives [people] a chance to start to move away from negative or self destructive patterns, habits and start to write a new story that promotes recovery.' – Phil Walters, Creative Minds strategic lead

This can reduce people's use of mental health services in the short and long term. It also reduces the pressure on core services, by providing additional activities for service users.

Dr Graham Hill, a consultant psychiatrist who refers clients to Creative Minds, [values Creative Minds](#) as an additional resource he can signpost clients to that will help them draw on their assets:

'We haven't traditionally used strategies effectively enough to use everyone's personal strengths so they can help themselves. An important part of recovery is about helping people to move forward, to cure themselves. Creative Minds offers that opportunity.' – Dr Graham Hill

How drawing and painting helped Debbie

'When I painted, I put everything on paper, all the thoughts, emotions, feelings. I wasn't being judged. I turned up and had fun, met other people, sat painting away you were chatting, no one was asking questions, no one putting pressure on you.

'I found confidence to believe in myself, to believe I could do something. Then pride, then learning to like myself, then learning to love myself, each time more and more things that allowed me to achieve.

'While I was drawing, my mind had time to relax, to work out how to proceed. Art allowed me to find skills for life and deal with problems when they've come up. Things I used to see as problems and issues I now see as challenges. I've had quite a lot of issues since stopping the medication, and I've dealt with them.'

Who do creative approaches help?

The Trust believes that creative approaches are of potential benefit to everyone, but perhaps particularly people for whom traditional approaches such as medication and talking therapies have not worked well. Dr Hill believes that this might include people with certain conditions such as dyslexia or autistic traits, or groups such as men who are less likely to engage with more traditional treatments.

Creative Minds is also starting to deliver activities for people with long-term physical health conditions, such as those conditions the Trust has responsibility for in the community, including heart conditions, respiratory conditions and diabetes. The Trust stresses that physical and mental health can be closely interrelated.

Evidencing the impact

There is evidence of the cost effectiveness of the Creative Minds approach: Nesta's [Realising the Value](#) programme examined evaluations conducted for two Creative Minds projects, which found that 'for every £100 invested they get a £700 social return on investment of asset-based approaches, group activities and health coaching.' [Nesta's evaluation concluded that:](#)

'The potential wider social savings estimated by our economic modeling for these approaches combined are approximately £1.3 billion a year, although many of these will not accrue to the health and social care system.' – Nesta

The broader social impacts are well illustrated by Debbie's story, who had been on medication and receiving mental health services for over 20 years, at an estimated cost to the NHS of around £10,000 a year. For Debbie, these reduced costs to the NHS were accompanied by other social and economic benefits such as her move into employment and the benefits to her family. For example, one of Debbie's daughters, who had been caring for Debbie while she was unwell, was able to return to education, and recently graduated with a degree.

Case studies provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of Creative Minds for individuals. To obtain more quantitative data across the programme, Creative Minds participants are now asked to complete the short Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale at regular intervals. Early data shows an improvement in well-being scores, and analysis of clinical records has shown a 'dramatic drop in the need for services' for individual case studies, according to Phil Walters, Creative Minds strategic lead. Huddersfield University is also supporting the project to design participatory research to capture outcomes over the 12 months following people's involvement with the project.

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*Image: Creative
Minds*

Securing support from all levels

Steven Michael, who was chief executive of the Trust when Creative Minds was developed, strongly supported the approach, and had solid support from the Trust's board to take it forward. This helped the Trust develop new ways of working, for example overcoming concerns in the procurement system around the perceived health and safety risks of some physical activities. Steven advises any Trust seeking to develop similar approaches to:

'Understand where the support for it will be – from services, from clinical leads, from people who've been convinced it works, and from the top to make sure it's sustained. If you don't have this support, be careful, because things can flounder.' – Steven Michael

A bridging role between the NHS and the voluntary sector

Creative Minds plays an important bridging role between sectors that have differing processes, cultures and languages. It helps those in the NHS to understand how social interventions can help achieve clinical outcomes, and those in the voluntary sector to navigate the processes of the NHS.

For example, each partner organisation is supported to become a preferred supplier to the Trust so that the NHS's relatively time-consuming procurement process is no longer a barrier to joint working. When Barnsley Football Club approached Creative Minds with an idea about using their archive as a reminiscence resource, Phil was able to present this idea to the Trust's memory services in a way that convinced clinical staff of its benefits. 'Voluntary sector organisations come to us', says Phil, 'and we translate a social model to be better understood in a medical setting.'

Creative Minds' involvement in training at Huddersfield University, as part of a spirituality special interest group, is another aspect of this. They have presented the Creative Minds approach to nurses, social workers, occupational therapists and psychology undergraduates, and have conducted master classes for advanced practitioners.

'Our training is fundamentally about getting people to think more broadly about what are mental health and well-being. Students are gripped by it, they want to get a better understanding of how they could contribute. I'd say [training on the social dimension of health] should be part of every curriculum.' – Phil Walters

Co-production

Creative Minds activities are co-produced between the Trust, local organisations and groups, and service users. This ensures that the activities funded are activities that people wish to do, and fosters a more equal and empowering relationship between professionals and service users.

'Local collectives made up of staff, service users and others explore ideas, find out what people want to do, and do it [...] We rarely reject ideas: sometimes projects hit the mark, sometimes ideas need tweaking. That interaction is refreshing – it's a dialogue, a shaping process.' – Phil Walters

'Talk to service users, let's work together as a team. People need to feel they're valued, not a burden.' – Debbie Taylor

Further information

[Information and videos about the Creative Minds projects](#)

[Further information on cultural commissioning](#)

Case study researched and written by Juliette Hough