

CASE STUDY: GAWTHORPE TEXTILES COLLECTION – TOUCH & FLOW

Touch & Flow was delivered by Gawthorpe Textiles Collection (GTC; a small independent charity who look after the collection of 30,000+ historic textile artefacts, founded by Miss Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth, and housed at Gawthorpe Hall in Padiham, Burnley) for East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group, via Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale Council for Voluntary Service, with the aim of increasing local wellbeing. It was developed as a legacy from Arts Council England funded resilience work to make GTC 'commissioning ready' and an action research project developed at Valley Street Community Centre (Burnley) in partnership with Calico Housing. We took what we knew worked there, expanded on the lessons learned to add to the social impact Gawthorpe Textiles Collection could achieve, aimed for the kinds of outcomes we could expect, using what we'd identified as the essential ingredients for making these happen. We used the project to develop some of the aims of the action research project hadn't achieved at that stage, such as focussing on hand stitching to develop repetitive, meditative processes; being able to work with communities who can't or won't come to the centre; and increasing the extent to which historic textiles were at the heart of the work. The title *Touch & Flow* is a representation of the benefits holding textiles can bring, and the 'flow' (very deep concentrated immersion to the exclusion of any other awareness of surroundings or thoughts) that handmade textiles techniques can create.

Artists were recruited to work in Burnley, running 8 sessions for each partner organisation: Safenet Women's Refuge; Action for ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and Carers Link. The partners fed into project development, artist recruitment and promotion to participants. The artists were selected for their relevance to the main aims and criteria of the project; in line with GTC's draft community strategy emphasising quality handmade textiles skills, sense of place, and ideas about strong links to the collection; open-ended, process driven ideas; and experience of similar activity and / or participants. Two artists were recruited; one to work with Safenet and Action for ASD, and one to work with Carers Link.

A special historic / antique handling collection was created in consultation with the curator and Director of GTC to ensure each item had specific resonance to the textiles in the collection. Artists were given access to the collection, provided with full interpretation details from the display case themes and objects, and the newly sourced items were described and detailed by the curator, to ensure the project had authenticity and represented the collection well. We anticipated that each project might have around 10 participants, some of whom would come and go, others who would form a core group of regular attenders.



OBJECTIVES MET

Priority Outcomes for GTC

- MET: Mobilise the collection by putting historic textiles at the heart of the project, to revisit Miss Rachel's ethos of a collection to take out for beneficial use around the local communities
- MET: Reach Burnley people who have barriers preventing them from attending the Valley Street Community Centre
- PARTLY MET: Create increased wellbeing for three groups of participants (total c30 people) over 8 workshops per group, across Burnley by working with local community partners, one of which may include young people. *One group received 4 rather than 8 workshops.*
- MET: Use textiles to teach portable skills which reduce stress by slowing the world down – these skills can be used anywhere, anytime, beyond the life of this project
- MET: Reduce social isolation by using textiles and local history as starting points for enjoyable conversation; and including people in quiet ways for those more naturally hesitant or who experience sensory overload
- PARTLY MET: Create *flow*, enabling people with difficult lives to focus solely on positive moments during our workshops. *Achieved with two groups, but hard to achieve with children taking part at Action for ASD once the project moved into a smaller room; though was noticeable in one young boy in particular*
- PARTLY MET: Increase relaxation by creating a space where responsibilities are left outside. *Achieved with two groups but hard to achieve at the women's refuge, where the environment was hectic and interruptions frequent so the atmosphere was often distracting*
- MET: Increase a feeling of self-worth and valued voice, by encouraging people to participate in ways that suit them, and encouraging their skills, choices and modes of expression
- PARTLY MET: Ensure participants and partners know about the opportunities for continuation at the Valley Street Community Centre. *Achieved with Safenet and Carers Link. Not necessarily appropriate for Action for ASD without specific support to address the needs of people on the autistic spectrum (especially children / young people)*
- MET: Create further robust evidence of the potential for increased wellbeing and social impact for Gawthorpe Textiles Collection, and its project partners

Priority Outcomes for E. Lancs CCG

- MET: Improved mental health and wellbeing in Burnley (E. Lancs CCG priority outcome)
- MET: Increase levels of social contact, awareness of skills, activities and behaviours that improve wellbeing (E. Lancs CCG priority outcome)
- NOT MET: Increase patient education about the appropriate use of services health services (E. Lancs CCG priority outcome) by using BPRCVS's new leaflet. *As noted in the application we planned to use a new NHS leaflet to achieve this, but the leaflet did not materialise, and we did not have the expertise to achieve this within the team*
- MET: Increasing resilience and improving mental wellbeing, enabling individuals and families to cope well, overcome barriers to achieving their potential and increase their skills
- MET: Support patients who are more vulnerable, such as those with a long-term health condition, who are frail and/or have complex needs
- MET: Promotes greater partnership working between the community and general practice, and other VCF organisations
- MET: Reduce social isolation, with a positive impact on health and wellbeing
- MET: Use the SWEMWBS evaluation framework to monitor wellbeing throughout the commission



KEY SUCCESSES

- 35 participants and 2 volunteers took part over 20 workshops, totaling 88 individual attendances
- Carers Link and Action for ASD participants attended 3 or more sessions each on average
- Comments and established wellbeing evaluation frameworks show that participants whose involvement could be measured reliably **all** demonstrated an increase in wellbeing, through flow, creative expression and socialising
- Increase of average 3.5 points on SWEMWBS wellbeing scale (equivalent to 7 points on WEMWBS) for adults in Carers Link project. 3-8 point increases are considered meaningful change
- Average 1.6 levels of increased wellbeing and 1.2 levels of increased involvement on the 5 point Leuven's Scale for participants (mostly aged 8-12) at Action for ASD
- There were regular references between workshop activities, historic textile items, and the local area
- Working in partnership with established local charities to reach new local people, advocate on our behalf, and advise on the needs of their populations worked well
- Despite (or perhaps because of) chaotic lives and living environment, the women at the refuge showed surprisingly overwhelming levels of interest and passion for the potential of our project

KEY CHALLENGES

- Carers who have enough time / independence to attend workshops often have end-of life caring duties for family members and cannot attend as much as they want / need
- Artist illness had a major impact on the refuge project, cutting it short (the nature of the project meant it was not possible to simply drop another artist in to cover), and there was not enough time to bring another artist up to speed and reschedule before the end of the spending period
- Women at the refuge came on average 1.3 times (mostly once, with a small number coming 2 or 3 times) because of either / both challenges in their personal circumstances and / or cancelled sessions
- Staff attending workshops from partner organisations were often not those involved in the development, so were unaware of finer details and changed things at short notice, resulting in losing some of the 'ingredients for success' which had been carefully planned in
- Staff changes and workload prevented us from including actual collection items in the workshops as originally planned

KEY LEGACIES

- A travelling handling collection of 20 historic / antique textile items (or small collections), closely aligned with the collection
- Two people from the carers' project participated in Valley Street Centre activities the week after their project ended, and one has continued to attend regularly
- The highly skilled and qualified textile artist volunteer from the Carers project has offered to run weekend workshops (free of charge) in partnership with GTC and Calico at the Valley Street Studio



- Staff at the women's refuge (also a Calico organisation) are keen to explore any future partnerships with GTC
- The women there are particularly keen to look at clothes making and clothes customisation workshops (possibly making use of the bank of sewing machines the refuge has). This may not be a fit for GTC but would be good to let other possible providers know about
- Action for ASD are keen to continue running textile workshops in-house in the future based on the experience, and have built up some skills in two team members, one whom attended as a participant in her own time; and one who was employed as the supervising staff member for the sessions
- A full and robust evaluation report will shortly be available for use in future funding applications and advocacy



"I didn't feel comfortable about coming, it's been lovely, really relaxing."

"I need company like this"

"I like coming here because there are no distractions, you can just relax and concentrate on what you're doing."

"That's amazing, he never normally joins in with anything!"

"I like it here, I don't get time to just sit and be creative, I can do this here. It doesn't matter if you can't come every time, you can just come when you can make it."

"He has always had problems with his pincer grip, he struggles to hold pens or pencils in school. To see him so focussed on sewing, getting on quietly and calmly was staggering. Normally after a minute or two he's more likely to throw something across the room, but he was there for around 5 minutes, just really engaged."

"I could do this all day, it's nice and fun, a nice calming activity"

"It gives me a reason to get up on a Saturday."

"I suddenly have all this free time and I'm on my own, it's been just right to start rebuilding this new life."

"I hated embroidery at school because we had to do it all perfectly and do exactly what we were told. I love breaking all the rules now!"

"I carried on my sewing at home. I sat down at 6 o'clock and when I looked up it was 11pm!"

"You don't want to go home when you come here do you? I want to stay all day."

"What time are you here next week? I want to make sure I wake up"

"I want to carry on now I can take this away with me, I'll carry on tonight when the kids have gone to bed"

"I was teaching her different stitches every week. She wanted the techniques, she didn't mind getting things wrong, she just enjoyed the process. She was rediscovering skills that had got buried and she'd forgotten she had."

"M was told as a child that sewing is silly, she thought she was weird for decorating her clothes. We talked and she was surprised you could do a degree in embroidery. She said she was really happy to know that and thanked me."

"There is a level of trust in the group that is lovely to witness. People are sharing, often quite personal, touching, reminiscences and experiences and I do think this is a genuinely supportive and caring environment for them."