



Art Therapy and Wellbeing in Primary Schools Project

Q What is the project?

A 'Art Therapy and Wellbeing in Primary Schools' aims to support primary aged children with their emotional wellbeing through art therapy sessions led by a HCPC registered art therapist. These sessions take place both in school and at the gallery using the Gerald Moore Gallery's exhibitions and collection as a stimulus to engage children in conversation and explore their feelings.

Teaching staff will also be supported and invited to take part in practical wellbeing art activities and CPD training sessions on 'Using Art for Wellbeing' to support their emotional wellbeing and their students.

The project begins in April 2021 and will run for three years working with three different primary schools in the Mottingham area. As a result, we hope to tackle some of the issues around Health and Wellbeing today and benefit the whole school community by working with pupils and teachers simultaneously.

Q Can you tell us a bit more about art therapy?

A Art therapy uses art media as a means of expression and communication to address emotional issues which may be confusing and distressing. It is particularly effective in supporting those who find verbal communication difficult and is rooted in the belief that creative expression can foster healing and mental wellbeing.

An art therapy group provides a safe space for young people going through personal or family difficulties to explore their feelings. By supporting children at a young age to develop self-awareness and greater resilience to mental health challenges in the future.

Q How did this project come about?

A The Gerald Moore Gallery is a contemporary art gallery, set within Eltham College, that supports the local community through exhibitions and events. In 2019, we began a project with Rangefield Primary School, offering free art therapy sessions using artworks from the gallery's exhibitions. The children were able to express themselves, build confidence and friendships through art therapy. When the opportunity to extend the outreach of this project came about through Mottingham Big Local Refocused we connected with other local primary schools and created the 'Art Therapy and Wellbeing in Primary Schools' project.

Who is running the project?

A Elaine Homer, an HCPC and *British Association of Art Therapists* (BAAT) registered art therapist, who has experience with young people, supporting them with their emotional and social development, within education. Elaine will lead the sessions, supported by a teaching



assistant from the school who can learn from the sessions as part of their professional development.

Katie Harris, Gallery Manager, will be project managing the project and has over nine years' experience in museum and art education. She is supported by Gerald Moore Gallery staff who have a wealth of experience working with teachers and schools to deliver practical art workshops.

Q What are the advantages?

A Each school can refer the students they feel would benefit the most from the sessions with each child receiving 14 weeks of group art therapy including two gallery visits. Many teachers and parents are aware that children have been negatively affected by the Covid pandemic and are seeing increase levels of anxiety, challenging behaviour or difficulties coping with loss and trauma in young people. This project will aim to support the emotional difficulties these children face and provide a secure environment for them to express their emotions.

This project also supports teaching staff at each school. There are growing concerns for the wellbeing and mental health of teachers who have been impacted by the stress of the pandemic on education through staff shortages and lack of funding. By providing practical wellbeing workshops and training for teachers to use in their classroom, we are ensuring emotional support filters down to their pupils and best practice becomes embedded in the school culture.

Q Which schools will be involved?

A We are working with three local primary schools across three years starting with Mottingham Primary School from April to December 2021. Followed by St Vincent's Primary and Castlecombe Primary through to 2023. All the schools had to be in the locality of the Mottingham Big Local area, but we hope this project will have further reach in the future for both Primary and Secondary Schools.

Q We understand there will be an exhibition at the Gerald Moore Gallery at the end of the project?

A In 2023 the project will culminate with a free public art exhibition on the importance of 'Art for Health and Wellbeing'; bringing together some of the works and findings from the schools who participated in the project, to promote this message to a wider community.

We want to promote the important role Art can have for our health and wellbeing and encourage everyone to take the time to participate in a creative activity either by making or viewing Art.



We hope the exhibition will encourage the local community to take part in some of our free offers and visit the gallery.

Q How do the Arts play a part in Health and Wellbeing?

A There has been growing research into the role arts play in improving health and wellbeing across the past two decades. Mental health professionals and experts agree that art therapy has many benefits, from boosting self-esteem to providing a safe outlet to relieve emotions. During the process of art creation, we can release feelings that have been difficult to express, feel a sense of achievement in a task or simply reduce stress by enjoying a pleasurable experience.

In 2020 the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport released a report that summarised the evidence of the role of arts in improving health & wellbeing.

It noted: *'There is promising evidence that other arts activities can support child social development, including improving prosocial skills, social competence, and socio-emotional development. There is also strong evidence that arts engagement can enhance aspects of social cohesion, including reducing individual loneliness and isolation, increasing prosocial behaviours, reducing aggression and discrimination, and improving social consciousness.'*

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929773/DCMS_report_April_2020_finalx_1_.pdf

The feedback and evaluations from our project will be written up into a final report and will feed into professional understanding amongst art therapists of the potential of museums and galleries for wellbeing.

Further evidence

[DCMS report: *The role of the arts in improving health and wellbeing* \(Fancourt, Warren & Aughterson, September 2020\)](#)

[World Health Organization Synthesis Report \(Fancourt & Finn, 2019\)](#)

[Creative Health: *The Arts for Health & Wellbeing* \(All-Party Parliamentary Group for Arts, Health & Wellbeing, 2017\)](#)

[Arts and culture in health and wellbeing and in the criminal justice system: a summary of evidence \(Arts Council England, 2018\)](#)

[Heritage and Wellbeing: *The State of the Evidence* \(What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2019\)](#)

[Museums for Health and Wellbeing. A Preliminary Report \(National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing, 2016\)](#)