CultureCase

Long-term improvements in wellbeing and social inclusion through art for people with mental health difficulties

This research was conducted by **Ceri Wilson, Jenny Secker** and **Lyn Kent** at **Anglia Ruskin University** and **Jo Keay** at **Open Arts Essex**.

Summary

This study explored whether improvement in wellbeing and social inclusion through the arts is maintained long-term for those experiencing (or at risk of) mental health problems. At the 6-month follow up, scores had increased significantly, adding further weight to the growing evidence that arts participation is an effective means of promoting wellbeing and social inclusion for this population.

Participants attended visual arts, drama and percussion courses

106 mental health service users, carers and self-referred individuals took part in 12 weekly sessions as part of Open Arts Essex, and completed questionnaires on mental wellbeing at baseline, initial follow-up, and 3- and 6-month follow-ups. Scores in mental wellbeing and social inclusion increased significantly from baseline to first follow-up, baseline to 3 months, and baseline to 6 months. However, scores were either unchanged or decreased after the first follow-up stage. All respondents reported enjoying the course and the majority were increasingly motivated to do art work and other activities. Participants also reported an improvement in confidence and relationships, and a general feeling of greater positivity as a result of the arts engagement. Continuing with art work was the activity most commonly reported by respondents at both follow-ups. Voluntary and paid employment – as well as

studying – were also reported as activities taken up by participants as a result of being on the course.

Mental wellbeing and social inclusion scores increased significantly by the end of the course

Although the study lacked a control group, making it difficult to attribute the wellbeing gains to the arts participation, the proportion of participants rating their experience highly, and the evidence of progression among those completing the follow-ups, are particularly encouraging. Future research should implement vigorous research methods such as randomised controlled trials to evaluate the impact of arts participation.

This summary is by **Anna Kolliakou, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

arts **social inclusion** **mental health** **wellbeing**

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