

Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Project: A Grateful Heart

Organisation: Air Arts, University Hospitals of Derby and Burton

Region: East Midlands



We are focusing now much more on staff than we did pre-pandemic. This is partly due to having access to staff social media platforms which did not exist before, but also due to the wellbeing needs of our staff, which are reaching a critical point.

Image credit: Air Arts

Introduction

Air Arts is the arts charity for the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton delivering arts exhibitions, performances and creative sessions for staff, patients and visitors across our 5 hospitals.

During Spring and summer 2020, our arts team were unable to visit our hospitals in person, and staff took to writing poetry, creating artwork for their department walls and recording themselves making music and singing. Our musicians wanted to acknowledge this outpouring, and thank the staff for their amazing work by creating a musical response. The result was an original song 'A Grateful Heart' composed by lead musicians Jamie and Rosie Rutherford. The song was performed and recorded by our Air Arts musicians and sung by over 30 hospital staff who recorded their parts at home. A video was created and the song was released as a charity single on 27 July at the end of a 3-hour live musicathon bringing together over 30 performances from musicians and staff. A sign language interpreter was also recorded on the video to make the video accessible.

Funders

This was funded through a diverted Arts Council England project grant earmarked for music performance at the hospitals.

Partners

Derby and Burton Hospitals Charity

Who is it for?

We wanted to show our support and thanks to our NHS colleagues at a time when they were exhausted after dealing with the pandemic for 3 months. We wanted to use the song to promote our programme and share in particular our much-increased online music presence e.g. Facebook live concerts, recorded songs on our YouTube channel which was available to patients on iPads on the wards.

We also wanted to support our artists and keep them working at a time when their other work streams had dried up.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

A bit of both – we wanted to raise awareness of our performances online for patients and we wanted to increase staff participation and encourage staff to use the arts and culture to aid their own wellbeing at a difficult time, and to understand the links between arts and culture and wellbeing.

How many people took/are taking part?

Over 60 musicians and staff members took part in the musicathon and recording of the song

Where is it happening?

Derby and Burton, working with people from Derbyshire and Staffordshire

For how long has it been happening?

March-July 2020

What were/are the main outputs?

- A charity single which is available on iTunes, amazon and google play
- A 3-hour musicathon event which is available on our YouTube channel

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Better supported staff and, in turn, better supported patients

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

Yes, we took our existing music programme online and worked with our regular musicians to make this happen

Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics¹?

Our project was open to all staff who wanted to take part so it was not specifically designed to do this

Evaluation & Feedback

We monitored feedback on social media during and after the musicathon. Over 8,000 people viewed the video and it raised over £400 on the first day it was released.

“Watch, watch, watch - you'll be uplifted. Congrats to all involved.” Ruth Evans MBE

¹Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (Equalities Act 2010).

“Wow this is amazing” Kay Fawcett OBE
“Everything about this is beautiful”

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The song itself has very powerful lyrics and an uplifting melody. Being able to include staff performing on the video was a very positive way to give back to them and for other colleagues to see their friends doing something positive and uplifting at a difficult time. We had 30 staff performing but there were around 40 other staff who asked for the information and were not able to do the recording, due to time or capacity, so a challenge for us is to make this a lot easier to participate in for the future.

The process of gathering inputs from staff and reflecting this back to them in an affirming way proved a powerful way of getting their voices heard (quite literally!) so we are now working on phase two of this project which will be called ‘The Staff voice’. This time staff will be asked to submit a much wider range of inputs (words, phrases, poems, images, art) which will be reflected back as music, poetry books, exhibitions and performance.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

We are focusing now much more on staff than we did pre-pandemic. This is partly due to having access to staff social media platforms which did not exist before, but also due to the wellbeing needs of our staff which are reaching a critical point. We are therefore working on two strands, one to directly support wellbeing for staff through arts and culture, and secondly to train/inform staff of the benefits of using arts for wellbeing and recovery for themselves and patients. As we cannot access our patient populations in the same way, we are reaching out to patients through our staff.

What (if any) new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

- Online skills! Using all the new platforms of zoom, google hangouts, webex, MS teams etc.
- Using Facebook live, performing to camera, recording performances for online events, hosting online sessions
- Including information on infection control and risk assessments for everything we do
- Being much more aware of our own wellbeing as artists and supporting our artist colleagues at this time

What would you say has made this project possible?

- The ‘we can do this’ attitude from the musicians on the team and the staff
- The imagination to conceive the project and make this happen – the creative sector is good at that!
- The Arts Council were very flexible in terms of diverting funding and extending deadlines for the grant

What would have made it easier?

Support with publicity – the musicians did everything from gathering the information from staff, to composing, to recording, to editing the video to putting it out there on music platforms. Generally I don’t think we’re very good at reaching the audiences we could with the work we do.

Further information

<https://music.apple.com/album/1524599588?app=itunes&ls=1>

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Grateful-Heart-Air-Arts/dp/B08DHZD4WK>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=345147913333047>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQu_FvdBxWE