

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

Organisation: GOSHArts, Great Ormond Street Hospital

Region: London

Designed for: Children and young people's hospital



Artwork by Jacqueline Colley, commissioned by GOSH Arts

“First long weekend on the wards in many years. Things I am grateful for: - colleagues with dry wit - chatty tween patients - the anonymous donors supplying us with barista coffee each day - this beautiful book of poetry from @GOSH_Arts and @ceciliaknapp - that I can go home.”

Introduction

GOSH Arts is the arts and culture programme at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Our award-winning participatory activity, art commissions and temporary exhibitions inspire creativity, create welcoming environments, and offer meaningful cultural opportunities across a variety of art forms for patients, families and staff.

At Great Ormond Street we have done our utmost to ensure that Covid 19 does not deny our hospital community access to the arts. We have adapted our usual programme delivery to continue to reach patients, families and staff in and outside the hospital. From online activities, a virtual choir, delivering activity packs to wards, and staff wellbeing resources, to a series of specially commissioned ‘Thank You’ art works, and much more.

At the start of the pandemic staff faced huge pressure and uncertainty – as we went into lockdown we immediately set up an Arts Hub (next to the coffee shop - a place we knew where staff would go!) so they could browse and take a variety of materials – GOSH poetry books, helpful resources such as child-friendly hand washing activity sheets, donations from local publishers, children’s books for patients or their own children, activity packs -such as flower pressing, and fun art quizzes to take part in whilst

waiting in socially distanced coffee queues. Basically a range of light touch and inspiring materials to lift spirits.

We curated a selection of our most calming and uplifting works from our collection and made a digital slide show that could be shown on hospital screens and online, accompanied by specially commissioned gentle harp sound track.

We commissioned a series of works from artists responding to changing moments and feelings during the pandemic. Early works focused on clapping for carers and thanking NHS staff, and then evolved into positive messages of resilience to keep going. This series is ongoing and we hope will continue to reflect our changing emotions and reactions to the times we find ourselves in. These have been shared digitally and around the hospital and will form an exhibition early next spring, marking a year since lockdown began.

Artists who would have been delivering face-to-face sessions to patients in the hospital were asked to create alternative work that could either be online or delivery remotely or in the form of self-contained activity packs. They were disseminated through our website, social media and by members of the Play and School team still on site. The school continue to use these resources as part of the online extra-curricular offer. This has created a bank of free online arts activities and resources available to all <https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/wards-and-departments/departments/gosh-arts/gosh-arts-resources>

Our Staff and Parent Choir rehearsals have continued to take place via Zoom, and we have recorded a number of tracks remotely that were then mixed together, and made accompanying music videos. These were used extensively as content and moral boosters at special moments –for example on VE day.

We adapted a number of projects that would have been happening as part of our ‘Biophilia’ theme for the arts programme this year – for example asking staff and patients to collect flowers on their daily walks that could be sent back in special envelopes. The artist will then use them to make a lightbox that can be taken to patient’s bedsides and help them connect them with the benefits of nature, even if they can’t go outside. We adapted another sustainability inspired project to work with our Young People’s Forum through their regular Zoom meetings, and we were then able to open it up to hospitals across the country via our NPAG network and social media. In this way we are trying to ensure that as many of the exciting creative project we had planned for this year can still go ahead, albeit in different forms.

Funders

Great Ormond Street Hospital Children’s Charity

Who is it for?

Children and young people at GOSH, both in and outpatients, their families, and all staff at GOSH.

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

Both - our online work has reached new / wider audiences outside the hospital.

How many people took/are taking part?

We usually reach approx. 12,000 a year – we hope to reach at least similar numbers virtually/remotely/ in a socially distanced ‘live’ way

Where is it happening?

London – but our remit is national and our patients come from across the country.

For how long has it been happening?

Ongoing

What were/are the main outputs?

A bank of new online arts activities videos and worksheets, a series of commissions, staff wellbeing resources, an exhibition in the hospital, new skills for our team and our freelance artists in new ways of working and delivering creative activities.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Our aim was to make sure that the pandemic and sudden pause of live arts activity in the hospital didn't mean that the arts programme stopped, that we could continue to deliver the positive benefits of arts participation during the early crisis and as we navigate the 'new normal'. Specific outcomes included:

- Reducing boredom and anxiety amongst patients and families – due to lack of external activity and restrictions on visitors
- Supporting hospital staff – under huge stress, in new roles, responding to new challenges
- Offering creative ways to reflect and process what was happening
- Distraction from challenging circumstances and the constant news cycle
- Supporting wellbeing and positivity
- Helping create connections between people even when physically distanced
- Continuing to support our freelance artists and cultural partners

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

See above.

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

Many of our patients identify with one or more of the protected characteristics, particularly Disability. Our staff body, like the NHS itself, is diverse, and the Trust has staff-led BAME, Women's, LGBTQ+ and Disability and Long Term Condition Forums.

Evaluation & Feedback

We're assessing impact using the number of page hits/ downloads/ views etc plus feedback received via social media and in person where possible in the hospital.

Quotes from staff

"Forgot to say thanks for this! As I was at home this week it provided some much needed sanctuary and culture 😊"

"It's nice to be able to come here (*arts and wellbeing hub*) when it's crazy to take the mask off and be 'normal'."

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

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

I am proud of how quickly we have adapted and continued to support patients, families and staff. We were able to offer alternative provision from the first day of lockdown and continue to work with artists and run an arts programme even when we were redeployed to work elsewhere in the hospital.

However, like many others, we've found it challenging to adapt to constantly changing guidelines and the 'new normal'. It's hard to stay motivated when your reason d'être has always been the magic of a moment of live interaction between artist and patient, but it's inspiring how adaptable and creative we can all be – and how much support the arts can offer, even virtually.

Although you can't replace face-to-face relationships, there have been some unexpected positives – virtual choir sessions have enabled staff who are on maternity leave or don't have evening childcare to join sessions – access to activities has been increased in many cases.

One other challenge – which we know has affected other arts teams in hospitals, is that as NHS employees we were often redeployed to other areas in the hospital, particularly during the early days of the pandemic and this may happen again. Obviously we were happy to go where we were needed, but it means taking staff away from the arts programme delivery. Or working on delivery in your own time.

We have also been very inspired by the partnership working that has taken place in response to the pandemic. The work of the members of the NPAG for Arts, Heritage and Design in Hospitals in bringing together national initiatives in very short time frames and under challenging circumstances had been incredible.

What would you say has made this project possible?

A crisis response meant that things could be done quickly, differently and without red tape. For example, the move to more telephone / online consultations in the NHS that has been discussed for some time happened almost overnight, a huge positive change in the way the service is delivered. For us as the arts programme this meant a willingness to trust us to deliver, a sense of innovation, and doing things differently, the rise of remote and agile working enabling flexibility and trialling new ways of working. Also, the support of our peers in other hospitals - the NPAG for Arts, Heritage and Design in Hospitals - has been invaluable.

What would have made it easier?

As always, additional funding and staffing resource.

Further information

Some of the activities and resources created online: <https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/wards-and-departments/departments/gosh-arts/gosh-arts-resources>

GOSH Choir music video created during lock down:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GBOQTuggYk>