

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

Project: Creative Comfort

Organisation: University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, UCLH Arts and Heritage

Region: London

Designed for: Hospital staff

Introduction

UCLH Arts and Heritage is the charitably funded arts programme that serves to improve patient and staff experience at UCLH NHS Foundation Trust through the arts.

We launched our 'Creative Comfort' programme as a wellbeing initiative directed at UCLH Staff to support them at the height of the Covid-19 crisis. The programme initially consisted of weekly art activities, origami sessions, colouring sheets, a bespoke Spotify playlist, portrait sittings by the hospital artist in residence, resources detailing how to access culture from home, a YouTube playlist with music clips recorded by our volunteer musicians. This has continued to grow with the programme extending to now include a staff choir, a staff art club, a commissioned colouring book.

Funders

The only funding received has been to produce 5000 colouring books and a year's funding for the staff choir – both from the hospital charity.

Partners

This project is not yet partnered with other organisations, mostly we have worked with individuals already involved in the hospital community.

Who is it for?

We aimed to reach a broad cross section of UCLH staff, with a focus on supporting front line teams e.g. the Critical Care team and a focus on those WFH experiencing social isolation.

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

The project was designed to widen the work we do with staff and to offer wellbeing support using the arts to as many new staff as possible – including those who may not have interacted with any of our previous programming.

How many people took/are taking part?

Estimated figure of those who have directly engaged, including both staff participants and the contributors, would be around 150 people. Those who are indirectly engaging e.g. listening to the Spotify playlist, watching the YouTube videos or receiving a colouring book are much higher but difficult to estimate.

Where is it happening?

We expect that most staff being reached are either living in Greater London or relatively close to London (a commutable distance e.g. 2 hours).

For how long has it been happening?

The work began towards the end of March, and there is no fixed end date. We anticipate that Creative Comfort will become an integrated aspect of the Arts & Heritage programme that can remain focused on supporting staff wellbeing.

What were/are the main outputs?

There were no expectations, but we've exhibited the portraits made during the Staff Portrait Sessions Project in our hospital street gallery.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

The project aimed to reduce boredom, combat isolation/loneliness, offer distraction – all to support staff wellbeing.

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

Yes, with patient contact limited (particularly in the first few months of the crisis) we invited the artists already working with patients on various arts' offers to form the Creative Comfort team. This included the UCLH Origami Specialist who began leading virtual staff origami sessions. The portrait Artist in Residence at our cancer centre, known for portraits of patients made whilst they undergo treatment, started up virtual portrait sessions for staff. Two artists who have been leading weekly workshops on wards adapted their material to create an art activity for staff to do each week. Lastly, some existing volunteer musicians (who would usually perform in outpatient areas) filmed music clips at home which we uploaded to our YouTube playlist.

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

The work was not specifically designed to support those who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics.

Evaluation & Feedback

We are gathering feedback through surveys/forms, verbally, via email from staff, and through views/listens on the videos and playlist.

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

Different aspects of the programme have been successful at different points over the past 6 months. The staff portrait project was an early success of the programme as it was a unique offer.

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

Yes, many of the staff who have interacted with the project are outside of the Staff Culture Club which is where those who engage with the Arts & Heritage work have recently come from. Definitely reaching more people, both frontline and those WFH.

What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

We've all had to adapt to WFH full time and utilising new technology and digital channels to share our work. Use of video editing and graphic design programmes have been learnt too.

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

What would you say has made this project possible?

Support from colleagues, especially the Staff Experience, the Staff Psychological and Welfare Services, the Occupational Health teams was essential in establishing the programme. They had the necessary channels to support the digital offers and were able to share materials on the ground at the hospital. Creative Comfort was integrated into the SPaWs programming and inclusion in their newsletters and communications helped direct staff to us. Having an existing group of artists within the hospital meant we could identify what to offer easily and start it quickly. Social Media was a brilliant way to share with colleagues internally and externally, to share resources.

What would have made it easier?

Having our own UCLH Arts and Heritage website and social media channels would have made sharing the resources much simpler. Also, having a bigger pool of artists to work with would have increased our output and would have enabled us to diversify the offer to cater for more staff interests.

Further information

Most content was uploaded through the hospital's internal communication channels, however some resources have also been uploaded via YouTube and the Google Drive, as below:

- Art Activities: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kP0llmjNvWaj_j1q_fH_hhtIRY1pHFb
- Colouring Sheets (later developed into a colouring book): <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UtbCJEGaUx4rRamw3P5vcVYzvOaz3FPO>
- How to engage with arts from home resource: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yhJ8YKkHpC3wbUbhjkFuassEqUfaSPgo>
- Staff Portrait Project: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11QxyvD-VQB47ZOsisf017EtZ8bn4KoIVX>
- Creative Comfort YouTube playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvnz2VbA0gdWdd9eWwSOg-Q/playlists>
- Staff Spotify Playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3sSXY6e9x9W54pprBf29tx?si=B84GT3okQhy3gggO4m1Lag>