



Art Works

Using the arts to promote emotional
health and wellbeing in schools

Foreword - Why Arts?



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The TaMHS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools) project was part of a national Department of Health initiative developed out of the desire to encourage innovation and whole school approaches supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of young people.

In Nottinghamshire eighteen schools were selected to take part. Each school used an audit tool to identify factors which raised or lowered emotional health and wellbeing in their school. Many of the schools identified physical environment as a de-motivating factor. Two of the three secondary schools had been part of BSF (Building Schools for the Future, a national programme seeking to rebuild or remodel all secondary schools in England, creating schools 'fit for the 21st century'). BSF had been abandoned by the new government in May 2010 despite a large scale investment in planning and preparation by staff and pupils. These schools in particular wished to harness some of the ideas already created by pupils about how they could improve their environment.

With this in mind, the TaMHS project managers worked with colleagues in Nottinghamshire County Council's Arts Service to commission City Arts, a local participatory arts organisation with many years of experience in the field of arts and health, to deliver projects in three secondary schools and one primary school.

The TaMHS projects were required to implement an emotional health and wellbeing strategy across three waves of intervention, prescribed by national government:

Wave one -
whole school training and approaches

Wave two -
targeted interventions with vulnerable individuals

Wave three -
therapeutic interventions.

The Nottinghamshire arts projects were commissioned specifically with the aims of simultaneously enhancing the physical environment of the schools and promoting social inclusion, thus promoting the health and wellbeing both of the individual children selected to take part in the projects and the wellbeing of all members of the school community.

Within the overall evaluation of the Nottinghamshire TaMHS programme the arts projects evaluated extremely well. Their success led to an investigation of the appropriateness of using similar projects within CaMHS and raised further issues about how such work is evaluated so as to demonstrate its efficacy as a non-stigmatising and inclusive method of promoting emotional health and wellbeing. Similar interventions have subsequently been used within Nottinghamshire County CAMHS District emotional health and wellbeing teams.

**Kate Duncan,
Creative Programme Manager, City Arts**

Art has long been known to have therapeutic properties. In creating visual images, people 'draw' on the right side of their brains. This same side is used before spoken language develops and is where visual memories are stored. Creativity is also well recognised for its potential to heal people, express hidden emotions, reduce stress, fear and anxiety, and promote a sense of autonomy.

Engaging young people in the arts can inspire and motivate, opening up new possibilities for creative expression and imagination. It can stimulate a young person's ability to question and connect with the world around them, and nurture positive aspirations, confidence and the capacity for autonomous critical thought. It can also help young people to develop the resilience to manage challenging life circumstances.

Arts projects in schools can be used to raise awareness of mental health issues and challenge stigmatising attitudes. Arts experiences challenge young people's sense of themselves in a very different way to formal education, providing different opportunities for young people to explore their identity, skills and abilities.

Evidence suggests that the relationships forged between artists and participants is fundamentally different to those experienced with other adults in schools, a point reinforced by participants in this research report. Specialist projects are very different from everyday work with teachers and often centre on a 'safe space'. There may also

be greater emphasis on process than on the outcomes or products required of more traditional approaches. As a consequence, young people report a sense of enjoyment and achievement in creating high-quality art. They also demonstrate greater levels of motivation, improved self-esteem, self-awareness, resilience and community engagement. Many evaluations of arts interventions document their effectiveness in re-engaging young people in education and developing skills that are transferable and as relevant to developing literacy and numeracy as to making art.

It is also important to acknowledge the achievements of the artists and arts organisations that specialise in working with young people and marginalised communities. They bring an impressive range of professional skills and approaches to this work. The methods they have developed over the years have made a tangible and positive impact on the artistic, social and personal growth of those involved. This is demonstrated by a sizeable body of research evidencing a strong case for the effectiveness of arts interventions with vulnerable young people.

This report aims to promote the case further.



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1. Introduction – why read this report?

This report is relevant to anyone working in health, education, social care, arts, the youth sector, and professionals supporting the emotional wellbeing of young people. It shares the learning from a creative project in four Nottinghamshire schools which used collaboration with artists to improve the emotional health of the whole school community.

Following a public tender process, the project was commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council as part of TaMHS, a national Department of Health pathfinder programme.

The arts project was delivered alongside a range of other interventions including teacher training, play, family engagement, therapy and counselling delivered by children's services and health providers, many of whom had not previously worked together. Each of the interventions was delivered and evaluated as a separate strand of activity (though planned within the overarching TaMHS action plan).

This report focuses specifically on the evaluation of the arts projects carried out by Dr Edward Sellman, University of Nottingham, School of Education, plus subsequent feedback from project facilitators, participants, parents, and school staff.

Although the project was time-limited (delivered over two terms only), it was still able to create a legacy and demonstrate the value of using the arts in:

- **Providing cost effective ways of improving the physical environment of the school, promoting the wellbeing of the whole school community**

- **Providing a cost effective non-stigmatising alternative to more traditional therapeutic interventions by creating safe therapeutic spaces and relationships**
- **Impacting positively on key factors promoting young people's emotional wellbeing, including increased confidence, self-esteem and resilience; improved interpersonal and communication skills; increased social capital, social skills and social inclusion; increased participation in school life; and improved school attendance (with figures at one school improving from 30% to 80% among participants who had participated in the programme).**

This report provides some valuable insights into the link between the arts and emotional wellbeing, and some excellent ideas and advice to help you develop the role of the arts in your own work.

Read on!



2. Project Description

Background

The aims of the national TaMHS project were to improve mental health outcomes for children and young people (5-13 years) via interventions delivered through schools.

The national TaMHS programme set out to:

- **Test effective models for early intervention**
- **Develop a credible research/evidence base to support future work**
- **Develop joined-up approaches**
- **Understand barriers to successful implementation of effective models.**

In Nottinghamshire TaMHS was developed and managed by a Project Manager (job-share) and an interdisciplinary TaMHS Project Board who met regularly to share outcomes and explore future connections between the different areas of practice.

Three Nottinghamshire school ‘families’ were invited to participate (three secondary schools and their primary school ‘families’). The schools were pre-selected using government criteria which included Healthy Schools Status, implementation of the Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme, and deprivation indices.

Each of the schools carried out an audit to identify factors which raised or lowered emotional health and wellbeing within their organisation. Many of the schools identified physical environment as a key priority. This

led to the decision to incorporate the arts into the local TaMHS programme and the TaMHS project board approached colleagues in Nottinghamshire County Council’s Arts Development Team to help achieve this (Nottinghamshire was one of only three TaMHS projects nationally which incorporated the arts).

City Arts and the University of Nottingham were tasked with delivering and evaluating collaborative projects in three Nottinghamshire secondary schools with a specific focus on 11-13 year olds, and one primary school focusing on 10-11 year olds.

The projects in each of the four schools set out to explore how collaboration between artists and schools can promote mental wellbeing. Each project consisted of an 8 - 15 week programme with a group of targeted vulnerable young people promoting the development of friendships, confidence, self-esteem, resilience, communication, and social and decision-making skills.

Consultation

The projects were underpinned by a person-centred approach and a commitment to young people’s voice. Initial consultation sessions were held with young people and staff in each school to identify their priorities for improving mental wellbeing. This ensured that the outcomes of the work were more likely to be meaningful and sustained. A cross-section of young people were sought, representing a balance of male and female, confident and less confident, vulnerable and self-assured.

During the exercise, each group was invited to:

- **Share their views of what constitutes ‘mental wellbeing’ in schools**
- **Give a guided tour of the school highlighting and documenting spaces associated with positive and negative emotions/ experiences**
- **De-brief about the tour and share ideas to improve environmental spaces or address some of the issues identified earlier in discussion.**

Consultation with each of the schools identified common priorities, mostly related to the physical environment:

- **Safety**
- **Brightening up/ improving interior and exterior social spaces**
- **Positive identity for their school**
- **The creation of art work that has a big impact upon their environment (big art)**
- **Art work that can be delivered as part of the curriculum to other year groups**
- **Community involvement**

Commissioning artists

Informed by the consultation, project partners advertised a brief for artists, who were initially long-listed. This process was important as it ensured that the artists had specialist skills and a track record in working with emotional health and wellbeing issues. The artists’ proposals were shared with the young people who made the final decision about which artists would be employed.

The arts projects

The following projects were commissioned:

SCHOOL A –

worked with artists at the Forestry Commission. They visited play areas in open and natural spaces and used this as inspiration to make large scale interactive environmental sculptures for the school playgrounds.

The Forestry Commission delivered workshops within the school and at Sherwood Pines (a large recreational park and area of woodland close to the school). This forged great links between the school and an organisation on their doorstep. The young people were able to experience indoor and outdoor activities facilitated by experienced staff and created art work that decorated the inside walls of the school. They also learnt how to use natural materials and constructed four living willow sculptures in the school grounds. These sculptures are dynamic and will change with the seasons, benefitting the whole school as they see the living sculptures grow through time. The sculptures not only enhance the appeal of the school grounds, but are used as a National Curriculum teaching resource, and a valuable interactive playground resource stimulating play and imagination for the whole school.

At the end of the project, a celebration event attended by parents and partners was held to showcase the young people’s achievements. It is hoped that this experience will inspire the young people and their families to engage in activities held near the village at Sherwood Pines.

SCHOOL B –

worked alongside a theatre designer. They used a wide range of art forms to transform an empty space into a vibrant, cheerful and relaxing chill-out room.

Activities were facilitated by artist and theatre designer Angela Connors, utilising her versatile artistic skills and expertise in re-designing indoor spaces. The young people were able to transform a disused classroom room into a safe ‘nurturing’ space where young people could retreat to if needed during school hours.

Participants gained creative and life skills, including design, use of colour, painting and mosaic work, independent decision making, team work, painting and decorating and working to a strict budget. The young people were not happy with their initial choice of design for the room and chose to adapt their plans as their ideas changed and evolved.

A celebration event was held and feedback from staff and young people confirm that the room is being utilised to its full capacity. It is being used as a peer mentor space, by teaching assistants for specialist sessions with young people, for student relaxation and a space for rewarding young people. The young people who created it feel a strong sense of ownership, pride and personal achievement.

SCHOOL C –

worked with a stained-glass and a mosaic artist. They created colourful and distinctive signage, brightening up the environment, helping new young people find their way around the school and creating a welcoming identity at the school entrance.

Artists Anna Dixon and Stella Chadwick facilitated activities exploring mosaics and stained glass. Both art forms were new to the school and the young people identified the specific projects they wished to embark on. The project resulted in a large group piece

being created for the exterior wall at the front of the school, smaller-scale signage to assist new young people joining the school to identify each area and individual stained glass artwork for participants to take home and share with their families.

The school invited parents, school staff and members of the community to an event to unveil the new sign at the entrance of the school. Very positive feedback has confirmed that the art work has enhanced the look of the school and has made a big impact on both the young people and visitors.

SCHOOL D –

worked with a sculptor and explored a wide variety of sculptural materials and created several large-scale artworks for the school entrance and grounds.

Sculptor James Sutton facilitated ambitious arts activities at this secondary school. The young people learnt a wide range of sculptural techniques and 3D design skills. They experimented with materials such as wire, stone, clay and recycled materials. They also gained inspiration from a group trip to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park with the artist, staff and some family members. Staff from the Yorkshire Sculpture Park Learning Centre gave the group a guided tour of an exhibition by David Nash and other diverse sculptures around the park made from different materials and on different scales. Subsequently, a series of large and small scale sculptures were created and installed around the school grounds.

Participants, families and staff attended a celebration event and feedback suggested that this project had not only inspired the young people taking part but had left a big impact on the whole of the school. Each young person was presented with a book recording their journeys, creative processes and sculptures, as well as a DVD of the project.

Participation statistics

	CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS	WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS SESSIONS	CELEBRATION EVENT ATTENDEES	INSET TRAINING - PARTICIPATING TEACHERS
SCHOOL A	6	36	8	45	
SCHOOL B	6	18	13	18	
SCHOOL C	4	18	13	25	
SCHOOL D	11	14	11	30	
TOTAL	27	50	45	118	
SCHOOL A FAMILY OF SCHOOLS					35
SCHOOL C FAMILY OF SCHOOLS					28



3. Evaluation

Documentation

The perspectives of young people, teachers and artists were captured throughout by a documentary film-maker who worked alongside the project evaluator. The resulting footage was used alongside extracts from informal and formal interviews with pupils, staff and artists to create a documentary DVD for each school.

Evaluation methods

The evaluation was carried out by Dr. Edward Sellman, School of Education, University of Nottingham. The approach to evaluating the impact was two-fold:

- **Visual methods were used to encourage young people to talk about the projects and their impact during formal and informal interviews**
- **A documentary film was made, incorporating footage of individual and group engagement throughout the process, alongside recorded interviews with young people, artists and teachers.**

At the start of the project, the young people, teachers and artists took part in interviews focusing on their hopes and aspirations for the projects. This gave an initial baseline for evaluation. The same participants were interviewed at the end in order to measure distance travelled, while more informal interviews throughout the film-making reflected on the process and impact.

Five or six young people from each school were also interviewed separately using a visual image (Figure 1) as a stimulus to encourage reflection and review distance travelled. The image selected, a 'feelings tree', has been developed to encourage young people and

those with less developed communication skills to talk about quite complex or potentially intrusive matters, such as feelings and social engagement (Wilson & Long 2009). Each young person was asked to select a position on the tree that represented how they felt at the beginning and end of the project and what, if anything, had caused any change.

Summary of outcomes

The following summary of outcomes is drawn from the project evaluation. The original evaluation report is available as a book chapter entitled **WORKING WITH ARTISTS TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS** (Stickley 2012).

Growth in confidence and pride in the art-form produced

This section demonstrates the outcomes from the feelings tree (Figure 1). Questions asked at the beginning of the project are shown with rings, in comparison to the end of the project, shown with shaded circles. The results show two trends:

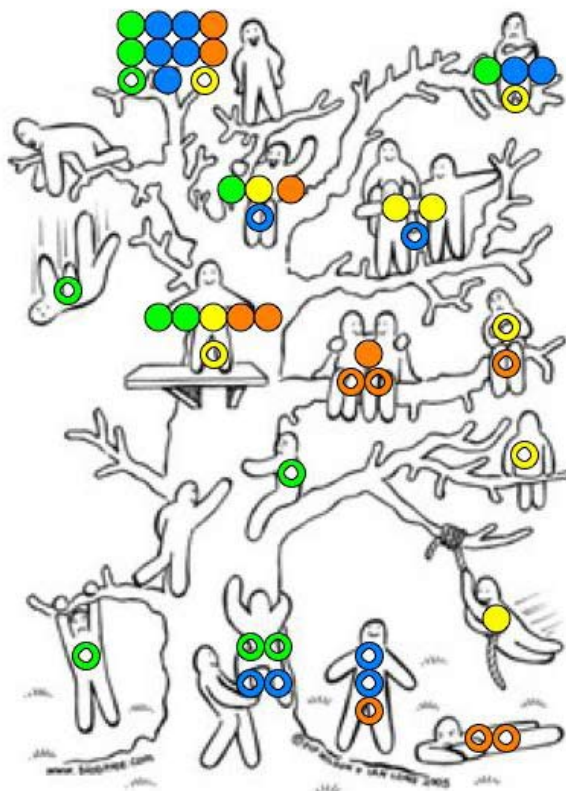
- **A general movement up the tree, with the three figures standing proud at the platform halfway up the tree or higher, being the most common positions chosen at the end of the project**
- **Some other movement from isolated figures to figures with companions. Feeling proud, achieving something beyond their expectations, growth in confidence and making new friends were the reasons given by the young people to explain these changes. Only one participant, who started and stayed on the platform half way up the tree, reported not moving.**

Figure 1: 'Blob Feelings Tree' Analysis

Key: School A (Green), B (Blue), C (Yellow) & D (Orange)

Ring = position at the beginning of the project

Circle = position at the end of the project



This feedback appears realistic as these observed changes are supported by interviews with all participants (young people, teachers and artists). The movement is not simply a case of a moving from the very bottom to the very top of the tree but is more subtle and considered. Three young people from two

schools reported a change from a contented figure to a figure that was now upset but each said this was because the project, which they had both enjoyed and benefited from, had now come to an end, so this can be interpreted positively too.



COMMENTARY	EVALUATION
<p>The overwhelming majority of participants reported feeling ‘proud’ of the project. This was linked to high quality outcomes that exceeded expectations, supported by working with an artist.</p>	<p>“I feel proud because I didn’t know we could actually do the things we’ve done, the courtyard was used for nothing and now there’s sculptures” (young person, school A) “I feel like I’ve produced something significant” (young person, school C)</p>
<p>Pride and growth in confidence was credited to ownership of the work, as this artist identifies.</p>	<p>“The ideas have come from the students so they have real ownership of the work, they feel really proud and bring their friends up at lunchtimes to show them and say we’ve done this today... you can see it in their faces, bubbling over to tell people what they’ve done” (artist, school B)</p>
<p>This was also linked to the ways in which each artist worked with the group, the process involved and the dynamics created.</p>	<p>“They’ve become more confident as they’ve met up with students in other tutor groups, they’ve had to listen to other people’s points of view and had to work as a team” (teacher, school D) “I think it’s important for the children to see something from start to finish and have something ‘concrete’ in school that can be celebrated” (teacher, school A)</p>
<p>The young people’s sentiments of pride owe much to a process that culminated in the group producing something higher in quality than they expected, which will also be sited prominently at each school for many people to see for many years to come. In this sense, they feel they have contributed to something bigger than themselves. This was reinforced at each school through the organisation of a grand opening and celebration event that was well attended by the school community, parents, visitors and local press. The feedback from all involved also highlights the importance of working with professional artists, guiding participants towards a high quality successful outcome, as key ingredients of improvements in confidence and esteem.</p>	<p>“It has been a privilege to work with a top artist!” (young person, school B)</p>

Developing resilience

COMMENTARY	EVALUATION
<p>The project at School B, whilst ultimately successful had to cope with an artistic setback. After the ‘chill-out’ room was painted to the young peoples’ initial ideas, they didn’t like it and with the artist’s guidance they went back to the drawing board to start afresh. This is a noteworthy achievement, as it demonstrates the group’s competence in problem-solving and resilience.</p>	<p>“The first design was like too childish, no-one really liked it, it had rainbows going all around the room, it looked too babyish and the room was meant to be for teenagers and adults... I felt we were in a tight spot, I felt a bit iffy ‘cos I didn’t know I’d be able to do it, and (young person’s name) said c’mon we can do it ...” (young person, school B, author’s editing in brackets)</p>
<p>Artists are used to dealing with such setbacks and unanticipated outcomes. Yet, children and young people who are either vulnerable or experiencing mental health difficulties may find it difficult to navigate such obstacles. In this case, the artist was able to model problem-solving skills and communicate that it is perfectly normal to experience such setbacks but success is still possible. Such lessons are invaluable and it could be a recommendation that artists working on projects like this one should deliberately incorporate ‘planned setbacks’ into projects so that participants experience how to manage this process.</p>	<p>“I thought that was one of the real strengths of the project, that they were able to say halfway through, that they had the confidence to actually say this isn’t how we wanted it to look ... I was really pleased that they could say that and they had the confidence in their own colour schemes and patterns to say ‘no’... I don’t think I would have had the confidence at their age to say to a member of staff what we’re doing is wrong, let’s start again, you might just go along with it” (artist, school B)</p>



Absorption and engagement

COMMENTARY	EVALUATION
<p>All participants interviewed about their artwork, with only one exception, have commented about how enjoyable they have found the work. For some, this provides a degree of absorption and respite from the stress they may experience in other areas of school life, as this young person indicates.</p>	<p>“Doing it is cheery, it makes you happier than doing anything else” (young person, school B)</p>
<p>Interestingly, this same young person is the subject of reflection by the artist when interviewed at the end of the project.</p> <p>By the end of the project, he is still eager to share his ideas but all his recorded references are to the process of transforming the room. If nothing else, the project has been a welcome distraction, though whilst it is beyond the evidence collected, tentatively there appears to have been an identity shift or maturation taken place.</p>	<p>“One student was very interested in drugs and drug culture and was leading, well just bringing it up a lot while chatting about ideas and that’s just now gone, he’s just more interested in the project, drawing out floor plans and coming to me to say I’ve done this design and I’ve got this idea and what about this shade and colour for this wall and he just became more engaged in the artwork, perhaps leaving other stuff behind” (artist, school B)</p>



Social capital

COMMENTARY	EVALUATION
<p>The most common impact theme in both adult and young people’s interviews was how the projects had afforded greater group cohesion and improvements in social skills for many participants. Participants at each project have reported making new friends and for some this has improved their wellbeing at school, as well illustrated by the following quote.</p>	<p>“Two girls now have a blossoming friendship from the group, beforehand they were the target for some name calling, bullying and had low self-esteem, now they’ve formed a friendship they’re able to support each other, they’re more likely to seek help and are coming more to things like after-school art clubs” (teacher, school D).</p>
<p>Some of this success could be credited to the formation of groups specifically for these projects, which included young people who were less familiar with each other. (With some similarity to points already made), this participant talked about how pleased they had been with the project but the fact that the young people ‘owned’ the project was key to him and a group identity is clearly apparent in his own terms of reference.</p>	<p>“I feel happy because WE did it, the teachers helped us a bit with buying stuff but we mostly did it, we painted the room and it’s kind of life changing for us because we’ve done it, we didn’t think we could do anything like this ... ” (young person, school B)</p>
<p>This would represent a growth in the sense of possibility, while other participants talked about greater hope for the future and the likelihood of taking up new hobbies. There was also evidence of increased ‘animation’ or growth in social skills and capital, as suggested by this artist’s reflection on conversations with young people.</p>	<p>“At the beginning a lot of them were very quiet and verbally wouldn’t share their ideas or share them with the group but by the end of it they were saying ‘oi’– don’t put that there and really interacting with one another ... conversation opened up over the weeks, there was a lot more talking and making friends. One student said he’s been able to chat to other classmates more and if he’s stood in the dinner queue he’ll turn round and talk to other people he doesn’t know and he’s found himself opening up to people a lot more ... ” (artist, school B)</p>
<p>The artists involved all worked in different ways to most teachers (albeit in smaller class sizes), being more attentive to process and allowing participants greater control in making decisions. This was acknowledged by two of the four teachers interviewed and several young people. The learning environments created offered a safe space for young people to share their views and have these respected. This provided participants with a realistic chance of them informing both the process and outcome, as these two comments suggest.</p>	<p>“Instead of shouting at you, she (the artist) helps you a bit more, they were like more relaxed than lessons rather than forced on to you ... you were able to choose if you wanted to do the tree or the painting ... I feel more confident and able to speak up, because usually you just get pushed to the side and everybody else chucks their ideas in, so we’ve all had a chance to get our ideas in” (young person, school C)</p> <p>“He (the artist) comes very prepared, he inspires them rather than forces them ... he understands dynamics and how to form a group too” (teacher, school D)</p>

On-going assessment of impact

Since the programme ended, the schools were contacted by the TaMHS Project Co-ordinator and asked to report their observations on the longer term impact of the arts project. Two of the three secondary schools responded and reported (via telephone and email exchange) the following impacts:

- **Improved school attendance with figures at one school improving from 30% to 80% among participants who had participated in the programme**
- **Increased motivation to learn and gain new skills**
- **Wider transferable skills gained including social competency, resilience, interpersonal and communication skills**
- **Increased cognitive abilities including the ability to question and explore critical thinking**
- **Personal development**
- **Increased social confidence with peers**
- **Increased cultural/ arts knowledge**
- **Sustained creative participation - participants from one of the schools now regularly attend lunchtime arts sessions beyond the project**
- **Whole school impact – improved external perceptions of parents and visitors to the schools**

Sustainability

All four TaMHS schools recognised the valuable contribution the arts made to the school's emotional wellbeing and stated their intention to continue delivering arts based approaches as follows:

- School A will use the arts at transition phases to support young people moving into secondary school, and also to strengthen their SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme in school. They also plan to maintain the new relationship forged with the Forestry Commission. Forestry Commission Rangers will re-visit the school to maintain the willow sculptures, and the school plans to repeat the visits to Sherwood Pines, acknowledging how engagement with nature has contributed positively to mental wellbeing.
- School B are using the 'chill out room' as a permanent nurture space which is in constant use by young people and teachers. They plan to repeat the project with other young people to transform other parts of the school
- School C have secured funding to repeat the project with other 'vulnerable' groups of young people
- School D are setting up a lunchtime arts group for vulnerable young people facilitated by teaching/ pastoral care staff, drawing on successful features of their TaMHS project.

The TaMHS project also enabled the Nottinghamshire County Council Arts Development Team to better understand mental health support for young people in Nottinghamshire schools, and to build relationships with relevant organisations and colleagues. The Arts Development Team is committed to further development of this area of practice and has:

- Collaborated with the Nottinghamshire County Council CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) training team to pilot a bespoke training day for twenty artists exploring a range of emotional health and wellbeing issues related to arts practice. The day was very well received and a commitment was established to repeat this training according to need.
- Commissioned a research report exploring how best to promote emotional health and wellbeing across Nottinghamshire schools. The report reviewed the evidence base; reviewed relevant examples of practice; consulted with appropriate professionals and recommended development needs, key opportunities and next steps.



5. Key learning outcomes

The TaMHS project highlighted a number of key themes contributing to good practice which we would like to share with you, themed according to the project's four key aims highlighted in Section 2.

To test effective models for early intervention

Universal provision (the whole school)

When individual schools were consulted about 'what influences their emotional health and wellbeing in their school life', young people and staff at all four schools identified the school environment (indoors and outdoors) as having a profound impact. Their key priorities for improving this included brightening up interior and exterior social spaces, clear signage, 'big art' and creating a positive identity for their school. The projects were able to provide inexpensive improvements to the physical environment, creating new signage, artworks, and interactive playground facilities

- School staff observed that the art and creative spaces produced appeared to impact positively on the young people's and visitors perceptions of the school
- One of the projects was able to create a 'chill out' room, a safe therapeutic space with a completely different feel to the rest of the school. This has been used to capacity as a retreat for vulnerable young people, and as a base for counselling, small group work and other pastoral activities.

Targeted provision (meeting the needs of vulnerable young people)

The arts projects provided a cost-effective early intervention option for vulnerable young people, offering an inclusive and non-threatening alternative to more traditional forms of therapy. Arts projects are more easily able to avoid the stigma which some young people feel is associated with mental health provision

- The projects were particularly instrumental in promoting self-esteem, social skills and social inclusion amongst participants who were isolated and/ or disengaged. They created opportunities for new supportive friendships and helped to motivate participation in school and extra-curricular activities. School staff observed that the projects impacted positively on school attendance for participating young people
- The creative activities provided a valuable tool as an 'absorption and engagement' activity (often referred to in mental health texts as 'flow' activity), impacting positively by detracting from anxieties rather than focusing on them
- The relationships established between the artists and participants were recognised as having a particular added benefit as an alternative to more traditional classroom or therapeutic roles
- The process led nature of the creative projects were recognised as having a particular benefit, especially where it allowed young people the greatest freedom to plan, steer and make decisions. The link between 'service user' participation and positive mental health outcomes is well documented in health research, especially arts and health research.

To develop joined-up approaches

- Any school-based intervention needs to be well supported at a senior level and incorporated into long term planning to benefit from long term impact. This is a challenge for arts interventions which are often small in scale, time limited, dependant on short term funding and too frequently seen as a luxury rather than a core school activity. It is important to remember that where collaborative arts projects are not incorporated into long term planning or service provision, they can leave teachers or young people feeling inadequate in continuing or replicating the work unaided
- The schools involved in the TaMHS project intend to replicate aspects of the project without additional cost by utilising the skills of school staff (e.g. by running lunchtime/ targeted art groups; by maximising the use of arts within the delivery of SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning); or by improving areas of the school grounds through curriculum or out of hours projects). Where possible the schools intend to secure funds to utilise artists within these projects, recognising the significant added value of the artist role
- The involvement of school staff in the projects was valuable in that it created relationships between participants and staff which could be sustained beyond the project end, thereby counteracting some of the potential negative impacts of short term projects

- For the maximum impact and sustainability of arts interventions to be realised, they need to be fully recognised by, and embedded within school, health and local authority strategy. Building on TaMHS, Nottinghamshire County Council's Arts Development Team commissioned a research report exploring how best to promote emotional health and wellbeing across Nottinghamshire schools. The report explored the evidence base and potential models for, and barriers to, effective practice. It made a number of recommendations for future practice based on consultation with key stakeholders and potential partners across adolescent health, social care and education.

These include:

- Developing a joint CAMHS/ arts steering group to plan joint practice across Tiers 2 and 3 in the CAMHS service, and is accountable to the CAMHS commissioning group
- Developing an agreed evaluation tool to measure the outcomes of young people's participation in arts-based emotional health and wellbeing interventions
- Developing a long term funding stream of partnership agencies to fund early intervention strategies
- Developing partnership protocols for use within the arts sector that addresses issues of governance, information sharing and ethics in working with children and young people with identified mental health difficulties
- Addressing professional development within the arts and health sector in supporting the development of joint practice.

To understand the barriers to successful implementation of effective models

The key barriers to successful implementation have been referred to in the sections above, and include:

- Securing a credible and compatible evidence base
- Joint planning and working
- Establishing partnership protocols to formalise shared understanding around governance, ethics, information sharing, record keeping, clinical risk and other issues
- Establishing arts interventions which benefit from the non-stigmatising perception that they are not ‘statutory mental health provision’, but which have appropriate levels of governance to ensure that they are safe and effective
- Sustainable funding and planning

In the project evaluation report Dr Edward Sellman highlighted the importance of preparing well planned projects to ensure the wellbeing of participants. He explains this as follows;

“If the arts have the power to heal and transform lives through positive experiences, it is also true that bad experiences can have a negative impact on individuals involved. So it is crucial that well devised approaches are developed by arts organisations and artists to ensure the effectiveness and positive impact of this work”

Therefore it is important to consider the ‘life-cycle’ of any group created. In relation to community arts projects, Thiele & Marsden (2003) model the key phases of this as;

- initial research and development
- an introductory phase
- a time for nurturing connectedness
- a period of disengagement

The initial phase includes questioning the relationship of the project to its context and setting out clear questions at the beginning that need developing and researching.

The appropriate selection of facilitating artists needs to be prioritised as they play a significant role in their approach to the work and the expertise that they bring. The selection of the groups needs careful consideration, especially if it is a specific or targeted group. This process needs to be carefully communicated and assumptions challenged in order to avoid colluding with a stigmatising label or stereotype.

Frequently, children and young people experiencing difficulties are attributed the label of low self-esteem as a ‘catch-all’ term. However, this ‘low self-esteem’ may only exist in the mind of the teacher and applies more precisely to esteem in relation to class based activities or behaviour that may be complex.

Finally, disengagement also necessitates careful management. As projects inevitably come to an end, there may be a ‘grieving’ stage and it is important to consider and develop appropriate exit strategies.



In response to these points, below are some guidelines for facilitating successful projects:

- Set realistic timescales
- Devise well-planned projects that reflect the group's experience, skills and confidence
- Ensure good management of group dynamics
- Ensure adequate safeguarding practices and training are in place
- Ensure that good visual and verbal communication is employed
- Reinforce individual contributions positively through good facilitation and supervision of responses from peers
- Encourage and support the young people's autonomy to ensure ownership of the work

- Reinforce the non-stigmatisation and stereotyping of participants
- Plan for addressing obstacles and setbacks that may arise
- Celebrate and acknowledge the outcomes achieved

It is our hope that this report imparts valuable approaches that can be utilised in work developed with young people and exhibits the value of the work generated by the young people taking part in this project. It is crucial that projects like this promote and demonstrate the efficacy of the arts in improving the quality of life and wellbeing of vulnerable young people.

6. References

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7. Useful Websites

City Arts: www.city-arts.org.uk

Nottinghamshire County Council Arts Service: www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/leisure/arts.htm

Arts Partnership Nottinghamshire: www.apnotts.org.uk

Dr Edward Sellman: www.megaumbrella.co.uk

Anthony McCourt/Push Media, film-maker: www.pushmedia.org.uk

TaMHS: www.chimat.org.uk/camhs/tamhs/studies

London Arts and Health Forum: www.lahf.org.uk

8. Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all the people who made it happen:

The young people and teachers at the four schools

Artists Karina Thornton and Amy Chandler (both Forestry Commission, School A); Angela Connors (School B); Anna Dixon and Stella Chadwick (School C) and James Sutton (School D)

Alma Cunliffe (City Arts), TaMHS project co-ordinator

Dr Edward Sellman (University of Nottingham), TaMHS project evaluator

Anthony McCourt, (film-maker) who worked with Dr Edward Sellman to produce the documentary DVD

Mary Jarrett and Jo Mitchell (Nottinghamshire County Council) TaHMS, programme managers

Amber Walls (Nottinghamshire County Council), Arts Development Team project lead and report co-writer

Kate Duncan, (City Arts) Creative Programme Manager who prepared this report with contributions from the project team and commissioners

Dr Theodore Stickley (University of Nottingham) who advised City Arts on the initial tender submission



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The funders

Department for Education

TaMHS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools)

Arts Partnership Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire County Council Arts Service



The University of
Nottingham



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**Nottingham
City Council**

Targeted Mental Health
in Schools (TaMHS)

