

Bitesize Case Study: Arts Loco - using arts to enhance wellbeing

Voluntary Sector North West

This case study is one in a series of studies curated to capture best practice, and highlight innovations, from the joint Health Education England (HEE) working across the North West and Voluntary Sector North West 'Learning Matters' awards 2017. The awards are part of a cross sector adult learning campaign delivered for the health and care sector through a number of key regional partnerships and collaborations. The overarching theme of the awards is simple: lifelong learning is good for people, organisations and health.



HEE Quality Standards met:

- 3 - Supporting and Empowering Learners
- 5 - Developing and Implementing Curricula and Assessments

What was the issue or problem? What did you set out to do?

Since its beginning in 2011 Arts Loco has aimed to offer an innovative model of arts and health to enhance the wellbeing of communities in Liverpool (see Appendix 1). The Student Development Coordinator in the Liverpool School of Art and Design, Elaine McNeill, embarked on a placement at Aintree University Hospital to gain a practical insight of the research gaps in hospitals to further the research and practice of arts and health for her PhD study.

Whilst placed at the heart of the hospital arts programme PARTIA (Promoting Art in Aintree), Elaine observed the huge benefits of arts on the patient experience and healing process. Meanwhile back at the University the demand from students for valuable work experience to support a career progression into arts therapy was increasing. Both problems provided the other a solution; it was almost a perfect fit.

What did you do? What was the intervention or initiative?

Given the financial challenges within the NHS Elaine recognised the need for sustainable arts and health models. Collaboration with local universities could develop effective work based learning programmes and serve the patient population by offering a quality programme of arts activities. Liverpool John Moores University developed Arts Loco, a sustainable arts and health in partnership with PARTIA, to enhance patient care; improve staff experience; and provide valuable professional practice for students from multiple disciplines including: nursing, creative arts and psychology.

In order for the placements to be effective an eight week training programme was developed to cover safeguarding, best practice and infection control. This enabled students to devise and lead suitable ward-based activities. By employing an interdisciplinary, learner-centred proactive programme, long-term retention of arts and health concepts was promoted. This allows students to assimilate and integrate their subject knowledge with practical application in the workplace.

Another project was Vinyl Images, a 60's inspired entertainment with the option of painting a 60's design. Students dressed up in tie-dye costumes with bright wigs and invited patients to select their favourite vinyl to enjoy some good music. Patients were taught a simple dance routine that could be done at the bedside or in the bed to get them more active and to improve the ward atmosphere to a more fun, supportive environment, where staff and volunteers are happy to improve the patient's day.

Whilst the team are making a difference in Aintree Hospital, it has been recognised there is also a demand within the wider community and therefore Arts Loco has expanded to meet community needs. The team also work with local housing schemes delivering arts and health activities in Independent Living Schemes and within mental health services for Merseycare Trust and Mary Seacole House.



What were the Key Outcomes?

Results have demonstrated that the arts sessions in the hospital improved feelings of wellbeing, whilst staff and patients reported the creative sessions provided fun, were relaxing and encouraged participants to be creative in a social way. It also boosts a positive sense of belonging. Improvements were also noted in the ability to manage self-care and overall quality of life. Meanwhile students who have engaged in the programme have progressed into the health care environment adopting a person centred holistic approach and have continued to support the field of arts and health in their work.

The project outputs range from film to music and drama, painting, poetry and photography - the possibilities are endless. One of the main group activities took place on Ward 34, the Frailty Unit in the department of medicine for the elderly and in the newly opened 'Aintree 2 Home'. 'Aintree 2 Home' is a community therapy-led service developed by Aintree University Hospital in response to the trust needing to increase the number of medical discharges. One of the activities consisted of patients being creative and producing simple watercolours and landscape paintings with washes of colour or simple patterns that they can paint on A4 paper. These pieces of art were then laminated and left with the patients.

These regular art sessions allow patients to break from the normal routine of a ward environment and impact positively on mood. This led to an improvement in patient experience and also increased patients functional abilities, which by extension reduced the time patients had to wait for community service discharges. It also prevented de-conditioning of patients, allowing the volunteers in the visual arts projects to engage more frequently with them.

What were the lessons learned?

The key learning within the importance of situating learners at the centre of the experience, empowering and motivating them to assume responsibility for their own learning. The teaching and learning strategies adopted were designed to encourage students to see themselves as active thinkers and problem-solvers.

Student experience:

- Working confidently in unfamiliar environments; e.g. nurses working with the arts to provide patient distractions, artists working in clinical environments
- How to work in multi-disciplinary teams to achieve a shared outcome i.e. the successful execution of an activity
- How to adapt their own experience either nursing or arts base to provide a flexible solution

One key benefit was ownership of the learning process. The task (developing suitable activities for the hospital) required students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Evaluation was utilised to analyse the student and patient experiences. The students' professional practice was evaluated using regular feedback and focus groups entrenched within the programme. The team could then evaluate credit bearing work-based learning reports and alumni career progression.

Data has highlighted how students are able to explore arts and health careers and incorporate creative skills into their future graduate health positions. The project has highlighted the difference the arts can make to the lives of so many people – even the simplest flash mob that took less than 30 minutes to prepare uplifted the atmosphere in a ward bay for patients and families. Our ethos is the simpler the better; it's amazing what a short routine to 'Hit the Road Jack' can do. Simple watercolour painting and making cards with a couple over 70s on Valentine's day was truly heart-warming.

As part of the activities patient feedback was gathered and staff were interviewed to assess their experience. Findings have been presented at teaching and learning conferences and an article has been submitted to Nursing Times. The project's successes have been shared with other universities and hospitals; Edge Hill will be adopting the model for their student nursing programmes, and the arts for Health Lead at the Royal Liverpool Hospital is keen to develop some of the activities when the new hospital opens.

Arts Loco continues to develop new partnerships so the work can reach out to the wider community.

Supporting Material

Appendix 1 - PARTIA Ward Activities leaflet

Level of award:

Runner-up - Supporting Learners in Practice Category

Organisation: PARTIA at Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

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