



what works
wellbeing



How does participating in visual art projects impact the wellbeing of adults with mental health issues?



the big picture

This is the first overall review of the evidence on the impact of visual arts on the wellbeing of adults with mental health conditions. Prior to this, there have been some insightful exploratory studies showing the positive impacts.

This briefing is based on a [systematic review](#) that looks at interventions that encouraged participation in, and enjoyment of, art among this group.

The review identifies the effects of visual art on subjective wellbeing. This describes both the good and bad feelings that arise from people's outlook: how they think about themselves and others, and what they do in the interactions and practices of everyday life. The visual arts activities we looked at include painting or drawing, art appreciation, making art and exhibiting, ceramics, sculpture, and crafts activities.

We found that there is limited good quality evidence for visual arts impacts, though case studies from the UK have provided important and consistent findings.

The review includes data from 163 participants across four countries: Australia, Sweden, the UK, and the US. Overall, more women were included in the studies than men.

We sifted
through
4,820
studies

and 8
were
included

Five qualitative studies
Two quantitative
One mixed-methods, predominantly
quantitative study/small-scale RCT

“

I benefit
from
socialising,
learning new
things and
widening my
creative
experience.

”

Designs in Mind participant
Find out more in our case
study on page four.

In partnership with:



key messages

Evidence shows that visual arts activities, of various kinds, can reduce depression and anxiety and increase confidence and self-esteem.

How? Engagement with visual arts can support phased progress towards recovery, re-engagement with 'everyday life' and other people in a local culture and community. The creative process can help participants immerse themselves and escape from everyday anxieties and in some cases, thrive with the new identity of 'artist' or member.

It matters how activities are run. The most effective interventions provided:

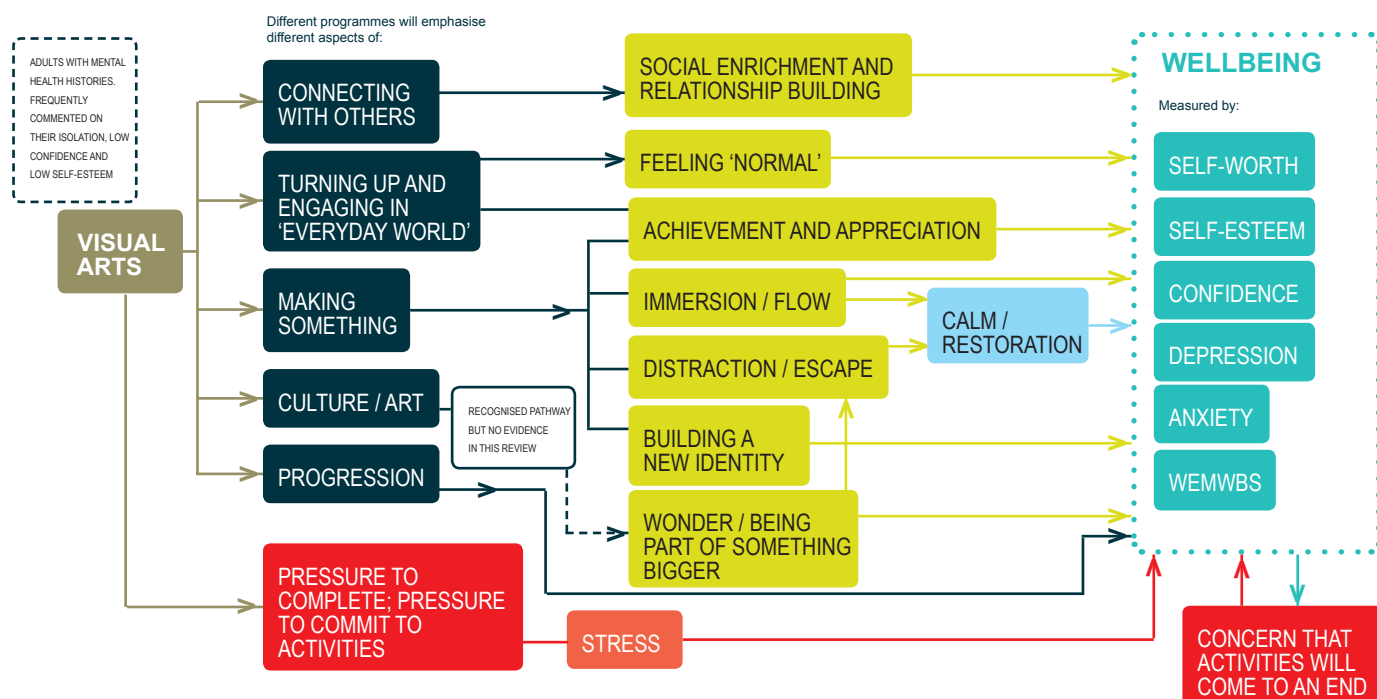
- safe spaces where people did not feel stigmatised
- facilitation by empathetic teams of practitioners/researchers

So what? Arts activities are important. We need to know more about which arts are effective in enhancing subjective wellbeing, for whom and in what contexts so that appropriate policy and practice decisions can be made.

The following diagram presents some of the emerging themes that were identified in the evidence

What are facilitating factors? Processes of implementation that:






- ensure provision of secure safe-space and havens for interventions
- recognise the value of non-stigmatising settings
- support and sustain genuine partnerships and enduring forms of collaboration that underpin interventions, programmes and sessions.


















what evidence did we find?

Quantitative findings on impact of visual art on wellbeing of adults with mental health issues

-   Drawing representations of emotions, as in an exercise focused upon drawing mandalas, can reduce trauma for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
-   Engaging in visual art activities can improve self-reported health and reduce symptoms of exhaustion for women with burnout.
-  Taking part in arts and crafts, such as ceramic painting, flower arranging, and assembling leather belts or models in plastic or wood, can improve quality of life for those suffering from PTSD.

Creating conditions to enhance wellbeing

The qualitative findings in the review showed evidence that participation in the visual arts can create conditions in which wellbeing can be enhanced. The five qualitative studies and the six project evaluations showed the following wellbeing impacts:

-    **Social enrichment and relationship building** through doing art practices with others.
-   **Achievement and appreciation** from completing an art project, or simply regularly attending art sessions.
-   **Using the intervention as a 'stepping stone'** to taking part in other arts projects, or activities.
-   **A distraction or escape from stigma** or the trials of day-to-day life.
-  **Doing and not talking**, and establishing the basis of a new sense of identity when participants immerse themselves in a new and creative practice.
-   **Improved confidence.**
-  **Identity gain** – for instance, identifying people as members, not participants.

Four of the six projects identified in the grey literature measured improvements in subjective wellbeing with the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS).

There are three types of evidence



strong

We can be confident that the evidence can be used to inform decisions.



promising

We have moderate confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.



initial

We have low confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.

Strong, promising and initial evidence refer to high, moderate and low quality evidence / confidence as per GRADE and CERQual guidance. For further information on these classifications, please see the Centre's [Methods Guide](#).

All evidence should be considered alongside questions of possible benefits and risks, affordability, acceptability, feasibility and wider impacts, including equity issues, in the user setting. Where the evidence is less strong, these other considerations become even more important.



Case study: Designs in Mind

The Designs in Mind (DM) project is a studio of designer-makers referred through mental health services. Located in Oswestry, Shropshire, UK, DM work as a collective to create high-quality ambitious and experimental art & design work, which makes it possible for people who have experienced mental health challenges to live life and have a greater sense of wellbeing.

DM is not time-limited. Members can stay until they are ready to move on. Members normally stay for 3-5 years. Typically, DM witnesses the transition of members leaving their house to come solely to DM, to doing their own shopping, meeting their children from school, joining other groups, volunteering, or going back to work.

DM report 56 (42 female, 14 male) members engaged in the project in 2016/17. Most members are aged 35-64 (40), but members are welcomed from age 18. Five new members (aged 18-24) have recently joined in the summer of 2017, increasing total membership to 61.

DM evaluate the impact of their work using a variety of methods, including the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS); questionnaires; one-to-one interviews about changes and impact on life outside of Designs in Mind; and through three member days a year. These events provide an opportunity for members to discuss, reflect and develop ideas for Designs in Mind with no staff present.

"It gives me such a sense of satisfaction coming here. Growing up, nobody really noticed me, I was written off. Nothing I did was of any use. Now I come here and I get satisfaction of making things that people want. If it isn't good enough people work with me to get it right and if it's good, someone buys it." - Member Interview

The making, the installation process, the launch events and the press/interest generated from producing and exhibiting high-quality art and design, has had a huge impact on feelings of connectedness, self-worth and recognition for creative excellence, whilst simultaneously challenging mental health stigma.

WEMWBS data shows 95% of members report increased wellbeing from participation at DM. The WEMWBS is a commonly used and easily understood wellbeing measurement tool. It uses a 14-question scale, each with 5 response options, summed to provide a final score ranging from 14 (very low wellbeing) to 70 (extremely positive wellbeing).

DM's WEMWBS scores showed that over two years a mean increase of 15 was recorded. The results from the WEMWBS demonstrate a positive relationship between sustained DM membership and a greater sense of wellbeing.

One-to-one interviews and member reviews reveal that 65% of members are more active in their local community due to attending Designs in Mind, while 100% of members report increased social network and a reduction in isolation.

Please follow this link to read a report on the impact for 2017:
[Designs in Mind Social Impact Report 2016-2017](#)



what works
wellbeing

www.whatworkswellbeing.org

@whatworksWB

We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.

Licensed under Creative Commons: AttributionNonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

