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Company no. 5260817
 Charity no. 1107757

Annual Report 2023-24



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Arty-Folks

Trustee Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024
Company Registration no. 5260817 Charity Registration no. 1107757

Charity Information

Charity Name: Arty-Folks
Charity Registration Number: 1107757
Company Registration Number: 5260817

Registered Office
1st Floor Eaton House
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Coventry CV1 2FJ

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Trustee Directors	Peter Young, Chair	March 2022
	Laura Wilde, Vice-Chair	November 2020
	William Brian, Engagement	March 2022
	Miho Taka, Service user	November 2022
	Mike Baker, NHS	January 2023, resigned Sept 2024
	Dan Sharkey, Treasurer	January 2023
Mark Cook, Arts&Outreach	May 2024	

Company Secretary
Hayley Cartwright
January 2022

Staff Team	Lorella Medici	Chief Executive Officer
	Liz Harvey	Art Programme
	Tasz Bailey	Progression Support Worker
	Chris Spicer	REACH Peer Support worker
	Emelia Deacon	Visual Content Creator (6month post)

Bank
CAF Bank Ltd.
25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ

Insurers
Markel (UK) Ltd., Verity House, 6 Canal Wharf
Leeds LS11 5AS

Policy Number	CD42569	02.04.23 to 01.04.24
	Period of Insurance	£10,000,000
	Public Liability	£10,000,000
	Employers Liability	£250,000
	Professional Indemnity	

Independent Examiner
Azets Audit Services
3Mc Middlemarch Business Park
Siskin Drive
Coventry CV3 4FJ

Chair's Welcome

I'm delighted to welcome you to Arty-Folks' report for the year 2023 to 2024.

I'd like to begin by congratulating our team on their fantastic achievements for the year. We measure impact in a number of ways, but reach is probably the most relatable: in 2023/24 we supported 623 individuals in Coventry and Warwickshire, up from 525 in the previous year. We are not a 'light touch' organisation, as some of the user stories contained herein make clear; to have had such impact with a team of less than 4 FTE's is remarkable. To have done so for less £200 per service user, equally so.

Our report sets out the services we have provided in the last year. This ranges from the sunflower project in Lillington, addressing social isolation through short activities in the community, to the dozens with more complex needs that we have seen weekly through the year at our studio. Our programme continues to evolve, and each year brings innovation. This year we have recognised the increasing needs of the youngest adults in our area. There are challenges in serving this community and we will adapt progressively, but as I write this I'm pleased to say we have just launched our first program for 16 to 25 year olds, on World Mental Health day, and we are receiving interest from the target group.

The structured programme built around the service user journey has also really taken shape this year and allows us to respond to the developing needs of individuals, providing continuity of support as their confidence and capabilities grow.

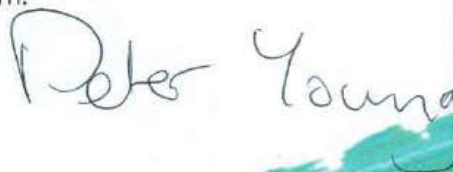
We continue to grow, 25% increase in expenditure in the last year, having doubled over the previous four. Growth comes with challenges and I am very pleased with the progress we have made on succession planning, which builds in long term leadership capacity. We are also providing accredited training of peer support workers so that they can progress to employment with us or other local VCSE organisations.

There is, regrettably, no let up in the demand for our services. In her introduction Lorella speaks of the number of people requiring support and in several places within our report you will read of the increasing complexity in the needs and circumstances of our users. Many factors are at play here: the residual effects of the pandemic; the inadequacies of social care provision; social media and its adverse impacts on well-being; social polarisation; stigmatisation of communities, such as refugees.

We are committed to further growth, program innovation and long-term stability so that we can continue to play our small part in addressing these tremendous challenges. Our team makes this happen on the ground - but it is our funders who ultimately make it all possible.

I would like to end by thanking you for your support in helping hundreds, hopefully thousands, of people in Coventry and Warwickshire live their lives with purpose, fulfilment and creative freedom.

Pete Young
Chairman of Trustees



Chief Executive Report

It is with great pride that I present Arty-Folks' Annual Report for 2023–2024. Reflecting on the past year, it's clear that the last 12 months have marked the beginning of a new and exciting trajectory for our charity—one that has been inspired by our members and propelled by the unwavering energy of our trustees, staff and peer volunteers, and of course our funders.

This year, we proudly completed the 2.5-year Art for Wellbeing programme, commissioned by Public Health Warwickshire, which provided vital support to over 1,300 individuals during the Covid-19 pandemic. An evaluation by Coventry University highlighted the significant mental health improvements achieved through the programme, which is also reflected in the powerful feedback from participants.

The growing recognition of the value of art in promoting both mental and social health has led to a new partnership with Warwick District Council, which has commissioned a three-year service in Lillington. This project will play a pivotal role in rebuilding a nurturing and inclusive community in a neighbourhood with the highest deprivation scores in South Warwickshire and whose social fabric has been most impacted by the pandemic.

Currently, an estimated 1.2 million people are on NHS waiting lists for community mental health services—a demand that can only be met through close collaboration between the statutory and voluntary sectors. We are proud to be part of various alliances that have formed across creative, health, and mental health sectors, working together to tackle this mental health tsunami and provide targeted, sustainable support for those most in need. One such collaboration is the REACH project, and we're particularly proud that one of our members designed its inspiring logo.

To meet the increasing demand for mental health support, we have expanded and restructured the programme of Creative Peer Support groups at our Coventry studios. The four distinct groups offer a progressive and structured approach to holistically tackle the factors impacting mental well-being and impeding a full recovery. You will read personal accounts by our members who continue to inspire us, driving Arty-Folks to grow in ways we never could have imagined.

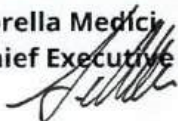
As a founding member of Arty-Folks inching towards retirement, I will be transitioning from my role as CEO over the next few years to focus on what I am most passionate about—working creatively alongside our members. With a robust CEO succession plan already in place, I am confident that Arty-Folks is well-positioned for sustained growth, continued innovation, and deeper impact in the years ahead.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our incredible team of trustees whose unwavering commitment, guidance, and strategic vision have been instrumental in driving Arty-Folks forward.

Arty-Folks currently stands on solid foundations and we are all looking forward to an exciting new era of growth and evolution that will continue to harness the transformative power of art to support mental health recovery, rebuild communities, and empower individuals to realize their potential.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Lorella Medici
Chief Executive Officer



Trustees' Governance Statement

Governing Document

Arty-Folks is a charitable company limited by guarantee. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association dated October 2004 and amended Nov 2018 and Dec 2020.

The company is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

Recruitment and Appointment of New Trustees

Trustees are elected at the AGM to serve a term of 4 years after which they may resign or seek re-election for another term. All trustees agree to comply with the Board Code of Conduct. The skills of the Board are reviewed regularly to ensure the breadth of knowledge appropriate to support the activities of the charity. A Register of Interests, Hospitality and Gifts received by Trustees and employees is maintained.

As a member-led organisation, there are always current or former service users on the Board and we are fortunate to have 2 members on the Board at the moment who can ensure that service users' perspectives are included in every Board decision.

When a new trustee is sought, depending on the skills and background desired, individuals are either approached or the post is advertised.

Induction and Training of Trustees

All current trustees are familiar with the work of the charity. New trustees are first invited to attend a Board meeting, meet the Chief Executive Officer and have a discussion with the Chair of the Board before committing themselves to the role.

A full induction pack covering the responsibilities of a trustee, the charity governance code, the main documents on Arty-Folks including the Memorandum and Articles, the Board code of conduct, Conflict of interest declaration, and links to trustee training and sources of trustee and charity governance information and webinars are all provided to support the role.

Organisation Structure

The Board comprises a minimum of 3 members and not more than 10. The Board meets 6 times per year with formal agendas and papers issued in advance for consideration by Trustees. Draft agendas are set by the Company Secretary following discussion with the Chair and Chief Executive Officer, and Board meetings are formally minuted.

Our Board of Trustees is very clear about our purpose, our mission, vision and aims and the impact we are seeking to make and is responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the charity. The execution of operational plans is delegated to employed and remunerated managers who are invited to Board Meetings to update the Board on operational performance. The Board monitors financial performance at each Board Meeting as well as operational metrics and agrees on any actions which need to be taken.

Arty-Folks' staff team is supported by Peer Volunteers who have grown through the service, and there is a strong programme in place for their support and supervision, with a number of policies specifically approved by the Board for such purposes. We supported 2 volunteers through ImRoc Peer Support training in 2023/24 and will continue this programme, funding permitting.

Formal processes are in place for every volunteer and employee to raise a concern if they wish to do so. All users are encouraged to complete service satisfaction questionnaires and we have an approved complaints process for users of our services.

The Board follows an agreed programme for policy review and, in that regard, reviewed the following policies in 2023/24:

- Lone worker policy
- Safeguarding for Adults Policy & Procedures
- NEW Safeguarding for Children & Young People Policy & Procedures
- NEW Social Media Policy – following Charity Commission guidance
- Data Protection & GDPR Policy
- Privacy Policy

Additionally, staff renewed Health & Safety training, and the following policies and assessments were updated:

- Cyber Security Awareness V4.1
- Designated Safeguarding Lead (Adults) V4.1
- Fire Warden (Fire Marshal) Training V4.1
- Health, Safety, and Welfare for Workers V4.1
- Risk Assessment Awareness V4.1

Risk Management

Trustees monitor all key strategic and operational risks and conduct a full risk review annually. Health and Safety and Safeguarding are standing items at every Board meeting. Risks are scored based on their impact and likelihood both before and after the consideration of mitigating actions.

Financial Review

Financial results are set out in the attached accounts. They show a year-end balance of £130,876. At the start of 2024/25, we hold an unrestricted surplus of £23,562 and will continue to fundraise as we expand.

Our annual costs are increasing year on year as we grow our staff team and activity.

Expenditure	2021/22	£78,160
	2022/23	£95,268
	2023/24	£124,497

Asset Transfer

Sitting Rooms of Culture CIC, a community-led organization dedicated to fostering creativity and social connection, decided to cease operations. In recognition of our shared values and vision, chose to transfer its remaining assets of £1,431 to Arty-Folks. This generous decision will allow us to build on their legacy and further enhance our capacity to provide creative mental health support to our community.

Designated Funds - Eaton House

The risk of immediate evacuation (21 days lease termination) of our Coventry Studios at Eaton House remains. The deadline for demolition has not been set, but we know that the state of the repair of the building is a concern of the landlord, and the work needed to maintain occupancy will not be completed. Consultations with Coventry City Council continue and discussions with estate agents reveal the high cost of commercial rent.

Research conducted in 2023 to inform the property risk led the Trustees to designate £44,822 to cover the cost of moving, the setup of new contracts, the impact on service delivery, and one-quarter of commercial rent. The Trustees wish to maintain the designated fund at this level for 2024/25. Additionally, there is a contingency fund of £47,634 which was made a designated fund in 2023 by the Board to cover operational running costs reflecting their prudent approach.

Reserves Policy

Arty-Folks CEO and founding member is planning to step down as CEO to concentrate on delivery as part of a phased retirement. To support this we increased our staff team during 2023/24 and we will be increasing the team further in 2024/25. To ensure our robustness as an organisation, we are upgrading our IT hardware/software, and moving to a fully cloud-based system.

The Trustees have reviewed the reserves policy and concluded that free reserves should be maintained at a level representing three to six months of planned running costs.

Due to the nature of the risks that the reserves are needed to cover, the reserves are held in cash.

Public Benefit

The Trustees confirm that, in the carrying out of the charity's activities, and in the exercise of their powers and duties as Trustees, the Trustees have acted in compliance with their duty to have regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance.



"It was nice meeting staff over the phone before coming in person to the studios. So I just couldn't understand the anxiety I felt on the morning! I felt absolutely petrified! I cannot tell you what I was thinking or why. It was just overwhelming!

I texted to say that I wasn't able to come. Staff called me right back and I let them convince me to meet in the car park.

Looking back, all that panicking seems really silly because I had a wonderful time! Painting soon calmed me down and people in the group were lovely.

The sense of achievement at the end of the day was enormous. I know I can do it!"

Participant 3-week Coventry studios induction course

Mission and Vision

Charitable Objects

'To relieve persons living with mental health conditions or suffering emotional distress by assisting such persons to realise their full potential and lead fulfilling lives through the provision of visual arts and wellbeing related activities.' We cover the geographical area of Coventry and Warwickshire.

Our Vision

We are working towards a world that understands creativity is not just a 'nice to have' but is the foundation of good mental health. People in Coventry and Warwickshire will feel empowered to own their mental well-being and will realise their potential.

Our Mission

We will paint a brighter, more compassionate world for all!

We inspire adults with mental ill health through the visual arts to regain self-belief to overcome challenges in life, and take control of their personal journey to recovery.

Service Aim

Our creative programme is structured into stepping stones to recovery and provides:

- **early intervention and prevention** support to adults with **low to moderate** mental health needs, thus reducing the need of more costly and longer-term interventions later. For example, people struggling with social anxiety and depression, financial pressures and exceptional life circumstances.
- **holistic and person-centred** support to adults with **severe and enduring mental conditions** such as anxiety, OCD, Psychosis, PTSD, Schizophrenia, and eating disorders, who are waiting for NHS therapies or are discharged.

Service Objectives

- **Reduce social isolation and loneliness**

We run a range of courses online and in-person that help people feel anchored in the community and enjoy being part of social networks.

- **Inspire people to achieve stability and self-manage their mental health conditions**

We support people to tackle obstacles in their daily lives so they are able to maintain a lifestyle that is conducive to good mental and physical health.

- **Unlock people's creativity for self-discovery and confidence to live purposeful lives**

We teach people to use the creative process for self-healing so they are more able to talk about, understand, and own their mental health and well-being.

- **Build resilience for social, community, and economic engagement**

We provide 1:1 mental health coaching and mentoring to empower people to live self-motivated and productive lives, embark on their vocational choices confident that they will be able to withstand knockbacks in life.

- **Foster art for mental health and community wellbeing**

We challenge the medical perspective of mental illness through our members' artwork and recovery stories. In future, people will understand their creativity and connectedness are fundamental pillars to good mental health, promoting healing, empathy, resilience, and a deeper understanding of the human experience.

Priorities 2023-24

Strategic Priorities set by the Board of Trustees for 2023-24

- **To complete the 2.5yr programme of Art for Wellbeing commissioned by Public Health Warwickshire County Council and meeting all targets**

January 2021 Warwickshire County Council Public Health commissioned Arty-Folks to deliver a programme of Art for Wellbeing courses and workshops online as well as in person, to support adults with low to moderate mental health needs across the county to remain well during Covid and to adjust to a post-pandemic world.

June 2023 completed this 30-month commission and we can report that we have **exceeded** all contract requirements in course numbers, attendance, reach and impact. The evaluation participants' data, participants' feedback and interviews conducted by Coventry University measured a statistically significant positive impact on participants' wellbeing, and showed the positive and lasting effect of attending.

- **To begin succession planning**

Our current Chief Executive Officer Lorella Medici is a founding member of the charity and will step down as CEO as part of a phased retirement plan. Working towards it, we will seek to recruit a number of new roles starting with a new CEO enabling Lorella to focus on direct delivery and further strengthening Arty-Folks' therapeutic arts programme.

- **To secure financial stability through multi-year commissions and grants**

The Art for Wellbeing commission gave us a great opportunity to expand our work into Warwickshire and explore different ways of working. Building on this, we will seek multi-year funding and embed a research element into new projects so we can continue developing the effectiveness of our interventions through independent data analysis.



Operational Report

During this financial year, we delivered the following projects & activities:

Art for Wellbeing
 Lillington Makers
 Coventry Studios
 REACH Peer Support Service
 Partnership projects LTB Gallery, Positive Youth Foundation, and Coventry University

623 Total number of individuals supported during 2023/24

Demographics

Age Range	20% aged 18-25yrs old 47% aged 26-45yrs old 33% aged 46-65yrs old
Gender	78% female 15% male 7% non-binary
Ethnicity	68% white British 32% other ethnic backgrounds
Education	10% no qualifications 51% completed GCSE/A-Level 25% University Degree 13% Masters/PHD

Economic Activity	36% in employment or education 15% unemployed less than 12 months 49% long-term unemployed
Additional Commitments	29% parent 12% carer 13% volunteers
Income	23% salary/student loan 44% benefits 3% sick pay 3% pension 27% no income
Additional Benefits	33% Disability benefits PIP/DLA 4% Carers Allowance

Trend 2023/24:

- more people off sick long-term due to stress at work
- more people holding multiple responsibilities (work&carer&parent)
- more parents with children with substantial mental health needs
- more people engaged in legal proceedings (employment/divorce/employment tribunals)
- increase of male and female participants of other nationalities escaping domestic violence
- wider range of nationalities seeking mental health support (reporting discrimination/stigma within their own culture)
- more asylum seekers seeking mental health support

Participants' reasons for enrolling

How did you hear about Arty-Folks?	24% recommended by Health Professionals 48% social media 28% word of mouth, family/friends
Reasons for enrolling	52% to de-stress and improve mental health 14% to improve my weekly routine 19% to learn new skills 15% to reduce social isolation
Loneliness scale	73% scoring moderate to high level 45% don't have a person they feel close to
Anxiety & Depression scale	83% scoring moderate to high level, of which 39% extremely or severe

Participants' mental health needs

Health Needs	31% mental health only (diagnosed) 25% mental health only (self-diagnosed) 13% additional Autism 33% additional physical health issues
Who is supporting you at present?	19% family/partner 14% Voluntary Sector (CRASAC/Mind) 15% Private Counsellor 36% NHS Psychology/GP 16% no support
Are you taking Medication for mental health?	54% are taking prescribed medication 46% not wanting to rely/not benefiting
Use of Emergency services prior to attending	22% ambulance, A&E, admitted to hospital

Trend 2023/24:

- sharp rise in people whose mental health is impacted by physical health conditions such as cancer, COPD, and in particular Autism
- more people seeking support to manage ADHD
- more under 35yr olds with long-term physical health conditions



"I had some talking therapy but it really wasn't for me. After 2years trying to deal with this 'thing' on my own and getting nowhere I became hopeless and suicidal.

Arty-Folks popped up on my feed and opened the door for me to art, people, support, and a different way of thinking."

Service User Journey

Enrolment

We do not offer drop-in attendance. All prospective service users must be living in Coventry&Warwickshire and enrol through the booking system on our website <https://arty-folks.org.uk/whats-on/> This enables us to screen participants for suitability, control group size and ensure a calm, positive and productive experience for participants, staff, and volunteers.

Online

Come Connect, 1 hour workshop, introduces participants to Creative Mindfulness through nature studies and Mandala.

Art for Relaxation, 3-week course, introduction to 3 different Creative Mindfulness techniques that are very accessible and fit into busy lives.

Painting for Pleasure, 6-week course, painting with acrylics teaching all the skills to create colourful work using just primary colours plus white.

Coventry studio course

Mondays, in-person 3-week block of max.12 participants provides an induction into our studios and our service. Participants evaluate whether art activities and the support we offer meets their expectations, and staff can assess whether our service is best to meet their needs. During the 3-week induction period participants learn painting with acrylics and during the sessions discuss 1:1 with our Wellbeing Coach what is holding their recovery journey back. Following on, we provide signposting information and our Progression Support Worker accompanies them to join other groups or specialist support if so required. Participants whom the team of staff and peer volunteers assess as benefiting from further support are invited to join Gateway group.

Lillington Makers

Tuesdays, 10am-11.30pm at Lillington Library, and 1pm-2.30pm at the Community Centre. Exclusively for residents in Lillington, Arts&Crafts with all age groups.

Gateway Creative Peer Support Group

Wednesdays, max. 3-months attendance of max.12 participants who receive a detailed financial check-up and benefits review to increase income, resolve debts, and reduce expenditure. Participants learn drawing, collage, textile, digital art, and glass painting to develop a creative hobby to pursue further with community groups and adult education courses. Participants who are looking to start volunteering, education, or employment are invited to join the Progression group.

Progression Creative Peer Support Group

Thursdays pm, max. 12-months attendance of max. 12 participants, with high levels of mental health needs who are seeking to improve their weekly routine and self-care abilities. The support needs in this group are complex and extensive and include immigration issues, benefit appeals, housing and dealing with negligent landlords, language and illiteracy, digital capacity, as well as social isolation. Participants increase self-awareness and communication skills through art projects that combine creative techniques with self-development themes. Participants who are looking to become economically active but are struggling with low self-esteem and to sustain their responsibilities are invited to join the New Perspectives group.

New Perspectives Creative Peer Support Group

Thursdays am, max. 12 participants who are expected to make a full recovery within max. 12-months attendance. Participants volunteer internally with Arty-Folks and complete a level-3 accredited Peer Support Worker training with <https://www.imroc.org/>. Participants are supported to complete their CV, apply for positions and prepare to resume their career routes into education or employment.

Note: service users can only attend ONE group at any one time.

Coventry Studios Eaton House

160 service users attended at our art studios in Coventry

Our ambition is to ensure that everyone who enrolls on our Coventry Studios programme can begin attending without delay and receive support at the point of need. 2023/24 we ran 15 induction courses of 3-weeks with max.10 participants at our art studios (total 45 weeks). During the course, every participant receives a 1:1 needs assessment and signposting information. Our Peer Support Worker accompanies participants with SEN needs to join suitable activities in the community.

3-week induction course (triage)	141 new service users, of whom 69 completed the course (49%) 32 booked a place but we were not able to establish contact (23%) 24 were not suitable for our service (17%) i.e. challenging behaviours and special needs we are not able to meet
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Trend:

- social anxiety is stated as the main reason for enrolment but also the main reason for dropping out
- sharp increase of people with challenging behaviours who are stepping down from statutory services
- NEW: parents whose own mental health is suffering as they are not able to gain specialist support for their children

As a result, we have intensified our pre-course communication to ensure that all attendees are able to engage in a group setting without substantial individual support.

IMPACT on completion of 3-week induction course

Loneliness scale	72% feel connected/made new friends 77% report reduced social anxiety
Meaningful activity	89% feel they have learnt new skills 92% during art activities able to disengage from worries



"It helped me in other areas in my life, almost immediately, as I learned to chop down tasks into a step by step process- and to breathe through it - just like we learnt in class.

The relaxing atmosphere and positive feedback made me review how I look at myself and stopped me being overly self-critical. It helped me develop my own style and feel good about it. I loved every minute."

Since reopening our studios in August '20 we have had to expand our programme of Creative Peer Support groups year on year to cope with demand for places as well as the rise in complex and enduring mental health needs.

Funded through the NHS Innovation Fund, in June '23 we introduced our **4th Creative Peer Support group** targeting those who are struggling to manage financial obligations and rising living costs.

Note that service users can attend only **1** weekly group.

IMPACT after 3 months attendance

<p>Coventry Studios programme of four weekly Creative Peer Support Groups</p>	<p>68 service users attended one of four Creative Peer Support groups, of whom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 started/went back to work 4 started a University course 15 started volunteering positions with Arty-Folks or Vol Sector 12 progressed to mainstream art groups <p>18 weeks average attendance <u>48 exited</u> the service during 2023/24</p>
<p>Use of NHS services</p>	<p>11% stopped or reduced their medication 1% used NHS emergency services/hospital (22% at start of service)</p>

Trend:

- social media addiction has overtaken cannabis use, and is identified as a significant problem by service users
- sharp increase of service users diagnosed with multiple interlinked health conditions affecting mental as well as physical health
- increase of service users trapped in complex life difficulties such as finance-relationship-housing
- sharp increase of service users on long-term sick leave with burnout due to stress, bullying, or mismanagement



I would recommend Arty-Folks to friends and family

"It has been a wonderful two years with you all and I am immensely grateful for all the opportunities and support you have given me.

After helping me in my journey that started in a dark and vulnerable place, and allowing me to grow, you have provided me so much encouragement and camaraderie which I can't thank you enough for.

You have all made such a positive impact on my life and on my well-being. I will treasure the memories, advice and experiences we've had."

Case study - Coventry Studios

K.TJ. - Overcoming the fear of death

My troubles started during Covid when I was living on my own and I had several blackouts caused by the wrong medication. I was taken to hospital with breathing issues which turned out to be a severe heart condition. Being in hospital was a big turning point because when I was feeling really scared there was nobody there to help me! Remember that family or friends were not allowed to visit! It was terrifying to be so alone!

When I came out I moved into my mums but I felt like a changed person. I was terrified I was going to die, that my heart was just going to stop. I cannot describe to you how intense and overpowering the fear of dying was. They sent me to see a psychiatrist who tried to assess me for bipolar as there is some family history. But in the end diagnosed me with a form of PTSD, and it all spiralled from there! I did talking therapies online but it wasn't for me. I needed to connect to real people.

At Arty-Folks I could immerse myself in amazing art projects with people around me who wouldn't judge me because they understand. Arty-Folks gave me the stability I needed and connected me to a lovely group of people who over time became my friends.

Even though we are much more open about mental health these days, the reality is that you still get labelled and you can see it in people's eyes. Medical therapies don't give you that sense of confidence in life and other people, don't build your sense of community, and don't restore that sense of normality. I recognised that ultimately, that's exactly what you need to start feeling better.

I do worry sometimes about having a dip because I know how quickly it can get bad. Life then goes on over there, and you're over here somewhere, trapped in fear and worrying. But nowadays I feel a lot brighter and clearer in my mind. The feeling of death is not as intense anymore because I am not alone!

For the first time in my life, I feel well enough to carry on on my own. I have learnt a lot of skills and I will carry on with my art. I have got lots of projects in mind and the confidence to pursue them. So watch out for the book I am designing for YouTube! I want to enjoy what I do on a daily basis, and get the most out of each day.

Of course, I would have stayed at Arty-Folks forever, but I understand it's important for my own personal growth to step out of the mental health environment and into the mainstream. And this is not the end of my Arty-Folks journey anyway! I am looking forward to popping in for a cuppa and a chat with staff and offer my peers a sense of hope, that it's possible to find yourself again."



Art for Wellbeing Warwickshire

This year completes the delivery of our highly successful 2.5year programme of Art for Wellbeing courses and workshops commissioned by Public Health Warwickshire County Council.

To support adults through the pandemic and to adjust to a whole new way of life, we offered early intervention and prevention support targeting those with low to moderate mental health needs. The first workshop, Come Connect, was held online on January 11th 2021 while the UK was still in lockdown, and the last course Mindful Crafts was completed July 2023 in Lillington/Leamington Spa.

145 courses and workshops delivered (Target 142)
1,311 participants engaged (Target 1,200)

We co-designed our art&mental health learning materials with our members to empower participants to communicate thoughts, feelings, experiences, and ideas to others in a creative and liberating process that brought about empathy, connection, and a greater understanding of mental self-care. This was achieved online and in-person across the county from Zoom to libraries, community centres and church halls. Data showed that we attracted and supported those most in need from more deprived areas, across age groups, from all ethnic backgrounds, economic situations and mental health experiences.

24% participants of ethnic minorities engaged (Warwickshire population 4.1%)
33% participants lived in areas of multiple deprivation

The impact of loneliness on the wellbeing of adults has been of concern for many years and it is no understatement to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has heaped on more levels of compounding factors such as health fears, social anxieties, and financial pressures. Many who were in receipt of benefits and unable to work before Covid slowly slipped back into 'same old' lifestyles, albeit with far less statutory support. However, the number of people in employment who are long-term off sick due to bullying at work is unprecedented! Never before, have we seen so many highly skilled and experienced workers express overwhelming and suicidal thoughts due to pressures at work, finances, relationships, and lacking life satisfaction.

72% felt connected to others and had made new friends
89% participants felt their mental health and wellbeing had improved

An independent evaluation by Coventry University demonstrated that **39.2% of participants reported a statistically meaningful positive change** in 6 weeks as measured through the SWEMWBS scale

The estimated cost per person supported: £116

Though originally outside the scope of this programme, one extremely important outcome has been that Art for Wellbeing courses delivered in person have been shown to spark creative community groups run by creative volunteers who are grounded in their locality, and who are able to meet local need.

Case study - online participant

L.W. attended the 3-week evening course, Art for Relaxation, online. Course content is tailored to people in employment and each workshop introduces participants to creative techniques that are accessible and fit into their busy lives. L.W., mid 40s, had been on sick leave for 4 months due to mental ill health.

"In September 2023, my low mood reached a point where I didn't want to wake up anymore. I wanted to stay sleeping and in my dreams hopefully see my mum again. One Saturday night I had a total breakdown, and I took an overdose of pills. Thankfully, this attempt failed.

How did I get to the point of not wanting to wake up? It may sound odd, but I didn't really want to die. I just didn't want to wake up! It had been an awful nine months up to that point, where I had suffered the loss of a dear friend, a wonderful neighbour, a much-loved great aunt, the sudden death of my foster niece, a very difficult decision to have to end my pregnancy, and the loss of a couple of my beloved pets, including my dearest feline companion of 14 years. It was too much.

I couldn't bring myself to carry on, with the awful sense that more loss and heartbreak would keep coming. I went on medication and booked in for a course of talking therapy with the NHS, but I knew that they would only give me a few sessions and I really needed something more substantial. I wanted to find something which I could keep going back to in times of need. Something which would help me to "quiet the chaos" and manage my depression and anxiety.

And this is when an ad popped up on my Facebook newsfeed for Arty-Folks. I immediately signed up. I had recently picked up some art supplies, not having done anything creative for over 20 years, and this course seemed the perfect fit for me.

I attended the 3-week evening course online with a group of other people who also struggled to keep focused in work while life circumstances weighed down. The way the workshops were structured really helped me calm down and I fell in love with the technique of zentangling. I learnt to combine my breathing with drawing and I have since filled a pocket sketchbook with my designs. This is such a therapeutic exercise for me, and one I wouldn't have known anything about if not for the lovely people at Arty-Folks.

I'm in a much better place mentally now, and love that I have this skill in my 'mental toolkit' that I can fall back on to help re-centre me and relax. Thank you so much, you have no idea how perfectly timed it was for me to find you."

2 weeks following the course, L.W. returned to full-time employment.



Lillington Makers

Following the success of Art for Wellbeing Warwickshire, **Warwick District Council** commissioned Arty-Folks to develop a creative social inclusion programme in the geographical area of Lillington with a population of around 12,000. A number of reports had identified Lillington as an area of high multiple deprivation, with Lillington East ranking in **the most deprived 10% LSOA in the country and the most deprived in South Warwickshire.**

On 1st October we were commissioned to develop a **3year programme** to engage, 'the disadvantaged and socially excluded living in these areas due to lack of resources, rights, services and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a community, whether those are of an economic, social or cultural nature'.

On 2nd October we ran the first arts&crafts workshop with 5 residents at Lillington Library. We co-designed our 'Lillington Makers' programme in collaboration with residents who had previously attended our Mindful Crafts course at their local library and who had urged us to apply for this commission.

Our long-term aims in Lillington are to weave a social fabric that promotes community spirit and pride of place and empowers residents of all backgrounds to thrive.

During the first 6 months of Lillington Makers we have started

- **developing an inclusive, resident-led and empowering programme of activities that brings colour and positive vibes to the area**
 - We ran weekly Lillington Makers sessions at the library to establish the venue as our main base.
 - January '24 we began running a **2nd group** at Acorn Court to engage elderly residents.
- **strengthening existing community assets and working with them to engage the most vulnerable and marginalised**
 - December '23 we held a Zoom meeting with community groups to explore collaborative ideas.
 - February '24 we organised a community gathering attended by 42 residents passionate about advancing the environmental agenda. this event became the catalyst for a community-wide **'10,000 Sunflower'** project to be realised in July.
 - March '24, ran workshop with 43 children at 'Kind Food, Kind Communities' event with the Pantry.
 - March '24, co-managing with residents **'Lillington Connect'** Facebook and website to increase traffic and engagement.

We are proud to have made significant progress in a relatively short period in establishing a positive and dynamic presence in Lillington that is beginning to galvanise the community. We are pleased with the number of residents engaged and the quality of our creative activities so far, and we are even more excited to pursue the wide range of ideas that are beginning to take shape at the grassroots.

198 residents engaged (Target 100)

Reasons for attending:

I want to de-stress and feel better in myself 29%

I want to learn new art skills and achieve something 28%

I want to meet people and socialize more 43%

Case studies - Lillington Makers

M.B. 72, participant Lillington Makers, has struggled with psychosis most of her life and lives with her husband.

We met M. and her husband at Crown Routes Cafe where they have lunch every Monday. Initially, she needed weekly reminders to attend and a lot of 1:1 support with activities and emotional support to silence intrusive thoughts of low self-esteem.

"I don't know why I became so mentally ill 5 years ago. I have been taking my medication for years very regularly and suddenly they didn't work anymore. I lost my social confidence and I know it's really hard for my husband to look after me 24/7.

I felt so anxious at first and worried that I might say something bad and upset everyone. I have never been part of a group before and I worried that you would all get fed up with me and kick me out. Now I really enjoy being part of this group because I don't feel judged and everyone is so helpful. I feel I am part of a group of friends who live nearby and I can call on them. It's a wonderful feeling I have never experienced before.

It's so nice to talk about things in our lives and have a laugh with lovely people. I have framed my watercolour, it's absolutely beautiful and I'm ever so proud of it! Everybody in my family loves my artwork and I have given so many pieces to my daughter and nieces. But I'm keeping hold of my dream catcher, it's hanging by the window to keep away my nightmares and remind me that everything is ok, I am not on my own."

A.&M.M. Friends of Lillington Expressway, organise monthly litter picks but struggled to attract support. Following the community gathering on 20.2.24 we supported them to connect to other environmental groups and raised their visibility through social media.

"It was such a lovely surprise to see how many people came out on the litter pick today! We just didn't know how to reach out to the wider community and it was always just the two of us.

We are keen to do our bit for the environment and the local area and could see how much rubbish piles up particularly in the winter months. Since the callout we've had so many people approaching us offering support which is just so heart-warming and encouraging.

It felt so good working together today with a bunch of other residents, and so much more fun too! We can see now that we are part of a much bigger movement and that makes us feel proud. What we are doing may be a drop in the ocean but it's worthwhile.



Partnership projects

LTB Showrooms (Litten Tree Gallery)

We commissioned seven talented local artists to run a workshop at the popular LTB Gallery in Coventry city centre based on their creative journey, their passion, knowledge, skills, and techniques. The workshops were hugely successful and attracted a vibrant community of artists and learners of all skill levels.

These workshops gave Arty-Folks members the opportunity to rub shoulders with other enthusiasts in the mainstream while learning what it takes to become an illustrator, a designer, a painter, a community artist, an experimental photographer, a portrait photographer, or a sculptor working with aluminium.

Additionally, we ran a 6-week Painting for Pleasure course that was equally popular and beneficial for our members as well as those wishing to learn skills. In future, Arty-Folks could consider running more activities with a mixed client group to enable members with long-term health conditions overcome social anxiety and anchor in the community.



Positive Youth Foundation

To start a new art club at Yardley Street Youth Club, we ran three workshops with young girls 16-25yrs old of non-British backgrounds including girls from Romania, Bulgaria, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Eritrea.



REACH (Realising Everyone's Access to Community Help)

REACH is the result of a fantastic collaboration by a consortium of over 70 local providers (VCFSE MHAlliance) spearheaded by Rethink Mental Illness. Arty-Folks is proud to be part of this new initiative that includes partners Valley Housing, Citizens Advice, and members of the Cultural Inclusion Network including Inini, Sahil, Ekta Unity, Ambacare, the Tamarind Centre, and Coventry Muslim Forum.

Chris Spicer, a member of New Progression group at our Coventry studios, completed extensive Peer Support Worker training and is now covering North Warwickshire for REACH. This new innovative and exciting collaboration of services has opened up the opportunity to move away from disjointed and silo working to a new integrated, flexible, responsive and personalised model of care for adults with severe mental health needs who are either waiting for secondary care Mental Health Services or are being discharged.

Coventry University Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations

We ran three art workshops with a group of PHD students led by Dr Miho Taka and Dr Michaelina Jakala to explore personal values within peacebuilding that are often difficult to express through words alone.

Dr Miho Taka: "There has been increasing use of art in research or arts-based research (ABR), a qualitative approach to research relying on artistic expression to explore meaning-making and lived experiences of research participants.

However, in such research, art is often used to collect participant data or art is used as an output of the study rather than as a self-reflective, experiential, or transformative approach. Our workshop, although a short one-off research-related event, has demonstrated to us as both participants and researchers that arts-based research can be something more.

It has also momentarily allowed us to feel the power of art in its magic and transformative nature that enables us to be free to find hope and beauty from within the painful experiences and subconscious and explore our unspoken values."



Business Planning

The Board set strategic targets and priorities for the financial year 2024/25:

Young People

This year we will lower our age remit to include young people 16+ years old who are waiting to transition from children to adult mental health services, and those struggling to adjust to adulthood.

Community Work

We will expand our engagement from Coventry to reach those most isolated in Warwickshire, igniting their creative spirit, and creating lasting social change.

Peer Support Work

We want to help more members into employment in a field where their lived experience is an asset. We will support their Peer Support Worker training and career pathways as it is key to changing how mental health services are delivered.

Research

Building on our outcome and impact measurement we will continue working with Coventry University to research how the creative process promotes good mental health and the drive to thrive.

Growing the Arty-Folks Team

Our current CEO and Founder will initiate a phased retirement plan starting with stepping down as CEO. We are therefore recruiting a new CEO who will build the team and organisational structure that will take Arty-Folks forward.

We envisage the management team to be further strengthened under the direction of the new CEO.

Arty-Folks at close of the financial year ended 31 March 2024 held a total £130,876 in funds, of which

Restricted funds:

- £14,858 carried over for projects to be completed in 2024-25.

Unrestricted funds:

- £44,822 designated for evacuation of Eaton House within 21 days and moving to new premises
- £47,634 contingency operational reserves to cover staffing and core costs of up to 6 months
- £23,562 funds available for use at the discretion of the trustees in furtherance of charitable objectives.

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