



## 20 years of providing Arts for Health & Well-being



*Sheena, Anna & Joe (Sue's children) receiving the Queen's Award from Graham Stowe, Vice Lord-Lieutenant*

**Borderland Voices Annual Report, 2017-18**

## **Introduction and executive summary, Andy Collins, Coordinator**

We are a micro charity based in Leek. In our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we continue to focus on what Borderland Voices has done well throughout that time. We deliver weekly, free, professionally-led workshops in a range of arts media. We also celebrate the life and contribution of our founder, Sue Gaukroger (1943-2013). Sue



***Sue Gaukroger who founded BV in 1998***

was a writer and teacher who suffered bouts of depression throughout her adult life. With the £2,000 prize which she won in a poetry competition organised by (national mental health charity) Mind, she started Borderland Voices, to channel the creativity of those suffering from mental ill-health. As we celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, our workshops continue to help people foster and celebrate creativity and friendship. For small groups of regular participants, many with enduring mental health issues, these provide vital support. These are just 3 representative participant quotes from feedback forms:

'One feels a camaraderie between the tutors and staff; we get along so well. We look out for each other and help with problems any of us have. It is the best day of the week for me and vital to my well-being. I believe the group should be supported in every way possible and that all of us here

want this to continue for a long, long time. We all, I think, feel a great need for this group – we participate in the activities at all times. Long live Borderland Voices, please.'

'I rely on Borderland Voices every week and try hard to attend each week. My friends are very nice and we all support one another.'

'Places like Borderland Voices provide various positive events that support everyone's health and well-being. Working and sharing time during a day at Borderland Voices encourages confidence, trust, relaxation methods; it helps people's state of mind to share – communicate – understand our problems; we work towards a positive thinking process which heals our mental health from within. Better than too many drugs. A vital need!'

Quite apart from our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it has been a momentous year. Firstly, we received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service: it is the highest accolade which any voluntary organisation can gain & is the group equivalent of the MBE. This led to many celebrations, the highlights being an invitation to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party for coordinator Andy and nominator Jason and the official award presentation in Leek by Vice Lord-Lieutenant Graham Stowe, who shared the touching facts of mental health issues in his own family.

In December 2017 we moved into new premises in central Leek, in the HQ of Support Staffordshire. Bank House is the only place which meets most of our needs &, while less convenient for some people, it has advantages for others. Sadly we had no alternative, as Your Housing Group would not renew our lease on any terms.

We were shocked to learn that N Staffs Voice (NSV) for Mental Health (formerly N Staffs Users' Group) had to close, because they lost a local



***Buckingham Palace Garden Party***



*The Mermaid's Pool*

government contract. We had always worked closely with this mental health charity which covered the whole of N Staffs. Although applying for grants is a never-ending process, the fate of NSV underlines the precariousness of contracts.

To sum up, our sessions emphasise creativity and friendly support. As well as our formal volunteers, all our participants function as volunteers, who support & encourage one another both during & between weekly workshops. That is fundamental to what Borderland Voices stands for.

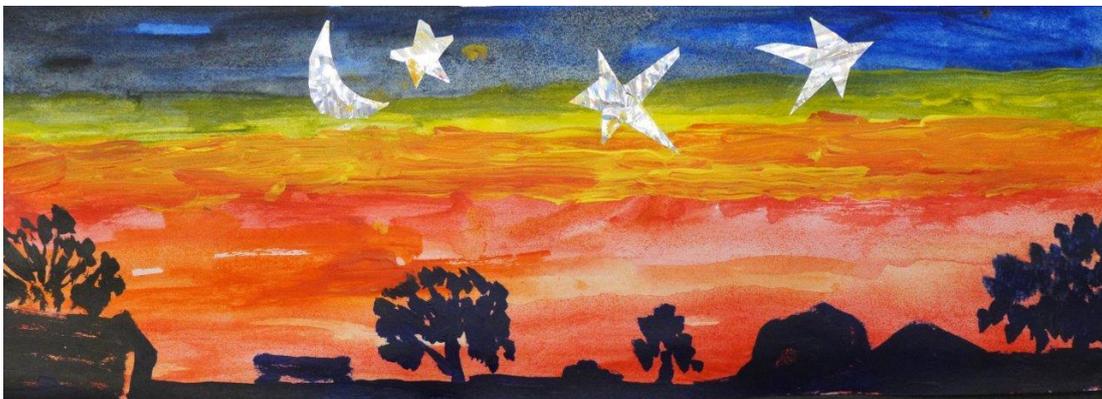
### **Our objectives. We:**

1. Provide weekly, free, enjoyable arts activities, in all forms, to support the health and mental wellbeing of regular participants, in and around the Staffordshire Moorlands;
2. Employ local professional artists to facilitate arts sessions;
3. Encourage participants to socialise and support one another, whether or not they have mental health issues, to help combat stigma;
4. Tackle stigma through displays, exhibitions, public events, publications, media coverage etc. which also raise awareness of our work;
5. Participate in community arts events as funding permits.



*Plate design on biscuit ware*

### **Under each heading, these are our Key Achievements this year:**



*Summer solstice*

1. **Weekly, free arts sessions.**

***Obtaining a 'patchwork' of grants to secure our core activities.***



***The Churnet Valley Railway***

From 01.09.16 to 31.08.17, Awards for All (A4A) supported not only our weekly creative writing and expressive arts sessions but also writing outreach. Whereas the uptake of sessions for Rethink (Leek, Cheadle, Biddulph) was disappointing, the 9 writing workshops in Ipstones, led by Pam Bell, were very successful (see below). Thereafter we have enjoyed financial support from the Co-op Community Fund, Silver Service Award (Staffs Foundation), Stronger Communities (Staffs Police & Crime Commissioner), Councillors Charlotte Atkins, Margaret Lovatt and Dani Ogden, Leek Town Lands Trust, Trinity Church, Waitrose Community Matters and, since January 2018, the SW Peak Landscape Partnership. This shows that to deliver our core, free writing and arts workshops, we need to obtain a 'patchwork' of grants of varying sizes.

2. **Providing arts-sector employment.**

***Employing 13 professional artists and giving 'work experience' to some participants.***

We employed 10 different visual artists (including one participant), some of whom delivered more than 1 set of workshops. Participants gain so much from this professional creativity and dedication. The topics included fantasy forests, painting inspired by flower forms on biscuit-ware pottery, printing, summer solstice, ceramic sundials, 3-D birds, posters inspired by BR posters & Japanese flattened colour landscapes, memories and maps, Christmas cards, abstract landscapes and collages of local landscape and legend. Inspiration for some of these came from the SW Peak, as we have funding from the Landscape Partnership, January – December 2018. Three professional writers shared facilitation of the writing group at Borderland Voices with four participants. In addition, the nine creative writing sessions at Café Connect in Ipstones funded by Awards for All and facilitated by Pam Bell, were so successful that the group decided to continue independently.

***Part of the Fantasy Forest***



3. **Socialisation & peer support.**

***Workshops buzzing with creativity, conversation and laughter & reducing feelings of isolation.***

In a year punctuated by, on one hand, celebrating our Queen's Award and, on the other, preparing for and moving premises, we didn't manage many visits. Writers and artists enjoyed their now-traditional Christmas lunch; the patchwork group organised their own. However, on a glorious day, a record number of people shared a summer BBQ, hosted by (Chair) Bob Foster & his wife Jackie & joined by Judy & Humphrey Scott-Moncrieff (Humphrey jointly assessed our Queen's Award nomination). Most participants



***Summer BBQ***

attended the formal presentation of the Queen's Award (a certificate signed by Her Majesty and an engraved crystal) by Vice Lord-Lieutenant Graham Stowe. Participants received, in turn, certificates



***A group of participants at the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service***

of appreciation. Peer support & socialisation are essential to our activities & help people feel less isolated. Weekly sessions (patchwork, creative writing and expressive arts) attract on average 10 people, who just about fit into our space. Workshops buzz with creativity, conversation and laughter, as people enjoy both the varied art forms and one another's company.

4. **Tackling stigma & raising awareness.**

***The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, generating plenty of press and radio coverage & leading to two further accolades.***



***Writing workshop, Mental Health Awareness Day***

Promotional Initiative of the Year 2017' Award (with an online health magazine). As always, Borderland Voices played a central role in planning and delivering the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Mental Health awareness and activity day at the Foxlowe.

The Foxlowe hosted both the Writing Group's 'Evening of Words' (as part of Leek Arts Festival) and an exhibition of artwork 'Inspired by Poems'. As always, the one hundred 2018 calendars disappeared like snow in the sun - either sold or distributed as complimentary copies to publicise BV's work.

The Queen's Award generated plenty of press and radio coverage & led to 2 further accolades: runner-up in the Sentinel's 'Our Heroes' award (Best Community Group) & 'Mental Health

**5. Community involvement.**

***Attending a broad range of events, in Leek & further afield.***

At our invitation, Humphrey Scott-Moncrieff officially opened Art in the Park where we had our stand & family-friendly art activity. We repeated this at the West End Fun Day. We also took the display to a 'Recovery and Wellness' conference (Burslem); St Andrew's Methodist church community day (Cheddleton); Endon well dressing; Health Awareness day (Trinity Church, Leek); Celebration Day (West Road Co-op) to receive a cheque & for a press photo. As 1 of 3 voluntary sector reps, the coordinator attended a raft of meetings about 'Designing future local health services in the Staffordshire Moorlands' (involving the future of the local 'cottage' hospitals).



***Painting on biscuit ware plates, which were donated after a community display***



***Celestial bodies***



**Exotic birds**

## Impact/value

***All participants enjoyed the activities and – importantly – coped better at home as a result; and the social value that we, & other small local charities, bring to the area is essential.***

It's virtually impossible to evaluate the impact of such a tiny charity quantitatively (by number-crunching). Instead, we use a range of qualitative tools, from simple anecdote to more formal methods. Participants periodically complete a simple feedback form: it's based on the widely used and regarded 'Shorter Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' (SWEMWBS) but with added questions specific to our arts for health and mental wellbeing activities. When at Borderland Voices, over half of participants reported improved outcomes to the SWEMWBS-based questions; had ways to meet new people; and felt more connected to others through our sessions. All enjoyed the activities, could express themselves through them, learned or developed new skills and – importantly – coped better at home as a result. We then combine this with in-depth evaluation of their

short courses by lead artists. Typical artist feedback included, 'Working on visual interpretations together in a supportive group enabled participants to talk more openly about their own feelings and emotions' and 'When a newcomer expressed hopes of improving their mental wellbeing by participating in creative activities in a social setting, this prompted general discussion about the group's positive benefits.' Artists rank participants highly for accepting feedback, meeting new challenges, demonstrating new or improved skills, enjoying the activities, maintaining involvement and contributing to the group dynamic. While we accept that 'process' is more important than 'product', lead artists also comment favourably on the quality of artwork e.g. 'The images produced were innovative and original'.

## Social value

Recently published research (*The Value of Small*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2018) identified three dimensions to the social value created by small charities. The value to individual participants and to the local arts economy are mentioned elsewhere in this report. The research also highlighted 'added value', including volunteering (see below), funding leverage (Key Achievements 1 above) and being 'embedded in local organisational and social networks, which gives small charities an enhanced understanding of local needs' (Networking & Links, below).



**Visual pun: 'Hen Cloud' on the Roaches**

## Volunteers

*A small but dedicated band with many & varied talents.*

We depend heavily on our small but dedicated band of volunteers. Sheena assists the patchwork group on a regular basis; mounts artwork; prepared a comprehensive exhibition for the Queen's Award ceremony; and sorted arts materials before the move. Trustee Richard volunteers regularly at the art group and



*Ceramic sundial (central gnomon added later)*

photographs all work, so we have both a record and images for the calendar and this report, while Nicola framed the Queen's Award certificate free of charge. Marion as usual ran her popular outdoor painting group in August. The coordinator relies heavily on our pro bono accountant Liz for support with budgets and finances but also all IT matters. Student mental health nurse Jessie helped for several sessions & we hope Zuleika has joined us long-term; she has an arts degree, so can both support as a volunteer & lead workshops. We must also stress the voluntary support that participants offer one another e.g. by maintaining phone contact between sessions. Last but not least, moving premises so smoothly relied on husbands, partners and 1 or 2 participants, pitching in over a hectic few days.

Although inevitably not ideal for all participants, Bank House was the only viable option when we had to leave Queens Drive, and Support Staffordshire have made us very welcome. After a successful move into our new home, with no interruption to workshops, our long-term strategy revolves around funding. We have to secure the income needed to maintain all our current services, as well as now paying rent (which Support Staffordshire have kept as low as possible). Austerity and uncertainties around Brexit, however, mean that funds are still hard to find. But the work which the coordinator did with mentor Liz Frost (Measuring the Good) has proved a very useful resource when completing application forms & demonstrating the impact of what we do.

We wait, so far in vain, for a volunteer to lead a Friends Group, which would be so helpful in raising both funds and our public profile. We would also benefit from a larger pool of trustees, particularly younger people.

photographs all work, so we have both a record and images for the calendar and this report, while Nicola framed the Queen's Award certificate free of charge. Marion as usual ran her popular outdoor painting group in August. The coordinator relies heavily on our pro bono accountant Liz for support with budgets and finances but also all IT matters. Student mental health nurse Jessie helped for several sessions & we hope Zuleika has joined us long-term; she has an arts degree, so can both support as a volunteer & lead workshops. We must also stress the voluntary support that participants offer one another e.g. by maintaining phone contact between sessions. Last but not least, moving premises so smoothly relied on husbands, partners and 1 or 2 participants, pitching in over a hectic few days.

## Long-term strategy

*This revolves, inevitably, around funding.*



*Study for an abstract landscape*



**Crow – bird print**

- Moorlands Information Group (mental health: statutory & voluntary bodies & service users)
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council: Officers and Councillors
- Haregate Community Centre
- Kniveden Partnership (N Staffs Combined Healthcare NHS Trust)
- Staffs Moorlands Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Assembly
- W Midlands Arts, Health and Wellbeing
- Leek Arts Forum
- Staffs County Council: Library Service; councillors
- Stone and Water (Buxton-based artists' cooperative)
- Changes – 12 Steps to Mental Health
- The Foxlowe Arts Centre
- Leek College
- Dove Valley Centre
- Rebecca Done's luncheon club
- 'The Beatrice' canal boat Trust
- Healthwatch
- Health & Care Forum

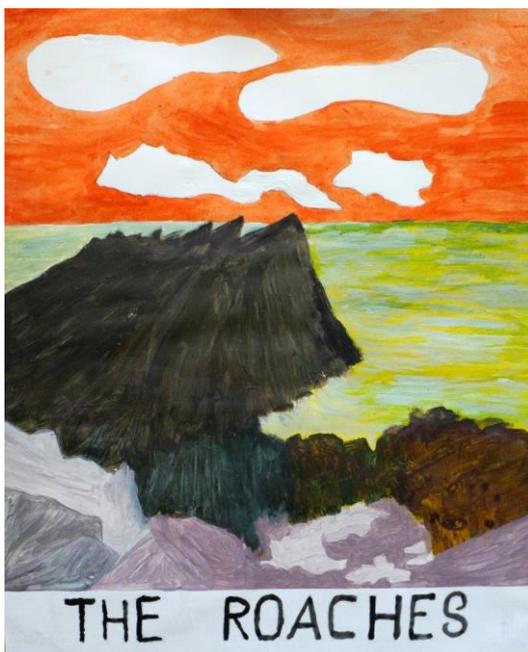
Borderland Voices has long cultivated its links with the **Adult Community Mental Health** and **Social Services Teams** and other partners including **Rethink** and **Homestart**, who all refer people to us. We also warmly welcome those who self-refer or simply come along on the strength of word-of-mouth or articles in the press.

## Networking & links

*It's vital to maintain a broad network of contacts, both to keep ourselves 'in the picture' and ensure we're part of that picture.*

Borderland Voices belongs to (and now shares a building with) **Support Staffordshire (Staffordshire Moorlands)** which offers advice on policies, procedures and funding and facilitates links with other community and voluntary organisations. We regularly update our policies, including health & safety and provide individual risk assessments as appropriate for external activities and workshops.

**We also have close links with the following:**



*Poster, inspired by Japanese art & BR*



*Abstract landscape*