



From financial rollercoaster to Covid-19 response



Spring Garland – Paper Flowers

Borderland Voices Annual Report, 2019-20

Introduction and executive summary, Andy Collins, Coordinator

Our mission in the Staffordshire Moorlands has remained unchanged since Borderland Voices (BV) was founded in 1998: use participatory arts to support mental well-being; and improve public understanding of mental health issues. We continue to pursue this mission, as this latest 'year in the life' of BV shows. It has proved to be a year of extremes.

Painting on glass



Despite starting out with dwindling balances, we 'cut our coat according to our cloth' and maintained core facilitated Tuesday activities. Participants offered unanimously to make a small voluntary donation each week. As ever, we are grateful to dedicated professional artists, both new and familiar faces, for inspiring participants.

Then days before the year ended, we were thrilled to receive a 2-year National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, for creative research into the history of the Women's Land Army locally. This should secure our finances medium term and give us lots to interest readers for the next couple of years.

Our established self-help groups: patchwork on Monday morning and Thursday morning's art group, continue to bring their own materials, help one another as needed and contribute a small weekly amount to overheads.

Essential fund-raising and the need to facilitate some sessions in order to save on artists' fees has left me no time for formal impact assessment this year. But working with the writing and art groups has confirmed my belief in the value of BV's services.

This year did not see any major outreach events to rival the Queen's Award ceremony or even the official opening of our Bank House premises. Outreach and volunteering did however coincide when trustee and volunteer Richard Egan won one of Support Staffordshire's 'Star Volunteer' awards.

We have quite a small number of volunteers who help BV run smoothly. Obviously the trustees with Liz and Sheena not only oversee the direction of the charity but also support me in many ways. But I wish here to pay tribute to our participants themselves. As I have said previously, they form a support network which is almost as essential as BV's art sessions.

In the middle of March we faced almost the most extreme situation known to mankind: a pandemic. I created individualised participant contact sheets in accordance with GDPR and sent art group members home with 'art packs' of card, envelopes and in some cases arts materials. Thereafter our Covid-19 response has evolved into a Zoom

Richard receiving his award



writing group, a WhatsApp group, e-mail communications and, for those not digitally connected, phone and post. Bonnie, both a trustee and a participant, has been instrumental in hosting the Zoom meetings. All other participants are helping one another to cope with this uncertainty and, in many cases, increased isolation by keeping in contact as never before. An extreme state of affairs is calling forth unparalleled mutual support.

Our objectives. We:

1. Provide weekly, enjoyable arts activities, in many 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.

Collage inspired by Frida Kahlo



Greek ruins – charcoal on paper



Under each heading, these are this year's Key Achievements:

1. **Weekly arts sessions.**

We maintained core activities by scrimping and saving, as funds were low until the year end.

We received small amounts from Leek Town Lands and 2 District Councillors (out of 19 applied to) plus several generous donations from participants. Eagle-eyed readers will notice that the word 'free' has disappeared from this sub-heading. We discussed the financial situation with participants who agreed, unanimously, to make a small donation (usually £1-2) for sessions. This is entirely voluntary and dependent on people's ability to contribute.

Meanwhile, Andy made 14 larger grant applications, 8 of them unsuccessful. Our big success came at the end of March (just after Covid-19 lockdown) – a 2-year grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to investigate the Women’s Land Army and Timber Corps locally. This will feature in future reports. Three other grants are match funding. Whether we can use one further grant, for outings with artists in 2020, depends on Covid-19.

The financial situation notwithstanding, we have maintained weekly, facilitated creative writing and expressive art workshops plus DIY patchwork and art sessions.

The patchwork group consists of 8-10 ladies (generally led by Sheena) who meet in term time. It includes some ladies from Harewood Park rehab unit in Cheadle who come with a driver/helper. The patchwork group makes an annual donation to BV overheads.

The DIY Thursday art group of proficient artists (5-6 people) meets weekly. Members work on their individual work while sharing ideas and techniques. They also make a weekly donation to overheads.

2. Arts-sector employment.

We were able to employ only 5 professional visual artists over 9 months. Two were new to BV and several delivered more than one session. Andy made up the difference, in order to save money.

Themes and media included flower studies, spring wreaths, paper sculpture, pictures with ‘sea glass’ and pebbles, glass painting, St George, the coronation, pop-up cards, abstract still-life, Greek landscapes in folding books, 3-D undersea worlds, Bonfire Night, #TheGreatBritishValentine, seasonal wreaths, bird studies (illustration to abstraction) and collage inspired by Frida Kahlo. We’re fortunate to have so many local professional artists willing to share their skills for minimal reward. The benefits for participants are enormous and ‘new faces’ always enliven proceedings.

#TheGreatBritishValentine is coordinated by the Mental Health Collective founded and run by Dr Amy Pollard. It involves sending a homemade card with a message of goodwill to a stranger and having someone allocated to send a card to you. BV artists each made a lovely card and received one in return.

Sarah facilitated most writing sessions, with Andy filling in as necessary. The writers also enjoyed a visit to Pam’s ‘stone caravan’ to work with her on ideas for a Foxlowe-based community play about Trade Unionism in Leek.

Our activities in the Covid-19 lockdown period at the end of this year are covered in the introduction.

Green woodpeckers – abstract study, felt-tip on paper



Writing group at Pam’s



3. Socialisation & peer support.

Although the financial situation reduced the number of visits, those which took place were as usual full of the creativity, conversation and laughter which characterize workshops at Bank House. People also keep in contact between weekly sessions, which is especially important for those living alone.



Dove Valley landscape – watercolour

Dove Valley Centre with activities courtesy of Sarah and Gordon (Buxton Artists' Collective 'Stone and Water'). We also discovered a new venue - Back Dane Cottage, Wincle – where we and several trustees had a 'bring and share' BBQ. Apart from the long, tortuous and pot-holed access track (apparently resurfaced since) it's a fabulous place with gorgeous views and we had ideal weather.

These opportunities: to experience new surroundings, especially with professional encouragement, inspire a wealth of creativity. The contents of the annual calendar (see section 4 below) are just the tip of that creative iceberg.

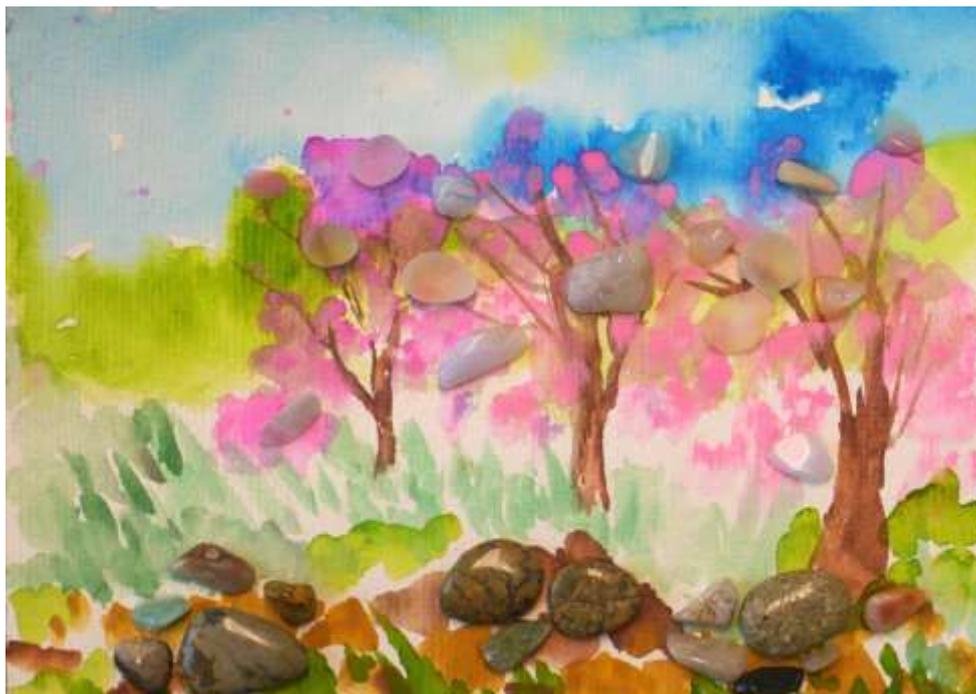
Thoughts of the calendar also prompt memories of our traditional Christmas lunch at Tittesworth restaurant. Participants, trustees, volunteers and supporters come

The Patchwork group enjoyed a morning in Cheadle, browsing and buying in the specialist patchwork and quilting shop there.

The writing group visited Pam's 'Stone Caravan' (converted barn) as mentioned in section 2. They also received their annual invitation to Leek College of Art's 'Astound' exhibition in Nicholson Institute where they wrote surrounded by Foundation Degree artwork.

Thanks to Buxton Museum and Art Gallery outreach funding, both artists and writers took a packed lunch and enjoyed a day at the

Landscape – watercolour with pebbles and sea-glass



together, both to celebrate the creative and caring achievements of the past year and look forward to the future.

- 4. Tackling stigma and raising awareness. *Some activities which actually took place last year received further publicity this year and the calendar, of course, always celebrates the creativity of the previous 12 months. We offered an increased number and range of events during Mental Health Awareness Week in May.***

Market stall – Mental Health Awareness Week



Participants buy about half our 125 calendars. The rest which we send out as complimentary copies (to councillors, officers, partners) to publicise our work were as enthusiastically received as ever.

In Mental Health Awareness Week, we again helped organise a stall on Leek market. BV writers also performed 'An Hour of Words' one evening at the Foxlowe. In response to colleagues, who missed the networking which featured in previous Mental Health Days at the Foxlowe, we hosted an event for mental health professionals at Bank House.

Creative activities funded by the South West Peak Landscape Partnership had continued exposure this year. Local people, Leek college students and BV participants all contributed to four community paintings of the Gawain legend, designed and coordinated by Sue Prince. These were displayed in the Gallery on Broad Street. Gordon MacLellan recorded Hollinsclough School children reading their Gawain-inspired pieces and turned these into a blog accompanied by atmospheric photographs. Lastly, liaison officer Ruth Wilson displayed some of our artwork at a final celebration event.

Six of the model theatres made with Cassie (our Derby University student last year) featured in the display cases in Leek Library throughout June. Andy subsequently attended a stakeholder event for the Creative Expressive Therapies course which Derby University is remodelling; but approaches to Buxton and Leek College and the Universities of Derby and Staffordshire have not yet yielded further student placements.

Whenever possible, Andy attends the Staffs Moorlands Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Forum and Healthwatch meetings to network and update other groups on our activities. She also gave four Moorlands Radio interviews.

Last year, trustee and volunteer Richard Egan's hair-raising, fund-raising escapades featured in these pages. This year he received one of Support Staffordshire's 'Star Volunteer' Awards (Volunteering through Adversity) at a memorable evening event which he shared with his wife and sister (see Intro.).

Bonfire night – soft pastel on black paper



5. Community involvement.

We always try to attend various events in Leek and further afield.

Andy took our display to Endon well dressing; Rudyard Sailability's Dragon Boat Race; Leek Health Centre; a 'Loneliness and Isolation' event in Moorlands House; and represented BV at Leek's annual Dr Plot's Festival (participatory arts inspired by history). She acts as secretary to the Leek Arts Forum and attended further NHS meetings about local priorities for future health services.

Coronation plate – felt-tip on paper plate



There were more meetings about SMDC's Creative People and Places bid to Arts Council England and the SMDC arts review; the creative industries roadshow at Leek College; and the Forum for rural research on health and well-being (Keele University) discussing Social Prescribing. Andy also attended a Leek Chamber of Commerce networking breakfast at Leek High School, making useful contacts with the School about involving students in the forthcoming National Lottery Heritage Funded 'Land Girls' project (see Section 1).

While supporting participants in their applications for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) has featured this year, we also again helped participant Marlene to host her Macmillan Cancer Support coffee morning at Bank House. The total raised (£200) was doubled by a private donation.

Impact/value

During this year, Andy's involvement with submitting grant applications and running some writing and art workshops has left her no time for formal impact assessment.

She has, though, participated in several impact and data management and presentation webinars delivered by the Coalition for Efficiency (who mentored our improved reporting mechanisms in 2017).

Meanwhile, many bodies (Arts Council England and the World Health Organisation to quote but two) continue to stress the value of arts for mental well-being.

Various things speak for themselves. We continue to attract new participants and welcome back others who haven't been able to attend for some time (years, in one recent case). We have new trustees on the board, both participants and people new to BV, increasing both its breadth of experience and its insight into the services we offer.

Marlene hosting her Macmillan Cancer Support coffee morning



3-D undersea world – mixed media



Regular participants attend week in, week out, often braving bad weather to do so. They unanimously agreed to make a voluntary contribution, individual finances permitting, to help cover overheads. Two participants offered to make items for a craft stall in aid of BV; as this was scheduled for an event in May 2020, now postponed because of Covid-19, we hope the delay will give them additional crafting time!

Many in the community recognise the social impact of our contribution. Colleagues in the Mental Health Team and at Rethink refer to us clients whose ongoing rehabilitation we can help in our

friendly, supportive, creative environment. We are conscious that local government is currently very cash-strapped, but several councillors nonetheless give us grant support when possible, recognising the impact of our work. The same holds true for local trusts such as Leek Town Lands.

People eagerly enquire about the calendars in advance of their arrival and those who buy them, for themselves and as gifts, frequently donate more than the asking price.

The grant just confirmed from the National Lottery Heritage Fund acknowledges the value of our past achievement and gives us the means to extend it. The activities this funding enables will feature in our reports for the next two years.

However, the lock-down imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the most about BV's impact and value. The 'BV family' has always been mutually supportive, both during and between sessions. In these times of unprecedented uncertainty, people have redoubled that support - by phone, post, email, Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom (how many of us had heard of Zoom before March?). This ensures that no-one is left out and all continue to look after one another, albeit at a distance. The Zoom writing group is starting to be particularly successful in allowing participants to share their experiences creatively. Some in the art group are almost looking forward to self-isolation as a time to finish creative projects.

Bird – abstract study, felt-tip on paper



Bonfire night – soft pastel on coloured paper



Our experience certainly bears out the opinion of **Arts Council England** in **Let's Create**, their Strategy 2020-2030 (p.33): 'Getting involved in creative activities in communities reduces loneliness, supports physical and mental health and wellbeing, sustains older people and helps to build and strengthen social ties.'

In November 2019, **WHO Europe** published their Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67: **What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review** by Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn. In a blog for the Culture Health and Well-being

Alliance, co-author Dr Daisy Fancourt wrote, 'It is over 12 years since Sir Nigel Crisp, then NHS Chief Executive, published a report concluding 'arts and health are (and should be firmly recognised as being) integral to health, healthcare provision and healthcare environments'. Progress has certainly been made, but few would argue that the arts are firmly recognised as "integral". **This report cements the fact that a lack of evidence is not what is holding us back. Certainly more research is needed (as in all areas of health); something researchers like me are grateful for. But what we also need is further policy action based on the mountain of evidence that already exists.** Hopefully the publication of this report will support such action over the coming years.'

Collage – inspired by Frida Kahlo



Volunteers

Our small group of dedicated volunteers continues to help with a wide range of tasks. These make life easier for Andy and improve the service for our participants.

As ever, Andy relies heavily on our pro bono accountant Liz for help with budgets, finances and IT matters. Most weeks, Sheena supports the patchwork group and she mounts any artwork needed. Richard regularly helps with the art group, maintains our photographic record, provided most of the photos for this report and did attempt, ultimately without success, to restart occasional photography sessions. We welcomed Becca, who is completing her Fine Art Degree, as a new volunteer. Other volunteering activities included artwork for the *Hour of Words* poster/flier - for mental health awareness week (Mark); rehanging a door to enlarge space in the activity room (John); cooking the BBQ (Felix); car-share transport, raffle prizes and BBQ food.

They also serve – Mark in another volunteering capacity, dangling a seahorse for photographer Richard (out of shot)



Long-term strategy

There are two keys to our long-term survival: funding and planning for succession (when Andy, Sheena and Liz wish to reduce their involvement). Andy continues to pursue suitable funding opportunities while the trustees consider how to secure new leadership in due course. BV firmly believes in two mantras which help us to remain agile. Firstly, 'stick to your last': feedback from participants reassures us that we are delivering what they want and need. Secondly, 'small is beautiful': our human resources, space restrictions, budget and available time dictate quite a restricted offering which is nonetheless highly valued. At the end of this particular year, we realise that our strategies in the short, medium and longer term may be shaped by Covid-19 but believe that we've managed to adapt our delivery, almost at a moment's notice, to serve our participants as best we can. Eventually we may be in a position to benefit from the development of Social Prescribing but this is still evolving both nationally and locally.

Grant funding has been difficult to secure for several years and this situation will be exacerbated by Covid-19. Although gurus always advise a 'funding mix', it is difficult for a tiny charity such as ours: mental health, while topical, never attracts donors in the same way as animals or children; we have no retail arm or big corporate sponsor; our social media presence is limited; space restricts participant numbers; and historically we've avoided contracts, which involve both some loss of independence and complex reporting procedures. Launching the Heritage Lottery funded 'Land Girls' project should not only improve our 'traditional' visibility but also our online profile, which is part of the scheme.

As mentioned in the section on Impact and Value, it's vital to recognise the importance of our participants' peer support network. In normal times, they phone, email or visit one another, especially anyone who's going through a bad patch. At the end of the year we were plunged into abnormal times, which both strengthened this safety net and made it all the more necessary. Trustee Bonnie deserves a special mention for setting up and hosting the (grant-funded) Zoom writing sessions.

Bird study – pencil on coloured paper



Pop-up card – felt-tip on card



Social prescribing (*Glossary, Let's Create: Strategy 2020-2030 Arts Council England*). 'The prescription of creative and cultural activities by health care professionals, and other referral services, to people experiencing anxiety, stress-related symptoms, depression or other mental and physical health problems.'

'Pilot GP practices which have introduced social prescribing report fewer GP appointments and attendances at A&E while people's health and wellbeing have improved. [The NHS Long Term Plan](#) will see 1,000 social prescribing link workers in place by 2021, with more after that, helping 900,000 more people to benefit from similar schemes.' (*NHS England and NHS Improvement, Issue: 94 12 July 2019*). Staffs Moorlands now has a social prescribing link worker; she's based at Bank House and Andy is in contact with her.

Networking and links

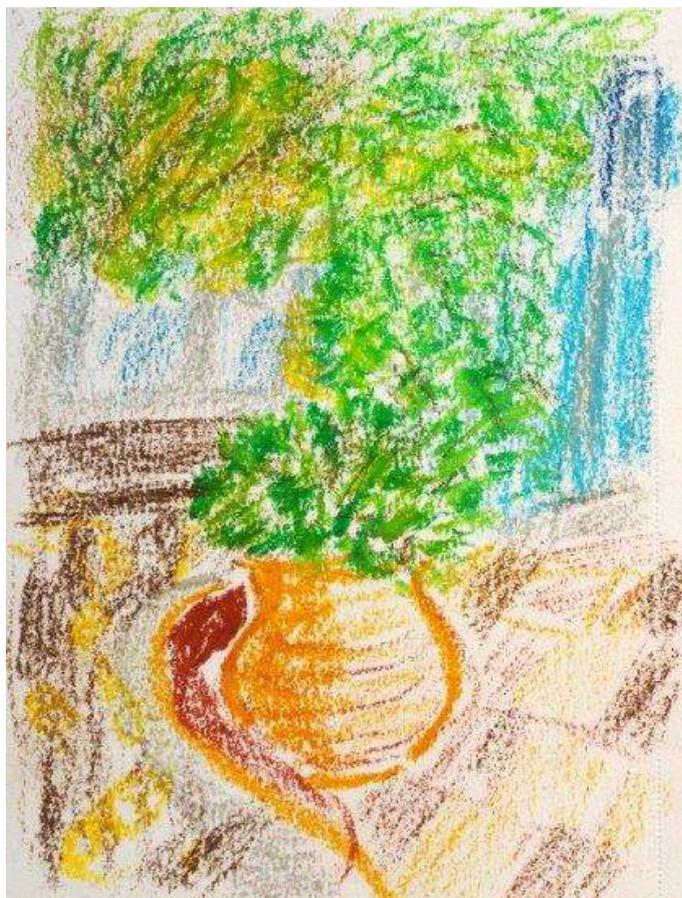
These are essential to maintaining our profile and keeping abreast of local developments.

Being in the same building as **Support Staffordshire (Staffordshire Moorlands)** makes it easy for Andy to maintain a close working relationship with our voluntary and community sector umbrella body.

We also network with the following:

- Moorlands Information Group (mental health: statutory and voluntary bodies and service users)
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council: Officers and Councillors
- Leek Town Council
- Kniveden Partnership (N Staffs Combined Healthcare NHS Trust)
- Staffs Moorlands Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Assembly
- W Midlands Arts, Health and Wellbeing
- Leek Arts Forum
- Staffs County Council: Library Service; Councillors
- Stone and Water (Buxton-based artists' cooperative)

Greek garden – mixed media on paper



- Changes – 12 Steps to Mental Health
- Brighter Futures and the Mental Health Helpline
- The Foxlowe Arts Centre
- Leek College of Art
- Dove Valley Centre
- Support Staffordshire Health and Care Forum
- Staffs Moorlands social prescribing link worker
- Dr Plot's Festival
- Forum for rural research on health and well-being (FRRESH – Keele University)
- Derby University: Creative Expressive Therapies course
- Leek High School
- Healthwatch

St George – pencil and acrylic on paper



*Above:
Beach – watercolour on paper with sea-glass and pebbles and shells*

Adult Community Mental Health and Social Services Teams continue to refer people, as do **Rethink, Homestart, SIL Leek** (support for complex mental health needs) and **Harewood Park** (rehab unit Cheadle).

No referral is needed, though; we welcome anyone who comes along via word-of-mouth, an article in the paper or a radio interview.

We also welcome visitors.



Right: 3-D undersea scene – Mixed media