



Transforming lives with the Arts



Borderland Voices Annual Report, 2016-17

Introduction and executive summary, Andy Collins, Coordinator

Borderland Voices is a micro charity based in Leek. Concentrating on what we do well, we deliver weekly, free, professionally-facilitated workshops in a range of arts media. For small groups of regular participants, many with enduring mental health issues, these provide vital support:

'Borderland Voices is my lifeline as I'm alone most of the time; I have friends here I can relate to.'

'Borderland Voices enables us to express opinions and share the problems we came in with, without feeling silly or drawing notice to ourselves, which we can't do anywhere else with ease ... and return home feeling happier and stronger and not so alone.'

'I look forward to my day at Borderland Voices as I forget my everyday problems for one day and that helps me through the rest of the week.'

No year at Borderland Voices is without its challenges and joys, and this was no exception. Confirmation that



'New beginnings'

we must vacate the rent-free premises we've enjoyed for so long is a worry which is exercising the trustees & me. I remain confident, however, that we shall shortly be starting a new chapter in our almost 20-year history. We also lost a very old & dear friend, Joan Jones, who attended the writing group for many years. In contrast, we were delighted when Jason nominated us for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service ('the MBE for voluntary groups') & even more thrilled when we progressed to the Assessment stage. In addition to our small number of formal volunteers, I view all our participants as volunteers, who support & encourage one another both during & between weekly workshops. That is fundamental to what we stand for.

Chairman's report,

Bob Foster

The Writing Group and Creative Arts Group continue to run with good attendance and high satisfaction expressed by our clients. The Patchwork Group also continues successfully.

For a number of years we have been unable to secure funding for the large projects we used to. It seems the money just is not available. While the funding we have received is less than those heady days it enables us to fund the Writing and Arts Groups but other activities are more modest. Personally I am happy with this change.



'Tyger, Tyger, burning bright'



Collage – ‘holiday greetings’

Our finances remain strong, enabling us to fund our core activities for about 2 years hence.

We continue to adhere to our Strategic Plan really well but one of our threats has come to fruition. Your Housing Group have funded our headquarters at Queen’s Drive for many years but have now withdrawn support and we have to find another venue by December 2017. We have examined a number of venues and are confident we will make a reasonably seamless change in due course.

We continue to rely on our “A team” of Andy, Sheena and Liz, and now we should include Richard, who continue to work very professionally; my sincere thanks to them.

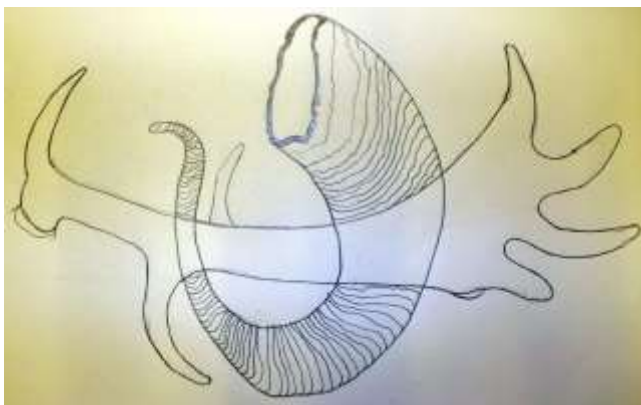
My thanks also to the trustee group for working so well together and I hope we can all continue to be associated with this small but perfectly formed organisation.

Lastly our good friend Jason nominated Borderland Voices for the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service (‘the MBE for voluntary groups’). Although we shall report fully next year, we all know it was ultimately successful. This accolade is so well deserved and Andy in particular should be congratulated for her unstinting energy in promoting the organisation and, with Jason and the participants, presenting the delights of Borderland Voices to the Queen’s Award assessors.



Mask, inspired by Hundertwasser

Our objectives. We:



From Buxton Museum’s handling collection

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.

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



Learning the skill of film animation

1. We used Big Lottery funding from HealthFair/People's Health Trust (PHT), Churnet Valley Living Landscapes Project and Awards for All (A4A) to support our weekly creative writing and expressive arts sessions. A4A writing outreach has just started for Rethink with sessions in Ipstones planned for later in the spring. With PHT permission we continued to deliver arts workshops to people in recovery from addiction at The Hub in Leek, but sadly this facility has now closed.

2. We employed 12 different visual artists. Their creativity and dedication empower all our participants. A former volunteer delivered her first ever workshops and another artist ran her first professional sessions, having gained the degree which she started after experimental workshops here 3 years ago. Nominated by the coordinator, Viv, our artist of long standing, was 'highly commended' in the Creative section of the Staffs Dignity in Care awards. Two professional writers shared facilitation of the writing group with participants (see 3 below).

3. Visits (Rudyard Lake; the Green Man Gallery in Buxton; the Dove Valley Centre; aboard the 'Beatrice' canal boat; working with the Staffs Poet Laureate in Leek Library; for the annual BBQ; Christmas lunches; sewing /patchwork centres) not only provide inspiration but also an extended opportunity for the socialisation which is an essential part of our activities. All weekly sessions (patchwork, creative writing and expressive arts) are full, attracting on average 10 people. They are alive not only with creativity but also conversation and laughter, as people enjoy both the varied art forms and one another's company. With the support of their peers, 3 or 4 participants take it in turns to facilitate writing once a month. Being a Healthwatch champion organisation allowed us to enable participant feedback to Healthwatch about changes they personally had experienced in health and social services locally.



Writers at the Dove Valley Centre

4. The Foxlowe café hosted our recycled art exhibition, mounted by Sheena, for a month. Original collagraph prints by participants featured in a print exhibition at ArtStop in Stoke, where some were sold. The SW Peak Landscape Partnership's Landscape Action Plan (Cultural Heritage and History section) made an honourable mention of our writing group. We again produced one hundred 2017 calendars, which were either sold or distributed as complimentary copies to raise awareness of our work.



Borderland Voices work in a Recycled Art exhibition at the Foxlowe

In 2016 Jason nominated Borderland Voices for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and in January 2017 two Deputy Lord Lieutenants made an assessment visit. Apparently simply progressing to this stage is a good sign, as there are thousands of nominations every year.

5. Again Borderland Voices played a central role in planning and delivering the 3rd annual Mental Health awareness and activity day at the Foxlowe. A wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies which support good mental health offer information, advice and participatory activities (writing and art, in our case). As usual, we took our stand and a family-friendly art project to Art in the Park. The coordinator took the display to an NHS consultative meeting and assisted with several events at Haregate Community Centre.



Mental Health Awareness Day, Foxlowe



One of our many collagraph prints exhibited in Stoke on Trent

Impact/value

The coordinator worked with a mentor from 'Measuring the Good' (a joint Coalition for Efficiency / Volunteering Matters scheme) to improve how we measure and report our impact. As a result, we redesigned our simple participant feedback form, based on the widely used and regarded 'Shorter Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' (SWEMWS) with added questions specific to our arts for health and mental wellbeing activities. We combine this feedback with anecdotal evidence, quality of artwork and In-depth evaluation of their short courses by lead artists. On average, participants recorded that coming to Borderland Voices improved 5 (out of 8) SWEMWS scores. All learned or developed new skills and felt these helped them connect with other people and cope better at home.

All had fun, felt respected, valued, supported and cared for at Borderland Voices, often to a greater extent than in everyday life. Commenting on what they most enjoy about attending, people used words like, 'fun, creativity, company, friendship, stimulation, being valued and accepted, focus, concentration'. As to what they would change, most people simply asked for 'more'.

Volunteers

In addition to our trustees, we are fortunate to have a small but dedicated band of volunteers. Sheena continues to assist the patchwork group; mounts exhibitions; and visited (former writing group member) Joan until her death. We were touched to receive half of the donations from Joan's funeral. Richard liaises with a small group of keen photographers; volunteers regularly at the art group; and maintains a photographic record of all work. We're indebted to him for many photos in this report. As usual, Marion



Still life with willow basket



Water colour

ran her popular outdoor painting group in August. Jason published his 2nd book (his first novel) and undertook the mammoth online task of nominating Borderland Voices for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. Crecy took up the challenge of starting a formal Friends Group but sadly resigned to concentrate on other voluntary work, related to her proposed PhD. 'Measuring the Good' mentor Liz travelled from Wolverhampton to visit and followed this up with many long emails and phone calls. Our pro bono accountant Liz supports the coordinator not only with budgets and finances but also all IT matters.

Long-term strategy

Our long-term strategy is currently two-fold: to find a new 'home' and to secure the income needed to maintain all our current services. For many years, Your Housing Group (YHG) has supported us in-kind by providing rent-free premises which have been excellently suited to our needs. Unfortunately, YHG indicated in November that they required 57 Queens Drive for commercial purposes and would be unable to renew our lease which expires in December 2017. The coordinator has met YHG staff on several occasions; trustees studied a spreadsheet of potential alternative premises which she prepared and are considering the available options. Unfortunately, the rental incurred in any new venue will increase the funding needed to deliver our activities, at a time when funds are harder to find. We are still advertising for a volunteer to replace Crecy as Friends Group Leader. Inspired by a dedicated and motivating individual, a Friends Group could raise both funds and our public profile.



Caricature exercise

Networking



Tie-dye underwater scene

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

We also have close links with the following organisations:

- Moorlands Information Group (mental health: statutory & voluntary bodies & service users)
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council: Officers and Councillors
- Haregate: Community and Environmental Group; Community Centre
- Kniveden Partnership (N Staffs Combined Healthcare NHS Trust)
- Staffs Moorlands Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly
- W Midlands Arts, Health and Wellbeing
- Leek Arts Forum
- Your Moorlands Housing Group
- Staffs County Council: Library Service; councillors
- NSUG (North Staffs Users' Group) (mental health charity covering whole of N Staffs)
- Stone and Water (Buxton-based artists' cooperative)
- The OneRecovery Hub, Leek (promoting recovery from all forms of addiction)
- 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
- Ruyard Lake Trust

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.



'Recycled' sculpture



Autumn day – writing aboard 'The Beatrice'