

Ways of Seeing Evaluation



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July 2011



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ISBN 978-1-908549-06-8

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SUMMARY

This report summarises the evaluation of *Ways of Seeing*, a community arts project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and hosted by the Lightbox, Woking, Surrey from 2008-11. The people involved have had remarkable experiences, choosing how to take part in each stage of preparations for a major public art exhibition. All those involved had disabilities, primarily arising from mental health issues but also including physical disabilities. The project was skilfully designed and led to enable them to make a significant contribution, enhancing their well-being and resulting in the *Ways of Seeing* exhibition which was widely appreciated.

The Lightbox is an award-winning museum, housing a permanent local history exhibition as well as touring major art exhibitions. The Ingram Modern Art collection is on permanent loan, with regular exhibitions of work from the collection. Since the Lightbox opened in 2007, it has had a stated intention to promote local community involvement, successfully obtaining external funding to support this work. *Ways of Seeing* was the most ambitious project to date, aiming to exhibit selected work from the Ingram Collection alongside art created as part of the project by local disabled people. The emphasis on *ways of seeing* reflected an interest in their diverse perspectives, especially in relation to long term mental health problems. A steering group was set up, with members from local mental health initiatives and an evaluation team from Brunel University.

The project started by orientating participants to how art is created and exhibited, with a series of visits and workshops on major art collections and artists' studios. This stage successfully attracted a range of people and was followed by taster workshops of different art techniques. Then participants examined every item in the Ingram Collection and agreed a selection to inspire their own artistic responses. All-day workshops were convened, covering the same techniques as before and giving everyone space and time to get started. Curation of the exhibition gathered pace as final selections were made from participants' art works and the Ingram Collection. The exhibition offered opportunities for everyone to have selections of their work exhibited to the public alongside the selected work from the Ingram Collection. A video artist captured the project in film and an MSc occupational therapy student from Brunel University undertook independent interviews of participants.

It is clear that this multi-stage and carefully considered approach was highly successful in engaging people who are often excluded from arts events and venues. It was also successful in engaging the public in an innovative and thought-provoking exhibition, challenging assumptions about mental health and promoting the benefits of participation. The willingness of the Lightbox to host and support the project was essential. Based on tolerance, respect and a sympathetic curiosity, with clear and skilled leadership, the project enabled participants to make significant changes in their own lives.

MILESTONES**2008**

- Proposal for the project developed by the Lightbox Museum Director and staff
- Funding applied for successfully from Heritage Lottery Fund
- Project manager Rib Davis appointed
- Steering group established and evaluation process agreed

2009

- Project launched and recruitment started
- BSc Occupational Therapy student on placement facilitated participation
- 4 full day visits to art galleries and studios alternating with discussions led by Lightbox staff
- 4 Taster workshops led by local artists: sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking
- Consideration of Ingram Collection and selection of 50 works

2010

- 4 series of 5 full day workshops convened from January to July including drawing, painting, sculpture and print-making.
- Participants interviewed individually
- Final selection of artwork: 15 originals and 70 responses
- Videos recordings made to capture the experiences of participants for the exhibition
- Curation of exhibition

2011

- Opening of the exhibition (15th Jan to 27th March) with participants
- Symposium convened on 28th February with UK wide attendance
- Marking the end of the exhibition with a cabaret performance
- Taking down the exhibition
- Evaluation of the project

REACHING AGREED GOALS

The goals identified at the beginning of the project guided its development. The original goals and outcomes are listed below:

Original goals and outcomes achieved

Respond to requests from mental health service users for opportunities to participate in The Lightbox's programmes.

Opportunities to join the project were sustained throughout, engaging with a wide range of people.

Support their paths towards employment where relevant.

Two people left the project having gained employment and others made significant progress towards this goal, where relevant.

Provide The Lightbox team with training and skills to enable them to work with people with mental health problems and increase and diversify The Lightbox's volunteers by recruiting people with mental health problems.

Achieved formally and informally. Mental health awareness training provided.

Provide the public with fresh, new interpretation for a major collection of Modern British Art.

There were more comments cards left by the public about this exhibition than for any other at the Lightbox. All were positive comments.

Through working with an artist, create new responses to and interpretations of an important collection.

Different artists were employed at different stages giving participants a range of opportunities.

Through the project, give a voice to people with mental health problems and address misconceptions about mental health.

The responses to the Ingram Collection were thought-provoking and inspiring. The Symposium attracted significant interest, triggering debate and sharing of ideas. Publication of the MSc research will aim to take the voices of participants to an international audience.

Additional achievements

The project has acted as springboard for two further arts/ heritage/ mental health projects, 'Opening Minds' and 'Speaking our Minds', culminating in a mental health cabaret. A valuable practice placement was created for a BSc (Hons) occupational therapy student.

Key figures	
Funding from Heritage Lottery Fund	£50,000
Duration of project	24 months
Duration of exhibition	10 weeks
Number of participants involved overall	29
Number of participants involved for more than one phase	17
Number of participants involved from beginning to end	9
Number of workshop leaders/artists employed	4
Proportion of Lightbox staff and volunteers in contact with project	100% staff, 15% volunteers
Number of people visiting the exhibition	6530
Number of comments cards left by the public	148
Number of people who attended the symposium	54 plus speakers



VIEWS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Halfway through the project, people involved were interviewed, as part of MSc occupational therapy research. Eight people shared their individual experiences. The main themes are detailed here.

Theme 1: “I wouldn’t have missed it for the world”; a prized experience

Participants placed great value on their overall experience of being involved in the project:

“I’m just grateful that I’ve been given the chance to be a part of this...”

“It’s great; a golden opportunity to look at art and understand art” “It’s like a gift someone’s given me this sort of thing that has been gift wrapped”

“It really was a diamond”

Theme 2: “There are still things I can do”; drawing confidence and self-worth from the project

Being involved had positive impacts:

“And it’s lovely to be able to do something that reminds you that actually you have some worth... it’s given me confidence that there are things that I can still do.”

“... it has given me inspiration to pursue a project like this ... because I didn’t realise I had a lot of ability...”

“...since I started coming here I started doing some voluntary work and now I’ve just been appointed, I just got a job... I don’t think I could have done that without rebuilding my confidence enough to actually be able to go out and say “I’m here, I don’t have the experience in the job, but I can do it” and I know I can do it.”

Some felt that the project provided a learning experience which could translate across their whole life:

“...I know now that people with mental health issues are allowed to enjoy themselves and that is very important.”



Theme 3: “Working within a group”; positive influences of a group setting

Being in a group with people who had similar interests and experiences made it easier to get involved:

“To come to a structured group, with a teacher who motivates me, is the best thing.”

“I’ve met a few people that I’ve got to know and that’s what’s really helped me...”

“I actually found that maybe it would be a group that I would be more accepted in...it made me feel good as part of a group...”

“I come into an atmosphere that is friendly and it's safe which is really very important...”

Theme 4: “You are being treated like a... human being”; forming a new sense of self

Some people were able to forget about their mental health issues, forming a new identity as an artist:

“It was like, it was like stepping into their world and being welcomed in...”

“I wasn't being treated like someone different...”

“it's good to have something to talk about...that... ... isn't necessarily mental health and how you're feeling and what's going on... and it's more what you are doing...”

“But with the Ingram collection it's just... it's not about mental health it's about art.”

“It's actually given me a hope, there could be a future for me in something which- I didn't realise I had, it was a corner that I turned and I realised, “god I have got something here which I can use”.

For others, to the visits and workshops offered a welcome change, reconnecting with the wider world:

“You know, you don't have to use your mind.”

“It's like having a day of freedom, a day off from being ill... for 6 hours it's enabled me to pretty well forget my mental health...”

“I think it's... more self-confidence in that... what you're doing is acceptable and ...more main stream.”

“I'm back in the world”

Theme 5: “It was like a history lesson and art lesson at the same time”; acquisition of skills

New skills and knowledge were gained throughout the project, with one person developing new strategies to manage mental health issues:

“I actually learnt to look at paintings to stop and look at paintings and see... and try and get some idea in my mind of... what was in the artist’s head when it was being done...”

“for me it was an opportunity to do something that I was already doing and that I love doing and, but with some professional guidance in it. Which was the fabulous bit, was getting the teaching...”

“I think part of this project has taught me is to look up or even to look down. Because... up there is some wonderful architecture or... it might be a huge painting...Don't just focus on this bit, there is something much wider going on around... I think that that is beneficial to your mental health... You can see the bigger picture 'cos you can actually drag that into your life and not just focus on yourself, you can look at what is going on for other people.”



Theme 6: “It’s having a focus”; provision of focus, doing and meaning

Many appreciated the visits to other galleries and others felt the value laid in actually “doing something”, at times becoming completely absorbed

“Now we’re actually doing the art, it’s been more positive”

“it’s good to have something to talk about...that... isn't necessarily mental health and how you're feeling and what's going on... and... It's more what you are doing...”

“focus the brain on something you like doing rather than let it wander.”

“I was trying to focus on the positive things like my art work, you know, what I was doing,”

“what's happened yesterday and what's going to happen tomorrow, what's going to happen this evening, all this negativity that you are full of... I become so focused, really to the point of... stupidity... I'm so focused on what I'm doing...that I can put all of that aside.”

Theme 7: "It's not all glamorous"; negative aspects of the project

Despite an overwhelming positive response, there were some negative aspects. Because the project was highly valued, some people felt a personal pressure to produce high quality pieces of artwork:

"if I come here and am provided with wonderful things I feel that I owe somebody something...you come here with so much pressure on your shoulders, to such an extent that you sit down and don't know what to do..."

For those with physical impairments, attendance was difficult at times:

"my tiredness that I still experience can be a problem sometimes"

"because of my energy levels, I found it very difficult"

"Just 'cos of the physical problems that I've got it's made it very difficult to attend every session and... to be able to... I've found the days were really long 10 til 4."

Physical limitations were clearly considered at certain stages during the project. However where assistance was given, some difficulties arose in taking personal pride in the artwork:

"...she [the tutor] did a beautiful print, but I don't want that in the exhibition because although, although it's very good, it's brilliant. I hope it's not in the exhibition... Because it's not- not my own work."

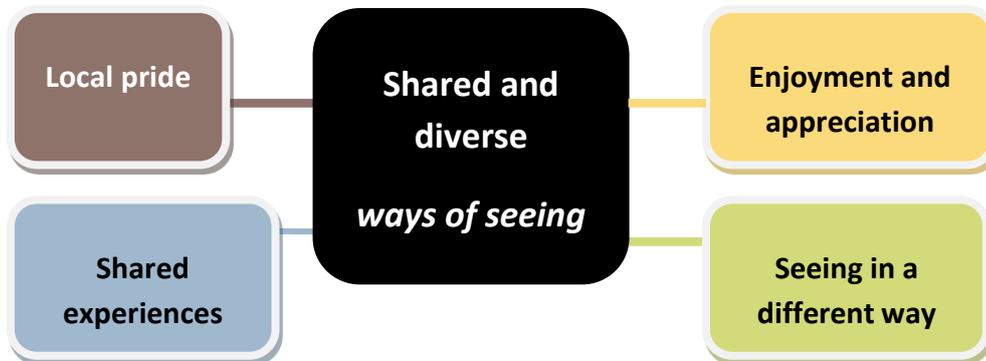
Because the project was conducted in phases, there were many endings which were not always welcome:

"when the project came to an end it was quite sad, in myself I felt quite sad, there was almost a sad ending to the situation..."

"And I do worry now about the more I get... the more I dig into this... I worry about the end. I'm frightened about that (pause) but it will come to an end I know, and I'll have to face up to it... .."

After the interviews, all the data were analysed and the findings presented in a dissertation, which is available from the authors on request.

VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC



Visitors to the *Ways of Seeing* exhibition completed 148 cards with their comments, which were overwhelmingly positive. Their comments have been used to create the summary framework above. This exhibition had a profoundly positive and stimulating impact on those who visited it. The lack of negative responses could have been due to a reluctance to show any disrespect for those involved, given the sensitive nature of mental health issues. However, the comments were anonymous and unsolicited. As mentioned previously, the number of comments made was unprecedented for any exhibition at the Lightbox.

Sharing and diverse ways of seeing

The aim of the project was understood by visitors who grasped the importance of including diverse artwork, responses and media. One visitor suggested that interpreting art was a normal creative activity while another was amazed at the different responses to the originals which had emerged. Many particularly appreciated the way in which responses had been shared.

Enjoyment and appreciation

There was an aesthetic appreciation of the artwork included in the exhibition, as well as strongly positive comments about how the work had been presented. A large number of comments suggested many people had enjoyed visiting the exhibition.

Seeing in a different way

Many comments described the exhibition as inspiring and thought-provoking. People were inspired by the talent evident in the artwork and inspired to engage in art themselves. Some were inspired and moved by the captions alongside the work, which provoked thoughts about the original artwork, the response and sometimes mental health issues. Many were fascinated by the relationship between the original artworks and the responses. One visitor abandoned an initial approach of focusing on the originals, finding a new way of seeing them by engaging with the responses.

Shared experiences

Another visitor described feeling “at home” in the exhibition, being able to understand and appreciate the responses to the original artwork. Others could relate to the ideas and experiences shared in the responses and their captions. Empathising in this way gave some insight into mental health issues and how they are experienced.

Local pride

A few visitors shared a sense of pride in the Lightbox for hosting the exhibition, thanking Chris Ingram for his willingness to share the Ingram Collection with local people in this way.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROJECT LEADER, RIB DAVIS

The *Ways of Seeing* project was an innovation in many ways, so it was agreed that the evaluation would include exploring leadership, to gain insight into the approach underpinning the project's success. Rib Davis's experiences as project manager were recorded from direct observations during the project and three in-depth interviews during and after the exhibition. He was pivotal in making this community arts project a success. His unique skill, with the generous support of the Lightbox staff, allowed the project to unfold towards their shared vision. The Director of the gallery asked Rib to lead the *Ways of Seeing* project based on seven years' involvement with previous local arts projects. This was the first to be directly aimed at including people with mental health problems in interpreting works of art and creating new ways of looking at those works, including curating the exhibition. He was surprised when asked to manage this particular project, not having a background in visual art nor experience of working with people who have mental health problems. However, it was his ability to unobtrusively but purposefully co-ordinate the project with a combination of sensitive leadership and facilitation that was key to its success. As this was a long term project, Rib had to sustain the vision of the final exhibition: his consistent presence ensured the aims of the project were achieved.



Initially starting with a launch event, recruitment for the project did not go very well. It was realised that to invite people to be part of the whole project was too daunting. This was changed to inviting people to take part one stage at a time, which worked much better. From then on, some people were involved throughout and more people were recruited, mostly through word of mouth.

Rib's consistent presence was very important to the participants, even though he described himself as the "tea boy" during the workshops. He fetched lunch and made sure everyone had access to refreshments. Everyone knew that if there were any problems, he would be able to make a helpful response. However, he was very keen to stress that the project was not set up as a therapeutic endeavour, like a series of art therapy classes. The vision of the public exhibition drove a serious exploration and interpretation of the art encountered and created. Nevertheless, he noted that there were definite therapeutic benefits for some, attributed partly to the acceptance and respect from Lightbox staff as well as being part of such a purposeful project over time.

There were challenges during the different phases. To ensure everyone was included, different approaches had to be used which involved problem solving on the spot and on reflection. There were conflicts at times, especially when difficult decisions had to be made about inclusion and exclusion. Where possible, Rib worked to include people in decision-making, so they could negotiate and understand the final outcomes. There was also the practical challenge of generating resources for the project, including artists to lead the workshops.





By the end of the project, after two and a half years of establishing its different phases and building up the infrastructure, the resulting exhibition was hugely successful. Working alongside Rib, the participants were involved throughout. His democratic style and inclusive way of being greatly contributed to the overall achievements of everyone involved in the project. He attributes this to the support of the steering group and Lightbox staff. However, he sustained the vision of enabling the participants to reach the goal of putting on an exhibition. The outcome exceeded all expectations.

FINAL REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation of this project identified three major aspects which are important for future similar initiatives. First, the central idea of sharing different *ways of seeing* is a complex but valuable basis for community arts projects. Second, the exhibition as a goal created memorable experiences for people to share at every stage. Overall, many people were inspired to see things differently. These three aspects are not unique to this project, being reflected in policy, theory, research and experiences elsewhere.

SHARED AND DIVERSE *WAYS OF SEEING*

The idea of sharing different perspectives on major art works, to engage the public with visual arts, has evolved with the work of Berger et al (1972), who suggested that sharing interpretations challenges assumptions people hold. This could be about the art works or, on a more general level, about being a visitor to museums and galleries. Sharing perspectives and interpretations can happen any point in visiting, highlighting the importance of everyone, at every level of an organisation, being responsible for promoting inclusion (Culbard 2009). Social inclusion is not just about increasing diversity of visitor profiles, however, but about increasing social links or networks between people. Reciprocal social links are fundamentally important for health (Wilkinson 2005).

Creating a group project enabled the participants to form links with each other and with the Lightbox. For people with mental health problems, being welcomed and accepted in community places such as the Lightbox is a vital part of social inclusion, which has been consistently promoted in government policy over recent years (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004, Rogers and Pilgrim 2003). Community arts projects for people with mental health issues are rarely located in major art galleries such as the Lightbox. Giving easy access to the public is important as it signals value to artwork created by people who might otherwise be marginalised (Parr 2008). This in turns challenges stigmatising perceptions and beliefs in an enjoyable way.

Making the project accessible, to people with varied and complex needs, involved responding in a practical and sympathetic way at every stage of the project. Taylor (2009) has suggested that addressing accessibility issues for people with mental health problems can be as simple as identifying a barrier, understanding why it is a barrier, and removing it. Despite apparent barriers,

people are attracted to opportunities which are novel, based on activity and responsive to their needs (Culbard 2009) and community arts projects such as *Ways of Seeing* are important and valuable.

Recommendation: As confirmed by the participants, public and people attending the Symposium, the project was a success and should be shared widely as an excellent example.

CREATING AND SHARING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

As the ultimate goal, the exhibition ensured *Ways of Seeing* would have a public presence, ensuring a clear purpose which could be shared. However, the exhibition could have seemed remote and unachievable at the outset. Having phases of the project meant that people could work towards it in individual and flexible ways. This way of thinking about participation, considering the purpose, the context and individual journeys, is increasingly important in occupational therapy and mental health services promoting recovery (Lloyd et al 2007, Secker et al 2007). The context, the Lightbox, was different to projects within mental health services. Being involved in projects like *Ways of Seeing* has been seen as “stabilising” (Parr 2009): it is not just doing art-based activities, but having a sense of belonging to associated areas such as the café and gallery itself. In addition to the occupational focus of the project, the social opportunities enabled people to take on different roles and identities. This has been identified as a benefit of arts participation by many researchers including Lloyd et al 2007, Spandler et al 2007 and Van Lith et al 2009.

Recommendation: The Lightbox is well placed for creating and hosting projects such as *Ways of Seeing* and should be offered more opportunities.

INSPIRING PEOPLE TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The use of artwork from the Ingram Collection engaged participants and the public. Using public resources in this way, to widen participation and foster community involvement, effectively changes attitudes and promotes social integration (Lamb 2009). Sharing and reflecting on the different ways of responding was thought-provoking, challenging assumptions about disability, modern art and participation in the arts. There was also curiosity and novelty – could new interpretations and understandings be revealed? This has also been suggested by idea of “outsider” art history, where people with expertise not related to art history offer a new perspective on a visual image (Gotlieb 2008). Inspirations extended beyond the artwork to participants’ lives as a whole, with some making major changes in their lives, supporting the idea that supported participation is often a “stepping stone” to other things (Heenan 2006).

Recommendation: Further funding should be sought by the Lightbox, sustaining its profile of having a particular interest in inspiring people to see things differently.

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FINE ART, FINE MENTAL HEALTH

SYMPOSIUM

The Lightbox, Woking, February 28th, 10.00am – 4.30 pm

PROGRAMME

Each session will be directly followed by Questions and Answers

9.45 REGISTRATION

10.10 INTRODUCTION

Presented by Claudia Hammond (of BBC Radio 4's *All in the Mind*).

10.20 GALLERY AS A MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE

Presented by Neil Springham, Consultant Art Therapist, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust

For a number of years art therapists and gallery curators have been looking at how to develop ways of narrowing the gap between mental health services and mainstream arts. This presentation will give examples of how this can work and outline the benefits of such collaborations to all parties.

11.10 CREATING A SPACE

Presented by Leisa Gray, Community Development Manager, Manchester Art Gallery

This talk will consider how looking at and discussing art can enable people to develop reflective thinking skills and allow issues to be explored in an open environment. It will also consider how art galleries can best work with professionals from the mental health sector.

12.00 Coffee

12.15 CREATIVE CARE, THE POWER OF ART IN THE HOSPITAL

Presented by Shaun Caton, **Art Curator, Art Project, Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust**

The speaker examines the outstanding art project which he created and developed at Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in London, as well as presenting some of his other diverse and often radical approaches to putting art in the hospital context.

1.05 VIEWING 'WAYS OF SEEING' EXHIBITION, AND LUNCH

2.20 THE GALLERY OF MENTAL HEALTH

Presented by Rib Davis, Special Projects Manager, The Lightbox; Dr Wendy Bryant, Occupational Therapy lecturer, Brunel University; Jacqueline Lawson, Recovery Lead, Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust, and participants of the 'Ways of Seeing' project.

The speakers examine how, over a period of 2 years, the participants of 'Ways of Seeing' went through all the processes necessary to curate an exhibition, comprising major artworks which they selected from The Ingram Collection alongside their own artistic responses to them.

3.10 VISUAL ART IN HOSPITALS: EFFECTS ON WELL-BEING AND OUTCOMES

Presented by Dr Chris Isles, Consultant Nephrologist, Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary

In 2006 a Department of Health Working Group on Arts and Health reported that the arts have 'a clear contribution to make and offer major opportunities in the delivery of better health, wellbeing and improved experience for patients, service users and staff alike.' In this review the speaker examines the evidence underpinning this statement and evaluates the visual art of three of Scotland's newest hospitals.

4.00 WAYS FORWARD

Discussion led by Claudia Hammond

4.30 Close

FINE ART, FINE MENTAL HEALTH is part of the *Ways of Seeing* project. The organisers are extremely grateful to Mr Chris Ingram for permission to use The Ingram Collection of Modern and Contemporary British Art, and to the Heritage Lottery Fund for its generous financial support.



