



The Phoenix Project 2020



Image by Sumit Sakar for "Colouring in the Blues" created for Green Close, the Phoenix Project 2020

Evaluation Report December 2020



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Introduction:

What is the project?

The Phoenix Project was a visual art mental health and wellbeing programme delivered by Green Close in partnership with Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust Recovery College during August–October 2020.

The project piloted a series of creative workshops, led by 23 contemporary visual artists, who explored ways of using the visual arts to engage with people to enhance their mental wellbeing. In total 75 workshops were delivered, to benefit 125 participants. A further 270 participants were identified through visits made to access downloadable resources hosted on the Green Close website.

Why was it done?

Green Close wanted to further its arts and creative health ambitions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and applied for funding to the Arts Council of England's Emergency Response Fund to support this. The Artistic Directors of Green Close both have lived experience of supporting family members with mental health conditions and wanted to use this to inform a new way of working for the organisation; whilst also supporting other creative practitioners at a time of social isolation and economic hardship.

What did the project aim to achieve?

The project aimed to explore the impact of visual artists in delivering mental health and wellbeing workshops using creative processes. It aimed to increase access to contemporary visual arts and see how the creative strategies employed by artists could be used to increase the confidence, mental health and wellbeing of participants, and the artists themselves.

How was it delivered?

Green Close recruited and managed the creative delivery of artists whilst Lancashire Recovery College advertised the project within their service and managed participant bookings and data. Dr Peter Weeks Lunesdale Surgery offered supervisory support to artists working on the programme. Artists worked remotely using differing communication methods such as the postal service, telephone and online strategies; making downloadable resources and delivering online workshops. Courses varied in the type of creative media, processes, length, sequence and duration on offer. Participants over the age of 16 were invited to take part in the programme.

Evaluation:

Green Close worked with researchers from Lancaster University to evaluate the impact that taking part in the Phoenix Project 2020 had on both the artists and participants. Quantitative, descriptive and narrative feedback was gathered from the artists and workshop participants via surveys, feedback forms, and semi-scripted interviews. The process adhered fully to the Lancaster University code of conduct for ethical research.

'Great work putting these on, especially in the times we are living in'

Artists

Of the 23 artists who delivered the workshops, 17 returned the feedback form sent by Green Close. The questionnaire (p21) asked them to rate their enjoyment of participating in The Phoenix Project 2020 and to describe their experience of delivering their workshop. In particular, they were asked about successes and challenges they experienced and whether the project had an impact on their own mental health. Each artist was also asked whether they had learnt anything as a result of taking part and whether / how the project contributed to their continuing professional development.

Eighteen of the artists also attended an online project close-out and feedback session organised by Green Close, in which they were invited to reflect on and share their feedback and ideas for future development.

Artist feedback

Feedback from artists working on the programme was overwhelmingly positive.

'It was lots of fun, empowering to make work for the benefit of others, and a very welcome commission in these strained times as a freelance artist'

All enjoyed the experience a lot apart from one who found using an online platform for delivery challenging. Artists reported that new employment opportunities to work on the Phoenix Project and working with others in a social context had boosted their self-esteem and personal wellbeing.

'During this crisis we have faced a level of uncertainty like no other time in our careers, and this support helped us to feel more stable, necessary and focussed. It gave us purpose.'

'This project gave me a boost of optimism which has helped create positive thought patterns, as working in isolation for the past 8 months has been a difficult time without meeting new people, regular contact with established peer networks or host organisations who help guide and support my practice through advice and as guiding forces'

Many commented on the lack of opportunities for artists since Covid-19 and the 'unbelievable challenges' of the year and that the process of helping others had really enhanced their own sense of wellbeing.

'I felt excited and happy about helping others creatively and in terms of their mental-wellbeing, and hopefully making a difference'

'Some people are really struggling and their mental health suffering and so it felt really good to be part of supporting people in adapted and creative ways'

All of the artists felt valued and supported by Green Close. Not only did they feel respected as artists, they enjoyed the commissioning process because creative processes were valued and encouraged rather than solely focusing on outcomes.

'Thank you for organising such a positive and diverse project! I really enjoyed the focus on creativity rather than outcome, it's a good way to work.'

Artists were able to witness the impact of their work first hand, direct feedback from one participant to an artist indicated her work had 'opened up a new door to creativity and recovery as they hadn't previously thought about using creativity as a healing tool'

Several artists commented on the availability of supervision should they need it. Whilst it was not used it was widely acknowledged that the provision of this was appreciated, alleviated stress & anxiety and led to feelings of being valued and supported by the project.

Feedback session

'The Phoenix Project could not have been delivered successfully without the care, commitment and creativity of our artists; I can't thank them enough!'

Sue Flowers, Director Green Close

Green Close noted that they had a very high quality of applicants for the programme and that even though this was a relatively small pilot programme the reduction of costs by delivering workshops remotely meant that they could employ the best artists from across the UK rather than those just living in the North West. Directors saw this as a real benefit to the project, enabling a high quality of work to be on offer to project participants.

Artists were both delighted and excited to have worked on the project and to come together to share their experiences. All expressed an interest in developing their work in this way, delivering sessions for mental wellbeing (remotely or physically) and continuing to work with Green Close in the future. All agreed they would like to come together and meet physically in the future.

Most expressed the importance of delivering to relatively small groups (from 1-1, groups of six to a maximum 12 people) but would have liked briefing from partners about specific client groups. Had artists known a high dropout ratio between booking and attendance was the norm for The Recovery College, most of the artists would have increased their workshop size to accommodate this.

Despite workshops providing much needed socialisation for artists, some artists still felt relatively isolated. Artists liked the idea of a buddying system so that artists can learn from each other and support each other. Many artists had felt they shouldn't book places on courses for themselves as there would be others in greater need. On reflection it was agreed that artists should be proactively encouraged to attend. The few that had attended sessions run by other artists had benefitted both personally and professionally.



Collaborative drawing by Danielle Chappell Aspinwall and participants of the "Creative Mindfulness Escape" workshops entitled "ENJOY our shared resilience"; created for Green Close, the Phoenix Project 2020

Participants

In total, there were 194 registrations for the 23 workshops, with 33 taking part in more than one workshop. Of the 125 individuals who participated in-person, 48 completed the baseline survey and 37 the follow-up survey, with 25 filling out both. Only 2 of the 270 who accessed the downloadable resource-based workshops or workshop extensions returned surveys. Our mental wellbeing evaluation is based on the 25 full returns, while progress to goals, workshop evaluation and feedback were taken from all 37 final surveys. Five of the workshop participants participated in the close-out feedback session and we conducted 8 individual interviews with workshop participants.

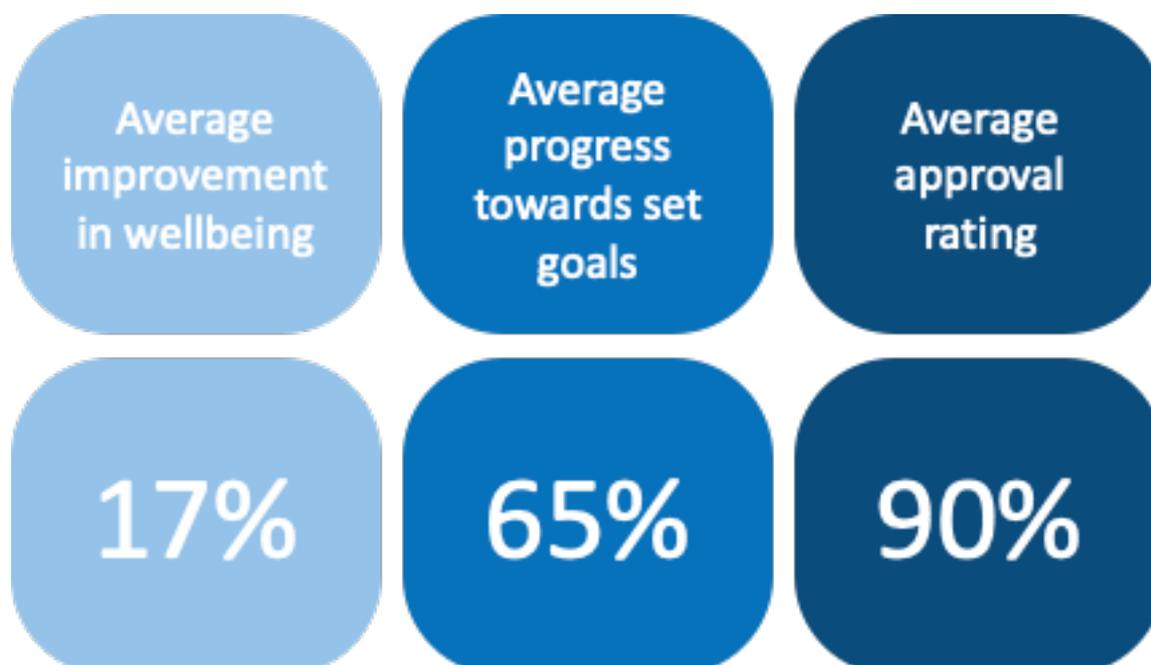
Immediately after registering for a workshop, each participant was sent a link to an online questionnaire – the baseline survey. In this, they were asked to score their current wellbeing via a WEMWBS (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Score) questionnaire¹, using a Likert scale from 1 to 5. Participants were also invited to set up to three new goals they hoped to achieve by participating in the Phoenix Project 2020². The choice of goal was left to the individual.

At the end of each workshop, participants were sent a link to the follow-up online questionnaire. Workshop participants were again asked to score their feelings of wellbeing using the WEMWBS questionnaire so we could determine whether an improvement had occurred over the course of participation. Each participant was also asked to indicate their perception of their progress toward each of their goals, using a score of 0 (no progress) to 10 (goal fully attained).

The final survey concluded with the opportunity for participants to provide feedback on the workshop they had attended. They were asked to rate (again using a Likert scale from 1 to 5) and comment on their enjoyment, learning and progress to recovery, as well as the delivery and organisation of the workshop (p24). Participants were also asked to indicate if they would be willing to be interviewed to provide us with more information about their experiences related to taking part in the Phoenix project.

The improvement in wellbeing was calculated as the difference between the baseline and follow-up WEMWBS survey scores for all those who completed both the baseline and the follow-up survey. Participants were ranked from greatest to least improvement and the top 6 and bottom 6 individuals who had given consent to be contacted were invited to a follow-up interview, held around 5 weeks after the end of the project. The semi-structured interviews (p25) were conducted by Lancaster University researchers and, where consent was given, were recorded for the purposes of analysis and preparing this report. Where consent was not given, extensive notes were taken instead.

Participant questionnaires



Wellbeing

Average WEMWBS scores substantially increased for 22 out of the 25 participants who completed both WEMWBS surveys. The average mental wellbeing score increased by 16.6% (from 3.03 to 3.50 out of 5) after completing at least one workshop session. This is shown in Figure 1. The change was statistically significant (p -value < 0.05) meaning it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

The fourteen items in the WEMWBS questionnaire were categorised into four themes adapted from Ryff's Scale of Psychological Wellbeing3: growth / purpose, mastery/acceptance, autonomy and positive relations.

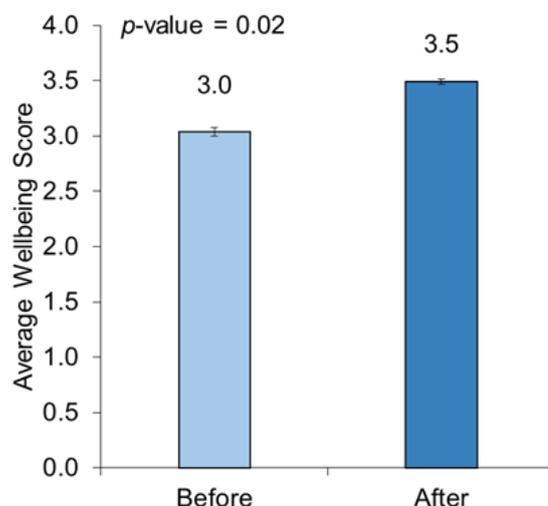


Fig 1. Bar graph showing average improvement in 14 WEMWBS statements before taking part in Phoenix Project sessions (baseline survey) and after completing sessions (final survey).

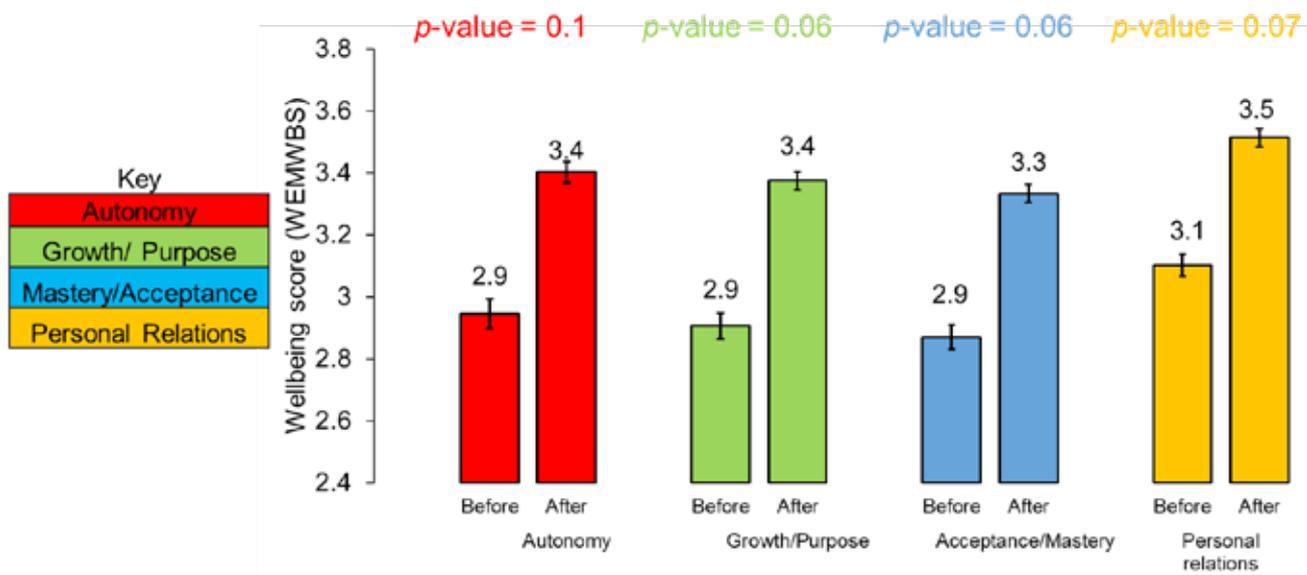
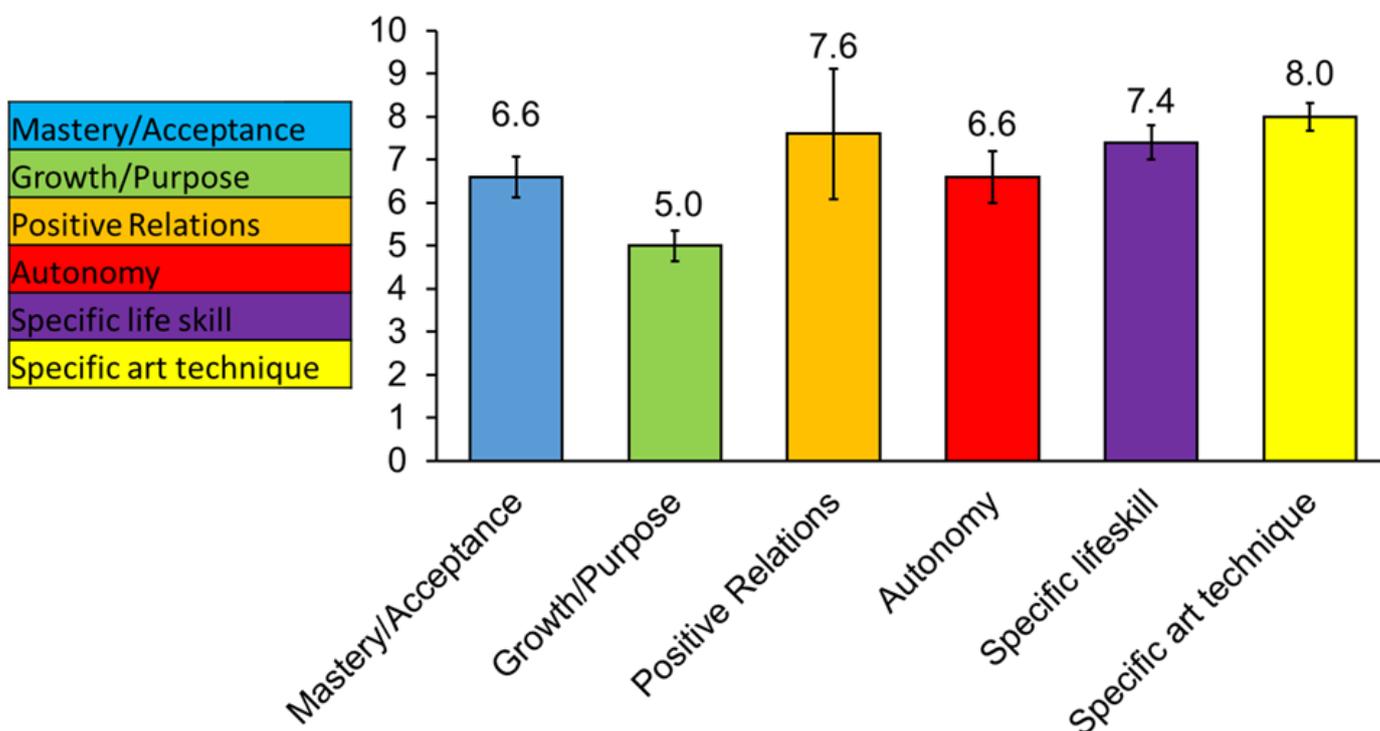


Fig. 2. Average Wellbeing scores, categorised by adapting Ryff's Wellbeing Scale, before taking part in Phoenix Project sessions (baseline survey) and after completing sessions (final survey).

Each of the four dimensions of wellbeing substantially increased between the baseline and the follow-up surveys, as shown in Figure 2. Both autonomy and growth / purpose scores increased by 17.2% from 2.9 to 3.4 out of 5. Acceptance / mastery scores increased by 13.7% from 2.9 to 3.3 out of 5. Personal relations scores increased by 12.9% from 3.1 to 3.5 out of 5. While none of the changes were statistically significant, they each demonstrated a clear trend (p -value between 0.05 and 0.1).



As shown in Figure 3, progress towards learning a specific art technique was the highest rated (8.0 out of 10), along with goals relating to positive relations (7.6 out of 10). Goals relating to a specific life skill also scored highly at 7.4 out of 10. Advancement toward mastery/acceptance and autonomy were near average (6.6 out of 10 respectively). Goals related to growth and purpose showed improvements slightly below the average at 5.0.

The most often-expressed purpose was to “learn something new”, whether in general or a specific skill or technique (18% of goals), with a similar number around bringing creativity or a new way of expressing themselves into their lives (17%). Three of the respondents were participating in order to challenge themselves in some way, while four just wanted to find happiness or enjoyment. **Just over 16% of the goals expressed a desire to find a way to live in the new normal or to cope with the changes in their lives resulting from lockdown or bereavement.** Interestingly, only three of the participants specifically wanted to meet new people. Almost 13% of the goals had the aim to feel more confident, more content or less anxious as a result of participating in the Phoenix Project 2020.

Workshop evaluation

The overall level of satisfaction in the Phoenix Project 2020 was high; **on average, the respondents of the final survey gave a score of 4.4 out of 5 for the workshop(s) as a whole**, with only five (13.5%) expressing less than 4 out of 5 approval. Enjoyment was high, with all but two of those who provided a rating (32 out of the 37 final surveys) giving full marks, and none scoring enjoyment below 4 out of 5. The majority of participants (nearly 95%) felt they had learned something by taking part, although this was rated slightly below enjoyment (with 19 awarding 5 out of 5 and 11 awarding 4).

Both teaching and organisation of the workshops scored highly, with an average rating of just under and just above 4.5 out of 5 respectively. In each case, 68% of respondents gave full marks and a further 21 and 24% gave 4 out of 5 respectively. The two lowest overall scores (of 1.4 and 0.8 out of 5) were given to a postal- and download-only workshop respectively, with feedback showing satisfaction levels to be much higher in general for those workshops with greater interaction with the artists and other participants, and those that took place later or over a longer period of time. These are all themes that were touched on in the comments provided in the feedback and during the interviews, and are discussed further below.

‘I wanted to thank the team for giving me the opportunity to attend these courses as they have felt like a lifeline for me over the past few weeks. I have learned so much and have felt less lonely when I can interact with others and chat about our lives.’

Feedback

General

The positive impact of the Phoenix Project 2020 on the mental health and wellbeing of participants was clear from the comments of the workshop feedback forms. **80% of the respondents thanked Green Close and the delivery artists for providing this opportunity**, there were few areas flagged as in need of improvement, and most simply asked for “more please”.

Teaching and interactions

One of the most important factors appeared to be the interactions, warmth and style of the artist delivering the workshop. 75% of those who participated in workshops involving Zoom or telephone sessions with the artist, commented positively on this and the quality of their interactions with the participants. A few felt that the workshop would have benefited from “more interaction with the tutor and the other participants”.

‘The host was so warm and friendly; nothing was too much trouble to explain’

Despite only 3 respondents listing meeting new people as a goal, **participants also highly valued the opportunity to meet each other and to feel part of a group again.**

‘I also really enjoyed feeling part of a group and being able to chat’

Delivery

Given the potential for new COVID19-related lockdown restrictions, the workshops were all remotely delivered via Zoom, provision of online resources such as items to download, video instructions, galleries, or by post. Unsurprisingly, the method and style of delivery featured strongly in the comments supplied in the final survey and the points raised during the interviews. **Again, the degree of interaction with the workshop tutor and with fellow participants appeared crucial to the level of satisfaction expressed by respondents.**

‘The weekly calls and receiving the exercises through the post have been really helpful, as I have felt quite isolated throughout the lockdown period’

Workshops involving purely postal or download delivery of materials without subsequent tutoring received less positive feedback, centred mostly around lack of understanding of the task being set, items arriving late or damaged, and the lack of human interaction and feedback. While some participants enjoyed receiving “quirky and beautiful” mailings and “cheerful messages on a Friday”, one reported finding it intimidating to receive “demands” in the post and was put off completing the task as a result.

‘Loved the personal touch with the art package. It brought a sense of connection in a very isolated time’

Learning outcomes

While the specific activity covered by the workshop mattered to around 40% of the participants, most reported that it was just “great to be creative” and to remember how to “relax and have fun”. **Over 80% reported having learnt new artistic or life skills and techniques.**

‘How to create and do a journal in a unique way and for myself and my wellbeing’

Around 20% of respondents confirmed that they had learnt how to use art and creativity to improve their mental wellbeing as a result of participating in the Phoenix Project 2020.

'How to incorporate different art activities when struggling with my emotions'



Image by 'Drawing from the Heart' participant for Green Close, Phoenix Project 2020

Participants particularly valued having the time, space, opportunity and guidance to enable them to explore their emotions and wellbeing at what was a difficult time for many.

'Gave me a clearer picture of me and where I am right now. I loved flipping all the negatives into positives on my Island – it was good to remind myself there are two sides to everything'

Areas for improvement

The majority (64%) of respondents had no suggestions to make regarding potential improvements to the Phoenix Project 2020, other than pleas for more. The feedback from the remaining participants were mostly focused on delivery and scheduling.

Four participants had experienced some difficulty accessing the online sessions or resources, although the same number made positive comments regarding the success of online delivery given the creative (and emotional) content of the courses. It is worth noting here, however, that two participants specifically made the point that they were in fact only able to attend as they could do so from home.

'Obviously it would have been great to have done this in person, but it was also very appropriate and taught well to be done online and via zoom.'

Three respondents reported that mailings arrived late or damaged, and an additional one felt they would have liked to have received the resources further in advance of the start of the workshop. Two felt that the instructions accompanying postal or downloadable resources were insufficient or lacking in clarity, making it hard for them to start the exercise. Both reported they felt they overcame this initial difficulty and were proud to have achieved that.

Six participants would have preferred the workshop to have included more sessions with the artist and/or with other members of the group. Around half of these felt that it would have been beneficial to have a final closing session in which they were able to share their work and discuss their experience of the course, while the remaining simply wanted more.



Image by 'See-D' participant, created for Green Close, Phoenix Project 2020

Just over a quarter of the respondents felt that the workshop sessions were too short and would have benefited from additional time for practice, learning and socialising. **Two of the participants suggested that it would be preferable for interactive sessions to be scheduled in the evening.** A further two felt that having multiple sessions in one week was too intense, in terms of both their own time commitments and not leaving sufficient time for learning, reflection and development between sessions.

One commented that they had found the evaluation onerous and felt that the number of surveys was excessive. They suggested they should have been better warned of this.

Legacy

'Just more of the same, I don't want it to end!'

Around 20% of the survey respondents, and all of those interviewed reported that they have continued to use the skills and/or materials since the end of the workshop.

'I found this such an enjoyable course and have carried on using the products supplied outside of the course'

Most expressed disappointment that the sessions had come to an end, saying they would have liked to have continued with the same activity or moved on to others that would enable them to transfer the skills learned in the first. Two expressly mentioned the importance of accountability in establishing time for creativity as part of their routine.

Interviews

General

All 8 interviewees were incredibly positive about the experience of participating in the Phoenix Project 2020. **They all commented that it was a unique opportunity that came up at a time in their lives when they most needed it, when they were struggling with their mental health and wellbeing due to isolation, bereavement and anxiety.**

'I suddenly found that I had something that I could really look forward to each week.'

Around half of those interviewed stated that they had chosen which workshop(s) to attend based on the art form, with a similar number being drawn to those targeting a particular wellbeing theme (e.g. bereavement and loss or stress and anxiety).

Teaching and interactions

All of the interviewees confirmed the feedback that the single most important factor contributing to their enjoyment of and learning from a workshop in which they participated was the artist(s) delivering it. All commented on their inclusivity and expertise. **The participants were deeply appreciative of the opportunity to be taught by practising artists** and all praised their warmth, patience and ability to put them at their ease.

'Not just leading a workshop, more like a meditation'

In-line with the feedback surveys, **all interview participants talked about the sense of community and belonging they experienced during the project.** One individual who attended more than one of the workshops found that she missed the social element of workshops where the sessions were 1-to-1 with the tutor. She also commented that she particularly valued the small group sizes as it enabled her to feel that she had made good connections with other attendees.

Delivery

'To be challenged intellectually was important for me so I related to (some sessions) more than (others).'

Again, delivery style and method were critical to the benefit a participant derived from a workshop. In addition to group size, group dynamics were cited as important by 2 of those interviewed. **A few reported that they had been nervous or unsure about attending an online art class, but found that by the end, they viewed this as a positive** as they were able to participate and socialise from home and felt less intimidated by those with greater skills. Both feedback form comments and interviewees referred on several occasions to the imaginative use of time during the online sessions. Three specifically valued the times when they were online but off-screen in order to create and when they were given sufficient time to pause and reflect.

'I liked having periods of time where you could create something where you didn't have your screen on.'

One of those interviewed reported that she had found receiving materials for one of the workshops she attended intimidating, stating they "felt scary" and "too arty for the public". She expressed concern that if someone with poor mental health were to receive this post, it would have negative rather than positive effects. By contrast, however, the same individual said about the mailings for a second workshop that *"the materials were cheery"* and gave *"a little boost"*.

'I liked that you got something through the post; it was special. Everything's online these days and that was a lovely aspect.'

A second interviewee, however, picked out these potentially intimidating postings as a highlight of the workshops she participated in. She described that whole workshop as *"phenomenal; sent items in the post. Items were tactile and lovely to receive. Really imaginative and the suggestions that they made allowed me to relate to my home. The quality of the materials was high. Having the ideas and materials was the most useful thing about the workshop. Enjoyed getting things in the post and having a clear theme to work within"*. Although all of the workshops she participated in were postal, she felt that some felt more like a dialogue or interaction with the artist(s) than others and enjoyed the feeling of a *"more personal communication with the artists"*. She found two of the postal workshops too basic and felt as if they had been *"cobbled together"*.

One of the interviewees stated that the length of the course made a real difference between the workshops she attended. She reported that the more interactive sessions, the better but again reiterated that it was best when these were spread out over a number of weeks rather than days. This was a common refrain amongst all those who had attended workshops with multiple sessions.

'I liked that they were every week and were multiple, because I got to know different people in the group.'

Nearly 70% of those interviewed would have liked to have seen at least one longer interactive session either at the beginning (to establish the community better) or at the end (to share experiences) of the workshop series.

Three specifically mentioned that the timing of the workshops mattered, both in terms of whether they could attend but also in their experience and enjoyment of the sessions. All of those interviewed who had participated in one of the download- or postal-only workshops reported these to have been the one(s) they least enjoyed and felt they gained the least benefit from. They ascribed this to the lack of connection with the artist or other participants and one commented that it just felt like something they could have done anytime and anywhere.

Learning outcomes

'I'm reminded of the 5 ways to mental wellbeing in everyday life now'

All interviewees confirmed they had learned far more than techniques and skills in art, creative writing and creativity. All reported not only a substantial improvement in mood, mental wellbeing and positivity, but also the learning of techniques to enable self-help and self-soothing.

'I learnt how to use art therapeutically'

Half of those interviewed thought that the impact on their mental wellbeing was strongly dependent on how it was included in the interactive sessions. **Classes in which mental health and wellbeing were explicitly linked to the activity and openly discussed by the tutor provided more and longer-lasting benefits** than those in which it was included as a standalone part of the session or not raised at all. Even with the latter, though, participants reported being able to find a sense of solace through the art or creative skills they learnt.

'It lets you get out of your head and go to a better place'

One interviewee also felt that the additional skills she now has using Eventbrite and zoom have given her the confidence to join in other events and workshops, expanding her horizons and opportunities in the future.



Image by 'Drawing from the Heart' participant for Green Close, Phoenix Project 2020

Areas for improvement

In addition to the suggestions for changes in delivery and timings of workshops that were included in both the feedback forms and the interviews and have already been discussed, **many of the interviewees felt Phoenix Project 2020 could have been better promoted.** Five of them had been directed to the workshops by a health care professional or organisation, while two others work for a service care provider and had been asked to promote it to users of their service. Most were unsure whether registration was restricted to those with existing diagnosed mental health problems, and didn't know who they could recommend it to. One interviewee had seen the workshops advertised on social media and joined with a view to incorporating the ideas into her own training and teaching.

'I'm always going to educational things, but this was for me because it was very much about mental health'

Around half of those interviewed and 16% of those who completed feedback forms had found at least one of the course descriptions misleading. Five of those said that they would not have signed up for that workshop if they had known in advance what it was going to be. Only two dropped out, however, and two said they had enjoyed the challenge.

Three of those interviewed mentioned their lack of familiarity with online meeting spaces and one suggested that in future participants should be sent a tutorial or link to a tutorial on how to use zoom ahead of the start of the workshops.

One of the interviewees felt that the course evaluation should be changed in the future. She found the layout of the feedback such that it was difficult for her to concentrate when asked to fill out e.g. the WEMWBS questionnaire. However, she welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback verbally during the interview. She also suggested offering interviewees the choice of having the video on or off during the interview as many people rely on the visual contact for social cues and interactions.

Nearly 70% of those interviewed would have liked to have had an online space to interact with other participants outside of the dedicated workshop times or to share and view each other's work. Participants of at least workshops have formed their own WhatsApp group in order to keep in touch.

Legacy

All interviewees reported that they have continued to include creativity and art in their daily routines since their workshop ended. Five (67.5%) are still using prompts and/or materials sent to them as part of the workshop, while half have purchased, repurposed or made new resources in order to continue.

'I probably do art every day now, from a base of zero!'

Three (37.5%) confided that the workshops had given them sufficient confidence to experiment with other art forms and to search regularly online for art workshops, art therapy and meditation. One participant has since set up a studio at home, bought a range of art materials and now practises some form of art every day. Not only is she proud of this achievement she also reported that it gives her the confidence and space to be happy.

'I've watched YouTube videos to do other things since; it's given me the confidence to do that'

All 8 also expressed a desire to maintain the sense of belonging they felt as part of the Phoenix Project 2020. Nearly all thought a closed Facebook page would be ideal and several also suggested setting up Facebook or Flickr albums for each course. **All would definitely sign up for future Phoenix workshops and recommend them to other people.**

Discussion

While it was clear from the feedback received from the participants that the Phoenix Project 2020 was highly successful, there are a couple of limitations to acknowledge. Firstly, the nature of the project and its evaluation do not allow us to directly attribute the reported improvements in wellbeing and progress to participation in the project. However, the feedback and interview findings indicate that the participants believe it to be so. As is the case for small-scale pilot studies, particularly those in which feedback and evaluation was not pre-requisites for research participation, the sample size was too small for definitive conclusions to be drawn. In addition, engagement with the evaluation was entirely by self-selection, and therefore likely to attract those with the strongest feelings of involvement and community, which could introduce a positive bias into the feedback received. In particular, the near-universal reporting that the most important factor in the success of a workshop was direct interaction with the artist-tutor and other participants, is to be expected from a cohort willing to discuss their opinions with the deliverers and researchers.

However, it is also worth pointing out that combining quantifiable measures of wellbeing and progress with discursive feedback lends confidence to the analysis and findings. This is further strengthened by the agreement that is apparent between average scores and comments for the whole sample and from specific individuals.

Case study:

One of the interviewees participated in two of the Phoenix Project 2020 workshops as she was “strongly encouraged” to do so by her GP. She believes that the sessions had made a ‘strong and lasting positive impact’ to her mental health and wellbeing. She found a ‘distraction’ in taking part in the sessions, which she felt helped to alleviate the symptoms of her mental and physical health conditions.

'I continue to use [artistic techniques] frequently to help me in everyday life'

She found the delivery of the project was “kind and patient”, which was enabling for her and allowed her to return to further sessions and complete both courses. In the end she “liked the combination of Zoom and individual work”, and really “enjoyed the feeling of community”.

She wishes a “legacy could come from The Phoenix Project and that it could be continued in the future”. She would certainly recommend it to everyone.

Costing and Legacy:

The success of the Phoenix Project 2020 has already provided myriad long-term benefits for the artists, partners and participants. We are currently developing proposals for funding for a full-scale follow-up project (Phoenix Rising), incorporating the practice recommendations suggested by all parties, to strengthen and extend the legacy of Phoenix Project 2020.

Those who participated in workshops that provided materials and resources by post or online have all continued to use them beyond the duration of the workshop themselves. In some cases, this was prompted by suggestions from the artists but for many this was self-directed as a result of the enthusiasm, confidence and pleasure of the workshop activities. Several reported that they had since invested in or repurposed existing items in order to carry on creating, and some had adapted activities to suit different art forms or media.

'I found the fact that we were sent materials really nice as it felt like a gift, and one that I can treasure and continue to use'

Inspired by the needs of project artists and participants, Green Close Directors have also recently launched a Rethink Mental Illness support group. The Rethink Phoenix Group for north Lancashire and South Cumbria is currently meeting monthly online and provides support for those who support their loved ones with mental health conditions.

The Phoenix Project is one of many partnerships The Lancashire Recovery College has been involved in on behalf of Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust. As the provider of mental health services across a large geographical footprint, Lancashire Recovery College is working to develop the link between statutory clinical services and third sector organisations to enhance individual and community wide access to health and wellbeing support.

We recognise Healthcare providers need to look beyond traditional clinical pathways to support access to external funding and work with subject experts, to positively impact wider determinants of health, engage with communities and provide socio-educational opportunities that empower individuals to self-manage and better prevent mental health crisis.



Image by 'See-D' participant, created for Green Close, Phoenix Project 2020

Partnership working was a key to the success of this programme. Green Close was uniquely placed to use their extensive experience of commissioning contemporary artists alongside their lived experience of supporting family members managing bipolar disorder and psychosis. The skills of the Directors leading the project ensured that the artists selected showed strong artistic quality and were also able to respond appropriately to the needs of delivering supportive mental health and well-being opportunities. Partners with lived experience from Lancaster University were also involved in the selection process, ensuring rigour and parity in the process.

Lancashire Recovery College was able to provide a much-needed resource: advocating for and signposting people to the Phoenix Project opportunities. The College have existing software, procedures and experienced staff which made bookings and data collection possible within the relatively short delivery timeframe.

‘Lancashire Recovery College is proud to be associated with the project and we feel proud that we have been able to assist with it. We believe that art for well-being has genuine benefits to people’s mental health and it would be great for it to be considered a vital methodology by the wider population.’

The input of specialist researchers from Lancaster University meant that the evaluation process (including this report) has independent academic excellence from which we can all learn. Dr Peter Weeks (Lunesdale Surgery) provided much needed advice, advocacy and supervision if needed. The involvement of all partners meant the programme was stronger, more cohesive and integrated than if these partnerships had not been established.

The average cost of delivering each workshop series was £1,030, ranging from £960 - £1,460. The average cost per participant was £122, ranging from £3.55 - £206.50. A further £9,300 was used to partially cover the cost of organisation, delivery and evaluation by the partners. Substantial in-kind contribution was required to supplement the small funding available: Green Close invested an additional £4,000 for staff time and resources; Lancaster University provided an additional £3,000 in the form of staff time alongside other researchers who received honorariums for work which would have been valued at a further £2,300; Lancashire Recovery College provided in excess of 100 hours of staff time and resources, valued at £1500. The true cost of the 12-week programme was therefore closer to £35,000 and this will be borne in mind in bids for a full-scale follow-up project.

As a result of the success of the Phoenix Project 2020, as measured by improvement in wellbeing and progress to goals and reported in feedback and narratives from the artists and participants, the partnership is in the process of applying for funding for a full-scale follow-up to Phoenix 2020: Phoenix Rising.

‘It has been the most rewarding and special opportunity for me this year’

Practice recommendations:

The key recommendation from participant feedback is best summarised as “More please”. Participants were generally overwhelmingly positive about the experience as a whole, and were particularly appreciative of the opportunity to be tutored by practising artists.

It was clear from the evaluation that it was the artists themselves who made the biggest difference to the experiences and improvements in wellbeing reported by the participants, as well as to learning outcomes. Based on feedback from the participants, future programmes should again employ practising arts to design and deliver workshops and activities.

Participant feedback indicates that their experience was most positive when they had the opportunity to interact meaningfully with both the artist and with fellow workshop participants. While receipt of postal resources and materials were appreciated by most, some found them intimidating or confusing and our recommendation would be that mailings are supported by at least one face-to-face session.

Workshop scheduling should also be carefully considered. Workshops delivered as a series of classes over a number of weeks were generally more highly rated than those with the same number of sessions over a shorter time period and

both scored more highly than those with just a single contact. **Our recommendation would be that courses consist of a minimum of 4 interactive zoom or phone sessions delivered weekly.** Engagement with other workshop participants should be included in the majority of these sessions.

It is apparent that the greatest benefits were derived when mental health and wellbeing were explicitly woven into the sessions. This requires careful selection of artists to lead workshops as well as support for both artists and participants who may experience emotional distress or mental health issues as a result of open discussion around sensitive topics.

Based on this, **in the future we would ensure that the project website has more prominent signposting to mental health and wellbeing support services** and that Lancashire Recovery College include this information in the material sent to each participant when they enrol on a workshop. It is also important that this information includes a statement about confidentiality and safeguarding actions. More efficient planning would allow for the recruitment of peer volunteers to support artists during deliveries. Experienced volunteers, already facilitating mental health and wellbeing courses with the Lancashire Recovery College, are able to offer peer support and signposting to specific opportunities that support mental and physical health wellbeing.

Given the isolated nature of delivering workshops online, it is important that a strong system of support is established for the artists. This should include initial training and advice around the importance of setting boundaries, signposting mental health support services to participants and action to take to safeguard themselves and the participants. In addition, peer support should be offered to enable artists to deal with the emotional stress of online sessions with vulnerable participants and a buddy system established so that artists have instant access to support for wellbeing as well as technical issues during workshop delivery.

The evaluation process should be slimmed down to ensure that it reflects the duration of individual workshops and the frequency of sessions. Intermediate surveys should only be included in workshop series lasting 12 or more weeks, and should be relatively light-touch, i.e. rating wellbeing and progress to goals and inviting feedback on how the workshops could be improved for the remainder of the series. In future workshops, advice and support will be provided to participants to enable them to set a range of clear, SMART goals, and to assess their progress toward them.

Several of the participants felt that the programme had not been widely or vigorously enough promoted, and that it was not made sufficiently clear who was eligible to register for a place. We would recommend that future programmes are advertised to local GP social prescriber link workers, other creative arts organisations in the area, community self-help groups, local councils and the NHS Trust, as well as more visibly on the Green Close, Lancashire Recovery College and Lancaster University websites. The LSCFT communications team should be more involved in promotions and marketing, providing wider access across the Trust staff and patients. Social media marketing tools should also be factored in to future funding to target those who don't access the usual means of advertising mentioned here.

Participants also found that the descriptions of some individual workshops were misleading, that what was actually delivered did not appear to reflect the pre-course information. While this was in part due to time constraints and the speed of preparing for the workshops, we would recommend Green Close and the Lancashire Recovery College meet with each selected workshop lead to discuss delivery and to ensure that prospective participants will be fully aware of the format, schedule, duration and theme of the workshop, as well as the expected time commitment between sessions.

It is important to find the best way to deliver arts and health support for both the learners and the artists/ teachers delivering them: finding this right balance for all involved is critical to successful project delivery.

Artists working on such programmes need to feel part of a team and be valued and supported, especially if they are trialling new ways of working. Many of the artists were highly experienced engagement specialists who also had experience of working with mental health issues. Adequate project management time needs to be allocated to support artists taking on for this important and specialist role.

The provision of supervision was important to alleviate anxiety and stress in workshop delivery, to ensure artists had access to professional support should they need it and importantly to mitigate any health risks to artists as a result of their work with others.

An additional support worker to manage IT issues and provide emotional support during sessions should participants need it, is recommended. Managing the delivery of creative sessions, IT systems and possible complex mental health problems is feasible for an experienced artist, but is neither sustainable or recommended.

Artists were overwhelmingly concerned about the wellbeing of their participants but lacked insight into their own well-being needs. Artists should be encouraged (or possibly contracted) to become participants as well as facilitators to address this need. Grouping artists so they can work to deliver, support or participate in sessions could be useful professional development for artists and provide much needed insight and feedback throughout peer support meetings.

Adequate time is needed for introductions between delivery partners and artists to ensure a satisfactory understanding of systems and processes being used, i.e. booking cut-off dates and how evaluation data was to be shared.

Conclusions:

The Phoenix 2020 pilot project was highly valued, recognised as a very special opportunity and extremely beneficial to the wellbeing and resilience of both artists and participants during a very difficult time. Many viewed it as vital to their adaptation to a new way of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, their recovery from its impact and their mental resilience.

'I feel very fortunate to have been given the chance to attend these workshops at a time of my life when I needed them most'

Nearly one-third of the participants were motivated to complete the online closing survey to feed back their appreciation of the programme of workshops delivered and to share their experiences. On average, they gave a score of 4.5 out of 5 for the programme as a whole and reported a (statistically significant) 16% improvement in mental health and wellbeing. Better still, the workshops appear to have delivered similar improvements in each of the four WEMWBS wellbeing categories: growth and purpose, mastery and acceptance, autonomy and positive relations.

The most substantial progress toward goals was reported for those associated with learning new art skills or techniques (an average of 8.0 out of 10), although acquisition of life skills and building positive relations were close behind (7.4 and 7.6 respectively). On average all goals were at least halfway to being fully achieved by the end of the workshop series.

Greatest benefit was reported from workshops that included high levels of direct interaction with artists and other participants, despite very few of the participants setting goals around building relationships with others. The clear message from both the feedback forms and the interviews was that well-spaced, regular sessions delivered over a number of weeks were strongly preferred over fewer sessions or those more closely spaced.

The sending of materials, resources and inspiration in the post was almost universally applauded. Participants reported that just receiving such a treasure trove was a boost to their mood and all were delighted to be sent items that enabled them to start the workshops on a level with each other, and that they have been able to continue to use. However, post- or download- only delivery was generally criticised, with participants strongly preferring to engage directly with each other and with the artists at some point during the workshop.

Participants especially appreciated the opportunity to interact with practising artists. They praised not just their artistic and creative skills but also their pedagogical expertise, and their patience, compassion, humanity and communication skills. Several of the participants interviewed reported that the passion and enthusiasm of the artists motivated them to persevere with the workshops, and ultimately kindled their enthusiasm to continue with the activity beyond the duration of the workshops. They also recognised the incredible effort that the artists put into designing and delivering the courses.

'I cannot begin to tell you how much I appreciated the courses and the effort that all of the artists put in.'

All of the participants who were interviewed reported that they have continued to make time for creativity in their daily lives. For some, this is a direct continuation of work started during the project (e.g., journaling and mark-making).

For others, it is an extension of that work (e.g., creating different textile objects). However, a number also reported that they gained the confidence and enthusiasm to have participated in other workshops since and have also used online resources, such as YouTube instruction videos, to try new techniques.

Most of the participants who took part in the evaluation wished to remain in contact with each other and to feel a part of Phoenix in perpetuity. Several workshops have set up social media groups to facilitate this and continue to share experiences, inspiration and successes with each other. Green Close have set up an online showcase of Phoenix 2020, including a virtual visual gallery, testimonials, additional project resources and links to external programmes, resources and organisations.

Artists overwhelmingly enjoyed working on this programme to pilot and deliver new ways of working with the visual arts to support the mental wellbeing of others. It provided much needed employment and socialisation at a period of isolation and distress due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The level of enjoyment and benefit to artists both personally and professionally means that this is a programme that should be developed further. The opportunity for artists to support each other through buddying and peer networks in future programmes would enable an even stronger and more cohesive engagement offer. Ensuring that the wellbeing of artists is considered alongside the wellbeing needs of participants will ensure that future programmes become sustainable.

'The way this programme has been developed retains the integrity of the arts to affect people and society by retaining creativity at the heart of practice. It can't be bottled but it can be supported'

The positive impact of inclusive arts opportunities on an individual's wellbeing are evident in this evaluation. This partnership work has highlighted the necessity for statutory and charitable organisations to work together, whilst ensuring proper funding is in place, so that people are empowered to make their own choices about accessing opportunities that will improve their social connection and health literacy.

Based on the success of Phoenix Project 2020, the project partners are putting together an application to secure funding for a full-scale programme of creative arts workshops.

'Anything creative that helps with wellbeing and perhaps a workshop on resilience would be great, especially in this current climate'

And thanks to all project partners and artists for their enthusiasm, creativity, dedication and commitment to the project:

Delivery partners: Green Close: Sue Flowers, Pete Flowers, Shelley Cater-Shipway & Adam York Gregory

Lancashire Recovery College: Suzie Smith & Shaun Everitt

Artists: Hannah Ayre, Rachel Capovila, Briony Campbell, Carlos Cortes, Danielle Chappell-Aspinwall, Kremena Dimitrova, Alice Evans, Alicia Gradon, David Haley, Charlie Hawksfield & Viktoria Stanzo, Ruth Flanagan, Sue Flowers, Pete Flowers, Ginny Koppenhol, Amanda Mudge, Laura Negus, Sumit Sarkar, Helen Walsh, Lisa Wigham, Megan Wyatt, Adam York Gregory & Gillian Jane Lees.

Researchers: Dr Kirsti Ashworth Dr Barbara Mezes, and PhD student Hattie Roberts MSc

Support: Dr Peter Weeks

And a final word from a participant of the Phoenix Project 2020:

'Thank you to all who organised this wonderful course'

References:

¹WEMWBS User Guide 2008; available at <http://www.healthscotland.com/scotlands-health/population/Measuring-positivemental-health.aspx>

²Goals and Goal-based Outcomes vn2.0; Dr Duncan Law; available at www.goals-in-therapy.com

³Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(4), 719

Artists' Evaluation Form

Did you enjoy delivering the Phoenix Project workshop/s? Please highlight your response

Yes - a lot Yes – a bit No No - not at all

Please explain why.....

Were there any successes? Please state....

Were there any challenges? Please state....

Did delivering the work have an impact on your mental health? Please state how...

Did you feel you learnt anything? Please state....

Did this event contribute to your continuing professional development? If so, how?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us...

Your responses are for evaluation purposes only. If you are happy for us to use your responses to promote the development of the Phoenix Project please state here

YES / NO

Please highlight your response

I am happy for my name to be included in promotion

YES / NO

Please highlight your response

Workshop feedback

We really value your feedback, as we'd like to arrange more events tailored to your needs.

1. Did you enjoy this series of workshops?

Yes, a lot Yes, a little Don't know No, not much No, not at all

Please explain why.....

2. Do you feel you learnt anything?

Yes, a lot Yes, a little Don't know No, not much No, not at all

If yes, what.....

3. Were you pleased with the teaching of this workshop?

Yes, a lot Yes, a little Don't know No, not much No, not at all

What did you particularly like or dislike? Please state.....

4. Were you pleased with the organisation of this workshop?

Yes, a lot Yes, a little Don't know No, not much No, not at all

Is there anything we could improve on? Please state.....

5. Was the venue appropriate for the workshop needs

Yes, a lot Yes, a little Don't know No, not much No, not at all

How could we improve the delivery of this workshop? Please state.....

6. Do you feel the workshop has helped you make progress in your recovery?

Yes, a lot Yes, a little Don't know No, not much No, not at all

If yes, in what way.....

7. Are you interested in taking part in other arts activities, workshops, or events?

If so, please state areas of interest.....

8. Any other comments?

9. Would you like to join the Green Close Studios database?

Semi-structured interview script

Introduction

Hello, I'm xxxxxx, a researcher from Lancaster University. I've been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the Phoenix Project in improving the wellbeing of participants. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed to follow up on the surveys and feedback event that you have already taken part in. Do you have any questions before we start?

Consent

Are you happy for me to start recording the interview now?

Can you confirm that *(read through the consent form and ask for verbal agreement to each of the points)?*

General

How did you hear about the Phoenix project?

Which workshop(s) did you attend?

How many sessions did you participate in?

Why did you choose that/those workshop(s)?

(Prompts: The theme? The art form? The artist(s)? The delivery style?)

Benefits gained

How did you like the workshop(s)?

How did it (they) make you feel?

What made you feel in that way?

What did you think about the workshop?

What did you find **most useful** in this workshop? Why?

What did you find **less useful**?

Would you change anything in this activity? Why?

(Prompts: enjoyment? break? purpose and motivation? achievement and satisfaction? learning? socialising?)

What was it that you found **most enjoyable**? Why?

What did you find **less enjoyable**? Why?

(Prompts: The art itself? The interaction with the artist(s)? The interaction with the other participants? The distraction it provided?)

What did you think of the **delivery**?

Did anything work particularly well?

Would you change anything?

(Prompts: the level of interaction with the artist(s)? the level of interaction with the other participants? the amount of time exploring issues around wellbeing itself?)

Longevity of effects

That's great, thank you. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about any changes you have noticed since you joined the Phoenix Project.

Did you learn anything new from this workshop? What?

(If yes) have you used the new things or skills you learned since the project? How? Can you give me an example?

Do you think you will continue to use them?

Can you think of any other changes that have happened for you since you participated in the Phoenix project?

How do you feel about these?

What are you most proud of from your participation in the Phoenix project?

If something similar to the Phoenix project was to be offered in the future, would you take part again?

Would you recommend it to other people?

[For those who participated in more than one workshop]

- which workshop did you enjoy most? and the least?
- which workshop did you find most helpful? and the least?
- how were the workshops different from each other?
- and what made the biggest difference to you?

(Prompts: could use the original questions as prompts to explore the differences further)

Thank you. That concludes our questions.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us? Do you have any questions for us?

If you do think of anything then please don't hesitate to get back in touch with us.

We will now save the recording to a secure server at Lancaster University and spend the next few weeks transcribing your answers so that we are able to evaluate everyone's responses and summarise how effective the Phoenix project has been. We will produce a report for Green Close Studio and the Recovery College, which they will use to attempt to secure funding for future workshops. We may quote you in the report but will not disclose your identity. Green Close Studio may similarly use your words as part of an online gallery they are planning to put together to showcase the Phoenix project but again will ensure that you cannot be identified.

If you decide within the next two weeks that you do not want us to include your answers in our analysis or in the report, please get in touch and we will delete both the audio file and the transcript of your interview.

Thank you once again for taking the time to speak with us today.

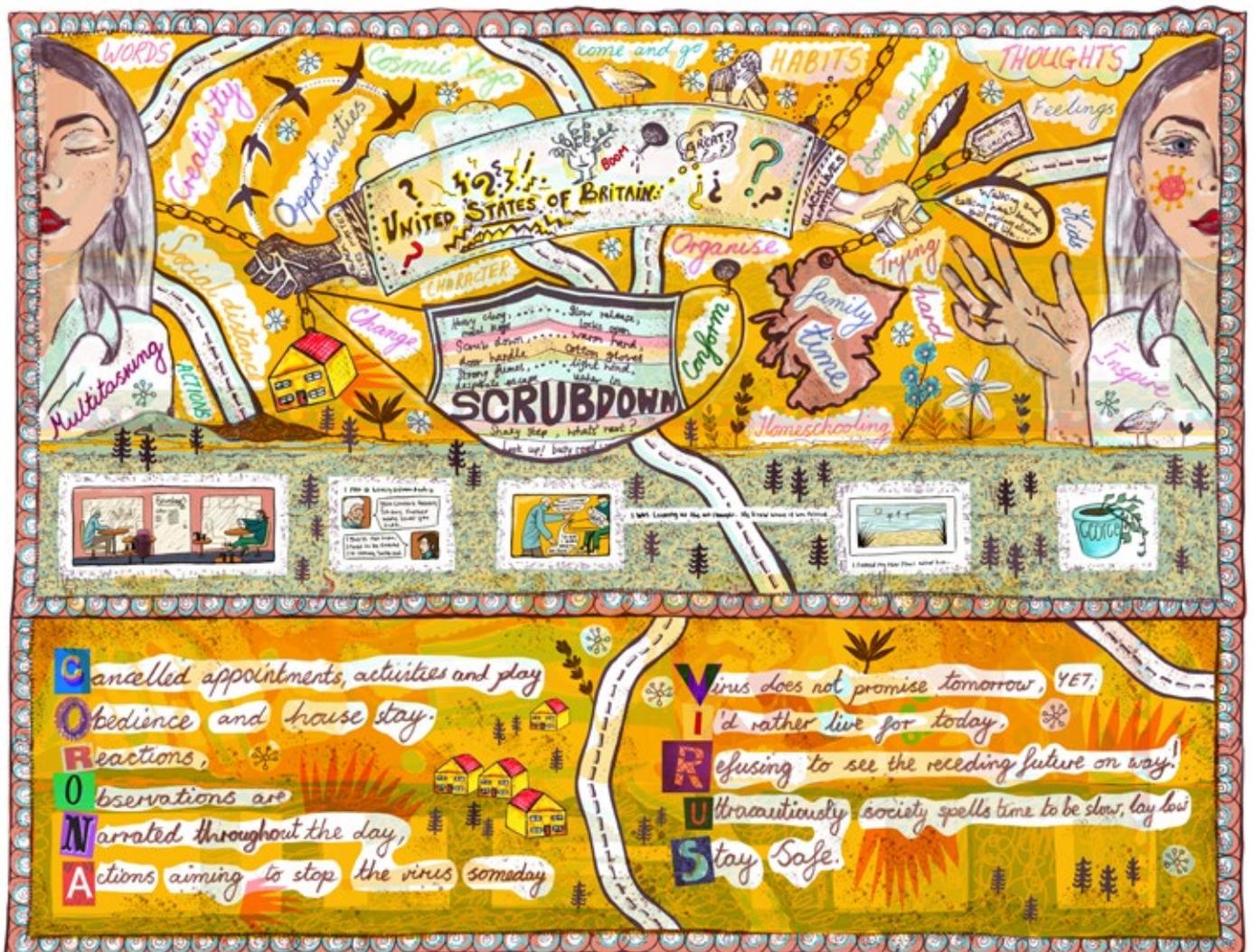
Appendix

Statistical tests

Statistical tests were carried out on R Studio (Version 1.2.5033, RStudio Team (2019). RStudio: Integrated Development for R. RStudio, Inc., Boston, MA, USA). Data was tested for normality and homogeneity of variance (using Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests). As seen in Table 1, t-tests were carried out to establish whether the differences in wellbeing before and after taking part in Phoenix sessions were statistically significant, meaning that the change was unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Table 1. All t-test outputs for Ryff's Wellbeing Scores

	<i>df</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Seen in Fig.</i>
Overall Wellbeing	37.5	-2.3	0.02**	1
Autonomy	41.8	-1.6	0.1	2
Growth/ Purpose	41.4	-1.9	0.06	2
Positive Relations	41.0	-1.9	0.06	2
Mastery/Acceptance	42.8	-1.9	0.07	2



"Mental Health and Well-being during Covid-19" (Colour); created for Green Close, Phoenix Project 2020