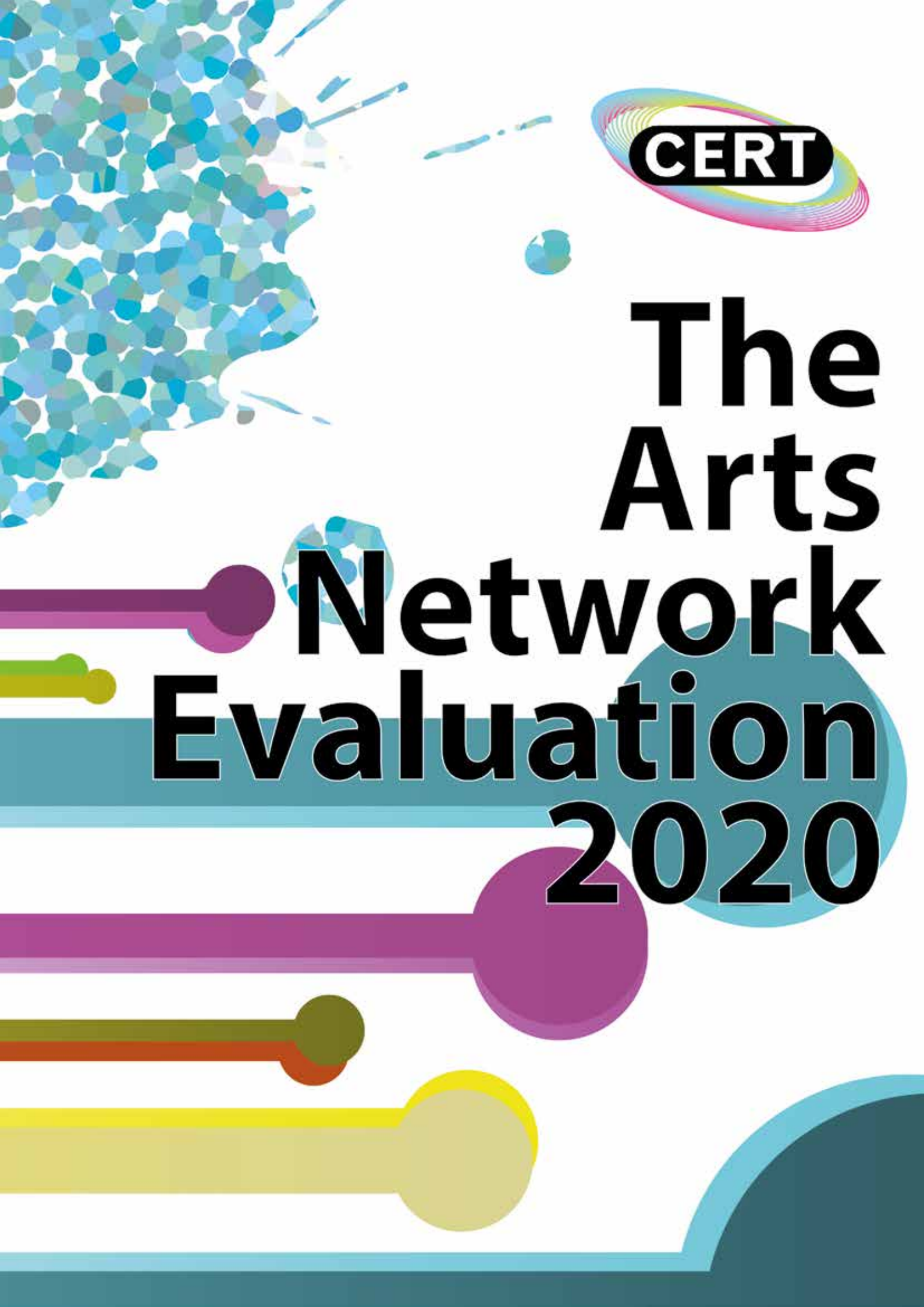


The CERT logo consists of the word "CERT" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters inside a black rounded rectangle. This rectangle is centered within a colorful, multi-layered oval shape that transitions through a spectrum of colors including blue, green, yellow, orange, and red.

**CERT**

The background features several abstract elements: a large, dense cluster of blue and green dots in the top left; a small blue globe; several horizontal lines of varying colors (purple, green, blue, purple, olive, orange, yellow) with circular nodes at their ends; and a large, light blue circular shape behind the text.

# The Arts Network Evaluation 2020

# The Arts Network Evaluation 2020

## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

The **Converge Evaluation and Research Team (CERT)** was commissioned by the **Igen Trust** to evaluate the **Arts Network**, a project in South London providing arts opportunities to local people with severe and enduring mental health problems. This is a repeat of the evaluation conducted in 2019 (a summary of which can be found in *appendix 1*).

The **Converge Evaluation and Research Team (CERT)** is a group of researchers with lived experience of mental health difficulties who have received training in research methods at **York St John University**.

### 2. Method

Prior to our visit, we were sent the results of **Arts Network's** 2019 internal annual survey (indicated by[\*]), which we used to plan our interview strategy and create a follow up questionnaire capturing information not covered by their survey.

On our visit, over two days in February 2019, we conducted fourteen individual interviews with **Arts Network** members and a group interview with all of the current staff. We received 36 completed questionnaires.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. HOW ARTS NETWORK ADDRESSED OUR 2019 RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 3.1.1. Explore NHS funding:

In 2019, 91% of members self-reported improved mental health since joining **Arts Network**, and indicated that their use of mental health services had decreased. Staff reported that **Arts Network** has been attempting to secure funding from the **NHS**.

##### 3.1.2. Explore community partnerships:

In addition to the continuing partnership with the **Horniman Museum** and Gardens, **Arts Network** has connected with the local mental health Trust (**South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust - SLAM**) to provide volunteer training and the organising of DBS (criminal record) checks. In addition, an advisor from **Centre 70**, a local charity, visits the **Arts Network** once a month giving advice on benefits, housing and debt. Lastly, an external person delivers a mindfulness course at the **Arts Network** studio.



### 3.1.3. Opportunities for progression:

Members who want to progress can attend a training course at **SLAM**, followed by further training at **Arts Network**. Various voluntary opportunities have been secured for members, including at the **Horniman Museum**.

### 3.1.4. Increase the range of courses available:

More courses are now on offer.

### 3.1.5. Consider an increase in the days or times of opening:

**Arts Network** is now open 5 days a week and now offers a Wednesday evening session between 5pm and 7pm.

### 3.1.6. Possible specific mental health support:

In 2019 some members reported that they wished **Arts Network** offered specific mental health support. This was attempted and the conclusion was that it detracted from the nature of **Arts Network** as an arts project, so will not take place in future.

### 3.1.7. New Members:

In 2019 we suggested that capacity for new members could be achieved by getting funding to pay for staffing extra sessions. This has been achieved via National Lottery funding. These extra sessions have opened spaces 46 for new members.

### 3.1.8. Entrepreneurial opportunities:

Various entrepreneurial and fundraising opportunities have taken place, including charging the **Horniman Museum** for workshops run by **Arts Network**; exhibitions where artwork can be sold; and the creation of a podcast to increase awareness of **Arts Network** in the wider community.

## 3.2. SELF-REPORTED USE OF NHS SERVICES

This year, 82% members report improved mental health since attending **Arts Network**. Of those who have one, 64% reported needing to see their care co-ordinator less or much less, and 80% reported needing their psychiatrist less or much less. As in 2019, **Arts Network** seems to have had a big impact on the need for unplanned emergency care: 82% reported attending Accident and Emergency for their mental health less or much less, crisis services 74% less or much less, and in-patient mental health care 88% less or much less. Graphs are shown in **figure 1** on pages 17-19.

## 3.3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, looking particularly for similarities and differences to the 2019 data (see **appendix 1**). In 2019, we identified six major themes: 'No pressure', 'Progression', 'A community', 'Learning new things', 'Time', and 'Place'.

For this report, the data has been organised into four overarching themes: 'Inside Arts Network'; 'The Arts Network as a community'; 'External partnerships' and 'Progression and future planning'.

### 3.3.1. Inside Arts Network

The experience of attending the **Arts Network** was spoken about in detail by interviewees. It was described as a non-judgemental and socially safe zone where people feel cared for and relaxed: 97% said they felt more at ease after a session. Members enjoy the flexibility and choice they have about what they can do while at **Arts Network**. **Arts Network** staff seem to be highly skilled at responding to the differing needs of members. For many members, practicing art provides a therapeutic focus.

### 3.3.2. The Arts Network as a community

There was a clear theme capturing the sense of community and belonging at **Arts Network**. Members feel part of a family where there is understanding, support, mutual respect and enjoyment.

We asked about members' social relationships (see **figure 2** on pages 26-27): High value was put on the 'mutual experience of mental health problems' and 'offering advice and support to each other' with 91% and 83% respectively stating that this was 'important' or 'extremely important'. Furthermore, 74% reported that 'looking out for each other e.g. when unwell' was 'important' or 'extremely important'. As in 2019, slightly less importance was placed on external contact with other members: 'meeting outside of Arts Network (e.g. for coffee)' was 'important' or 'extremely important' to 61%, but 22% responding 'not very important' or 'not important at all'. We asked about 'communicating outside of Arts Network' (eg texting or social media). A total of 39% stating this was 'important' or 'extremely important', but 19% responding 'not very important' or 'not important at all'.

### 3.3.3. External partnerships

In 2019 we suggested exploring possibilities for further external community partnerships. An advisor from **Center 70** (a local charity providing advice about housing, welfare benefits, debt and legal problems) now visits **Arts Network** monthly, offering advice about a range of things, including benefits, housing and debt. There is now a relationship with **SLAM** to offer volunteer training and DBS (criminal record) checks. Another change since 2019 is that there is now an externally provided mindfulness course taking place in the **Arts Network** building.

Trips to various places such as art exhibitions, **Kew Gardens**, **The Royal Academy** and **Hampton Court Palace** have always taken place, and are discussed enthusiastically by members. The trips are enjoyable and interesting and encourage members to face the challenge of leaving their homes and travelling to the venue. The chance to see different places, artistic techniques and a variety of different artists is highly valued among members. External exhibitions of **Arts Network** members' work have also taken place. For members, having a piece of their own art exhibited, and even sold, is a significant step and a source of pride.

### 3.3.4. Progression and future planning

A total of 18% of members said that the most important reason they attended **Arts Network** was to gain *'the confidence to achieve new things'*; and 88% reported that their confidence was *'better'* or *'much better'* since attending **Arts Network**[\*]. The absence of pressure facilitates the freedom for members to take charge of their personal progression. A total of 21% of members named volunteering as an achievement in the past 6 months[\*].

Volunteering opportunities appear to have expanded considerably since 2019. At **Arts Network**, volunteers co-facilitate or lead workshops. Other members have progressed to volunteering externally, for example, at **The Horniman Museum** and as a peer support worker in an Accident and Emergency department. There is now structured volunteer training delivered by **SLAM**. There is a member on the Board of Trustees, and a member-led advisory group providing a member voice on the Board. However, for some members, volunteering and progression is not a goal they want. **Arts Network** is now open for exhibitions more often.

## 4. Staff Interview

Staff retention remains high at **Arts Network**, with staff reporting enjoying a flat hierarchy and a close family environment. The Lottery funding meant **Arts Network** could recruit a new member of staff and increase the hours of existing staff. The advantages of this include closer team working, due to time to debrief after sessions, capacity for session planning, and staff training. **Arts Network** management are keen for staff to develop their roles in pursuit of their own interests and define their own role. Staff report working hard to develop community partnerships in London, including **The London Arts and Health Forum**, and in national events such as **Creativity and Wellbeing Week**.

## 5. Suggestions for Future Development

1. **Using social return on investment (SROI) to support funding applications:** SROI could place a monetary value on **Arts Network's** activity. This allows potential funders to see the impact of the **Arts Network** more clearly.
2. **Further increase in opening times:** Further evening and weekend opening would allow existing or new members who are working or volunteering during the day to benefit from attending the **Arts Network**.
3. **Employing an additional member of staff:** Additional staff would make it easier to add sessions in the evenings and weekends, and would free existing staff for planning workshop sessions, exhibitions, external workshops and events, and training.
4. **Targeting volunteering in the community:** Expanding external partnerships should increase the variety of opportunities for members who want to volunteer. In addition, recruiting volunteers from the community (eg local colleges and artists) would strengthen links and increase the range of skill experience available at **Arts Network**.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

Since 2019, the **Arts Network** has built considerably on its achievements, offering more opportunities for progression through volunteering, additional workshop space allowing new members, and a new member of staff.

Members self-reported improved mental health and indicated that their use of mental health services had decreased. There are now considerable links with the local community, including volunteer training; trips; internal and external volunteering opportunities; increased exhibition time at **Arts Network**; and external exhibitions in other galleries. Similar themes emerged from the interviews this year.

The **Arts Network** remains a non-judgemental, socially safe, pressure free zone, where members feel cared for, and it continues to play an important role in members' quality of life. Members enjoy the flexibility and control they have about what they do at **Arts Network**. Members feel part of a family where there is understanding, support, mutual respect and enjoyment. Suggestions for future development are made.

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# Summary of 2019 CERT Arts Network Evaluation Findings

## 1. Introduction

The **Converge Evaluation and Research Team (CERT)** was commissioned by the **Igen Trust** to evaluate the **Arts Network**, a project in South London providing arts opportunities to local people with severe and enduring mental health problems. This is a repeat of the evaluation conducted in 2019 (a summary of which can be found in *appendix 1*).

The aim of this 2020 evaluation was to again gather the views and opinions of **Arts Network** members (the term for those who attend **Arts Network**) and staff. We interviewed 12 members and a group of staff over a 2-day period in February 2020. In addition, we had access to the results of the 2019 end of year survey conducted internally at **Arts Network** (data from this survey is indicated by[\*] in this report).

A follow up survey we created, and further questions for staff were delayed by the COVID-19 lockdown, meaning we did not have all of the data we hoped to obtain for this report.

The Converge Research and Evaluation Team (CERT) is a group of researchers with lived experience of mental health difficulties who have received training in research methods at **York St John University**.

## 2. Method

The aim of this evaluation was to explore the perceptions and experiences of **Arts Network** members and its staff.

Prior to our visit, we were sent the data from the **Arts Network's** 2019 internal annual survey. We used this initial information to plan our interview strategy and to create a follow up questionnaire capturing information of interest in areas not covered by their survey.

We sent a participant information sheet to be shared with **Arts Network** members beforehand explaining who **CERT** are and what they should expect on our visit. This meant they could make a decision about whether to attend the venue while we were visiting.

On our visit, we conducted individual interviews with **Arts Network** members and a group interview with all of the current staff. Our experience of mental health research has indicated that often, people want to tell their story of how they came to be somewhere and its impact on their life. Because of this, we offered all of the **Arts Network** members the choice of whether to participate in a 'case study' interview, which would be more in-depth in terms of their life-story than our traditional interview (pseudonyms used in this report).

Prior to beginning, the purpose of the interview was explained to participating members, their fully informed written consent was obtained, and they were assured of anonymity. Members were given the choice of audio recording or hand-written notes.

Eleven interviews and three case studies took place over two days (12th – 13th February 2020). Thirteen interviews were audio recorded; one interviewee requested that we took written notes. All of the interviews were transcribed to allow analysis of the data. We received 36 completed questionnaires.

## 3. Report findings

In our evaluation, we focused on three main areas: firstly, examining how **Arts Network** addressed the suggestions we made in 2019; **Arts Network** members' self-reported use of **NHS** services; and lastly, a thematic analysis of the interviews.

*Table 1* shows how **Arts Network** have addressed the recommendations we made in 2019 (recommendations can be found in full in *Appendix 2*).

### 3.1. HOW ARTS NETWORK ADDRESSED CERT'S 2019 RECOMMENDATIONS

What we recommended in 2019	What has been achieved by February 2020
<p><b>1. Explore NHS funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members reported that their use of mental health services had reduced considerably since attending <b>Arts Network</b>, in particular acute care such as inpatient mental health treatment, crisis/home treatment and A&amp;E</li> <li>On these grounds we suggested pursuing funding from the local <b>NHS</b> mental health trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Arts Network</b> have made unsuccessful attempts to access <b>NHS</b> funding</li> <li>They are persisting with attempting to get funding from the <b>NHS</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Explore possible community partnerships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We suggested that <b>Arts Network</b> should explore the possibility of creating local partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considerable reciprocal partnership established with The <b>Horniman Museum</b> and Gardens</li> <li>Partnership with <b>South London Maudsley (SLAM) NHS</b> Trust for training volunteers and organising DBS checks</li> <li>Suggestion of working with local charities/organisations</li> <li>An adviser from <b>Centre 70</b> (a charity) now attends once a month to help <b>Arts Network</b> members get advice about benefits, housing and debt</li> <li>An external person leads mindfulness sessions at the <b>Arts Network</b> studio</li> <li>Offer work placements of university/college students</li> <li>At the <b>Horniman Museum</b> members can learn about curating and running museums</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Find opportunities for progression</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We suggested creating pathways for members to develop their skills, follow their ambitions, and access arts-based voluntary or paid opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members who want to progress can attend a training course for volunteers at <b>SLAM</b>, and additional training at <b>Arts Network</b> – this is encouraged for members who seem to be doing well – progression to becoming a volunteer allows spaces on courses to open up to new members</li> <li>Volunteers who have completed the training can volunteer at <b>Arts Network</b> or <b>SLAM</b> as they wish</li> <li><b>Leonard Cheshire</b> internship</li> <li>At the <b>Horniman Museum</b> members can learn about curating and running museums</li> </ul>

Table 1: How Arts Network addressed CERT's 2019 recommendations

What we recommended in 2019	What has been achieved by February 2020
<p><b>4. Increasing the range of courses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members and staff all mentioned a desire to increase the range of courses and opportunities on offer at <b>Arts Network</b></li> <li>Suggestions included photography, digital art, creative writing, book group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional courses have taken place</li> <li>There are future plans for more new different courses</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Consider increasing the opening hours and available days</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many members stated that they would like it if <b>Arts Network</b> was open for more sessions during the week, including weekend and evening sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Arts Network</b> is now open 5 days per week – no workshops Wednesday and Thursday mornings to allow for staff training (including new member volunteers) and other administrative tasks</li> <li><b>Arts Network</b> now offers a course on Wednesday evenings</li> <li>The gallery is now open on Wednesday evening and all day on Fridays</li> <li>They host public workshops on the last Friday of the month</li> <li><b>Arts Network</b> was open for some sessions around Christmas, acknowledging it is a challenging time for people with mental health difficulties</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Considering the provision of specific mental health support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many members expressed a wish that <b>Arts Network</b> had specific mental health support available to them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This was attempted, but the conclusion was that it did not work – it detracted from the provision of arts activities</li> <li>However, they now offer support from a benefits/housing specialist once a month for those that need it (from <b>Centre 70</b>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Welcoming new members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We suggested the exploration of increasing capacity to involve new members</li> <li>We suggested exploring the possibility of training existing members to act as mentors for new members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The extra sessions they now offer has allowed them to have 46 more members</li> <li>Because of increased demand they have had to limit the number of sessions some members can attend to free up spaces for new members</li> <li>They are working hard to avoid having a waiting list so they can be there to support people immediately</li> <li>This seems to be happening via the training at <b>SLAM</b> and further training at <b>Arts Network</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Entrepreneurial opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We suggested exploring new ways of attracting income, including increasing the number of <i>'Open Studios'</i> events; opportunities to exhibit in local galleries/cafes; craft fairs; and online opportunities such as Etsy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Podcast created</li> <li>Charge the <b>Horniman Museum</b> for workshops run by <b>Arts Network</b></li> <li>Exhibitions where work can be sold have taken place</li> </ul>

**Table 1:** How Arts Network addressed CERT's 2019 recommendations



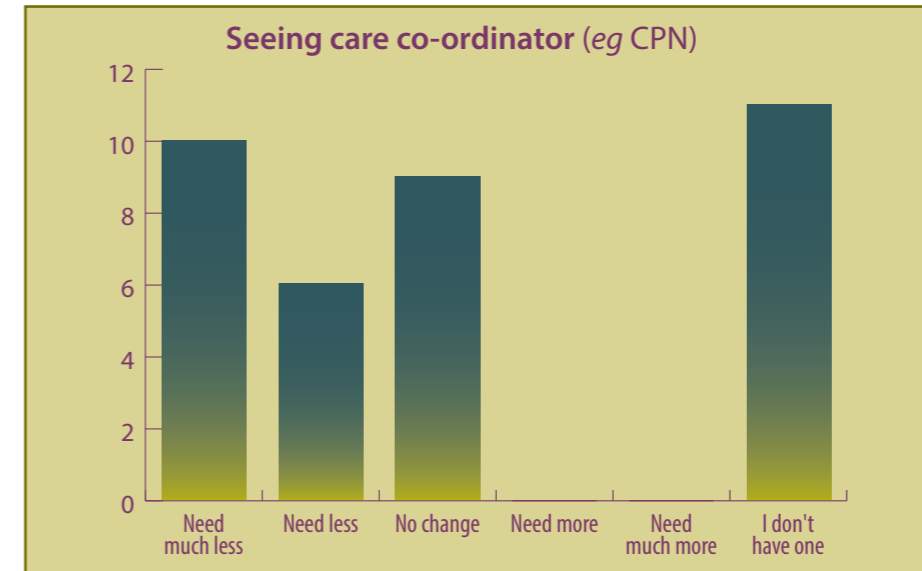
### 3.2. SELF-REPORTED USE OF NHS SERVICES

This year 82% members report improved mental health since attending **Arts Network**, if this is the case, there should be a reduction in their use of **NHS** resources.

In 2019 there was clear evidence that members report using **NHS** services less since attending **Arts Network**. Of those who had them, the majority reported reductions in the amount they need to see their mental health care coordinator (usually a community psychiatric nurse/social worker/occupational therapist), and their psychiatrist, therapist or psychologist. Last year the biggest reductions were reported in unplanned emergency care such as attending Accident and Emergency departments for their mental health, crisis services and in-patient mental health care.

Shown in **figure 1**, this pattern seems to have been repeated this year. Of those who have one, 64% reported needing to see their care co-ordinator less or much less, and 80% reported needing their psychiatrist less or much less. Furthermore, **Arts Network** seems to have again had a big impact on the need for unplanned emergency care: 82% reported attending Accident and Emergency for their mental health less or much less, crisis services 74% less or much less, and in-patient mental health reduced by 88%.

**82%** **AN** members report improved mental health



**64%**  
Need to see care co-ordinator less

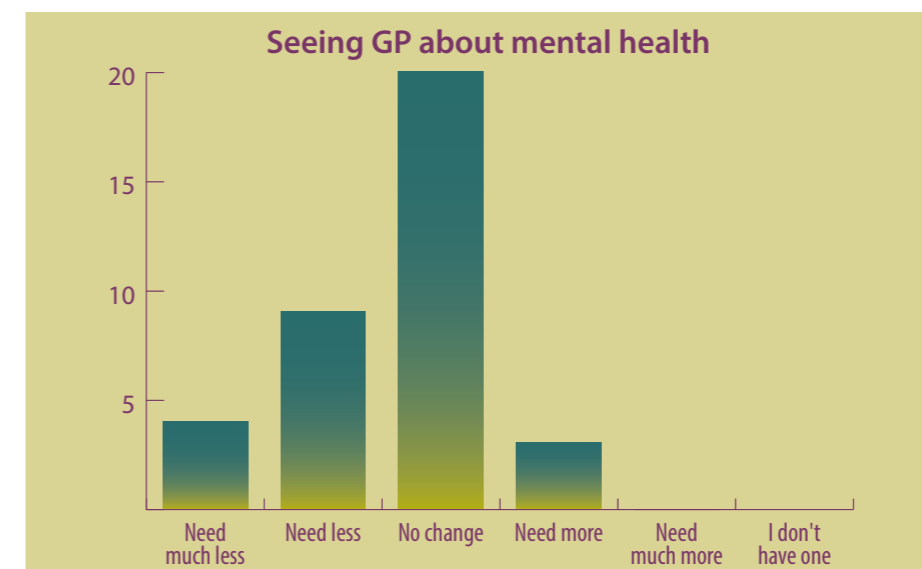
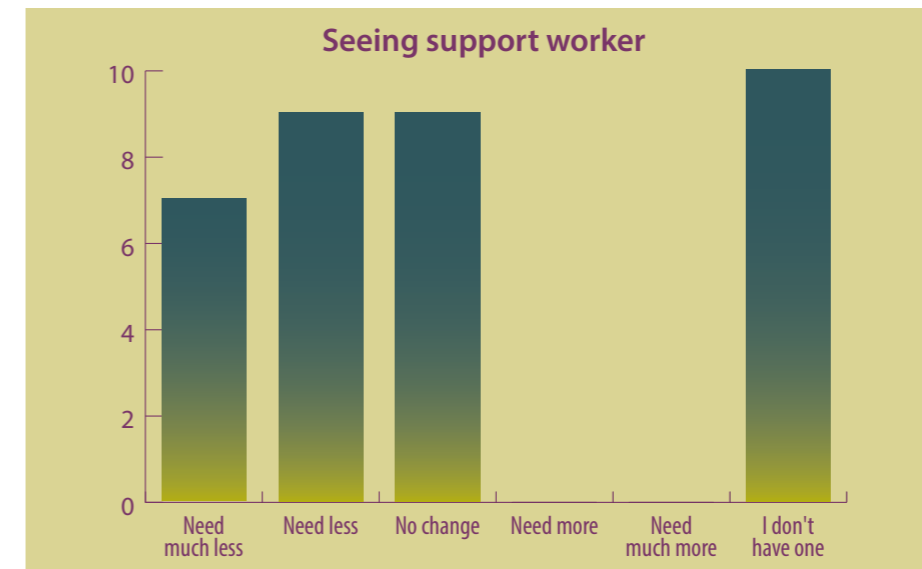
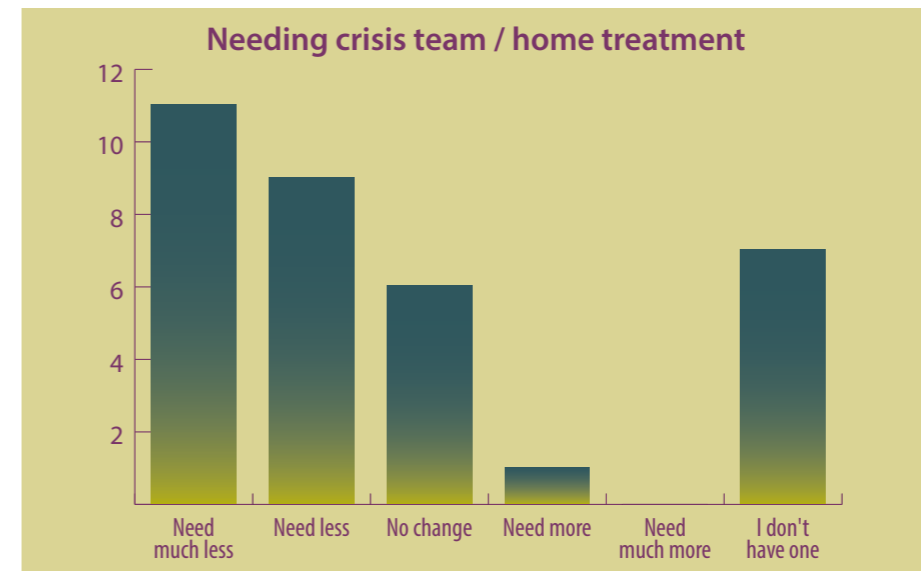
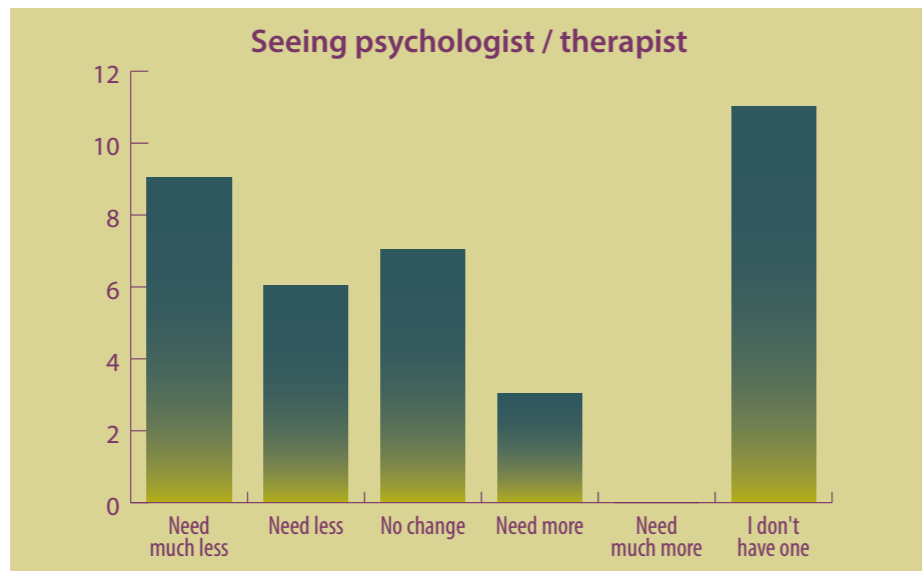
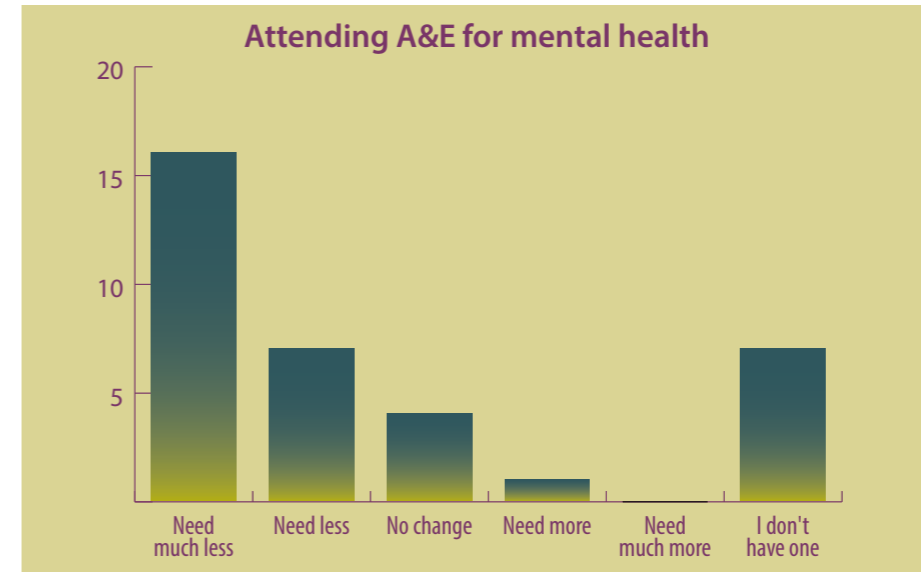
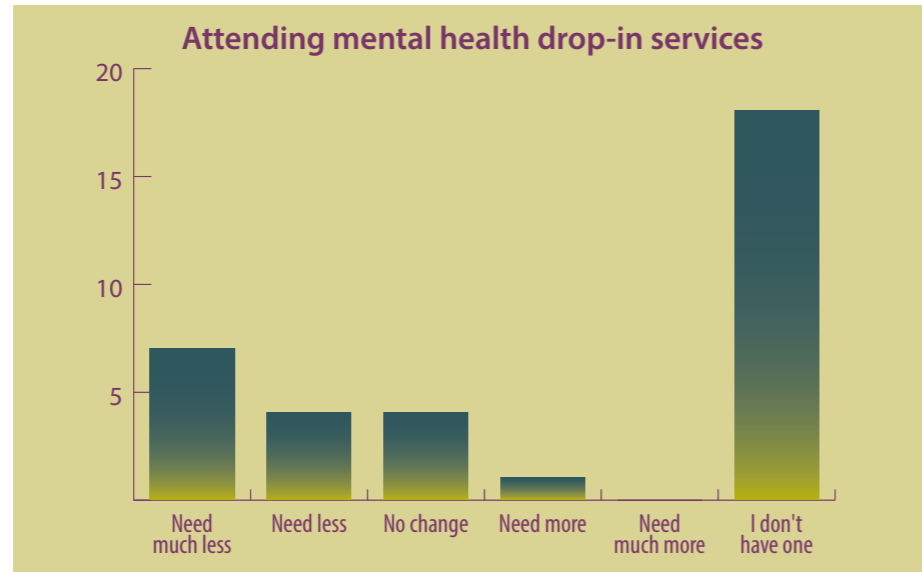


Figure 1: Self-reported use of NHS services by Arts Network members

**Figure 1:**  
Self-reported use of  
NHS services by Arts  
Network members

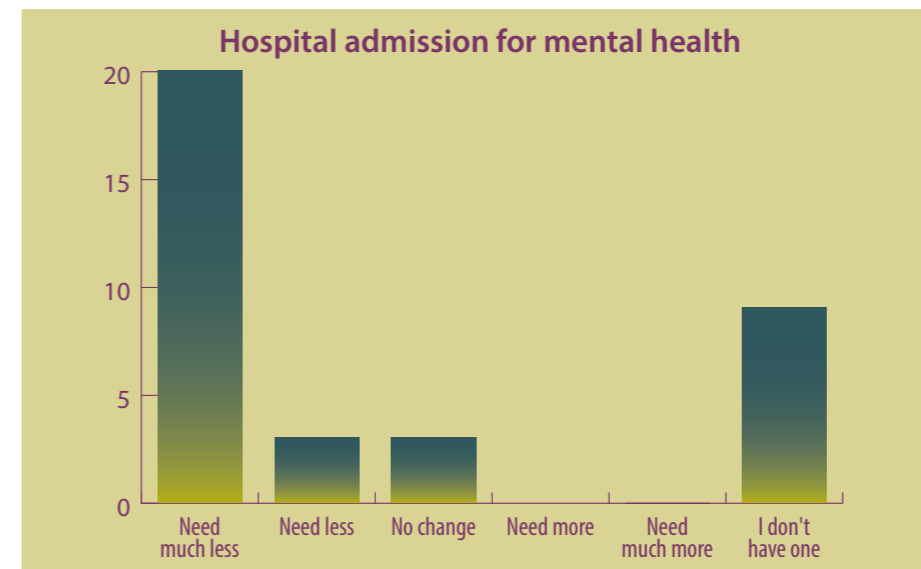
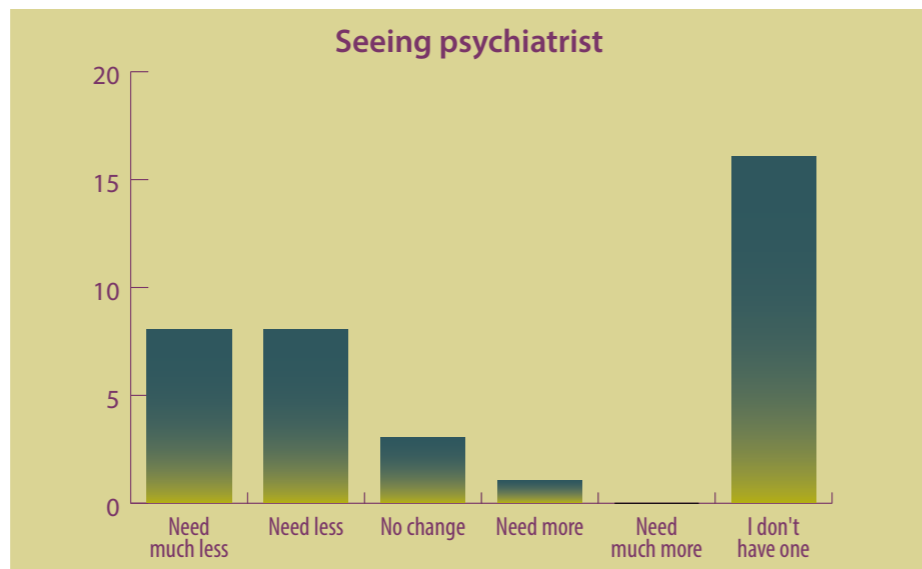


**88%**

**In-patient  
mental health  
reduced**

**80%**

**Need to see  
psychiatrist  
less**



### 3.3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, looking particularly for changes from the 2019 data (see [appendix 1](#)).

In 2019, we identified six major themes: ‘No pressure’, ‘Progression’, ‘A community’, ‘Learning new things’, ‘Time’, and ‘Place’ which were largely replicated this year. For this report, the data has been organised into four overarching themes:

- 3.3.1. Inside Arts Network
- 3.3.2. The Arts Network as a community
- 3.3.3. External partnerships
- 3.3.4. Progression and future planning

#### 3.3.1. Inside Arts Network

The experience of attending the **Arts Network** was spoken about in detail by interviewees. It is related to the themes ‘A safe zone’, ‘Learning new things’, ‘Experience of making artwork’, ‘No pressure’ and ‘Time’.

##### 3.3.1.1. “A safe zone.”

The 2019 data identified that the socially safe atmosphere at **Arts Network** is crucial to its success. As one member put it:

*“The Arts Network is a caring place, it feels safe, and no one judges me.”*

When asked if they felt more at ease after a session at **Arts Network**, 97% agreed[\*]. One member described how they felt the **Arts Network** differed from some other projects:

*“It’s not bitchy here. Other places where groups run can be really bitchy.”*

##### 3.3.1.2. Learning new things – “It’s nice to have a great choice.”

The learning on offer at **Arts Network** is not rigid – members are able to use it flexibly to meet their requirements. Some use the workshops as a way of expanding their artistic abilities, and others feel able to continue their artwork as a hobby. A total of 85% of members felt they had learned new, or developed existing skills and knowledge[\*]:

*“I really like that they’ve such a range [of workshops]. There’s a variety of things to try. If you’re not trained, like me, it’s nice to have a great choice.”*

Others have learnt to develop art as a way of expressing their emotions:

*“I’m working on using art as a way of processing thoughts and feelings. I seem to be finding my own therapy.”*

“  
I’m working  
on using art  
as a way of  
processing  
thoughts and  
feelings.”



##### 3.3.1.3. The experience of making artwork – “I realised I really liked what I produced.”

Twenty percent of members report that they attend **Arts Network** to take part in activities and learn new skills[\*]. Making a piece of artwork means different things to different members and **Arts Network** staff seem to be highly skilled at responding to the differing needs of members. For example, one member commented:

*“Staff offered me support, [the staff said to her] “We will help you figure out your goal to becoming a professional artist.””*

This member is now renting a studio and working on a project funded by **SANE** (a mental health charity). Their decision to become a professional artist was significantly influenced by their experience of artistic and personal growth at **Arts Network**.

For many members, practicing art provides a focus, which in itself, is therapeutic:

*“I can lose myself when I’m working. I concentrate – no – I’m absorbed. That means I haven’t got space to worry about my health.”*

Interviews indicated that members felt that taking part in art increased their confidence:

*“My confidence has increased. I work with an amateur theatre making props. The Arts Network increases your confidence.”*



## Louise's Story

Louise has been coming to **Arts Network** for roughly five years, with occasional absences due to fluctuations in her mental health. Initially referred by **Mind**, she remembers how when she first attended, she was very mentally unwell, scared of everything, and simply leaving the house took tremendous effort.

Louise remembered that the first time she attended, despite extreme levels of anxiety, Mo and Emily succeeded in making her comfortable. She felt an unspoken bond between members through shared mental illness – as she put it, ‘a wonky brain’ – which made her feel at ease in the initial stages of her membership.

Louise remembers preferring attending workshops, due to the structure they offered. Now she relishes doing whatever takes her fancy, independently.

She is not always sociable – Louise recalls that there were plenty of occasions where she has come to **Arts Network** and barely spoken to anyone – sticking her headphones in and just getting on with her work. Louise described an occasion she attended when she was unwell – Mo noticed immediately that she was not herself and was able to offer the support she needed to cope.

An important factor for Louise was the sense that **Arts Network** has become a family for her, when she does not have much of a ‘real’ family. Louise believes that without **Arts Network**, she would not be here, and that it played a key role in her recovery.

Louise remembers her first exhibition – in the art room at **Arts Network** – as ‘*exhilarating, very, very exciting... one of the best nights in my life*’. Alongside the excitement however, she reports it also brings a colossal amount of stress, but she feels that Mo and Emily have always supported her extremely well with this.

Louise’s increased confidence and ability has culminated in her independently running workshops, which she admits was really terrifying at first, but really fun now she has got into it. Furthermore, she is now a Trustee at the **Arts Network** and is in an advisory group, which is, member led.

She has exhibited her work outside of **Arts Network** and was supported by **Arts Network** to get a grant from **Sane** to progress her artistic work. This means she now feels like she is able to bring some of her expertise back to **Arts Network** for their benefit.

### 3.3.1.4. No pressure.

The ‘no pressure’ atmosphere of **Arts Network** was identified as a major theme in 2019, and emerged clearly again this year. Ninety-three percent of members either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “*The Arts Network is a safe and calm place, which puts no pressure upon its members and is encouraging towards them*”[1]. One member commented:

*“It’s lovely to have that slot where you come here, where you are allowed to do something at your own pace and do it whatever way you want but being given some ideas and guidance.”*

“  
It’s like having  
another family...  
It’s having people  
who get it.”



Some interviewees have had experience of attending other art projects and described their perception of pressure levels:

*“Here you are left to your own devices. You can try all sorts. The others [different art projects] tell you what to do. They take control.”*

*“Here [at Arts Network] we are left to our own devices. The other places told us what to do.”*

‘No pressure’ also appears in relation to staff empathy and compassion:

*“They [the staff] would text or phone to see how I was. They didn’t push or nag. I felt cared for.”*

### 3.3.1.5. Time – “You always want more.”

In 2019, many interviewees expressed a desire to come to **Arts Network** more often, including evenings and weekends. Since the last evaluation, **Arts Network** now runs an evening session on Wednesday between 17.00 and 19.00:

*“[An evening session is] really good because if you can’t get in during the day you have that option.”*

This additional evening session is particularly useful to existing or new members in paid or voluntary employment during ordinary working hours, allowing them to keep in contact with **Arts Network**:

*“The Wednesday evening sessions are set up for working people, so that’s an option if I’m working again.”*

### 3.3.2. The Arts Network as a Community – “We’re all in the same boat”

As in 2019, this year there was a clear theme capturing the sense of community and of being part of a family with a shared experience of mental health problems. **Arts Network** is a place where members are able to experience a sense of belonging.

People with mental health issues commonly struggle to leave their homes, have difficulties communicating and may experience high levels of anxiety. The socially safe community feeling described by members includes a sense of belonging, understanding, support, mutual respect and enjoyment:

*“Even if it’s a really rubbish day, you can sit quietly and everyone understands. Everyone is easy going, they’ve all been there.”*

*“It’s like having another family...I think it’s having fellow sufferers, people understand. We are on one level but overlapping in different ways, medically and physically. It’s having people who get it.”*

*“Sometimes people sense there’s something wrong. You can sit with tea and talk.”*

Members were asked in the end of year survey what the most important reason they attended **Arts Network** was: 17% answered “to make friends and meet people[\*].”

As in 2019, our questionnaire again asked about members’ social relationships (figure 2), and a similar pattern was found. High value was put on the ‘mutual experience of mental health problems’ and ‘offering advice and support to each other’ with 91% and 83% respectively stating that this was ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’.

Furthermore, 74% reported that 'looking out for each other' (eg when unwell) was 'important' or 'extremely important'. As in 2019, slightly less importance was placed on external contact with other members: 'meeting outside of Arts Network' (eg for coffee) was 'important' or 'extremely important' to 61%, but 22% responding 'not very important' or 'not important at all'. We asked about 'communicating outside of Arts Network' (eg texting or social media). A total of 39% stating this was 'important' or 'extremely important', but 19% responding 'not very important' or 'not important at all'.

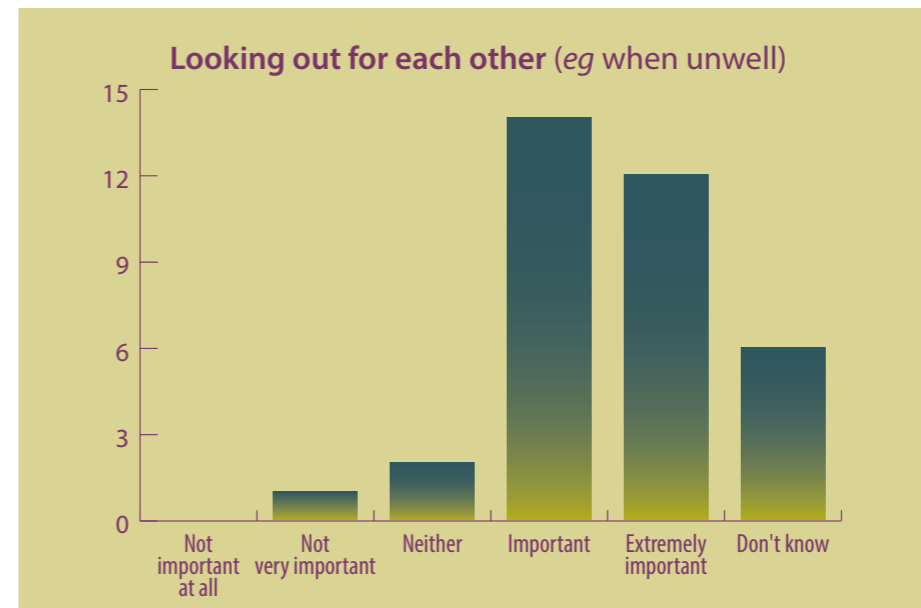
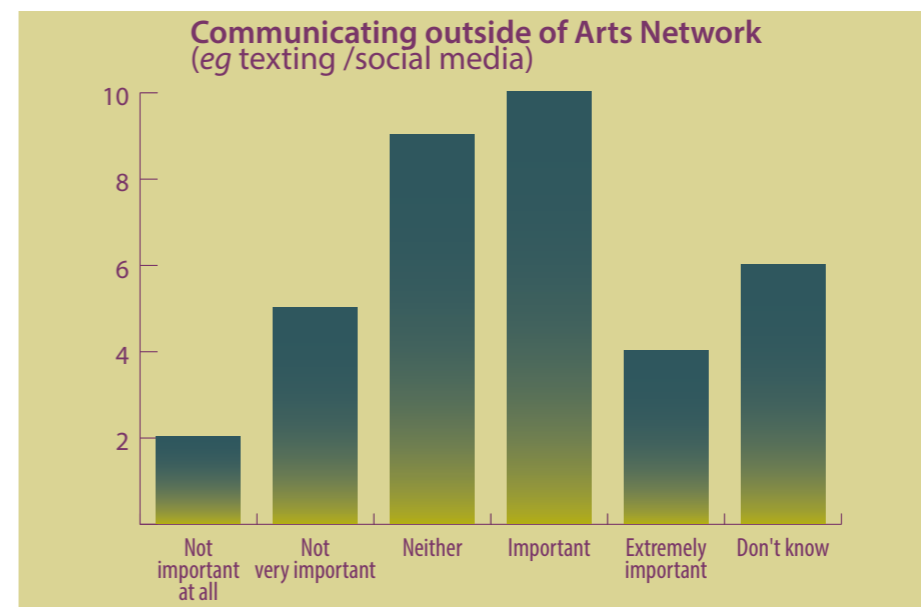
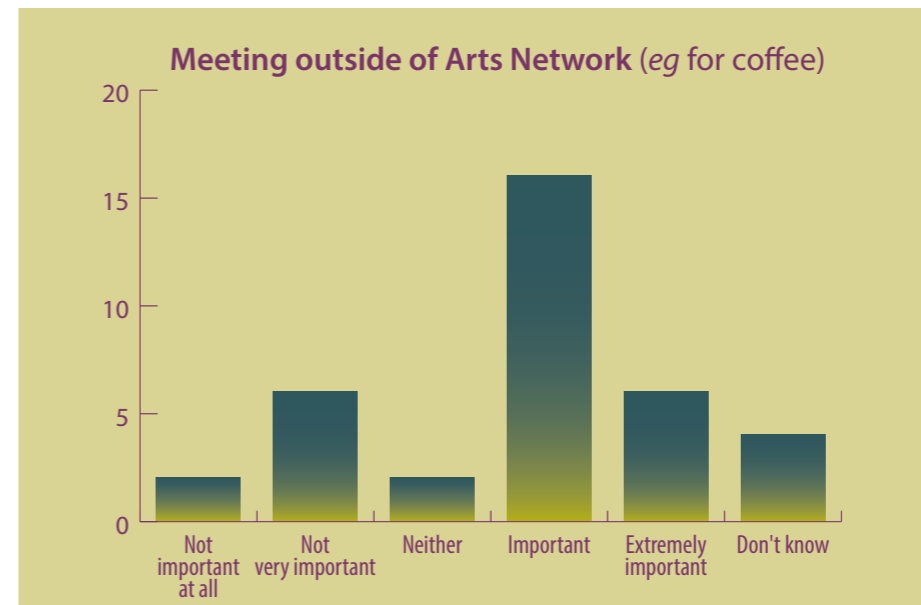
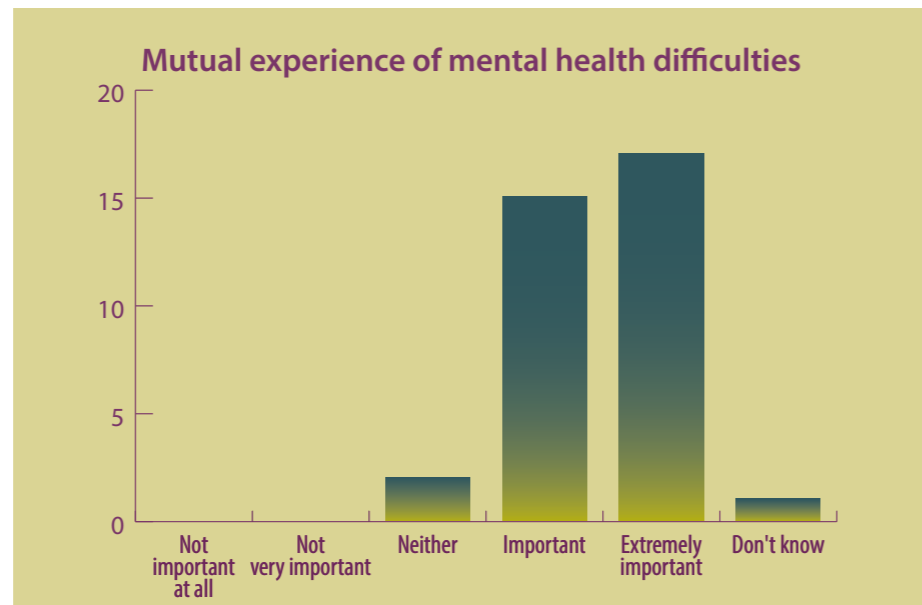


Figure 2: Social relationships between Arts Network members



High value is put on mutual support with many stating it is 'important' or 'extremely important' across different factors

Figure 2: Social relationships between Arts Network members

# Karen's Story

Karen is a lady in her 40s who recounted having had mental health problems for the last 35 years. Prior to becoming so seriously unwell that she needed admission to a mental health hospital, she was employed as an Executive Officer working in the Civil Service and owned her own home and car.

Karen described her difficulties as psychosis and dissociation and explained that due to this she spent five months on a mental health ward, and lost her job, home, and car. After her discharge from hospital, she described experiencing significant social isolation, with no friends or social contacts, and rarely leaving her flat. Karen believed that she was so unwell no one would take her on for support; she reported that her consultant psychiatrist told her *'your working life is over now; you've got to accept that you've lost these things'*.

Her key worker suggested the **Arts Network** to Karen. Remembering her first day, she described how she was extremely nervous and afraid, but that the staff were kind and welcoming. They persuaded her to try and stay for just an hour, which she managed. Mo encouraged her to *'just take it easy'* and was a reassuring and consistent presence.

Progressively, Karen worked with Mo to set both short- and long-term goals and create a care plan. Karen explained that for the first year she spent at **Arts Network**, she did not mix with any of the other members, and that it took two years before she was able to go on the trips out. This gradual improvement in confidence has led to her now being able to talk to anyone; to establish good relationships – both friendships with other **Arts Network** members and her family. Karen is enthusiastic about welcoming and supporting new members in the same way that she was welcomed and supported.

Karen still reports fluctuating mental health, and remains on medication, and she is conscious that she needs to be careful not to overdo things. She says the routine and focus provided by the **Arts Network** is a crucial component to her staying mentally well, offering her things to look forward to, and how just being there lifts her mood. She values the freedom and lack of pressure from staff, and believes it is important that members are taught to be responsible, to express themselves and to follow the Code of Conduct which everyone signs up to.

She ended by commenting *"now I have what I think is a good life – it's a quiet life, but it's a lot better than being unwell and being in hospital... I hope I never, ever, go back there."*

*I've done mindfulness at other places and not really got on with it but because it's here, it's an environment I'm comfortable with.*

### 3.3.3. External Partnerships

Recommendations made in 2019 included the suggestion of exploring further external community partnerships. **Arts Network** have addressed this in a variety of ways: monthly visits from a financial advisor from a local charity; offering a mindfulness course delivered by an external person; extending their programme of trips; exhibitions; and volunteering training with **SLAM**.

#### 3.3.3.1. Finance, form filling and advice – "If they can't help, they know someone who can".

Since the 2019 evaluation, an advisor from **Center 70** (a local charity providing advice on housing, welfare benefits, debt and legal problems) now visits **Arts Network** monthly. Money problems are associated with stress and poor mental health. Members report that this is a very valuable provision:

*"DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] assessments affect everyone's mental health. I had one last month; it affected my concentration, sleep and nerves. I didn't know stuff would go wrong but it did and he helped me deal with it."*

*"He helped with my bus pass. He just did it on the computer. I can't do that. It's a useful service."*

#### 3.3.3.2. Mindfulness – "That's really made a difference to me".

Another change since 2019 is that there is now a mindfulness course taking place in the **Arts Network** building. Running the course there meant it was taking place in a familiar and safe environment for members:

*"I've done mindfulness at other places and not really got on with it but because it's here, it's an environment I'm comfortable with. That's really made a difference to me."*

*"I was a bit skeptical because I've done it [mindfulness] before and it didn't work. As I started doing it [at Arts Network] there was more and more improvement."*

The only criticism of the mindfulness course was that it starts at 10am, which is early for people on sedating medication, one participant reported feeling "very groggy" during sessions.



“  
It was a fun day out. A bit like a school trip but without bossy adults.”

### 3.3.3.3. Trips – “a privilege that we’ve got”.

Trips to various places such as art exhibitions, **The Horniman Museum and Gardens**, **Kew Gardens**, **The Royal Academy** and **Hampton Court Palace** have always taken place, but this year they were discussed enthusiastically by members. In the survey, 64% of members had been on trips[\*]. The trips were obviously enjoyable and interesting, and encouraged members to face the challenge of leaving their homes and then traveling to the venue:

*“The trips are fantastic... lots of things I wouldn’t have done when it’s hard to leave home.”*

*“If I’d been on my own I wouldn’t have had the confidence to go [to an exhibition] but I’m in part of a group. I know everyone.”*

*“Without the trips I wouldn’t have gone anywhere.”*

*“It was a fun day out. A bit like a school trip but without bossy adults.”*

There are several mentions of the challenges faced by members and the advantages of going as part of a group. The cost of visiting places was another rea-

son for members not to go to similar places on their own – often, those on a low income could not have these experiences without **Arts Network**:

*“Go to weird places on my own? That’s not happening. For trips we all go together, travel together.”*

The chance to see different places, artistic techniques and a variety of different artists and approaches is highly valued among members. In particular, workshops at the Royal Academy were mentioned:

*“I’ve done workshops at the Royal Academy. We go to an artist’s show and then do a workshop based on that artist.”*







### 3.3.3.4. Exhibitions – “It’s exciting having stuff exhibited”.

Exhibitions of **Arts Network** member’s artwork seems to have expanded significantly since 2019.

Exhibitions take place at **Arts Network** itself, with the gallery being open additionally on Wednesday evenings and all day on Friday. Other exhibitions have taken place in external galleries, including The **Horniman Museum** and **Pelican Art Gallery**:

*“They [The Horniman Museum] were looking for members of different community groups to take part in a project and then putting an exhibition on.”*

*“I had a piece of work on the wall at the Arts Network and at an exhibition at the Pelican Art Gallery [arranged by the Arts Network]”.*

*“They’ve [Arts Network staff] put me onto outside agencies, so I had a piece in the recent ‘Outside In’ exhibition in London.”*

For members, having a piece of their own art exhibited can be a significant step:

*“The first [exhibition] was here [at Arts Network]. It’s great fun but very stressful too.”*

One interviewees told us with pride that they had sold a piece of their work from an exhibition. The majority of members felt positive about having work exhibited, though there were mentions of anxiety or being surprised that their work was being put into an exhibition. However, not all of the members were enthusiastic about having their work exhibited:

*“The exhibition thing isn’t that important to me. It’s the making.”*

## David’s Story

David, a 68-year-old man, who has been attending **Arts Network** once a week for approximately three months. A mental health care worker introduced him to **Arts Network**, and he enthusiastically got involved. He describes enjoying the friendly atmosphere and forming good relationships with both the staff and other members.

Before joining the **Arts Network**, David described his main occupation during the day as going to the pub. Now he uses art as a distraction, something interesting and productive to do, rather than just ‘lazing around’. His long-term goal is to become what he describes as ‘a competent artist’.

David has attended other visual arts projects; he continues to attend one at a community centre near where he lives, unfortunately another one recently closed down. He has a strong preference for the freedom to do what he chooses at **Arts Network** in terms of the art he is able to produce – explaining that the other projects he has attended are quite prescriptive and rigid about what you do while you’re there.

Even though he has only been attending for a short time, David already takes pride in his work at the **Arts Network** – he was thrilled to have had work displayed on the wall, and even sold ‘a daub of mine’ to a member of the public, which had been exhibited locally. David says he is very happy at the **Arts Network** and hopes to continue to make friends and get to know people, and that it is already an important part of his life.

### 3.3.3.5. Community Connections - “I started volunteering...I feel included”.

Connecting with the wider community is important to members – 67% of members agreed that ‘attending **Arts Network** helped them to engage with the community’[\*]. Since 2019, **Arts Network** seems to have increased its connections with external agencies, especially supporting members to volunteering elsewhere, in particular at **The Horniman Museum**. A total of 13% of members reported volunteering in the last 6 months[\*]:

*“I started volunteering at The Horniman. It’s ideal; they know I’m from here [Arts Network] already. I feel supported and included. I feel I’m being treated as worthy of my professional identity.”*

**Arts Network** staff have helped to organise the volunteering opportunities even where there is no artistic content. One member told us that they were using their experience of mental health problems, in a peer support role based in an Accident and Emergency department at a local hospital.

### 3.3.4. Progression and future planning – “I’m doing things I never thought I would do”

#### 3.3.4.1. Personal progression – “Now I talk to everyone”.

As in 2019, this year members described personal progression and planning for their future. A total of 18% of members said that the most important reason they attended **Arts Network** was to gain ‘the confidence to achieve new things’; and 88% reported that their confidence was ‘better’ or ‘much better’ since attending **Arts Network**[\*]. The absence of pressure facilitates the freedom to take personal charge of their progression. One member described a journey lasting two years:

*“I was very isolated here [at Arts Network], I didn’t talk or mix with anyone... Gradually I’ve come out of the state I was in, now I talk to everyone.”*

During interviews members talked about how **Arts Network** had helped them:

*“I was supported [by Arts Network] through the steps you need to take to become a professional artist.”*

#### 3.3.4.2. Volunteering – “I want to give something back”.

A total of 21% of members named volunteering as an achievement in the past 6 months[\*]. Volunteering appears to have expanded considerably since 2019. Members are now working as volunteers for the **Arts Network**, for example, co-facilitating or leading workshops, and elsewhere, such as curating at **The Horniman Museum**, and peer support in an Accident and Emergency. Many other members have becoming a volunteer as a part of their future ambitions:

*“I’m aiming to become a volunteer eventually. It’s going to take time, but I’m going to get there!”*

*“The biggest reason why I wanted to volunteer here is to give something back. I don’t think I would be here without the opportunities I’ve had.”*

Since 2019, **Arts Network** has introduced more structured volunteer training. Those members wanting to become volunteers can attend formal volunteer training run by the local **NHS Trust (South London and Maudsley Foundation Trust – SLAM)** to equip them with the skills they need to volunteer at the **NHS, Arts Network** or elsewhere.

A member talked about progressing to becoming Trustees of the project, acting as the member voice in board meetings and decisions:

*“I’ve become a trustee of the project and I’m in an advisory group here which is member led.”*

It is interesting, however, that for some members, a leadership role through volunteering is not a goal they want:

*“It’s [Arts Network] the only place where I can be vulnerable. If I don’t want to talk, I can be quiet. I don’t have to function. That’s really important because I’ve never had a place to be me.”*

## 4. Staff interview

Staff retention remains high at **Arts Network**, with staff reporting enjoying a flat hierarchy and a family environment. Management is hands-on in the sense that all staff deliver workshops to maintain a direct connection with the members.

The increased Lottery funding has meant **Arts Network** was able to recruit a new member of staff and increase the hours of existing staff. The advantages of this include closer team working, in part due to time to de-brief after sessions and session planning. The additional member of staff has freed up time for staff training, for example, in teaching and events management. Furthermore, **Arts Network** management are keen for staff to develop their roles in pursuit of their own interests and define their own role. Increased staff and member numbers means there are opportunities for progression to new leadership roles.

Staff report working hard to develop community partnerships in London, including **The London Arts and Health Forum**, and in national events such as **Creativity and Wellbeing Week**.

## 5. Suggestions for future development

1. **Using social return on investment (SROI) to support funding applications:** SROI can be used to measure 'social value' – placing a monetary value on the organisation's activity. By being able to put a figure to the Social Value of the **Arts Network**, potential funders can clearly see the benefit of the **Arts Network**. See [www.socialvalueuk.org](http://www.socialvalueuk.org) for further information.
2. **Further increase in opening times:** Following the evaluation, it was clear that evening opening was a welcomed move and that further evening and weekend sessions would be appreciated. Members who are working or volunteering during the day would be able to continue benefiting from attending the **Arts Network**.
3. **Employing an additional member of staff:** An additional member of staff would make it easier to add sessions in the evening and weekends, and would take pressure off current staff members, freeing them for things such as planning workshop sessions, exhibitions, external workshops and events, and time for development training.
4. **Targeting volunteering in the community:** Building community connections should widen the types of external volunteering opportunities available to members. Conversely, recruiting volunteers from the community into **Arts Network** would strengthen links and bring a range of experiences and skills into **Arts Network**. This could include encouraging volunteers from local colleges or other art courses.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

This evaluation gathered the views and perceptions of participants of the **Arts Network** and its staff. Since 2019, the **Arts Network** has built considerably on its achievements, offering more opportunities for progression, particularly through volunteering.

Ninety-one percent of members self-reported improved mental health since joining **Arts Network**, and many indicated that their use of mental health services had decreased. Since 2019, the project has expanded, with more sessions adding space for 46 new members, and an evening workshop.

There are now considerable links with the local community, including volunteer training at **SLAM**; trips to places such as art exhibitions, **Kew Gardens**, **The Royal Academy** and **Hampton Court Palace**; external volunteering opportunities; and external exhibitions in other galleries. An expert now attends once a month to offer specialist services including benefits advice, and a mindfulness course is offered.

Similar themes emerged from the interviews this year. The **Arts Network** was described as a non-judgemental, socially safe, pressure free zone, where people feel cared for. Members enjoy the flexibility and choice they have about what they can do at **Arts Network**. Members feel part of a family where there is understanding, support, mutual respect and enjoyment. The ability of members to progress as they wish, at their speed, for example through volunteering, was again identified as important.

Staff retention remains high at **Arts Network**, with staff reporting enjoying a flat hierarchy and a close family environment. The Lottery funding meant **Arts Network** recruited a new member of staff and increased the hours of existing staff.

Suggestions for future development were made, including using social return on investment calculations, increasing opening times in the evenings and weekend; employing additional staff; and targeting volunteering in the community.

In conclusion, **Arts Network** is an organisation where members get support, respect, encouragement and learning. It continues to play an important role in its members' quality of life. Members are able to plan their own progression and goals.



## Appendix 1: Summary of 2019 CERT Arts Network evaluation findings

### CORE THEMES

Analysis of the interviews led us to extract six core themes: **No pressure**; **Progression**; **A community**; **Learning new things**; **Time**; and **Place**.

#### No pressure:

In our interviews there was considerable reference to the **Arts Network** as being 'safe' and 'calm', and a place which put 'no pressure' upon its members and which is 'encouraging' towards them. Care is taken to support new members and those who struggle to attend sessions.

There is choice and privacy around disclosure of mental health problems. **Arts Network** is a socially safe place where art provides a pressure free, calming, focus and distraction from outside worries and difficulties.

Our questionnaire provided evidence that members value the peer social relationships they have at **Arts Network** extremely highly. However, for many members this applied only while in the studio itself – they did not report meeting or communicating with other members at outside of sessions.

#### Progression:

Many members spoke of changes in their lives since they started attending **Arts Network**. This includes reduced isolation, increased confidence, pride in their work and beneficial changes in their mental health.

Some members found initially joining **Arts Network** very daunting, and while some long-standing members still find getting to the studio a challenge, many described finding that it gets easier to attend over time. Others described settling in very fast.

Whilst some members had ambitions to progress, for example, to co-facilitate and lead sessions, others described a desire to "keep it as a hobby." Our questionnaire asked members about their experience of art and their confidence in their artistic ability before and after joining **Arts Network**. Analysis demonstrated that the improvement in experience and confidence was highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

In their interviews, many members described improvements in how they perceive their mental health since joining **Arts Network**. Our questionnaire supported this finding (*figure 1*), with half of all respondents (eleven members) reporting their mental health was 'much better' since joining **Arts Network**, and nine said 'a bit better'. None said their mental health had got worse.

#### A community:

Another common thread through the interviews was how members experience being part of a community built on respect, peer support, sensitivity, kindness, encouragement and support. Several members describe **Arts Network** as being 'a family'.

In both our interview and questionnaire, almost all members expressed how important the staff of the **Arts Network** are to their good experience of the project: As one member put it, staff go "above and beyond" supporting members with a wide variety of problems, well beyond art. Some members raised the suggestion of having a dedicated staff member for supporting members' mental health.

#### Learning new things:

Members talked about the range of courses available to them and the opportunities to try new things – it's like "an adventure," and "there's always something new and interesting" to try.

Some talked about "taking home" activities from the **Arts Network** to do in their own time away from the workshop. This could be viewed as the development of a new coping strategy. Our questionnaire demonstrated a highly statistically significant increase in self-reported practising of art at home among members ( $p < 0.001$ ).

#### Time:

"I wish I could do it every day," and "it would be nice to be able to come here more often" were repeated comments. The generous flexibility about when members can attend offered by **Arts Network**, and the patience of the staff in this respect is also highly valued.

#### Arts Network (place):

"I feel very fortunate to have this place" was a common phrase. Many members reported a feeling of gratitude that they had 'found' the **Arts Network**, and wished they had discovered it sooner.

### SELF-REPORTED USE OF NHS SERVICES

Our questionnaire asked members to report if there had been any changes in their use of **NHS** services since attending **Arts Network**. Among those who had them, over half reported seeing their care-coordinator, support worker, therapist, psychologist or drop-in service 'less' or 'much less'.

There was no clear pattern around seeing their GP, with most reporting 'no change'. Among those reporting having a psychiatrist, over three-quarters reported needing them 'less' or 'much less'.

The biggest impact seems to be in terms of acute care. Roughly two-thirds of respondents said they attended Accident and Emergency departments 'less' or 'much less'; and none reported increases. This pattern was repeated in self-reported use of crisis and home treatment teams and in-patient mental health care.

### STAFF INTERVIEW

Two members of staff were interviewed. They talked about how their role was to try and get around and speak to all of the members in the work room, observing whether they might like extra support or if they just want to be "immersed in what they're doing and don't necessarily want to be chatting". They also described the transformation they see in members over time.

## Appendix 2: CERT recommendations to Arts Network 2019

### 1. EXPLORE GETTING NHS FUNDING

It was striking how clearly members reported positive changes to their mental health which they attributed specifically to attending **Arts Network**. It was also clear that they believe their use of **NHS** services has decreased since attending, especially acute services.

- Can this report be used as evidence to get funding to expand the service to include more service users from the local **NHS** mental health trust?

### 2. EXPLORE POSSIBLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

We wondered whether the possibility of creating local partnerships has been explored? This might include connecting with local colleges, universities or third sector charities.

- Are there local art colleges and universities which might be willing to explore an exchange relationship? This might include, for example, allowing use of more specialist arts equipment or access to courses for **Arts Network** members in exchange for their students getting work placements or voluntary opportunities at **Arts Network**. This would also mean members could access specialist equipment through the college rather than **Arts Network** needing to buy it.
- Are there local drama or music colleges which might be willing to offer music and drama courses for **Arts Network** members in exchange for their students getting work placements or voluntary opportunities at **Arts Network**?

- Are there other local third sector organisations which **Arts Network** could create links with to support members with non-art related needs, for example, housing and benefits, for example, monthly visits from someone from **Citizen's Advice**?
- Can **Arts Network** link with other community groups to provide interaction between members and their community, perhaps offering use of their studio and equipment, for example children's sessions, or sessions for elderly people. Alternatively, members could take their skills out into the community to offer sessions elsewhere.
- Are there opportunities to create public art such as murals?

### 3. FIND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESSION

We considered exploring opportunities for members to develop their skills and follow their ambitions.

- Could a training pathway be created for members to develop mentoring skills to support new members as they join?
- Could a more formal training pathway be created for members to start teaching or support the teaching of courses in which they have particular skill?
- Are there art-based courses at local colleges/adult education which members could be supported to access?
- Can there be a more systematic way in which members be supported access arts-based voluntary or paid opportunities outside of **Arts Network**, for example, at museums or galleries?

### 4. INCREASING THE RANGE OF COURSES

Both members and staff talked of a desire to increase the range of courses and opportunities on offer at **Arts Network**.

- As mentioned above, there could be the possibility of expanding into performing arts (drama and music based) via local colleges.
- More specialist courses, such as jewellery making and silk screen printing.
- Some members talked about enjoying a project where they made YouTube videos. The possibility of getting specialist computer technology for digital arts such as graphic design, Photoshop and film making might be explored.

- A photography course might be a good way of getting people out into the community.
- A local college might be able to support a creative writing course.
- A simple weekly book group where members all read the same book and talk about it might be something enjoyable and easy to start.

## 5. INCREASE OPENING HOURS AND AVAILABLE DAYS

Many members stated that they would like it if **Arts Network** was open for more sessions in the week, including evening and weekend sessions. Doing this would considerably increase the number of members who could attend.

- Can funding be found for opening on more days and for more sessions?

## 6. CONSIDERING THE PROVISION OF SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Many members expressed a wish that **Arts Network** had specialist counsellors available to them. It is also clear that currently **Arts Network** staff do a lot of ad hoc work which could be considered as counselling in their day-to-day interactions with members. The provision of more a more formal counselling offer at **Arts Network** might draw the focus of the organisation away from art and in that sense is a strategic decision. Alternatively:

- Links could be made with other local counselling services for members who would benefit from it.
- There might be trainee counsellors at local colleges looking for work experience who could offer their time for free.

## 7. WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

We were unclear about the capacity for taking on more new members. We admired the *'we just pull up another chair'* attitude to new people joining the project, however this clearly can't go on indefinitely. We also admired that members can attend for as long as they wish, and would definitely not advocate changing that policy. However:

- Are there ways people can be helped to move on from the project into new paid or voluntary roles outside, or to become teachers/mentors to new members?
- Can funding be accessed to increase the number of days/hours in which **Arts Network** is open? This would create room for many new members.

Some members we interviewed talked about how difficult they had found the initial steps of joining **Arts Network** to be. A particular barrier seemed to be anxiety about actually getting to the studio.

- Can existing members be trained to mentor new members?
- Is there a possibility of providing taxis for new members, or arranging a buddy to travel with them?
- Is there a way small *'new member only'* groups could be established? This might increase new members confidence before joining groups with more established members.

## 8. ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for attracting income is clearly important to **Arts Network**. These are some ideas we had:

- Increasing the number of *'Open Studio'* events to raise the project's profile locally.
- Seeking new ways of displaying work locally, for example, seeking a café or bar which would be willing to have exhibitions.
- Online opportunities, for example, creating work to order, or advertising pieces for sale.
- Are there local craft fairs/Christmas fairs for which work could be created specifically for sale?
- Possibility of a permanent gallery?



# The Arts Network Evaluation 2020

Produced by CERT -  
Converge Evaluation and  
Research Team

The Converge Evaluation and Research  
Team is a group of researchers with lived  
experience of mental health difficulties.

We are based at York St John University.

CERT@yorks.ac.uk  
Tel: 07572 112404



Converge Evaluation and Research Team  
**insight through experience**



