



Magic Carpet

# **CREATIVE CAREERS ANNUAL EVALUATION**

**1 June 08 – 31 August 09  
&**

# **FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

**1 June 06 – 31 August 09**

# CREATIVE CARERS EVALUATION REPORT

This report is based on services delivered during the third and final year of the Magic Carpet Creative Carers Project. In the final conclusion the report also provides a summary of the project from its commencement in June 06 to completion in August 09.

The Creative Carers Project, funded by the Big Lottery, aims to provide creative opportunities for carers away from their, often extensive, caring responsibilities. Sessions are designed to be interesting, fun and relaxing, providing the opportunity to meet with other carers and learn new creative skills in an informal, engaging, supportive and stimulating environment. We endeavour to develop the confidence of participants, both in their creative abilities and in their wider lives. Sessions are organised taking into account the time limitations which are inherent in the caring role and run at times and locations convenient to participants.

During this final project year the Big Lottery kindly extended the delivery period by 3 months, from the original completion date of 31/5/09, allowing additional sessions to be delivered.

## **Report Aim**

This report aims to evaluate the uptake and success of the Creative Carers Project by:

1. Recording details of sessions delivered.
2. Recording the numbers of carers attending sessions.
3. Providing details of feedback received from carers, carer's organisations and creative workers.
4. Providing an evaluation of the benefits of using creative methods to work with carers.

## **Research Methods**

In order to assess the impact of services an evaluation system using individual semi-structured questionnaires and focus groups was implemented periodically for the duration of the project. Session leaders provided feedback on each project using a standardised form. Key organisations that helped link us with individual carers were asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire.<sup>1</sup> Informal comments which were made verbally or by email were also logged.

## **Services Delivered**

As the Creative Carers Project evolved over the 3 year period, particular individuals and groups emerged as enthusiastic and committed attendees. These groups were based in Exeter, Honiton & Tiverton (adult carers) and Exeter & Tiverton (young carers). Whilst we continued, during the final project year, to attempt to make contact with potential new participants, the main focus for the project became to develop the quality and effectiveness of our existing work, by responding to the expressed individual needs and interests of our core service users. This report will highlight the ways in which we amended service delivery in response to participant feedback.

During the final year of Creative Carers Magic Carpet worked with 174 individual carers over a total of 114 sessions. Some sessions were regular, weekly events attended by core service users and delivered in blocks of up to 10 at a time. Others were one off events which attracted different carers each time, notably the young carers' events.

## **Project/ Event**

Below are listed the range of sessions and events delivered during the past year. The numbers in brackets indicate how many sessions were delivered during each period.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendices for questionnaires

1. **Exminster Young Carers:** August 08 (2); February 09 (1); April 09 (2); July 09 (1); August 09 (1).
2. **Tiverton & Cullumpton Young Carers:** July 08 (2); February 09 (1) May 09 (1); August 09 (2).
3. **Honiton Adult Carers:** June 08 (3); Summer workshop: August 08 (1); September – November 08 (10); Christmas workshop: December 08 (1); Art Exhibition: December 09 (1); January – May 09 (14)
4. **Exeter Adult Carers Art Sessions:** June - July 08 (4); Summer workshop: July 08 (1); September – November 08 (7); Christmas workshop: December 08 (1); January – May 09 (17); Summer workshops: July & August 09 (2).
5. **Exeter Adult Drama Sessions:** June 08 (1); May – June 09 (5)
6. **Tiverton Art & Drama sessions:** June – July 08 (4); Summer workshop 08 (1); July – September 08 (5); Christmas workshop: December 08 (1); January – June 09 (11); Summer workshops: July & August 09 (2).
7. **Tiverton Mental Health Carers:** September 08 (2)
8. **Hollow Lane Carers:** January – May 09 (5)
9. **Mayoral Reception:** June 08 (1)
10. **Carers Forum:** June 08 (1)
11. **Carers Recharge Day:** June 08 (1)
12. **Carers Focus Day:** October 08 (1)
13. **Carers Pamper Day:** June 09 (1)

## **YOUNG CARERS**

Since the start of the Creative Carers Project in 2006, our work with Young Carers has flourished. Our working relationships with young carers' organisations in Exminster and Tiverton have evolved, enabling us to bring a wide range of creative opportunities to young carers both within shorter 'club' sessions and at 2 day intensive workshops. Session themes have included: animals; pigs in space; monsters; giants; puppet making; Africa; the giant caterpillar. Methods and materials have included: clay, mod roc, sand, fabric, paint, glitter, storytelling, drama, music, movement. We have received enthusiastic responses from participants who have been provided with the opportunity to get involved in some exciting, unique and engaging activities, away from their caring responsibilities.

### **1. EXMINSTER YOUNG CARERS**

During this period we delivered **7 sessions** to young carers in Exminster at the Westbank Healthy Living Centre. These were primarily one day events for groups of between 11 to 15 participants. One 2 day workshop was delivered called '**The Amazing Giant Carnival**'. This provided a fantastic opportunity for a group of children to work across 2 days with 4 artists and storytellers on developing, making and performing a story and a procession.

#### **Results: what participants said**

A questionnaire was given to, and returned by, each of the 14 participants at the 'Amazing Giant Carnival'. The questions, and some of the responses, are detailed below:

**1. Please tell us what you thought about being part of the Magic Carpet Carnival:**

*All 14 young people said they thought it was 'Great'.*

**2. Which bit did you like best?**

*'Making the giant and covering him with tissue and paint'; 'The storm because it goes quiet and gets louder'; 'All of it. I wish this didn't end today'; 'The carnival'; 'The beginning because you can meet other people'.*

**3. Which bit didn't you like much?**

*'The falling over'; 'I can't give you an answer because I thought it was all extraordinary!'; 'I didn't like it when we all had to go home'.*

#### **4. What will you tell your friends about the Carnival?**

*'Mainly how I made new friends and how much I enjoyed it'; 'Everything'; 'Great fun, want to do it all again'; 'There was a mermaid'; 'It was fantastic, you should have been there'.*

#### **Session Leader feedback:**

Session leaders provided feedback for all sessions delivered to the young carers. The comments below are an amalgamation of their evaluation of these sessions.

1. Session leaders unanimously reported that sessions were well received by participants. Comments included:

- *'The children enjoyed themselves and had great fun'*
- *'Lots of keen participants, all very focused and inventive with the themes/ activities'*
- *'Initially this group were shy as hardly any of them knew each other. But the 2 days gave enough time for people to interact through the different activities and choose who they would like to make friends with ... the pace and variety of things to do helped to keep them interested, but not too pressured ...'*

2. Regarding how participants benefited:

- *'There was lots of positive play between the children .... They were creative with materials and inspired to make other things, as well as the planned ones'*
- *'Interacting with each other, and they played at lunch time with their space suits on. They had great fun'*
- *'The children helped each other ..... All creations were taken home keenly. The children were particularly inventive with the monster making and clay work and kept it going in to their break time'.*

3. Location:

- *'The space is lovely ... we were able to adapt it to slightly cosier areas for craft work and used the centre for games and improvisation'*

4. Regarding running further sessions:

- *'Having broken the social ice and introduced this way of working we could develop longer term projects with great benefits'.*
- *'These are children who rarely get the chance to explore their imaginations and interact with children who are under-going similar life experiences. The level of change we saw in the children through the day made the benefits to them very clear. These children could only benefit greatly from more sessions of this kind'.*
- *I think they would enjoy further sessions. Obviously regular groups create a sense of community which is very helpful for young carers.*

## **2. TIVERTON & CULLUMPTON YOUNG CARERS**

We delivered 6 sessions to young carers from Tiverton and Cullumpton, held at various locations: Tiverton Youth Club, Cullumpton Youth Club and the Community Hut at Belmont Park in Exeter. There was one 2 day event, 'The Hungry Caterpillar'. The sessions attracted between 12 to 18 young people and were enthusiastically received. Although the children were not asked to complete questionnaires, session leaders and the young carer's worker provided a good insight into the reactions of participants.

### **Session Leader feedback:**

1. How the sessions were received:

- *'All of the activities were well received. Everybody joined in'.*
- *'The group were very attentive and seemed quite gripped by the telling of the story – they engaged fully in all the activities and the performance ....'*

2. How participants benefitted:

- *'Most of the children in this group are familiar with each other, they interact extremely well, are patient and warm with each other, across the ages. They demonstrate how much can be achieved when a group has the opportunity to meet and do creative activities together ... Their enthusiasm just increased throughout the day, they were a real joy to work with'.*
- *'On both occasions we witnessed new members to Young Carers arriving very shy and nervous, but leaving relaxed, happy and with new friends ... a welcome break and release of energy and focus for themselves'.*

3. How were the location/ facilities

- *'Really great locations'*

Regarding running further sessions with this group?

- *'Yes, there is a need for young carers to escape from reality and enter a fantasy world'.*
- *'Yes, this group is a fine example of just how valuable creative activities are for groups of this kind. The children, despite all the age differences and variety of personalities, have bonded into a kind of supportive and understanding extended family, a group that is all about listening and ensuring that life contains enjoyment and laughter. More creativity could only help build on and increase these positive elements'.*

### **Young Carer's Worker Feedback**

- *'Thanks for the wonderful session you put on for the young carers at Cullumpton. It was lovely to see them all so focussed and involved ....'*

## **YOUNG CARERS SUMMARY**

Young Carers are often growing up in an environment in which the needs of siblings or other family members can mean that their own needs are not prioritised. They may be expected to contribute to the daily, possibly intensive, care of someone else and opportunities to behave as a child can be limited. Being able to have time out and escape into a world of images, texture, noises, play and fantasy can be a great release. Meeting and bonding with others who have similar experiences, through play and creativity, can provide an ongoing source of friendship and comfort. Having the opportunity to take part in an event which is just for them is exciting, rewarding and necessary.

Working with young carers has provided Magic Carpet creative workers with an opportunity to use their skills in new and challenging ways. In particular, the 2 day workshops have seen groups of artists coming together and, through a process of intensive planning, jointly creating exciting, intriguing and engaging activities for children of a wide age range (from 6 – 14yrs), and therefore of mixed levels of ability. As a result of their input the young carers had great fun, learned skills and developed in confidence. The memories they have gained will undoubtedly stay with many of them well into the future.

# ADULT CARERS

## 3. HONITON ADULT CARERS

We have worked with carers in Honiton since the Creative Carers project began. Sessions have been delivered weekly, usually in blocks of 10. Summer and Christmas workshops have also been provided. The group have been through phases of high levels of attendance along with periods of lower numbers of core participants. The project has always been well supported by the Carers Link Worker and additional funding was provided by the Carers team to provide lunches for those who attended. This had the added benefit of making each session an extended event with the opportunity for both creativity and socialising.

Themes during this period included: print-making; clay masks and tiles; willow garden decorations; animation; shadow puppetry - 'Into the Woods'; a group sea-scape collage (now on display at Pine Park residential home in Honiton). Additionally, a Christmas workshop was delivered during which participants made a range of decorations. An exhibition of work was displayed at Honiton library for 2 weeks in December 08. This provided an opportunity for participants to display their work in public – a tremendous achievement for individuals who had typically previously lacked confidence in their artistic abilities.

### Results: what participants said

On 3 separate occasions during the final year participants were asked to complete feedback questionnaires. 11 completed forms were returned. Some of the comments are recorded below.

1. Is there anything you particularly enjoyed or did not enjoy about the sessions?
  - *The creativity, opening my mind to arts which would otherwise not have been in my experience. Meeting new people.*
  - *I very much enjoyed all the sessions – especially the printing/ pottery and animation.*
  - *I enjoyed every session, particularly using 3 dimensional materials, e.g. clay and willow.*
2. Participants were asked to rate their experiences on a scale of 1 to 10. The results, as averages were:
  - Content of the sessions: 9.8
  - Enjoyment: 9.9
  - Access: 9.7
  - Relaxation: 9.4
3. Did sessions live up to your expectations?
  - *They were lovely and far exceeded expectations.*
  - *Yes – they were excellent*
4. Participants were asked about the extent to which their knowledge of and confidence in the arts had changed since coming to sessions. 1 person said 'A Bit', 3 'Quite a Bit' and 7 'A lot'.
5. In relation to attending further Magic Carpet sessions, participants unanimously stated that they would like to.
6. Just over half of those who completed the questionnaire said that they would like to continue their involvement with the arts outside of Magic Carpet sessions. However, they also stated that this would have to fit in with their caring responsibilities:
  - *Only if I can access something on my days off.*
  - *I would like to if I can find accessibility within my caring role.*
7. All reported that they had met other carers who they would be staying in contact with.

8. Over half of respondents reported that the skills they had gained as a result of coming to sessions had impacted positively on their relationship with their cared for. Some stated that they would use the creative skills they had learned in activities with them at home. Others stated that:

- *.... I am more refreshed, animated etc and have things to show them and talk to them about.*
- *... mostly I am refreshed and therefore feel I have more energy to bring to the home and less resentment.*

9. Final comments:

- *Just thank you for the project and PLEASE don't let the funding stop.*
- *Thank you very much for the wonderful sessions.*
- *So many thanks to all concerned, especially the artists.*
- *Just be more than gutted if the funding stops as it has become such a big part of my life.*
- *I would like to thank all the organisers and tutors for their enthusiasm in arranging the sessions. I enjoy art but don't always find the time or energy to do it at home. The best thing is that the 'end product' is not the main reason, the company of other 'artists'/ carers was so important'.*

Additionally, during the year individuals who had not attended for some time were contacted by telephone for feedback on their reasons, and to establish whether it would help to make changes to service delivery. Reasons given for non-attendance included illness, holidays and general caring demands. No one indicated that making changes to the programme would increase the prospect of their attendance.

### **Session Leader Feedback**

1. Session leaders reported than sessions were generally received. On occasion there were factors which affected group dynamics, such as a more dominant member or low numbers.

2. In relation to how participants benefited:

- *They really liked the activity and its immediate rewards ... (printing)*
- *They are all very supportive of each other and through discussions have shared information relevant to their offspring ...*

3. The location was well received by participants who could park easily and get lunch. Artists were less enthusiastic for practical reasons such as access to sinks and decent work surfaces.

4. In relation to running further sessions with this group:

- *The dynamics of the group grows from strength to strength and the friendships which have been made are a benefit. The use of art is the foundation to this as it helps to relax the participants, along with the enjoyment of learning something new and the fun they have doing so.*
- *The group has become dependent on the project as a place to meet and be creative. I think the session should run again, but only after a break. I think it would be healthy for one or two of the group to find different outlets for what they need .....*
- *Yes. They really enjoy experiencing new art activities and were enthusiastic to do more. Also there was a lot of sharing in conversation ...'*

### **Summary**

The majority of participants who attended during the final year of the project were established, core group members who evidently continued to enjoy and benefit from the creative opportunities they were offered. Confidence amongst these individuals continued to grow, as evidenced by their willingness to display their work in an exhibition, and their enthusiasm for producing a joint piece of work which is now on permanent display. The group became a supportive network. One of the drawbacks to this is that individuals can become dependent on the sessions. Difficulties can

emerge when new individuals join, altering the dynamics of the established core group. The skills of session leaders are very evident at such times, when they are called upon not only to offer creative input but also to facilitate sensitive discussions and, on occasion, respond to distress or disputes.

Although the impact of these sessions upon those who are cared for is largely hidden, it is notable that participants recognised a link between the benefits they personally gained and their ability to cope at home. Having time out for themselves, feeling more relaxed and energised resulted in their having more patience, and interesting things to discuss with their cared for.

#### 4. EXETER ADULT CARERS VISUAL ART

The Exeter Creative Carers project first came into existence in January 2008. Since then it has gone from strength to strength, becoming a dynamic group of committed participants. As a consequence of feedback, more sessions have been provided for this group than for any other during the past year. These have included regular, weekly sessions and one-off summer and Christmas workshops. Sessions have mainly been provided by one artist, contributing to continuity and group bonding. However, on certain occasions visiting artists have been invited to attend. This has had the benefit of introducing the group to new techniques and broadening their opportunity to experience and learn from different artists. Themes have included: felt making; batik; printing; watercolour painting; fabric painting; clay; mosaic; willow sculpture; ceramic painting; card making; decorations.

Participants were asked to complete questionnaires on 3 separate occasions during the year: June 08, July 08 and March 09. Two focus groups were conducted, in November 08 and May 09.

#### **Results: what participants said**

##### **Questionnaire feedback (14 returned):**

1. Is there anything you particularly enjoyed or did not enjoy about the sessions?
  - *I particularly enjoyed the group members themselves! I also enjoyed feeling so 'free' – to enjoy myself, to 'have a go', not to feel judged, to feel valued and once to do something that quite impressed me!*
  - *The encouraging atmosphere and the fun of the sessions.*
  - *I loved having everything set out and ready and not having to clear up afterwards!*
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 participants rated the following:
  - *Session content: 9.3*
  - *Enjoyment: 9.6*
  - *Access: 8.7*
  - *Relaxation: 9*
3. Did the sessions live up to your expectations?
  - *I did not really have any expectations but my self confidence/ self esteem/ self awareness have all been positively affected.*
  - *They were great.*
  - *Yes – brilliant! Jess comes up with such fun ideas and provides excellent materials.*
4. To what extent has your knowledge of and confidence in the arts changed?
  - *A Little Bit: 3*
  - *Quite a Bit: 8*
  - *A Lot: 3*
5. All participants said they would like to attend further Magic Carpet sessions.

6. The majority said that in the future they intended, or hoped, to continue their involvement in the arts outside of Magic Carpet sessions. Comments included:

- *Probably – if they are accessible.*
- *Yes – adult ed class.*
- *Yes, I am hoping to get involved with other groups.*
- *I have joined a landscape painting course.*

7. Most people felt that had met other carers during the sessions that they would stay in contact with.

8. Many said that they would use skills they had learned at home with their cared for. Comments included:

- *The person I care for has begun some drawing at home.*
- *Yes – use more creative stimulation.*
- *Rather than use them directly with my mum I think they have left me feeling stronger to deal with her, and to feel I do still have my own personality ... somewhere!?*

9. Other comments:

- *Thank you so much for the art and drama – made a big difference and enriched my life.*
- *I felt less comfortable in the art, I felt one person dominated the group and that was one reason, though not the only one, of why I stopped going.*
- *The tutor was great.*
- *It's unbelievable what I've got out of these sessions ..... I would never have done this before.*
- *I can't thank Magic Carpet enough for bringing this little bit of light into my life.*

### **Focus group feedback:**

At each focus group 5 participants were present.

The first focus group was very informal. Participants stated that they would like further sessions and were pleased to hear that a further block would be running. They commented on location, preferring the new venue (the Phew Centre) due to accessibility and space. Much of the discussion focussed on their interest in further drama sessions and whether this would be possible (see next section).

The second focus group followed a more structured format using a list of pre-prepared questions regarding the impact of Magic Carpet sessions. Responses were as follows:

1. Have your creative skills changed?

- *They are better.*
- *You have the opportunity to try things you wouldn't normally do.*

2. Has your self confidence changed?

- *My confidence has grown. I'm more willing to try new things, have a go. It's a safe place and I'm less likely to be bothered by what others think. Coming here, it doesn't matter what you produce, there's no judgement.*
- *I went on an acrylic course ... I had to do a piece of work ... previously I would have thought I couldn't do it, but these sessions have raised my confidence, and I did it.*
- *I have put my priorities right – now if other things come up I refuse to do them – Magic Carpet is number 1!*

3. Has your motivation changed?

- *Coming to Magic Carpet has motivated me to go to another activity. I wouldn't have done this before. If I had the time and the money I would do other courses.*

- *I am now motivated to buy a shed and set up my own 'workshop'.*
  - *It helps me to get up in the morning. I have gone out for days out more often, on my own.*
4. Have your support networks increased?
- *We would like to meet up again in the future with each other.*
  - *We help each other, give each other ideas.*
  - *Coming here, you forget about your responsibilities. You don't have to explain yourself, people understand.*
5. Have you used any of your creative skills with the person you care for?
- *Yes, I have used an idea.*
  - *It's not always possible, due to their behaviour and capabilities.*
  - *My partner is interested in the work I bring home and has started looking at art books.*
  - *They are always very interested in what I've been doing.*
6. Have you developed other skills which you use with the person you care for?
- *You can step back and see things more clearly.*
  - *I feel more relaxed and able to cope.*
  - *Because you are feeling more relaxed you have a bit more patience.*
6. Has your health and well being, or that of your cared for, improved in any way?
- *Yes, I'm more relaxed.*
  - *Yes, because we've been looking after ourselves, recharging our batteries.*
  - *Magic Carpet is saving the NHS money, reducing the prospect of stress-related illnesses & saving those we care for from being stressed.*
  - *It gives me something to focus on in the week, distracts me. I enjoy thinking about what we'll be doing in sessions. Because the sessions are relaxed I don't worry if I'm late (because of a caring issue) – no-one will criticise.*
  - *If you are more relaxed, they are more relaxed.*
7. Other comments
- *There are lots of things to do out there, but they are usually at times that aren't convenient.*

### **Session Leader Feedback**

1. How sessions were received by participants.
- *All went well. A mixture of new faces as well as several familiar ones. All activities were enjoyed, commented on positively. A lot of open talking, all very appreciative of having an opportunity to relax and be creative.*
  - *They seemed to find the session stimulating, supportive, engaging and creative with really good results.*
  - *Participants turned up early, demonstrating enthusiasm and were keen to start. Joined in all activities, got on very well with each other, were shocked by how fast the time went, were keen to learn and produced many successful art works (feedback from summer workshops).*
2. How participants benefitted.
- *They joined in activities with which they were unfamiliar and expressed enjoyment at the experience and the results. Telephone numbers were exchanged between participants who had never met before & they arranged to meet for coffee. It was clear they wanted to offer each other support.*
  - *Lots of good communication, sometimes maybe a bit too open about personal info.*
  - *Increased creative skills/ confidence/ self esteem. Release from other pressures.*
  - *Some came in looking low, depressed & expressed how difficult things were for them at the moment. There was a lot of evidence of support between carers throughout the day,*

*sharing of experiences. By the end quite a few left in pairs, keen to take work ... clearly looking lifted by all aspects of the day's experience (feedback from summer workshops).*

3. Session leaders commented that the location and facilities were good.

4. In relation to running future sessions:

- *Absolutely, it is essential for the carers to have the opportunity to interact with each other, in order to feel that they are not alone, and to vent their feelings in order to release and lighten them through creative expression.*
- *Regular classes of this kind would guarantee cohesion and positive direction of this group.*
- *Yes – they need ongoing support and creative outlet and interaction in this kind of relaxed, supportive group.*

5. Other comments:

- *A few members of the group have met up since the last session, offering support to each other. They arrived together which is great evidence of developing friendships.*
- *There has been increased evidence of the carers wanting to take on more responsibility during the sessions, helping set-up, clear-up, taking the initiative with introductions to new members etc. They also seem to have become increasingly aware of and tolerant of each others needs .... The sessions have clearly become increasingly valued by the group, who are keen to invest in them now and share the pleasure they take in them.*
- *Boundaries were hard work ... always late to finish ... they completely lost themselves in their art work.*

## **Summary**

The feedback from both carers and session leaders highlights the very positive response to this project, how valued it has been and the wide range of benefits felt by participants. As with the Honiton groups, there have been times when the dynamics of the group and the needs of individuals have required the session leader to use facilitation skills in a sensitive and understanding manner, whilst retaining the focus on the creative purpose of the session. By and large the evidence is that individuals have responded well to the way in which sessions have been delivered, forging friendships and taking skills learned out of the classroom to help in their relations with their cared for, and in their on-going quest to invest in their own health and well being.

## **5. EXETER ADULT CARERS DRAMA**

Initially, a block of 10 drama sessions were provided for Exeter carers, dating back to April 08. This block was completed at the beginning of this final year of the project. Participants were not asked to complete evaluation forms, although verbal feedback was received. Further sessions were offered in Autumn but due to the low uptake they were not continued. Feedback indicated that this was due to a clash with other responsibilities, or holidays. Carers felt that those who had not tried it before may have been anxious about getting involved in drama. To gauge interest for further sessions a letter was sent out in November 08 and, as a result, a further block of 5 sessions was delivered from May to June 09. These sessions covered: expression through movement & dance; script & poem reading; improvisation; reminiscence & scene work; the use of props, costume & instruments.

### **Session Leader Feedback**

1. BLOCK ONE (April 08 – June 08)

How participants benefited:

- *Their creative skills did improve and their willingness to join in and have a go increased as the sessions went on. The group members led the sessions really – always able to come up with new ideas that they wishes to work on.*

Would it be appropriate to run further sessions?

- *Yes, ideally it would be most beneficial to be able to offer drama therapy to this group but drama activity and a chance to be creative, share stories, use costumes, masks, song and dance etc appears to be a good release. A chance to have fun and enjoy time away from the caring role and to have the time and opportunity to care for and about themselves.*

## 2. BLOCK TWO (May 09 – June 09)

How sessions were received/ how participants benefited:

- *The participants clearly enjoyed the set space and time for the sessions. They fed back that they wished it could be a regular, weekly activity ..... They were keen to help plan ... so there was proper 'ownership' of the group .... This clearly helped get creative ideas going and helped individuals open up and share information about themselves which led to more closeness among them. In turn the improvisation, creativity and spontaneity FLOWED.*
- *Because there was no 'right' or 'wrong' ... no one felt threatened in any way and as a consequence people seemed to push beyond their boundaries.*

Location

- *The location and facilities were great! Drinks were provided, the toilets were clean and close to the room, the staff at the Phew Centre were helpful and friendly and the room itself a good size and private.*

Would it be appropriate to run further sessions?

- *(Yes) .... It appeared to be a wonderful release for the women who attended. Their lives are full of doing things for others and just a few hours a week for them to look forward to doing something for themselves in a fun, imaginative and creative way gives them the time and opportunity to focus on themselves and remember **who** they are and **what** they are ....*
- *..... I believe it would be much more beneficial if it could be long term.*

### **Summary**

Although the drama sessions only attracted small numbers of participants, those who did attend were committed and valued the sessions highly. There is an issue about how 'drama' is perceived, by potential participants. Fears about not being any good at it, or being 'exposed' appear to be more acute than for visual art. A number of carers who attended the visual art sessions refused to try out drama for these very reasons. That said, once people are engaged in the process there are clear benefits to be gained in the development of confidence, having fun and the opportunity to bond with others through the process of jointly participating in something different and inventive.

## 6. TIVERTON ADULT CARERS CREATIVE SESSIONS

The Annual Report for the period ending 31/5/08 highlights how the carers in Tiverton initially received the Creative Carers project with the most ambivalence of all carers groups. We therefore entered the final year of the project with a new direction for the group, endeavouring to respond to their feedback and interests, focussing on joint activities to help the group bond and to reduce anxieties about individual capabilities. Some drama techniques were threaded into several sessions, but this was not a main focus given responses to the early drama sessions and subsequent feedback.

During this period 2 joint pieces of art work were produced: a beautiful fabric wall hanging, now on display at the UNITE office in Tiverton, and a stunning 3d cockerel made from slices of metal cans,

now on display at the Heathcoat Community Centre, Tiverton. Both images have been made into postcards, as recognition that the images merit wider distribution and acknowledgement. Other activities have included: batik; mosaic; masks; shadow puppetry and, at the Christmas workshop, making decorations.

### **Results: what participants said**

Questionnaires were completed on 2 occasions (July 08 and September 08), with 10 forms returned. In May 09 a focus group was conducted with 3 carers.

#### **Feedback from Questionnaires:**

1. Is there anything you particularly enjoyed or did not enjoy about the sessions?
  - *Enjoyed everything.*
  - *Getting engrossed. Didn't like the way some of my things turned out.*
  - *Working on a joint project.*
  - *Mosaics.*
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 participants rated the following:
  - *Session content: 9.4*
  - *Enjoyment: 9.4*
  - *Access: 9.1*
  - *Relaxation: 9.5*
3. Participants reported that sessions lived up to their expectations.
4. To what extent has your knowledge of and confidence in the arts changed?
  - A Little Bit: 4
  - Quite a Bit: 3
  - A Lot: 3
5. Most participants indicated that they would like to attend further Magic Carpet sessions.
6. The majority said that they hoped to continue their involvement in the arts outside of Magic Carpet sessions, although most said it would be difficult. Comments included:
  - *I feel I would like to do more at home and perhaps join an art class*
  - *If I have time – I'm a carer*
  - *If I can get away*
  - *Art for beginners*
7. Most participants felt that had met other carers during the sessions that they would stay in contact with.
8. Have you learned any skills which you will use with the person you care for?
  - *Yes, to be patient.*
  - *Not really.*
9. Other Comments:
  - *This was most enjoyable.*
  - *The materials you provide are excellent and inspiring.*

#### **Feedback from the Focus group:**

A structured process, with specific questions was used to guide the focus group. However, people were encouraged to talk freely and voice their opinions.

1. Have your creative skills changed?
  - *They are better, they have widened. I've done things I've never done before and have been amazed at what I've done.*
  - *I've enjoyed it. I have a picture of the banner we did in my kitchen and I look at it every day – it's amazing. It's all down to Cath's amazing guidance.*
2. Has your confidence changed?
  - *I would be more confident to try things. I would normally be afraid to try something like this.*
  - *Most things I like to do in private - it's been of benefit to be with others.*
  - *At the beginning we worried about the quality of our work - I'm no longer so bothered, if it goes wrong, it goes wrong!*
  - *I would like to join a beginners art class.*
3. Has your motivation changed?
  - *It's motivated me to get out and do other things.*
  - *I've had a look at evening classes ...*
4. Have your support networks increased?
  - *It's been a useful arena to talk about caring matters to people who understand and are willing to listen.*
  - *Socialising has been a very important part of it.*
5. Have you been able to use any of your creative skills with the person you care for?
  - *No – it wouldn't be appropriate.*
6. Have you developed other skills?
  - *Because of coming to Magic Carpet I brought some new bold wallpaper for the dining room – it's helped me to take more risks.*
  - *The sessions help me to switch off, concentrate, go back to caring with a different frame of mind, like having a little holiday.*
7. Has your health and well being improved?
  - *It's been emotionally stabilising, very therapeutic.*
  - *I know if I stay at home I'll be miserable.*
  - *It helps with general well being. It doesn't solve any problems, but it makes you feel better.*
8. Has it made a difference to the health & well being of the person you care for?
  - *It makes me a little more tolerant which impacts on them.*

### **Session Leader Feedback**

1. How sessions were received & how participants benefitted:
  - *The sessions were received very positively .... The participants are becoming very supportive of each other.*
  - *They have developed creatively, their confidence has grown, they have made friendships and given each other support.*
  - *Enthusiastically – I was surprised that this group were so definite about choosing to work on a group project such as shadow play.*
2. Do you consider it appropriate to run further sessions?
  - *Yes, this group is well-established; good strong friendships ... they clearly enjoy coming together and benefit from having creative time ...*
  - *As this group continues I can see that the sessions help them to relax. The individuals begin to talk about the difficulties they are going through and the rest of the group understands .... The wall hanging is looking great and the feeling of achieving something that looks good has given confidence. They are now wanting to push their creativity further.*

- *This group runs extremely well, the last session felt sad and they all talked about how they would like it to continue.*

### **Summary**

Having started as a group of strangers who doubted they had any creative ability at all, this group made huge strides which saw them produce some incredible pieces of art work and, more importantly, recognise that the time they spent together was valuable regardless of the 'success' of the project they were working on. They have reported that some good friendships and support networks have evolved. The process of coming together – either to reject or celebrate the creative task in hand – has proved unifying and rewarding and is a real testament to the progress that creative opportunities can produce.

## **7. TIVERTON MENTAL HEALTH CARERS**

Following the success of a series of taster sessions in year 2 of the project, a further block of sessions were scheduled for Autumn/ Winter 2008. Feedback had indicated that participants would find it difficult to attend regular weekly or fortnightly groups and we therefore set up 4 x monthly, 4 hour workshops.

### **Results**

5 participants came to the first session which offered printmaking. Session leader feedback indicates that the workshop was well received and that carers '*enjoyed the session immensely*'. However, no-one turned up to the next session and, following a discussion with the carers link worker, it was decided to cancel future events. It would appear that, although people enjoyed their involvement in creative activities, they were unable to prioritise these sessions and other demands took over.

### **Summary**

As far as we can tell, the creative carer's sessions we delivered were well received and the workshops we offered were designed appropriately to take into account individual interests and commitments. Although we cannot be sure of the exact reasons for people not continuing their involvement with the project, it would appear that the varying demands on this group of carers meant that they were unable to set aside dedicated time to do something they enjoyed and valued.

## **8. HOLLOW LANE CARERS**

The Hollow Lane Saturday Club, linked to Ellen Tinkham School, provides out of school activities for children with specific needs. In an attempt to expand our contact with carers, and particularly those who care for younger children (a group noticeably absent from existing carers sessions), we consulted with the Club and agreed to set up a series of 5 Creative Carer sessions, to be run alongside existing Club facilities. In theory this meant that carers could drop their child at the Club and come straight to the Magic Carpet session, delivered in another room in the same location. Adult carers were also invited to bring their other children (i.e. those not attending the Club session) with them. Themes included: animation; print making; sculpture and storytelling.

### **Results**

There was a low uptake of this service with 2 people attending most sessions. The feedback received, via session leaders, was positive:

- *The participants appeared to enjoy themselves and gained an understanding of how animation is made;*

- *The session was thoroughly enjoyed by the mother and daughter who attended; they produced a whole wall full of prints!*

### **Summary**

These sessions aimed to take creative opportunities to the carers, in a location they were already attending and at a time when their cared for would have other activities to occupy them. We were aware before embarking on this venture that we would be competing with other demands on the carer's time. For many people whose child attends the Club, the time that is made available is used to undertake practical tasks such as shopping or other activities that can be made more difficult if their child is with them. Parents who have a child with specific needs (who may have other siblings) may be particularly needy of creative time out, of an opportunity to look after themselves and of something to take them away from the demands they face daily. Unfortunately, they may also be the people who find it most difficult to find the space to do these things.

## **9. MAYORAL RECEPTION & CARERS FORUM**

At these two annual events, attended by individual carers, carer's organisations and other interested parties, Magic Carpet contributed presentations about the Creative Carer's Project.

## **10. CARERS RECHARGE DAY, FOCUS DAY & PAMPER DAY**

These events offer carers the opportunity to come together and participate in activities which recognise their role and value, provide information and offer the chance to relax and unwind. Creative Carers provided a range of opportunities at each of these days: felt making; card making; tile painting and making & decorating bags from recycled fabric.

### **Session leader feedback**

- *Although some people were initially reluctant ('I can't paint ...') they all seemed to really enjoy taking part.*
- *The carers relaxed into the session, there was lots of chatting and laughing.*
- *Many said they never normally have the time to do such things at home. One person said she hasn't done anything artistic since she was at school where she had been good at art.*
- *It was obvious from the smiling faces that people were enjoying the opportunity .... People who took kits away to make bags up ... could continue to work at home, which seems ideal for carers who may be confined to the house.*

### **Summary**

These events are great ways to engage with a range of carers who might not otherwise have the experience of engaging in creative activities. There were carers who heard about the Creative Carers project through their attendance at a pamper or recharge day, and subsequently came along to the regular carers sessions.

## **11. OTHER**

In conjunction with the Carers Link Service at Exeter CVS, we sought to establish sessions for carers and their cared for, in an effort to reach carers who might not be able to, or choose to, attend sessions independently. Unfortunately, despite identifying dates, times and a location for these sessions the Carer's worker was unable to generate sufficient interest and the sessions did not go ahead. The reasons for this are likely to be varied. It is possible that the carers may have felt that the sessions would have been another pressure on their time; they may have lacked the confidence to engage in creative activities; the person they were caring for may not have been

interested. The circumstances, the motivation and the confidence levels of individuals are a complex set of inter-related factors which will undoubtedly impact on service uptake.

## 12. MOVING ON

Core, regular participants of sessions have frequently indicated that the project has provided them with a highly valued and beneficial opportunity which they wished could continue indefinitely. Various steps have been taken during this final year to encourage individuals to find other ways to express themselves creatively, to receive friendship and support, to continue to build on their confidence & skills, and to constructively move on from Creative Carers. Artists have discussed external opportunities to get involved in the arts, and have informed participants about locally available classes. They have encouraged supportive networks to evolve and for people to exchange contact details. Additionally, a booklet entitled 'Creative Carers: What Next?' was produced and circulated to all participants, providing suggestions for activities both inside and outside of the home.

### **ANNUAL SUMMARY**

- This final year of the Creative Carers project has witnessed the delivery of a range of exciting, innovative and responsive sessions. As with previous years, participants have reported that the sessions are enjoyable, relaxing and fun, that they have learned new skills, developed their confidence, made new friends and have been taken away for a period of time from the responsibility of being a carer.
- There is on-going evidence for the development of strong and supportive friendship networks. Participants clearly value the opportunity to meet with other carers and discuss issues which they are perhaps unable to discuss elsewhere. These friendships have extended beyond the creative sessions and have resulted in people contacting each other and meeting up at other times. There have been occasions when the bond which has developed between certain members has created a dynamic which has been unsettled by the arrival of others. Also, at times, the very real and current difficulties faced by individuals have impinged upon and over-whelmed the group. The facilitation and communication skills of the artists involved have been crucial at these times, demonstrating their ability to manage the creative and emotional elements evident within sessions.
- Carers have continued to report that their involvement in this project has helped them to re-discover, or to develop, an interest in creativity. The wide range of activities offered has helped people to find something of particular interest to them. Some have continued their activities at home, or have joined other groups or courses. For some, their circumstances, both practical and financial, can mean that accessing other art activities is difficult or impossible. Mainstream art classes are not always held at times or locations convenient to caring responsibilities. For some individuals, transport, or the cost of classes, is an issue. Participants have welcomed the fact that the Creative Carers sessions have been offered at no cost to them, with some carers' link teams additionally able to fund occasional respite care, or lunches. (It is unfortunate that funding for respite care is so limited. Carers have reported that, by attending Creative carer's sessions, they are left with very little time to do such essential tasks as shopping, going to the hairdressers or getting the car serviced). Creative Carers has always endeavoured to deliver sessions, as far as possible, at times and in locations to meet the needs of those attending.
- Increased confidence, and the impact that has on their wider lives, has been a significant outcome for carers attending this project. Session leaders reported an evolving enthusiasm amongst even the most nervous of participants for 'having a go' at activities. Carers reported how their increased confidence has impacted upon their life at home, and their

willingness to get more involved in other external activities. As a further consequence, they feel more relaxed, healthier and resilient.

- Overall, during this final year the project has continued to provide services to regular and committed participants who have continued to enjoy and relish their creative opportunities. We have additionally welcomed in new individuals, both to one off events and to core sessions. We have endeavoured, not always successfully, to engage with other, more difficult to reach, carers through our developing relationships with carers workers and organisations. We have sought to bring to people something that they will grow from, value and remember, enabling individuals to experience the benefits of 'taking time to be creative'.

## **FINAL PROJECT COMMENTS & CONCLUSION**

The success of Creative Carers has been dependent upon the ability of artists to deliver stimulating, interesting and high standard creative sessions, whilst responding to the individual emotional and practical needs of those attending. It has also been dependent on the support of the carers and carers support workers who have engaged with Magic Carpet and demonstrated great enthusiasm for our work.

As part of the final evaluation, participating organisations were asked to complete a feedback form, commenting on the success of the project from their point of view. 8 forms were sent out, with 5 returned from: Westbank Healthy Living Centre (Exminster young carers); Exeter CVS; Carers support, St Johns Ambulance; Hollow Lane Club; Volunteering in Health (Tiverton Mental Health services). A range of comments are included below. It is satisfying to know that other organisations working with carers have recognised the value to be gained from involvement in creativity, and that they took time out to let us know.

### **FEEDBACK RESULTS FROM PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS**

#### **1. How do you think carer's responded to the Project?**

- *'Young carers responded positively to all the activities held. We always had plenty of responses on trip letters with numbers always being on or near the max allowed. During the projects the young carers always seemed to enjoy themselves and always went home with plenty of things to show their families'.*
- *'Carers responded very positively ... it became an important part of some carer's lives. All of the artists were absolutely fantastic in engaging with carers and encouraging them to try new things'.*
- *'This was the first time Hollow Lane Club had been able to offer creative workshops for carers. There was initial reluctance because carers didn't think they were 'arty' or that they could spare the time. However, those that did participate responded positively...'*
- *'Enthusiastically! It was great to have something free to offer local carers that was fun, creative and different to the norm'.*

#### **2. Do you consider that the project has had any positive impact on the lives of those carers who attended our sessions? If so, what is the nature of this impact?**

- *'Providing such projects certainly has a positive impact ... it provides them with a break away from their caring role .... it allows their creative side to develop even in those that would not naturally be interested in arts and crafts. The sessions are always flexible on the day and tailor the children's needs and desires'.*
- *'Carers really valued the opportunity to get together and chat whilst being involved in producing some really beautiful works of art. I saw carers gain in confidence, have the opportunity to make friends and I know that these friendships have been maintained'.*

- *'The carers were able to learn new skills and move away from their caring roles for a couple of hours each week.'*

### **3. If you could make any changes to the project, what would these be?**

- *'I wish we could have attracted more carers, but we marketed and advertised the workshops as widely as possible. I can't think of any changes that would have made it more attractive'.*
- *'On the two day workshop more coordination so we knew how many staff were needed and what Magic Carpet would want us to lead/ be involved in'.*
- *'More local courses in the Teignmouth area'.*

### **4. Do you believe that there is a continuing demand for this type of project?**

- *'Yes.... providing a break that is different from the normal trips to Crealy etc etc. It is also very useful for us as staff as planning such events would be difficult, costly and time consuming'.*
- *'Yes, carers need opportunities to relax and 'lose' themselves in subjects other than being a carer'.*
- *'Carers are not particularly good at 'demanding' activities for themselves. However, I strongly believe that there is a value and need for this type of project'.*

### **5. Any other comments?**

- *'Thank you very much for all your support and hard work with our young carers'.*
- *'The range of activities and variety of workshops that Magic Carpet was able to offer was excellent, as was the quality of the artists. They are always reliable, personable and skilful'.*

## **FINAL CONCLUSION**

Over the past three years the Creative Carers project has evolved from a series of one off creative workshops working with a small group of carers to a programme of regular sessions with a core group of participants, and periodic special events. We have worked with carers from the ages of 5 years to 70+ across geographical areas, delivering sessions designed to respond to the needs of individuals and groups. We have engaged with over 500 individual carers across the project. A range of creative workers, including visual artists, storytellers, musicians and drama therapists have contributed a wealth of skills and experience to create a dynamic and responsive programme.

This report highlights the responses of participants and there is overwhelming evidence that they have not only enjoyed their experience of being creative, but have developed skills, confidence, and friendships that they would not previously have imagined. The impact may best be summed up by the comment of one carer:

*'These sessions have really opened up my life. I have met lovely people and so talented. It has given me the courage to try things myself and I am slowly gaining confidence in my ability. I look forward to these sessions. They are never boring and I have learned a lot'.*

Jacky Cox  
| Creative Carers Project Co-ordinator  
25/9/09