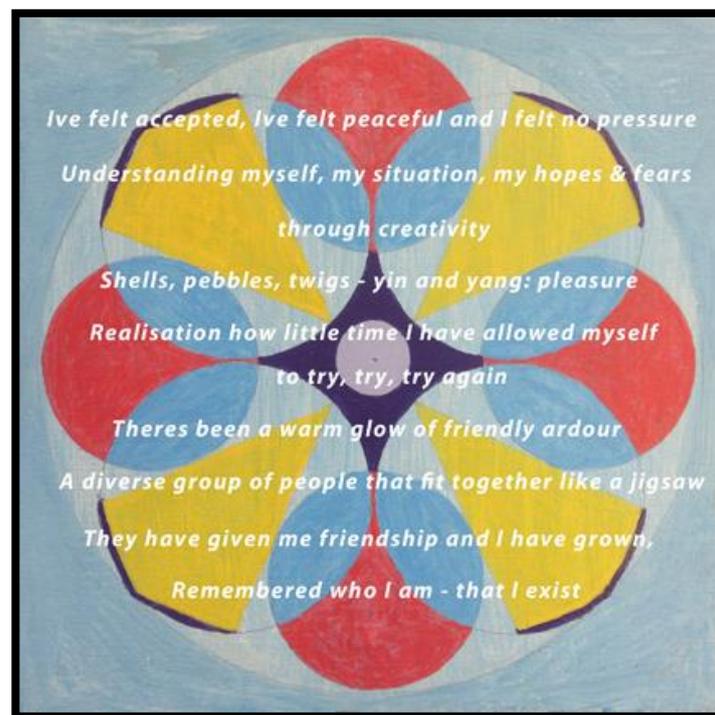




# **A social return on investment evaluation of the St Helens Creative Alternatives arts on prescription programme**

**Reporting period: June 2015 – July 2016**

**Gayle Whelan, Helen Holden and Jessica  
Bockler**



The research conducted in this report was commissioned by Creative Alternatives, Saint Helens. This report has been researched and written by Research Fellow Gayle Whelan at the Institute of Cultural Capital and the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool. The final compilation of the report was supported by Helen Holden, project coordinator for Creative Alternatives in St. Helens, Sheryl Clowes, project support worker, and Jessica Bockler, director. Creative Alternatives' artists Selina Dunne, John Ayling, Sarah Jane Richards and Hazel Mutch further contributed sections to the report, reflecting on the group dynamics and processes unfolding in their respective core workshops.

The Institute of Cultural Capital is a strategic collaboration between the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. The academic research institute conducts research which aims to consider a cultural society for all, shifting the general perception that 'culture' is simply about ideas and artefacts, or venues and performances, but is more about everything we do together ([www.http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/](http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/)).

The Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University supports multi-disciplinary approaches to public health, and delivers intelligence and evidence to inform public health policy and practice (<http://www.cph.org.uk/>).

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# Executive Summary

**By Helen Holden and Jessica Bockler**

## **1. Mental Health in St.Helens**

Mental health in St. Helens is worse than the national average, with 35 people per 1,000 population claiming Incapacity Benefit for mental health reasons, compared with 27 in England. The borough has a high number of people with mental illness who are in receipt of welfare benefits (including pensions) of which 1,310 are classified as long-term unemployed. Research shows there are strong links between low income, loneliness and isolation in communities and in particular amongst older people (Age UK, 2014). GP diagnoses of depression is 7.5% of the adult population (18+) compared with 5.8% in England as a whole (source: mental health intelligence profiles QOF 2012/13). There are twice as many attendances at A&E for psychiatric disorders per 100,000 population - 524.1 in St. Helens, compared with 243.5 for England.

## **2. Social prescribing and the Creative Alternatives model**

With a large burden of England's NHS budget spent on dealing with mental disorders (£11.48bn in 2012/13) (Nuffield Trust, 2015) there is a drive to reduce these costs by offering community-based interventions, typically using social prescription models. There is a growing understanding that social prescribing positively affects three key stakeholder groups (Dayson, 2014): the participants and their networks experiencing an improvement in their health and wellbeing; the local public sector (health bodies which may experience a reduction in the proportion of people drawing on their resources); and the local voluntary sector which may experience enhanced service output and sustainability.

Creative Alternatives follows an innovative 'arts on prescription/social prescribing' model, in which health and care professionals can refer individuals to arts-based activities in a bid to improve health outcomes. Evidence is gathering on the efficacy of social prescribing to improve, promote and protect people's health and wellbeing, specifically in the field of arts and creativity. Reported benefits of arts on prescription include:

- Self-management and skills development
- Building self-esteem, resilience and confidence
- Improved physical activity and health
- Increased social participation, networks and inclusion
- Self-knowledge and personal development
- Increased citizenship through volunteering, education & employment

In June 2015 St.Helens Public Health commissioned the Alef Trust, a North West based social enterprise dedicated to transformative education and community development, to deliver ‘Creative Alternatives,’ a 12-month pilot arts on prescription programme modelled on the successful service which has been delivered in the borough of Sefton since 2006. The pilot was aimed at St.Helens residents who are experiencing mild to moderate stress, anxiety or depression. Creative Alternatives St.Helens is part of the ‘Cultural Hubs – Arts in Libraries Programme’ and provides an opportunity to explore a range of arts activities which enhance self-expression, relaxation and social interaction within a creative core workshop programme that lasts over a period of 12 weekly sessions.

### **3. Success Measures**

The St. Helens pilot programme operated to the following benchmarks to measure success:

- At least 70 participants over the pilot period (June 2015 – May 2016)
- At least 50 participants completing the 12-week programme, having missed fewer than three sessions
- An average SWEMWBs (short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale) increase from programme start to end of 3.5 points
- 50% increase in health-based outcomes
- Half of all programme participants attend further community-based activities

### **4. Outputs and Impact to date**

- **63** people have participated in taster sessions at St.Helens’ libraries
- **90** referrals have been submitted (**58** self-referrals and **32** professional referrals)
- To date, **58** clients have actively engaged with the core workshop programme and taster session
- A total of **53** people have successfully completed the programme, attending six or more workshops and taster session
- **SWEMWBS evaluation** thus far shows an average improvement of **3.6** points by week 5 and an average improvement of **5.2** points at programme exit.
- **Lifestyle evaluation** thus far indicates improvement particularly in the following areas:
  - ✓ **Physical activity: 52%** of participants improved / much improved
  - ✓ **GP visits: 27%** of participants reduced / much reduced their visits
  - ✓ **Social activity: 60%** of participants increased
  - ✓ **Mental health: 69%** of participants improved / much improved

- ✓ Additionally **42%** reported uptake of volunteering, **40%** uptake of education and **70%** reported accessing cultural activities in St.Helens.
- **Qualitative evaluation** indicates that the programme encourages playful self-exploration and expression, leading to improved self-care, increased self-esteem and confidence, as well as enhancing social networks and active citizenship. The artist diaries, as well as ongoing dialogue with participants give clear insight into how individuals are flourishing in the groups and are developing new friendships and skills.

## **5. What we have learnt so far...**

In the main Creative Alternatives in St.Helens has had a very positive response from all the stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Referral sources have ranged widely, coming from organisations and health bodies across the borough, but it is notable that more than half of the clients have self-referred in to the programme. Further, 77% of people who have completed the programme to date are self-referrals, indicating that the programme might be more suited to those whose initial motivations levels are higher and are able to make a regular commitment to attend the weekly sessions.

The SROI (social return on investment) ratio generated by the programme shows that for every one pound input into the programme, a total of £11.55 is returned in social value.

*“Before joining Creative Alternatives I felt like I’d lost sense of who I was and like I was trapped in a dark place. Since taking part I can now see light again and have gained confidence in the person that I used to be. The creative process has helped me do that and I get lost in drawing and painting for hours on end. I now also feel confident that I can join new groups and meet new people. Without Creative Alternatives I honestly think I would still be at home feeling lost and alone in the darkness.”*

*Creative Alternatives participant*

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## Background

St. Helens is one of five local authorities in Merseyside and has a population of 177,188 residents (ONS Mid-year estimate 2014<sup>1</sup>). The town has rich links to the industrial revolution, with coal mines and a world famous glass industry. With the creation of strong public and private sector partnerships St. Helens has undergone considerable positive change locally, with the completion of the new Saints stadium Langtree Park, renewed transport facilities such as Central Station, the development of new business premises, the new Town Centre College Campus, improvements to parks and open spaces, and significant levels of new housing. St. Helens has a similar aging population structure to England, however with a higher proportion of people aged 65 years and over and proportionally fewer people of working age (16-64 years) this can lead to an increase in demand and pressure upon the health and social care services. St. Helens' employment rate is 67.2% (Apr14 - Mar15)<sup>2</sup>. Overall, St. Helens is now ranked the 51<sup>st</sup> most deprived local authority in England out of 326. St. Helens has improved its relative deprivation ranking across 5 out of 6 domains between 2007 and 2010. Life expectancy in the town is lower than the England average - 78.1 years for males and females 81.6 years<sup>3</sup>, compared with 79.4 years and 83.1 respectively. There is also significant variation between wards in the borough, with a difference of 10.2 years between males living in the Town Centre ward and Rainford ward. The gap is slightly smaller for females, with a variation of 7.3 years between Parr Ward and Eccleston Ward.

The two main causes of death in St. Helens are cancers (28%) and cardiovascular diseases (CVD) (25%) including heart diseases and strokes. The rate of early deaths due to cancer in St. Helens has fallen in recent years and is now statistically similar to England. However, early mortality rates due to respiratory disease are significantly worse than England, and alcohol misuse remains a problem locally. A relatively high proportion of residents perceive their state of health to be bad. 6.48% of residents in St. Helens self-reported their health as bad and 1.79% perceived their health to be very bad. The data confirms what we already know of the comparatively poor health of the borough and reflects the demographic profile that

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<sup>1</sup> [www.sthelens.gov.uk/media/648782/jsna\\_2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk/media/648782/jsna_2014_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [share.sthelens.gov.uk/IAS/resource/view?resourceId=124](http://share.sthelens.gov.uk/IAS/resource/view?resourceId=124)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.phoutcomes.info/public-health-outcomes-framework#page/3/gid/1000044/pat/6/par/E12000002/ati/102/are/E06000008/iid/40101/age/2/sex/4>

of an ageing population with greater proportions of manual and unskilled occupations. St. Helens has a high percent of carers – almost twice the national average – with two percent of the town’s population (3,440) people receiving carers’ allowance, two-thirds of whom (2,280) are female. St. Helens also has the highest proportion of residents (12.9%) providing unpaid care in the NW and the 4th highest in England. The average for England is 10.2%.

The number and proportion of people who are unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability, as reported in the most recent Census Survey, shows that 7% of the population (8,638) are unable to work due to sickness or disability, compared with an England average of four per cent.

Research shows that around one in four people experience mental ill-health; an estimated quarter of the population experience common mental health problems in any given year and that approximately 50% of people will have conditions severe enough to require treatment including medication or psychological therapies (NHS Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group, 2014). NHS Data shows that in 2008/09, people with physical symptoms caused by psychological distress accounted for: one in five new primary care consultations; seven per cent of all prescriptions; 25% of outpatient care; eight per cent of inpatient bed days; and five percent of A&E attendances, costing an estimated £3 billion per year to the NHS (based on 2008/09 prices) (Department of Health, 2014).

Mental health in St. Helens is worse than the national average, with 35 people per 1,000 population claiming Incapacity Benefit for mental health reasons, compared with 27 in England. St. Helens is not unlike many industrial towns where historical factors and the economic infrastructure of the town mean that the impact of mental health issues on the population are complex and multi-faceted. The town has a high number of people with mental illness who are in receipt of welfare benefits (including pensions) of which 1,310 are classified as long-term unemployed. Research shows there are strong links between low income, loneliness and isolation in communities and in particular amongst older people (Age UK, 2014). GP diagnoses of depression is 7.5% of the adult population (18+) compared with 5.8% in England as a whole (source: mental health intelligence profiles QOF 2012/13). This may be due to there being a larger prevalence of depression in St. Helens or better recognition within primary care than other areas of the country. There are twice as many attendances at A&E for psychiatric disorders per 100,000 population - 524.1 in St. Helens, compared with 243.5 for England.

With a large burden of England’s NHS budget spent on dealing with mental disorders (£11.48bn in 2012/13) (Nuffield Trust, 2015) there is a drive to reduce these costs by offering community-based interventions, typically using social

prescription models. Social prescribing initiatives are based on the idea that many people with non-clinical needs often present to primary care for treatment. There is a growing understanding that through community-based interventions, the benefits of social prescribing would directly and indirectly affect three key stakeholder groups (Dayson, 2014): the participants and their networks (family, friends, carers) experiencing a potential change in their health and wellbeing; the local public sector, in particular health bodies who may experience a reduction in the proportion of people drawing on their resources; and the local voluntary community sector who by delivering/supporting socially prescribed services have increased access to individuals which has the potential to improve their services' output, delivery and sustainability.



# Arts on prescription and social prescribing

Creative Alternatives follows an innovative ‘arts on prescription/social prescribing’ model, whereby health and other professionals can refer individuals to community-based non-medical initiatives in a bid to improve or increase health outcomes. Evidence is gathering on the efficacy of social prescribing interventions to improve, promote and protect people’s health and wellbeing, specifically in the field of arts and creativity. However, there is no clear definition for the term ‘social prescribing’ and it can relate to many models which typically offer a referral process into the programme. Many types of activities offered through social prescribing are often labelled as ‘arts for health’, ‘arts on prescription’, ‘exercise on prescription’ and ‘prescription for learning’ (Friedli, 2007).

Social prescribing can be used instead of, or as well as traditional medical interventions. Social prescribing is an umbrella phrase that refers to a framework of programmes that encourage individuals to learn skills in coping and self-care.

## What are the benefits of social prescribing?

- Self-management and skills development
- Building self-esteem and confidence
- Improved physical health
- Increased social participation, networks and inclusion
- Self-knowledge and personal development
- Money and debt management

To further support the work of Creative Alternatives, other local social prescribing programmes include<sup>4</sup>:

- Reading Well - Books on Prescription
- Learning on Prescription – Learn to Grow (1 year national pilot delivered by Adult and Community Learning)
- Lifestyles Referral
- Get Yourself Outdoors.

## Benefits of the arts

*“From Hippocrates to the industrial revolution, the value of a rounded creative and imaginative life to bodily and mental well-being has been taken as a fact. Now we*

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<sup>4</sup> For further information about these programmes and other health and wellbeing advice in St. Helens visit: [www.healthysthelens.co.uk](http://www.healthysthelens.co.uk) and [www.live-lifewell.net](http://www.live-lifewell.net) or call Healthy St. Helens 0300 300 0103.

*in the UK are rediscovering that wisdom by linking art with health in social policy and strategies that are influencing the international debate.”*

*(Arts Council England, Department of Health & Culture Northwest, Cultural Medicine, 2005)*

Social prescribing models complement the government’s current policy on tackling health inequalities and their ambition to reduce healthcare costs, while enhancing the quality and sustainability of the NHS. Similarly, social prescribing models respond to the governments appeal for solutions to overcome the burden of mental health. However, it is acknowledged that while there is growing enthusiasm for social prescribing models, there is a lack of robust evidence and comprehensive evaluations to demonstrate its economic and long-term health benefits (Kinsella, 2015). There are also issues concerning the long-term effects as potential savings to the NHS may not be realised for many years to come, and even if demand on services were to be reduced, the causation may not be proved.

There is also growing evidence of the link between the creative arts and improved mental health and wellbeing (e.g. (Bungay and Clift, 2010)); that frequent dancing, drama and crafts activity are significant predictors of greater happiness (Fujiwara, 2015). A recent review of the evidence base around Arts on Prescription (AoP) claims that the evidence from current evaluations is not robust enough to instigate a wide-scale implementation of AoP schemes in the UK (Bungay and Clift, 2015). Over the past decade there have been an increasing number of AoP models being piloted and evaluated across the UK, many of which report reductions in depression and anxiety and improvements in mental wellbeing and social inclusion. Often the outcome data reported derives from qualitative evidence, although there were a number of evaluations using validated data tools, particularly WEMWBS (Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale). A shared limitation with many of the AoP schemes’ evaluations was that the long term outcomes were not reported – probably due to the infancy of many programmes and models.



## **Creative Alternatives St. Helens**

Creative Alternatives is an arts on prescription programme which offers a range of stimulating, creative and artistic activities which to those suffering mild to moderate mental health illness. The therapeutic group sessions run over 12 weeks and are framed by a 'Welcome Meeting' at the start of a workshop series and a 'Moving Forward' session at the end of programme. The approach is an adaption for St. Helens of Creative Alternatives' successful Sefton model that has been running since September 2006.

In June 2015 St. Helens Public Health commissioned Creative Alternatives to deliver 12-month arts on prescription pilot scheme, open to residents of St. Helens who are experiencing mild to moderate stress, anxiety or depression. Creative Alternatives is funded through St. Helens Council's Public Health Directorate as part of the Cultural Hubs – Arts in Libraries Programme. The Cultural Hubs is an Arts Council England funded programme which offers a wide range of creative and artistic events and participatory activities including performances, plays, gigs, workshops, courses, events and exhibitions, available throughout the year in St. Helens ' network of 13 libraries.

Creative Alternatives provides an opportunity to explore a range of art forms which enhance self-expression, relaxation and social interaction within the weekly creative core workshop groups. Over the duration of the pilot programme, attendees have the opportunity to attend one of six 12-week workshop groups which are offered, each with a maximum of 12 places. The 12 weekly sessions last for two hours and consist of a Welcome Meeting, 10 creative workshops and a Moving Forward session at the end. The creative workshops are led by two artists and the range of creative activities include woodwork, creative writing, mandalas, painting and textiles, with a small element of mindfulness also incorporated into the workshops. Along with the Taster Workshops, Welcome Meetings and Moving Forward sessions, a member of the Creative Alternatives project team is also present at the first artist-led workshop to provide transitional support from the relationship that has been built up thus far and then also at an interim session to check on client's progress in action.

Previous evaluation of the Sefton Creative Alternatives model (Bockler, 2012) shows that the benefits of attending the workshops include: increased confidence and self-esteem; reduced social isolation and creation of new friendships; increased motivation and wellbeing; broader positive effects on lifestyle choices; increased motivation and resilience, accessing further education, volunteering and

employment; increased participation in the arts and cultural landscape of the local community.

At the end of the 12 weeks, individuals referred on to Creative Alternatives are given the opportunity to be signposted toward other cultural and health and wellbeing schemes that are available in St. Helens.

This St. Helens pilot evaluation aims to understand the potential reported impacts of the Creative Alternatives programme, and has set benchmarks to measure its success, which include:

- At least 70 participants over the pilot period (June 2015 – May 2016)
- At least 50 participants completing the 12 week programme, having missed fewer than three sessions
- An average SWEMWBs increase from beginning to end of 3.5 points
- 50% increase in health-based outcomes
- Half of all attendees attend further community-based activities.



## Methodology

This evaluation involved using a mixed methods approach adopting both quantitative and qualitative tools to assess the wider impact of the social prescribing model on individuals' health and mental wellbeing.

### Methods:

**A scoping exercise** was undertaken by the principal researcher with the support of the project team, with the aim of identifying and clarifying what the evaluation would involve, who the key stakeholders were, and what the analysis would measure and how. This scoping exercise took the form of two meetings with colleagues at Creative Alternatives. This stage of the research set out the purpose, background, resources, activities and timescales for the evaluation. A number of methods and individuals were identified for inclusion in the research, and recruitment and the best approaches to engage with them during the first phase of the research was also discussed and agreed upon.

This report outlines the initial research conducted as part of the evaluation and understanding of the social value created by Creative Alternatives, St. Helens.

**A rapid literature review** was conducted to understand more about public health and mental health in St. Helens, the definition of social prescribing, and its reported benefits.

**A range of engagement activities** were organised to understand more about Creative Alternatives and to determine the outcomes and impacts of the programme in relation to the social value it creates.

A total of 24 people were directly involved in the evaluation, including past and present attendees, project delivery staff and the views of commissioning staff. A total of 56 individuals' data was analysed from across the six groups and included questionnaires collected by the programme team as part of the induction and exit meetings as well as longitudinal data.

Qualitative data collection: The researcher attended the last group workshop – a Moving Forward session of one of the groups delivered during the reporting period. The session was observed and data was collected in the form of questionnaires - including SWEMWBs and a Lifestyle Questionnaire developed in-house - and a short discussion took place at the end of the session. The following week, a focus group took place in which attendees were specifically asked about the impact of the programme on their lives and what they had gained from engaging with Creative Alternatives. A case study interview was also conducted with one group member and the Creative Alternatives project coordinator.

Quantitative data collection: The seven item short WEMWBs questionnaire was given to each attendee at the first, middle and end points of the workshop programme. This, along with demographic information and the Lifestyle Questionnaire administered at programme exit was analysed and has been included in this evaluation. Session facilitators' reflective diaries were also analysed.

Longitudinal follow up of individuals who have completed the twelve-week programme, providing feedback on their journey since leaving.

Social value: To determine the cost-effectiveness of the Creative Alternatives programme, this evaluation also considers what social value has been gained through engagement with Creative Alternatives. This has been determined by asking attendees to record what has changed since starting workshops and what impact this has had on their lives; whether anything has changed for them and their families, whether positively or negatively. The subjective costs of these changes have been understood by using indicators to measure the value of this.

### **Social return on investment**

A mixed methods approach was used for the evaluation, which included undertaking an evaluative Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis.

SROI is a framework to assess evidence of value and impact by measuring and accounting for improvements in wellbeing by incorporating social, environmental and economic costs and benefits. SROI allows for the measurement and capture of outcomes that can be intangible and hard to measure, and is therefore useful for evidencing the impact of the Creative Alternatives programme where immediate and longitudinal results are not always possible. This method also enables consideration of the wider impacts of community projects on the areas they thrive in.

The SROI process involves identifying changes as a direct result of an individual's engagement with Creative Alternatives. This approach enables those involved to draw on the changes that have occurred to them as a direct and indirect result of participating in the workshops, and the potential impacts this has on their mental health and wellbeing. The analysis uses a combination of qualitative, quantitative and financial information to estimate the amount of 'value' created by Creative Alternatives programme.

### **The stages to carrying out an evaluative SROI**

***Establishing scope & identifying key stakeholders (scoping activities to analyse and understanding why these have been chosen)***

Initial meetings took place with the programme commissioners and the Creative Alternative team to determine the nature of the evaluation, background to the programme and specific details of the workshop programme.

***Mapping outcomes (stakeholder engagement and mapping outcomes)***

Between September 2015 and July 2016, four focus groups were held with attendees who had previously attended Creative Alternative workshops to establish what had changed for them already as a result of being part of the programme. The focus groups also explored what participants' experiences of the programme were, what impact it had on their lives and what changes may have occurred as a result.

**Outcome(s)**  
*The changes resulting from an activity. The main types of change from the perspective of stakeholders are unintended (unexpected) and intended (expected), positive and negative change.*

Focus group attendees were also asked specific social value related questions, including:

- What is the value of that specific outcome to you?
- What are you able to do differently or what can you do now that you couldn't before?
- If the project was not in place, what would you have to do to achieve the same level of change?

Key outcomes were identified as a result of the focus groups and these are transferred onto an impact map, which helps to calculate the SROI ratio.

***Evidencing outcomes and giving them a value (proxy values)***

Indicators and proxy values for the outcomes were informed through the focus groups as well as looking at proxy measures provided by a number of data sources.

***Establishing impact (deadweight and attribution)***

To further establish the proportion of change (impact) that can be attributed to the Creative Alternatives programme, it was necessary to determine:

**Impact**  
*The difference between the outcome for participants, taking into account what would have happened anyway, the contribution of others and the length of time the outcomes last.*

1. How likely it is the change would have happened anyway (deadweight); and
2. If any other projects/services/organisations/people helped to bring about the change (attribution).

When looking to establish deadweight and attribution, there are a number of aspects to consider:

- **Deadweight**

- How much has it changed by? (what was the level before the project, what is the level now?)
- What are the chances that the change would have happened anyway if the project was not in place?

**Deadweight**

*A measure of the amount of outcome that would have happened even if the activity had not taken place.*

SROI Network (2012)

- **Attribution**

- What other organisations/services/projects/people have helped bring about this change? How much have they contributed to the change?
- What proportion of the change is due to the project only?
- Did or will the contribution from other organisations/services/projects/people change with time? (this question is asked if the SROI is looking at more than one year).

**Attribution**

*An assessment of how much of the outcome was caused by the contribution of other organisations or people.*

Levels of *deadweight* were collected from a number of national and regional data sources, while levels of *attribution* were collected through discussion with the service users/volunteers during the focus groups.

### ***Impact map and calculating the SROI***

The results of the engagement activities with adult attendees (including focus groups, questionnaires and demographic data) were brought together and input into an impact map. The impact map is a pre-prepared spreadsheet separated into the different stakeholder groups vertically, and the inputs and outcomes horizontally. Formulas are inserted into the spreadsheet to calculate the impact value for each indicator, taking into account quantity (the number of people experiencing the change) and impact (quantity times financial proxy, less deadweight and attribution). The impact value of each indicator for all stakeholder groups is totalled and the present value of the project determined. The present value

is the current value of the cash flows discounted by the future value (3.5%).<sup>5</sup> The SROI is conducted by calculating the ratio of return by dividing the present value of the project impact (the total value of the benefits) by the total value of investment.

A sensitivity analysis was carried out where assumptions were made or discrepancies were found in order to assess the robustness of the impact map. This involves adjusting the variables under question and examining the effect on the overall SROI result.

### **Sensitivity Analysis**

*Process by which the sensitivity of an SROI model to changes in different variables is assessed.*

Financial information relating to project delivery costs were given by Creative Alternatives and used to establish the value of all the inputs covering the evaluation period.

When looking at the quantities used in the impact map, estimates derived from the engagement activities were used – some as actual numbers or as representative samples.



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<sup>5</sup> The recommended discount rate for public funds (HM Treasury, 2003. The Government Green Book).

# Findings

## Project Outputs

Since the programme has launched there have been a total of **90** referrals with **58** people participating in the core workshop programme at Central Library. By the end of May 2016, a total of 88 creative workshops had been delivered across six groups.

### Referral information:

A total of **90** people have been referred on to the programme since August 2015, **58** of those were self-referrals and **32** professional referrals (see appendix for full table).

### Partner Agencies and Networking

Interest in the Creative Alternatives programme has come from a variety of sources and follow-up enquiries were made by the Project Coordinator and Project Support Worker by email, telephone, face-to-face meetings, leaflet drop-offs, staff presentations and promotional sessions directly with the client group. Contact and promotion of the programme took place using a variety of approaches (for detailed breakdown see appendix 3).

### Workshops

*Assessment Taster Workshops:* Since the programme began in August 2015, 16 taster assessment workshops have been delivered by the Project Coordinator and/or the Project Support Worker. Taster workshops served as an initial opportunity to gain a better understanding of what Creative Alternatives offers and whether it is something individuals want to pursue without having to make an immediate commitment. The taster sessions usually take place in the room where the core workshop programme takes place and attendees also get to meet others who are interested in signing up to Creative Alternatives. These sessions usually involve an overview of what the programme entails; a simple creative activity that allows people express their hopes, aspirations and/or fears; and a short mindfulness meditation.

Location	Date	Attendees
Central	10 Aug	4
Thatto Heath	17 Aug	3
Central	21 Aug	5
Central	2 Sept	4
Central	10 Sept	4
Thatto Heath	14 Sept	2

Thatto Heath	26 Oct	1
Central	10 Nov	4
Central	24 Nov	3
Central	4 Dec	5
Central	8 Dec	5
Central	5 Jan	7
Central	7 Jan	6
Central	2 Feb	4
Central	9 Feb	3
Central	16 Feb	4
Total		63

*Core Workshop Attendance:* Between September 2015 and May 2016, six core workshop groups took place at St.Helens Central Library each consisting of 12 weekly sessions, the first being a Welcome Meeting followed by 10 artist led workshops and then the last session is a Moving Forward workshop. A total of **53** people completed the programme, attending at least six sessions including an initial taster workshop. For each of the six groups, there was an average weekly attendance of seven individuals.

Group	Number starting	Number completing	Average weekly number in attendance
Monday 1	9	9	8
Tuesday 2	7	6	5
Monday 3	12	11	8
Tuesday 4	8	8	6
Monday 5	11	10	8
Tuesday 6	11	9	7
Total	58	53	7

A total of 60 clients were successfully referred on to the core workshop programme with two clients then failing to attend.

Clients who completed 6 or more workshops and taster session	53
Completed in less than allocated time/left early	5
Felt programme was unsuitable for their needs	2
Engaged via telephone then invited to taster session on 1 or more occasions but failed to attend	7
Telephone assessment was unsuccessful	3
Non-starter after accepting place	2

Interested in CA but could not attend due to other commitments or deterioration on health since initial contact	11
Expression of interest submitted & referral information sent but did not respond	7
Potential clients directly engaged with via promotional sessions	124

Reasons for clients not being able to take part in the programme and/or complete the programme have included:

- Deterioration in physical health/increase in pain
- Mobility issues preventing from attending (eg. needed taxi to access programme but could not afford one)
- Deterioration in mental health – medication under review/increased anxiety/
- Childcare commitments
- Workshops dates/days clashed with other commitments such as work or other groups
- Begun employment during 12 week programme
- Begun mandatory job centre course during 12 week programme
- Did not feel programme was the right fit for them.

#### *Core Workshop Activities:*

**Welcome Meetings:** The initial meetings serve as an opportunity for new clients to meet as a cohesive group for the first time and to complete monitoring forms. It also addresses any concerns anyone may have surrounding the programme. Everyone is given a Welcome Booklet which sets out the programme’s ethos and creative promise with the benefits surrounding the programme highlighted. The meeting closes with an introduction to mindfulness with a short meditation which aims to support individuals’ wellbeing, while familiarising attendees with the mindfulness-based element of each of the core workshops.

**Moving Forward Workshops:** The final session consists of a mindfulness visualisation exercise which encourages attendees to reflect on their experience and journey of their time on the programme. Through the guided meditation, individuals are encouraged to connect both to their inner process and progress of their mental wellbeing. The follow-up activity is to create a mandala of possibilities through which the clients can map out, through collage, what they feel might be ‘calling them’ at programme exit. This activity allows for attendees to consolidate their experiences and consider what they hope to do or explore in the future. The final part of the session focuses on signposting where attendees are guided to local agencies and organisations that offer both creative and support opportunities in a

'Creative Directory'. A creative 'Home Explorations' pack is also offered to encourage ongoing creative exploration that can be done at home.

### **Client Support**

Having been successfully referred onto the Creative Alternatives programme, attendees have their details recorded and the project team offer moral and/or emotional support throughout the programme, which includes:

- The creation of confidential attendee profiles, a weekly register, a detailed log of all workshops, and client communication trails that are updated throughout the process.
- Initial calls or letters sent to each attendee to confirm their place, including dates of workshops. They are also invited to a Welcome Meeting
- Delivery of Welcome Meeting workshop and Moving Forward session
- Support during week one of the artists' workshop to 'handover' the attendees and introduce them to the artists
- Attending artists' workshops at an interim point to see how they are doing and administer interim evaluation forms
- Artists' diaries - records of made by the artists after each weekly workshop, which include what happened, highlights and issues/concerns.
- Maintaining a relationship with the attendee - this may be if a client hasn't attended a workshop without any communication or a mid-way check-in with all clients to see how they are feeling about CA. This information is then updated in an individual client communication trail.



## **Demographic information**

A total of 57 attendees completed demographic questionnaires, which recorded that there were multiple referral routes into the Creative Alternatives workshops. These included word of mouth, charities, GP, drug and alcohol services, the Job Centre, Condition management programme, NHS and other counselling services, website and newspaper advertisements. All but one client classed themselves as of white British origin. Five were lone parents and ten carers; 20 were classed as socially isolated and were experiencing financial problems. Fourteen attendees were male, and 43 female. Over half (n=38) reported having a disability; including seven who reported learning disability; 22 with additional mental health diagnoses; 24 experienced health problems including 13 individuals reporting chronic pain and six with hearing or visual impairment. Two attendees were aged 18-24; 14 aged 25-40; 30 aged 41-65 and 11 were aged over 65 years. Consequently, 16 were retired; nine were working; and 18 were unemployed.

The majority of those attending Creative Alternatives reported experiencing currently, or most recently, depression and anxiety, some of which was directly related to recent events including bereavement. Some of the group were diagnosed with schizophrenia, dementia, bi-polar and personality disorders. Many attendees attended other local support and creative groups, including a reading group, and support groups delivered by MIND, the mental health charity and local organisations.

Attendees stated that they hoped to achieve many outcomes as a result of attending Creative Alternatives, including meeting like-minded people and learn new skills, building confidence, developing routine, helping themselves and self-management/coping strategies for their mental health condition, taking time for themselves and have the opportunity to express themselves creatively.

## **Short WEMWBS survey**

A total of 57 people completed SWEMWBs at entry with an average score of 17.7 (individual scores ranged from 7 to 26 points).

A total of 53 completed the survey at midpoint with an average score of 21.6 (after week 5; individual scores ranged from 7 to 27 points).

A total of 48 completed the survey at endpoint with an average score of 22.8 (individual scores ranged from 15 to 30 points).

Overall, there was a five score improvement in mental health and wellbeing – a score change greater than three is considered significant. There was however, more of a marked difference in scores from start to midpoint, suggesting that improvements in mental health and general wellbeing were quite quickly made, but that these improvements also continued over time.

## Lifestyle Questionnaire results

A total of 48 people completed a Lifestyle Questionnaire at programme exit. The questionnaire was first developed in-house for Creative Alternatives in Sefton and was adapted for St. Helens. It measures self-reported improvements across a range of eight domains pertaining to lifestyle choice and wellbeing: physical activity, diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, medication, GP visits, social activities & mental health. Uptake of voluntary work, employment, education and cultural activity are also reported with 'yes' or 'no'. For each item participants also have the option to tick 'does not apply.'

The following table includes all lifestyle data gathered for the reporting period.

		<b>No. of Responses</b>	<b>Impact in percentage</b>
Physical Activity			
	Not Applicable	0	
	Much Reduced	0	0%
	Reduced	3	6%
	Unchanged	20	42%
	Improved	23	48%
	Much Improved	2	4%
Diet			
	Not Applicable	2	
	Much worse	0	0%
	Worse	2	4%
	Unchanged	35	76%
	Improved	9	20%
	Much Improved	0	0%
Smoking			
	Not Applicable	29	

	Much worse	0	0%
	Worse	1	5%
	Unchanged	15	79%
	Improved	3	16%
	Stopped smoking	0	0%
Alcohol			
	Not Applicable	32	
	Much worse	0	0%
	Worse	0	0%
	Unchanged	12	75%
	Improved	4	25%
	Stopped drinking	0	0%
Medication			
	Not Applicable	9	
	Much increased	0	0%
	Increased	2	5%
	Unchanged	31	79%
	Reduced	5	13%
	Stopped medication	1	3%
GP Visits			
	Not Applicable	4	
	Much increased	1	2 %
	Increased	0	0%
	Unchanged	31	70%
	Reduced	9	20%
	Much reduced	3	7%
Social Activity			
	Not Applicable	0	
	None	0	0%
	Reduced	0	0%
	Unchanged	19	40%
	Increased	28	58%
	Much increased	1	2%

Mental Health			
	Not Applicable	0	
	Much worse	0	0%
	Worse	2	4%
	Unchanged	13	27%
	Improved	32	67%
	Much Improved	1	2%
Take up of voluntary work?			
	Does Not Apply	3	
	No	33	73%
	Yes	12	27%
Take up of employment?			
	Does Not Apply	18	
	No	28	93%
	Yes	2	7%
Take up of education?			
	Does Not Apply	8	
	No	24	60%
	Yes	16	40%
Take up of cultural opportunities in St. Helens?			
	Does Not Apply	0	
	No	15	31%
	Yes	33	70%

## **Commissioner comments**

Creative Alternatives runs as part of Arts in Libraries St Helens' Cultural Hub. The programme runs a series of events and meetings based in its 13 libraries and other venues across the town. Commissioners felt that modern libraries have become multi-space centres which offer modern facilities and technology and should also engage individuals beyond the borrowing books or attending meetings.

Creative Alternatives St Helens was based on a successful social prescribing model that had been running for a decade in Sefton. It was hoped that the St Helens model would provide opportunities to explore a range of art forms led by professional artists, which would enhance group attendees' self-expression, relaxation and social interaction within a creative core workshop group.

Mental health and wellbeing has been identified as a priority within St Helens' 2013-2016 health and wellbeing strategy. While many programmes already ran which had a focus on improving mental health, it was felt there needed to be a more effective and coordinated approach which could also incorporate its Cultural Hubs programme.

Generally, commissioners felt that the Creative Alternatives programme was showing an increase in participants' wellbeing, with benefits of the programme including: increased confidence and self-esteem; reduced social isolation and new friendships; increased motivation and wellbeing; broader positive effects on lifestyle choices; increased motivation and resilience, accessing further education, volunteering and employment; increased participation in the arts and cultural landscape of the local community.

One specific outcome that was hoped to have been achieved as part of its programme was greater engagement of Creative Alternatives attendees specifically with the wider Cultural Hub programme. However, data is limited on the numbers who actually go and attend further events. However, it was felt that linking events in with Creative Alternatives did encourage more attendees to try different events and other social activities. An element of 'hand-holding' gave many people the confidence to try new things, where they would not have otherwise. Knowing that staff from Creative Alternatives would be in attendance at events, along with other workshop attendees, also meant that there was familiarity and trust – that they were not attending alone.

Creative Alternatives had met its target of the number of individuals completing the programme, however, it was felt that the programme would be especially beneficial for men, who are currently underrepresented in the programme. However, it was

acknowledged that in many fields of public health, men typically engage less with professional services.

Creative Alternatives facilitated social interaction, which further supported mental health and wellbeing improvements and this was something that was recognised by commissioners; further supported by the use of the library as a social space for attendees. However, there was concern that such social interaction may not be maintained following completion of the Creative Alternatives programme. It was therefore felt that a more formal programme which directly linked into Creative Alternatives would offer an opportunity for people to join in activities and events with friends they had met during the workshops.

The connection with St Helens libraries was important as it was felt that the open and inviting space that the library offered and enabled people to do far more and to get involved in a wide variety of programmes and cultural and artistic events. The Creative Alternatives social prescription model is just one offer of service in the borough and more linkage could be made between other initiatives, including exercise, healthy weight management, reading and bicycles.

In moving forward, it was acknowledged that the programme will run with less funding, over a five week rolling programme. This should, it was felt, offer greater workshop completion numbers. It was hoped that the programme would generate an attendees' group that could continue with regular meetings and be accessible to all who have attended Creative Alternatives.

It was felt that the Creative Alternatives team were very committed to the programme and in ensuring the best outcomes for workshop attendees. It was acknowledged that it may have initially been a struggle to identify people for the workshops but that the referral process was working well. Self-referral was high, however, there had not been a great push for referral from GPs. Links had been made with the Healthy Living team and health trainers. It was acknowledged that once individuals were referred to Creative Alternatives they were very well supported and the programme was successful.

Commissioners agreed that as mental illness is a fluctuating state, success cannot always be recognised in the number of successful completions, or those who are able to attend a certain number of workshops. Individual improvement in mental health is important. It was also recognised that many individuals experiencing mental health conditions, also have accompanying existing health conditions which may further limit their mobility or limit opportunities for them.

Commissioners felt that Creative Alternatives had been able to respond to the specific and often individual needs of its workshop attendees. The small number in each workshop also meant the groups were offered quite nuanced care – and that the success of the programme was in getting the right individuals referred and supporting them to keep them interested and engaged in the programme.

## **Completion data**

All attending the Moving Forward sessions felt they had benefited greatly from attending Creative Alternatives workshops. They had been given the tools to carry on with their wellbeing and in being creative afterwards; that they had achieved something both creatively and on a personal level; they had also become part of a group and had made new friends, some of whom they continued to meet outside of the sessions, and would do so after they had finished the course. However, some reported feeling sad that they no longer had sessions to attend.

*“I feel that I have found a new family. With the help and support they have given me, I now have cracked this cube I have spent years living in. I am ready to move forward, thank you Creative Alternatives”.*

*“A sense of achievement and satisfaction, but sad that the people I have grown to like won’t all be in the same place at the same time doing creative hobbies”.*

*“Quite sad really, I enjoyed the activities and it was good to have something to look forward to. It helped me with leaving the house”.*

*“A bit disappointed that it’s ending because I felt it was beneficial and helped improve my mood afterwards and get out and I enjoy art and expressing myself in that way”.*

The specific benefits gained from attendance were also wide ranging. Attendees reported feeling better in themselves, mentally, and that they were better able to cope with stress and anxiety.

*“I do feel better in myself, and feel awakened more to taking time out for myself and make things”.*

*“I feel much more confident at using healthier coping methods for stress and anxiety”.*

*“[Creative Alternatives] made me feel calmer and manage my symptoms by giving me new distraction techniques”.*

*“Before joining Creative Alternatives I felt like I’d lost sense of who I was and like I was trapped in a dark place. Since taking part I can now see light again and have gained confidence in the person that I used to be. The creative process has helped me do that and I get lost in drawing and painting for hours on end. I now also feel confident that I can join new groups and meet new people. Without Creative Alternatives I honestly think I would still be at home feeling lost and alone in the darkness.”*

*“My agoraphobia has lessened. I’m not as scared of groups as I was before”.*

*“it helped to still my mind for a while”.*

The element of trying new things was also stated as one of the benefits of the sessions; that they had been given the opportunity to try something they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to do. In some, it also reawakened enjoyment in being creative, something which would now stay with them.

*“It reminded me that creative things can help me express myself”.*

*“From a personal viewpoint, the whole taster session was of benefit to me & I was interacting with & observing the other participants & they seemed engrossed in their work, within a serene environment. Besides self-expression, it provided ‘time-out’ for us all from our hectic lives, where we focused on fulfilling our own needs, as well as helping each other. Thanks to you both again, I’m looking forward to starting with Creative Alternatives in February.”*

Particular enjoyment of the sessions came from their therapeutic quality, which many reported was important for them, and had made a big difference to their life. The small groups offered opportunities to chat openly, or to simply listen to others. The creativity element itself was also considered therapeutic for attendees.

*“People listening to what I have to say without judgement. Seeing other people as a whole caring – people with feelings”.*

*“It’s nice to be creative with things, just for yourself. Just to sit and make stuff and paint is very therapeutic”.*

*“I enjoyed the creative writing. I felt able to experiment with materials, freeing my inner identity and creativity”.*

*“I have learned to express more of my creativity which has given me a sense of self-worth that was missing before”.*

There was also an added element of attendees enjoying the diversity of the group and the pleasant, informative and friendly session facilitators.

*"It was a nice sized group, mixture of ages. All lovely people. The artists were lovely and encouraging".*

*"I think the mixed ages was good for all. At aged 80 I tend to be lumped with my age group".*

*"I enjoyed all the workshops and I'm sad it's coming to an end. The artists had a wonderful empathy with the group and made us all gel together. Just keep doing what you're doing as it works."*

*"The artists put everyone at ease and were very encouraging".*

All elements of the workshops were attended, but particularly painting, bookmaking, creative writing, mandala design and the meditation. Attendees reported that the mindfulness mediations were calming and reflective and offered a nice start/end to the sessions. Also the spontaneity of some of the sessions added to the enjoyment, and the feeling of being able to do things yourself:

*"I liked after time we came to do things unprompted; and I liked Sarah's way of teaching. She was very calming and informative".*

When asked about what could be improved upon, or if they found anything particularly difficult in the sessions, attendees reported that it took some time to get used to the group and join in, possibly due to nerves, but that this subsided with time as they got to know everyone. Not enough time was given to specific art forms, including creative writing and that there could be better art space, the course could be longer and more time was needed to discuss each other's work. However, most comments were very positive:

*"Nothing to improve upon. Without places like this I would not be going anywhere, so well done Creative Alternatives. It is this kind of thing that we need, and long may this continue".*

*"It has given me a day in the week to be somewhere, to do something, amongst people facing similar challenges to me".*

Many attendees commented that they felt the course was not long enough, that they had only just to the stage of bonding and relaxing with each other and they wanted to spend more time as a group. Some however said they felt that it was enough time.

While there had been no specific change in medication, some reported that they had consequently had to rely less on mental health services, and as such would continue to self-manage their wellbeing. Attendees also reported that they would access the Cultural Hubs-Arts in libraries service after their work with Creative Alternatives and would also partake in creative activities including: writing an autobiography, sewing, painting and general arts and crafts. Some attendees had already booked onto further courses and sessions offered by the Third Sector, including a six-week mindfulness course, photography and creative writing groups.



## Longitudinal data

A total of 11 individuals were followed up three or more months after completion of the Creative Alternatives workshops. The group was asked what the impact of the programme had been on them, whether they participated in creative activities now and in the recent past, whether they had taken part in any other cultural or creative activities or groups since leaving, and how they felt about leaving, and the impact it had on them.

All reported that attending Creative Alternatives had a positive impact upon their lives, and many stated that it had a lasting effect on how they deal with their mental health conditions.

*“When I started with Creative Alternatives, I didn’t actually recognise how low I’d been feeling. It was only when I was going to the workshops that it made me realize that such an intervention like this was a great way to help me express my inner feelings without any pressure to do so. I know now how to use some of the techniques and activities to help me cope in my day-to-day life which I never would have imagined I’d have been able to before taking part”.*

*“Creative Alternatives was the best thing that happened to me in a long time and I still get such a buzz when I look at what I created during that time as I keep my artwork so I can see it in my house”.*

*“This course gave me confidence to give myself a chance and now I’m beginning to work on things at home”.*

*“It really has helped my confidence and self-esteem and I feel more able to tackle challenges within my life which I don’t think I would have previously”.*

*“It has helped me gain confidence in myself and my abilities to do things out of my comfort zone”.*

Some offered that during the workshops their mental health had deteriorated, however this was recognised by the individuals, most of whom used techniques they had learnt in the group setting to better cope and deal with their feelings. In the time since attending Creative Alternatives, creativity, art and writing had also helped many come through that time and empowered them to reflect and learn on their experiences.

*“Even though I’ve had this dip in my mental health I feel the course helped me recognize the symptoms sooner which shows that I have more self-awareness and I*

*feel proud that I have been more proactive about getting help sooner which shows that I have grown as a person”.*

For many, the appeal and lasting effect on the group was the social element. Attending the first workshop and taster session had been a large step that had not been taken lightly. The social aspect had been very important for many, who reported that they were isolated and housebound prior to attending and that the initial efforts to leave the house to attend had been difficult. However, they were happy they had and the group dynamic had meant they had made friends, some of whom they had continued meeting with after completing Creative Alternatives workshops. Attending had given individuals something to look forward to and supported their inclusion, giving them a reason to be more mobile, and travel on public transport.

*A positive one, meeting like-minded people who are non-judgmental and kind”.*

*“Living on my own and thinking about the future more, hopefully to get out more, and making more new friends that are genuine”.*

*I gave it a chance and I’m so glad I did as all the people were lovely and I enjoyed the fact we were all very different. It also gave me hope seeing some of the people who were older giving something like that a go at their age which shows it’s never too late and you should never give up on your hopes and dreams”.*

*“The open, accepting kind attitudes of the facilitators is a major factor, along with their encouragement to reengage after missing sessions”.*

Initially, many said they had felt anxious, worried and unsure about attending, however, their fears had been allayed once they had met everyone and the groups were the focus of their week.

*“For the first time since childhood, I threw caution to the wind and joined in”.*

*“It made me feel like I wasn’t the only person who had struggled in their life and it gave me a real confidence boost as well.*

*“Something to look forward to on a Monday afternoon and to belong to”.*

*“It made me feel more alive and helped me crack the cube I felt I had been trapped in since losing my husband”.*

The group reported that since attending workshops, they had continued using a range of creative practices including art, poetry, creative writing and mindfulness.

Many had attended further courses and groups including an online creative group, photography and art groups and mindfulness sessions. A number had also attended groups with other organisations including MIND.

*“I never ever saw myself as a creative person before getting involved in Creative Alternatives and now I try to draw and write short stories to help me when I’m feeling a bit low. Also I’ve started to put some ideas down for my autobiography which is what I’ve wanted to do for some time now”.*

*“I have started taking photos of inspiring moments and begun to draw/copy them. I guess I didn’t notice these things before the course”.*

*“I do hope I can run my own creative group if I can get enough people to join like-minded people”.*

*“I found the creative writing really helped me during the sessions and I surprised myself that I was able to do it so I have carried on with it. Sometimes it helps me work through a problem or just lifts me when I’m feeling a bit down”.*

Since attending Creative Alternative workshops, many stated that they had experienced both physical and mental health improvements, which continued beyond the sessions.

*“I definitely feel in a better place both physically and mentally but I’d say the more positive and notable impact of the programme was on my mental health”.*

*“I definitely feel more optimistic about my abilities now which has woken up a side of me that I buried for fear of embarrassment, which has built my confidence”.*

*“Helped me fight anxiety and depression”.*

Many reported specific changes to attitudes and how they felt, with positivity, optimism and discovery of personal qualities that had previously been dormant.

*“I don’t feel as stressed or anxious and even when I do I know how to cope with them more so than I did before. I also feel more uplifted in general”.*

*“It has helped me remove feelings of isolation and raised my expectations of my abilities which in turn helps me want to join in and not sit back to let others excel while I’m left behind”.*

*“I do feel better mentally as I feel more connected with the world and I am regaining my inner strength, the person I used to be”.*

There were many positive comments regarding how Creative Alternatives had impacted upon their life. Many had not wanted the workshops to end, and hoped they could continue.

*“If I could do it all over again I would. Mental health issues don’t just go away overnight and even with an alternative programme like this it should be something that can be prescribed as and when is needed”.*

Below is a word cloud generated from three words, past attendees were asked to list to describe their experiences of Creative Alternatives.



# Discussion

## **Successes/strengths**

Creative Alternatives has received much positive feedback so far from the majority of the referral and partner organisations it works with. To support this, programme participants have also said how welcomed and supported they have felt throughout the process which has helped them to engage in the group, and creative activities even more. Creative Alternatives is not simply a 12-week course which supports end product art work; while the creative work that has been produced by clients has been visually exciting and has allowed a lot of self-expression, there has also been a great connection between participants and artists, with most clients commenting how their support and enthusiasm has made them feel encouraged and empowered to do more. The artist diaries give clear insight in to how individuals and the group as a whole are responding to the workshops and the communication log ensures that there are clear channels for openness, honesty, support and friendship.

The main benefits experienced by attendees are wide ranging, and can be grouped into three themes associated with the social, mental health and wellbeing improvements and learning of new skills. Workshop attendees gained confidence in themselves, their abilities, their own creativity and gained a sense of pride with their completed work.

## **Challenges**

While the individuals attending Creative Alternative workshops highlight the obvious and apparent outcomes of their involvement with Creative Alternatives, it is often difficult to manage the expectations set against Creative Alternatives' benchmark outputs. And whilst these are not unrealistic, programme facilitators feel that it is a lot of work to try and achieve in a short, twelve month period and within just six groups.

Creative Alternatives delivers its programme with limited resources: a project manager employed for 2.5 days a week and a project support worker for one day a week. However, there is a high volume of work associated with each 12-week programme with a varied amount of work required to establish and deliver each workshop series, which involves: marketing and promotion; co-ordination of workshops (artists and library spaces); delivery of taster sessions; recruitment/referral of potential clients; delivery of Welcome Meetings and Moving

Forward sessions; supporting clients throughout the process including maintenance of a communication log; and, administration and collation of data.

As Creative Alternatives engages with a vulnerable client group, each individual's circumstances and health can change quite quickly. Whilst they may feel very keen to be referred onto the programme initially this decision can be affected by a change in their personal circumstances, physical and or mental health, meaning they feel they may no longer be able to commit to the programme. As many individuals also deal with complex and very personal emotional difficulties in their life, sometimes information is disclosed with Creative Alternatives' staff both prior to, and whilst attending the programme. This needs to be dealt with sensitively to build trust and rapport with individuals, however, Creative Alternatives also needs to ensure that there are boundaries in place to safeguard both the staff and individuals and that an appropriate amount of support or signposting can be offered.

Further challenges come with the administration of the programme. The coordination of booking rooms within a library and organization of staff and artists for taster sessions during the 12-week core workshop blocks can be time consuming. As this is a new initiative in the town, there is currently no regularity in place (yet), and as such, the programme has had to be both responsive to the uptake and availability spaces while managing the need for artists to be booked with advance notice - both of which are needed to effectively deliver the programme.

There are obvious limitations on when the workshops can be offered, based on individual need, programme requirements and room availability. It is also not always possible to provide workshops to suit everyone attending sessions – there can be clashes with work or other personal commitments such as hospital appointments or other learning/social groups. However, while a challenge, there is the acceptance among Creative Alternatives that it is not possible for everyone to attend every session, and this is dealt with sensitively to ensure that the individuals involved are given ongoing support and encouragement even if they are unable to attend every session.

### **Main learning points**

There have been very different response levels from the organisations Creative Alternatives has targeted to date, with some being immediately receptive and others having taken longer time to build a relationship with. However, it has been realised that it is more valuable to meet up with referral organisations in person as this gives the opportunity to provide a much better understanding of what the Creative Alternatives programme is about while learning about the services that are provided in St. Helens, too. It would also have been beneficial, if the programme

commissioners had been able to share news of the programme with potential referral agencies, so to enable Creative Alternatives to bed down in St. Helens with greater speed.

It was felt that in order to maintain a steady amount of attendees, ongoing marketing and promotion was essential not only to create new referral relationships but also to maintain the relationships, particularly considering that this is a new initiative. Meeting individuals in person seems to be the most effective way of managing successful referrals via the organisations, however this is not always practical or possible due to time restraints and/or the service provider infrastructure. Retention rates from individuals already signed up to Creative Alternatives is higher from people who have self-referred on to the programme, this can be seen as reflective of motivation levels of someone who has chosen to sign up themselves. Several individuals have expressed that alongside having a creative interest, or intent to be creative and learn new skills, their motivation for wanting to join Creative Alternatives is often due to social isolation. Reasons for this may be down to poor health, a bereavement, or losing confidence and/or friends since retiring from work.

Venue and the social aspect was very important to attendees: the nature of the library being a very social place meant that attendees felt it was an open and inviting and safe place where they could not be judged. This was further added to by the group dynamics and the support offered to individuals throughout the 12-week period. The library also facilitated greater use of its services as attendees borrowed books, used the computers and met friends before and afterwards.

Longitudinal data also found that attending Creative Alternatives had resulted in a change in understanding about their own mental health and many were able to recognise, and deal, with changes in their mental health following completion of the programme. They were also better prepared to use art and creativity when they were aware they were feeling low. Creativity had become a very personal way of dealing with issues and life pressures. It offered an outlet, whilst empowering. There was a sense of pride and achievement in what they were achieving through such creativity.

### **Achievements**

At the start of project six objectives and goals were set out to have achieved by the end of the first year. All have been achieved, and some far exceeded.

Goals	Achieved
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At least 70 participants over the pilot period (June 2015 – May 2016)	Yes. A total of 90 referrals have been made into Creative Alternatives (58 self-referrals and 32 professional referrals)
At least 50 participants completing the 12 week programme, having missed fewer than three sessions	Yes. 53 individuals having attended at least six sessions, including an initial taster session.
An average SWEMWBs increase from beginning to end of 3.5 points	Yes, there was an average five-point score improvement from start to end.
50% increase in health-based outcomes	Yes. 69% improvement in mental health; 52% improvement in physical activity levels; 27% reduced GP appointments
50% of all attendees attend further community-based activities.	Yes. 60% increasing social activity. 70% have reported taking up cultural events in St Helens.

### **Recommendations/ideas for continuation of the programme**

The St Helens public health team has committed a further £20,000 investment into the Creative Alternatives programme for the 2016/2017 period due to the success of this pilot. In moving forward, sessions will now work on a five-week rolling programme, which it is hoped will allow for more flexibility for individuals who may have not been able to previously commit to a 12-week programme. This should also mean shorter wait times between programmes and hopefully encourage and support more to be able to attend.

In going forward, there are a number of suggestions which may help to maximise the value and achievements of the programme.

It was felt that having a greater presence in St. Helens Central Library to promote the scheme would be beneficial. A dedicated promotional stand or display case with information and artwork created so far was considered one of the ways of making this happen, offering a visual advertisement point. Linked with this is the continued promotion and advertisement of the programme – Creative Alternatives has identified that it needs to continue to promote its future groups while also looking for new opportunities to engage with individuals and referral agencies.

It would also be beneficial for Creative Alternatives to link in with other social prescribing initiatives and other mental wellbeing programmes in the borough, particularly where we are targeting the same client group. This could help streamline the referral process which can be the most time consuming element for project staff. Potentially joint work with and evaluation of the Learn to Grow initiative would be beneficial – where the similarities, differences, strengths and benefits of both could be identified.

More joined-up work within the Cultural Hub could potentially support greater inclusion and attendance at library-based events. It was felt that promotion of such events and attendance by Creative Alternatives project team would encourage greater attendance within the fold and support network that attendees felt Creative Alternatives gave them.



## Social return on investment

It costs £40,000 to deliver and support 58 people through the Creative Alternatives programme. Based on 12-weeks of attendance, this costs £28.24 per person per hour to deliver the programme. When comparing the cost of this to private creative tutorials or for therapy or management of mental health conditions in general, the amount is far less, with wide-ranging benefits. In addition, programme capacity would have allowed a total of 72 people (12 per group) to access the programme.

The calculation for the SROI is described in this section. Expressed as a ratio of return, it is derived from dividing the impact value by the value of the investment. However, before the calculation is made, the impact value is adjusted to reflect the present value of the projected outcome values. This is to reflect the present day value of benefits as they may be projected into the future. In this social value account, some outcomes are projected for the one year period of the pilot and so the effect of discounting for this is limited.

A total of 53 people have successfully completed Creative Alternatives workshops, however, there is the potential for the benefits of this programme to be far greater than those expressed here, as this evaluation represents findings from individuals, and not their family and friends and social networks.

It costs a total of £40,000 to deliver Creative Alternatives for the pilot period. This includes:

Programme Management & Coordination: £25,525
Artists: £10,800
Reflective practice: £540
Marketing: £500
Arts materials: £600
Admin expenses & contingency: £2,035

There is much social value to be gained from the Creative Alternatives programme, both for the initiative itself, but also its attendees, as well as the wider community, St. Helens as a whole, the Third Sector, the local authority, and local NHS services. This evaluation focused on the main reported impacts related to social outcomes and improvements in mental health and wellbeing.

These are not an outline of what has actually been spent, but an example proxy of what could be spent to achieve the same outcomes as those reported, and to realise the expected outcomes as benchmarked by Creative Alternatives. Although the

burden of cost is never actually realised, the figures used are an example of what the worth of an outcome is to society, or the value in cost savings to stakeholders, including local authority or the NHS. This outlines where the value comes from in the service being delivered at the point of contact for free to the individual attendee.

There is much wider contextual evidence on social value created by social prescribing models (Bockler, 2012). For example, cost effectiveness modelling conducted on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Fujiwara et al, 2015) has looked into the potential impact of engagement with arts, culture and sport, and has found that the predicted reduction in GP visits as a result of good health associated with engagement with culture has a value to society in that it can result in costs savings for the NHS in participation of £5.07 (audience arts), £1.05 (library) and £1.89 (museum) per person annum. The predicted reduction in the use of mental health services, also as a result of good health associated with culture has a value to society in that it leads to costs savings for the NHS of £6.84 (audience arts), £3.50 (heritage), £1.42 (library) and £2.55 (museum) per person per annum.

### **Impact tables**

The following tables (1 and 2) show the changes identified by Creative Alternatives workshop attendees and the associated financial values that helped to create the impact map and which contributed towards the social return on investment value. The tables show the main outcomes and changes experienced by attendees were related to social, mental health and wellbeing improvements. The indicators used to represent these changes were suggested as examples by research participants either during interviews, focus groups or in questionnaires. Financial proxies were arrived at using the Global Value Exchange, a crowd sourced database of Values, Outcomes, Indicators and Stakeholders which provides a free platform for information to be shared. This enables greater consistency and transparency in measuring social and environmental values.

The main outcomes reported by Creative Alternatives workshop attendees were related to general health and wellbeing improvements, including: increases in confidence, optimism and positivity, the therapeutic element of the workshop sessions, improved socialisation and participation in cultural activities. Potential longer term impacts in cost savings to society, the NHS were related to general improvements in mental health and wellbeing, including reductions in reliance on the NHS and medications and relief from anxiety and depression and better self-management of mental health conditions.



**Table 1: Financial proxies for impacts experienced by Creative Alternatives attendees**

Stakeholders	Description	Equivalent proxy value	Number s	Cost	Impact value*
Creative Alternatives attendees	Increase in optimism	Attendance at optimism and positivity course	26	£195.00	<b>£1,014.00</b>
	Therapeutic element of sessions	Cost of an hours' therapy session for six weeks	53	£360.00	<b>£2,385.00</b>
	Improvements in socialisation	Annual spend on socialising	44	£52.70	<b>£314.00</b>
	Participation in cultural activities	Cost of participation in cultural activities	44	£9000.80	<b>£49,500.00</b>
	Increased confidence	Cost of assertiveness and building personal confidence training	26	£450.00	<b>£2,950.00</b>
	Taking part in further training/courses	Average cost of further training	24	£233	<b>£1819.00</b>
*Taking into consideration all deadweight and attribution calculations					<b>£57,982.00</b>

**Table 2: Wider impacts upon health and professional services**

	Indicator	Description	Equivalent proxy value	Numbers	Cost	Impact value*
National Health Service		Reduction in GP appointments	Cost saving to NHS	18	£450.00	£101.25.
		Increase in mental health and wellbeing	Cost saving to services, including reduced anxiety and distress (change in)	48	£941.88.20	£5,651.28
		Relief from anxiety and depression	Improvements in mental health and better management of mental health 'dip'	11	£36,827.00	£101,274.25
*Taking into consideration all deadweight and attribution calculations						<b>£107,026.78</b>



The SROI ratio is calculated by dividing the Total Present Value of impact by the investment made:

### **Social Return on Investment ratio at least £1: £11.55**

The ratio of return for SROI calculates the net present value of benefits created, based upon the net present value of investment required to deliver such benefits. The SROI found that Creative Alternatives St Helens returned a value far greater than the cost of delivering the service. For every one pound invested in Creative Alternatives, **£11.55** in potential cost savings were made to individuals, the wider community, the NHS and the local authority.

### **Deadweight/drop-off and attribution**

Deadweight accounts for whether the same changes would have occurred anyway without the Creative Alternatives' intervention. This has been set at 35%, as many workshop attendees stated that without the programme their mental health would have continued to decline and they wouldn't have chosen to participate in other types of social groups, gatherings or events.

While some individuals attended only Creative Alternatives, others had joined other support networks, attending other events and groups. After consultation with programme attendees, it was agreed that around 50% of the reported impacts achieved and reported in this report were as a direct result of involvement in Creative Alternatives. For this reason, attribution was recorded at 50% on the impact map, to account for others' involvement. This has been taken as an average, however it is acknowledged that for some, the only intervention they received was directly through Creative Alternatives.

Longitudinal data shows that the effect and impact of attending Creative Alternatives lasted beyond completion of the programme (measured at three months post-completion). As this drop-off is minimal, the rate however was again set at 50% to allow for more conservative counting.

## Sensitivity analysis

A sensitivity analysis looks at changes that can be made on the impact map which significantly affect the final ratio. When looking at all financial proxies, adjusting the percentages of deadweight, attribution and drop-off, only have a small effect on the final ratio. In most cases, adjustments made the total ratio slightly higher than the reported £11.55. However, to ensure accurate and uninflated results, a conservative 'at least' total has been used, so that the ratio represents that Creative Alternatives returns at least £11.55 in social value for every one pound invested.

## Limitations

This interim report has been commissioned by the Alef Trust, which delivers the Creative Alternatives programme in St. Helens, for the purposes of proving independent evaluation of the current workshop programme delivered.

This report has involved secondary analysis of data currently provided by Creative Alternatives and has been summarised for the purposes of this report. However, this data is limited. The findings from this evaluation aim to explore the impact and value of the Creative Alternatives programme over its first year pilot. It is important to acknowledge that the findings, and SROI ratio, reported as a result of the Creative Alternatives social prescription model cannot be compared with any other similar evaluations conducted elsewhere. For the purposes of this report, the SROI ratio has been calculated based on the specific circumstances and experiences of adults attending its workshops over the past year. Considering differences in demographic and geographical areas, while the experiences for many attendees engaging in the research were similar, they were also subjective to the group engaging with the research on that day. This evaluation has taken a representative sample of attendees for inclusion in the research, and as such, the numbers used in calculating the SROI ratio have been extrapolated to account for experiences in the whole sample of 53 attendees. Where proxies have been used, the researcher and used the lowest possible value, so as to ensure there is no over counting of social value amounts, and as such, this SROI ratio represents an at least amount.

*What does this SROI value mean?*

In return for an investment of £40,000 to support **58** individuals through a 12-week creative programme, returns a total amount of **£176,815.89** of social value was created, returning an SROI ratio of £11.55:£1, when discounting for other attributable factors and the chances that changes would have occurred anyway.

This SROI ratio is in no way comparable to other evaluations where SROI calculations have been used and this ratio should only be considered in conjunction with the accompanying report. This value can be used to consider what is working well and what the outcomes of the Creative Alternatives programme is regards to improve mental health and wellbeing, creativity, and better self-management of mental health conditions.

The financial proxies arrived at have been agreed and developed with stakeholders who have been directly involved in the research. To this extent, the SROI ratios presented in this report are subjective and relevant to the individuals on the day that the research was conducted. The ratio presented offers an insight into the impacts which may be gained as a result of the training model, and is not a financial representation of what has actually been spent by stakeholders.

The SROI figure is important in understanding that Creative Alternatives generates a good return on investment: the impacts gained by participants as a direct result of engagement with the programme has a much wider impact that resonates far beyond the individual.

## Conclusion

In its first year, Creative Alternatives St. Helens received 90 referrals, 58 of which were self-referrals. Of the total number of referrals, 53 individuals completed the 12 week series of workshops, attending at least six sessions including a taster workshop session. The data gathered through the Lifestyle Questionnaire indicates that an improvement in health outcomes was achieved for at least **69%** of participants in the following domains: physical activity, reduced GP visits, social activity and mental health. Furthermore, 55% percent of programme participants reported increased uptake of education and 70% reported increased uptake of cultural activities in St. Helens.

The benefits of attending Creative Alternatives as reported by artists, facilitators and attendees are numerous and can be grouped into three themes relating to the social, learning of new skills, and mental health and wellbeing improvements.

### Social

For many, the social element of the groups was important, as they made new friends and some of these friendships were maintained outside of the group. With their friendships, attendees also planned future arts engagement and other Third Sector courses including mindfulness and photography and creative writing courses. The social element was also meaningful for many attendees who felt they were socially isolated prior to attending the session. This may have been brought on by mental ill health, bereavement or through age and reduced opportunities to socialise. There was also an element of sharing personal stories among the group, which may have provided motivation and support in their mental wellness. It was reported that there was also a reduced reliance on other organisations such as mental health services, and that the group dynamic was akin to a counselling or therapy session. Also, the venue where the workshops took place was also seen as a key to facilitating socialisation and ensuring a safe, non-judgmental place where a range of other activities could be conducted at the same time.

### New skills

The nature of the programme meant that there was a creative and artistic focus to the workshops and therefore there was an element of learning of new skills. As a result of this new learning, further creativity and a love of being artistic was sparked in many attendees. For some it was a new skill they had tried and for others it was the renewed interest in something they may had tried a long time ago, but were keen to take up again. On a personal level, participating in the arts and having a

completed piece of artwork resulted in a sense of achievement; that there was pride in what they had accomplished, which had the added effect of gaining confidence in their artistic ability and as well as in socialising skills.

### **Mental health and wellbeing improvements**

Attendees reported that the session evoked many emotions – from the satisfaction of completing a task, learning a new skill, or from sharing personal stories and from social interaction. The workshops had supported, and given individuals increased confidence to achieve more, specifically regarding their own mental health. Many attendees reported feeling better mentally, that they had overcome isolation, had something to look forward to, a focus to their week while the sessions were ongoing. The sessions provided the opportunity to learn and develop coping strategies for negative stresses in life; that they could actively incorporate creativity into their lives as a coping mechanism, but more importantly for them, for fun and relaxation.

The SWEMWBs scores show that there have been reported increases in wellbeing which show improvements and a positive wellbeing, which research highlighted above, points to potential cost savings to the state including local authorities, government and the NHS.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Referring organisations and agencies

Name of organisation or source	No of referrals submitted to date	No of actual referrals signed up to date
CA Leaflet/Arts Service	14	11
Open Mind (now called Minds Matter)	5	1
St.Helens Mind	11	8
Recovery Team	5	2
GP/Practice Nurse	5	3
St.Helens CCG	1	1
Healthwatch	2	2
Newspaper/Council Magazine	5	3
Carers Centre	3	2
Adult & Social Care	4	2
Housing Association (Helena Partnerships)	7	4
5BP	1	0
Addaction	1	1
Learn to Grow – Learning on Prescription Programme	8	8
World Mental Health Day stall (Central Library)	4	3
Coalition of Disabled People	4	3
Making Space	2	2
Priority Families Team	1	1
Word of Mouth	2	2

## Appendix 2: Core Workshop Depictions

### Group 1: Mandalas for Wellbeing

**Week one:** The workshop series started with introductions and icebreakers, giving the group the opportunity to share something about themselves, highlighting background and their personal likes and dislikes.

Artists' observations & comments:

*“Once they had had opportunity to share something of themselves in a non-threatening, light-hearted way, all were willing to share ideas. Feelings were named, heard and allowed - not dismissed.”*

The artists then gave an introduction to *mandalas*: spiritual and ritual symbols found in Eastern religions, representing the universe. The term ‘mandala’ (Sanskrit for ‘circle’) is used for diagrams, charts or geometric patterns that represent the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically. Following the presentation of some examples, the group were invited to create their own mandala. The group also began creating a personal sketchbooks for gathering ideas, images, and writing through the workshop sessions.

**Week two:** The group began the session with a mindfulness meditation and a stream-of-consciousness writing exercise, using a poem as a trigger. The group then used natural materials to create mandala designs on board. The group finished binding the personal sketchbooks they had begun the previous week. A representative from the council’s library service came in and gave free tickets to a theatre event at the library for WMHD, and all were given a brochure of upcoming events.

Artists' observations & comments:

*“The mandala-making allowed for exploration of symmetry and order, as well as for the experience of impermanence. Allowing the work to evolve naturally, with nothing fixed, allowed for an experience of fluidity and change.”*

*“Some participants made contact with suppressed emotions which were acknowledged and accepted. For some participants this was the start of a process of discovery and self-acceptance through which they were able to observe thoughts and feelings and experiment with different perspectives of them.”*

*“The low-risk nature of the mandala task ensured a safe way toward experimenting with creativity.”*

**Week three:** The session started with a mindfulness meditation followed by a writing activity inspired by images of ‘ensō’ (in Zen Buddhism an ensō is a circle that is hand-drawn in one or two uninhibited brushstrokes to express a moment of mindfulness / presence) and a guided visualisation, allowing for the exploration of perfection and imperfection, and the beauty of imperfection. The group then returned to individual mandala making. At the end of the session there was time for the group to add work to their personal books.

Artists’ observations & comments:

*“The group found the visualisation a powerful route into the imagination.”*

*“The drawing activity was an opportunity to gently challenge perceptions of group members that they were ‘not creative’ and that they ‘couldn’t draw’ as they came to see that control of the pencil was a skill which improved with practice.”*

*“Self-limiting thoughts were expressed and heard, and therefore observed, creating an opportunity to question them.”*

**Week four:** The group started in a circle with a mindfulness meditation and a spontaneous writing activity, inspired by a poem by Wendell Berry. They were then introduced to the colour wheel and colour mixing.

Artists’ observations & comments:

*“Mixed reaction to Wendell Berry’s poem: some people disliking the images provoked by the poem, others finding comfort in them.”*

*“There was pleasure in manipulating colours, there was a feeling of empowerment.”*

*“The session gave the opportunity to respond on a feeling level rather than a cognitive level – validating emotion, felt-sense, and individual personal response.”*

*“Acknowledgement of the different forms and language used by individuals (list, prose, poem, fragments, etc.) allowed gentle challenging of notions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. This was an ongoing process throughout the sessions, which developed to various degrees in individuals over time.”*

**Week five:** Following the opening mindfulness meditation the group engaged in a short writing activity, which was then shared. For the remainder of the session the group worked on their mandala paintings.

Artists' observations & comments:

*"A session marked by much self-expression and absorption."*

*"Participants noticed they had written about aspects of themselves which were normally difficult to acknowledge – especially positive attributes."*

*"By the end of this session all group members had shared personal writing with the group and were experiencing validation from each other."*

**Week six:** Following the opening mindfulness meditation the group engaged completing their mandala paintings.

Artists' observations & comments:

*"The session was marked by celebration, surprise and delight."*

*"It was noted that 'failure' is a part of the creative process; the participants experienced taking a different approach to failure: redefining it - and increasing their resilience in this way."*

*"Some members of the group found taking praise uncomfortable and were able to notice and reflect on this."*

**Week seven:** Following the opening mindfulness meditation, drawing attention to one's ability to choose where to place to awareness, the group used their mandala paintings to practice 'beholding' - spending time in silence looking at each piece of art and noticing thoughts, feelings, responses. This was followed by free writing. The group were then introduced to a variety of poetry styles and forms, and the group were led through a process of deepening and expanding their writing practice. They shared their writing and their experiences of the process along the way.

Artists' observations & comments:

*"Surprise at what could be written; breaking through preconceived notions of what 'poetry' is and it thereby becoming more inclusive, less alien."*

*“By this point in the group process it was evident that many in the group were confronting creative challenges with more resilience – able to experiment through fear of failure, and so allow themselves to break into unknown territory.”*

*“Some strong emotions communicated by this point in the group process – sadness, frustration, joy – these were accepted by others without judgment, allowing those expressing them to accept them in themselves.”*

**Week eight:** A meditation based on breathing and mindfulness started the session before the group went on to make simple folded star books. The group were introduced to *haikus* (Japanese poems) and were given some examples of published haikus. The group composed their own haikus, and, following a guided visualisation, expanded on these by developing haibun (combining prose with haiku).

Artists’ observations & comments:

*“There was pleasure at creating something beautiful from simple folding techniques.”*

*“There was surprise at what was accomplished.”*

*“There was an appreciation of the significance of the present moment, whatever its content. Observing and appreciating ordinary and simple things.”*

**Week nine:** Following the opening mindfulness meditation, the group continued their experimentation with poetry-writing, exploring sonnets. The group tried a ‘six minute write’ with a change of perspective half way through the time to create material for a sonnet. They then shared each other's writing to identify the shift in perspective, and they engaged in a discussion about the advantages of consciously shifting perspective in their life situations. The group then spent some time shaping their writing into a sonnet form, and all shared their final poems with the group. Everyone then started the process of reviewing and choosing previous work to display in their sketchbooks.

Artists’ observations & comments:

*“For many there was surprise at the writing produced, and an experience of warm validation from others in response to sharing it.”*

*“There was pride and fulfilment from what had been created.”*

*“Group members expressed finding their voice and experiencing being heard, describing it as ‘freeing.’”*

**Week ten:** The group began with a final mindfulness meditation to get the group feeling relaxed and focused. The artists reviewed the achievements over the past 10 weeks and invited the group to write about their experience of being in Creative Alternatives and what they felt they had achieved. They then chose a line from their writing that most reflected the positive things they felt about this experience and read it out to the group. A group poem was created from this work, which was photocopied and given out to each person. The remainder of the session was spent finishing off the personal sketchbooks, reflection on the work created.

Artists' observations & comments:

*"Every group member made a contribution and experienced being part of a whole."*

*"There was sadness at ending but also acknowledgement of the next steps of their journeys to come."*

*"There was a feeling of celebration and achievement, an honouring of belonging and a recognition of endings and transitions."*



## Group 2: Assemblage Boxes and Mandalas

**Week 1:** After personal introductions the artists gave an introduction to the life of Joseph Cornell and his artwork. Cornell had a day job: he was a lifelong carer for his brother; he had no artistic training and his art grew out of his passion for reading and collecting and his fascination with foreign lands (though he never really travelled). The artists passed around images of his Cornell's collections of source material and of his finished artworks. They also highlighted a rare UK exhibition of Cornell's work at the Royal Academy in London. They then introduced 'Assemblage Boxes' as 3d collage / decoupage. The participants were invited to spend the following week thinking about possible themes they might like to explore in their boxes - anything of particular meaning or importance to them - and to gather a range of materials to bring to weeks 2-5 for possible inclusion in their work. Suggested possible themes: family/relations; a place of interest; local history; an event; a holiday; an era; famous person; hobby/interest; or people could simply gather materials with no apparent theme: simply collecting images/items/objects of fancy. Mindfulness was embedded within the 10 weeks with a breathing and mindfulness meditation that closed the session each week.

Artists' observations & comments:

*"There was much interest from people and discussion during the introduction. Participants were interested by Cornell's works and liked the fact that their art could be created by copying, cutting and pasting; and by trial and error and success."*

*"With the theme introduced we got down to the practicality of making the boxes. The first task was very simple; sanding away rough edges to create smooth ones - this was instantly 'do-able' - all participants were keen to get going and found this simple task rewarding!"*

*"We then did a demonstration of assembly, working as a pair and then paired people up to help each other with the assembly. The act of helping another person put people at ease with their neighbour and encouraged bonding."*

*"General discussion revealed a common theme of downheartedness at St. Helens' demise from a thriving industrial community and the number of empty shops, though one lady was keen to point out new shops that had opened and that she felt encouraged that a fashionable brand considered St. Helens to be worth investing in."*

*"Cornell's work involves many maps, letters, photos and ornaments, that inspired the group to discuss their own life experience which revolved mainly around their*

*hometown, St. Helen's. The conversation took a marked change in tone, with the group sharing how St. Helen's used to be a buoyant, colourful and thriving town, and instead now seems to have a rather gloomy and 'hopeless' future. With many of the group in excess of 50 years of age, they appeared to have had a very similar experience growing up in the town, all encouraged to pick up a trade very young, and having lived through the trade businesses (coal mining industry, fabric mills, factories) shutting down one by one, leaving the communities of St. Helens in a desolate situation. They shared their feelings of being a town 'cut off' from their prosperous neighbouring towns and cities (Liverpool & Manchester)."*

*"Participants expressed pride in what they had made in the session - the boxes were solid and tangible and 'finished.'"*

**Week 2:** The group reviewed the previous week's work and went round the table looking at people's gatherings and listening to their ideas for the theme of their individual works. Some were unsure about ideas but with the help of reference material in the library they were able to make a start. Materials were reviewed and sorted. Images & texts were copied and enlarged, using the library's photocopier.

Artists' observations & comments:

*"The second session saw the group's confidence grow, with the group members mingling amongst the room and enquiring on each other's ideas and themes for their boxes. A variety of themes were developing - all very personal to the makers. The group showed willingness to share with each other. The box acted like a 'container', offering its maker a safe place to explore him- or herself with the knowledge that its content is safely tucked in the confines of the four walls of the box. We saw quick results in the participants' self-expression, and the group experienced leaps of progress in their ability to process suppressed emotions."*

*"One person was helped to negotiate the local history library. He spoke about his past in the mines and the sense of comradeship he had found there. He also spoke of his ill physical health and of his current feelings of isolation and depression. He was interested though at what he found in the library and said he was thinking of joining the local history group, which he went on to do."*

*"Frank joined the Local History Group that ran from the Library once a week - expanding his experience and connection with the local community that he explained he had largely cut himself off from for many years due to depression and health problem."*

*“This was a really lively productive and session - people were busy with their own materials and interested in each other, the gatherings and themes proved to be catalysts for enquiry and discussion between group members. This was also the case in the remaining weeks.”*

**Weeks 3-5:** The structure of sessions 3 to 5 were similar to session 2.

Artists' observations & comments:

*“Peoples' work developed and their confidence grew accordingly. We opened each session with a welcome. Selina and I would each work our way around the table and discuss people's work with them and the associated meanings and feelings. Having two facilitators enabled one of us to give people a period of one-to-one attention (whilst keeping a level of awareness on the group in case any particular needs arose), to really listen to them. If one of us was in a one-to-one discussion the other would remain mindful of the group as a whole and attentive to its social and technical needs. We rounded the sessions up with an encouraging review of progress, inviting people to describe to the group the progress they had made with their work.”*

*“Although the third week saw a drop off of two regular attendees of the group, the remaining members grew stronger bonds. Cross table chatter filled the room, with group members who had otherwise been reserved and shy confidently sharing ideas. This week saw a marked change in one gentleman in the group, who had been less conversationally active and absorbed in his research for his box, and who made a connection with the group by sharing tales of his mining days.”*

*“The fourth week saw a large leap of development of the boxes, they were really taking shape. The mutual appreciation and admiration shared by the group to one another was infectious. The room was filled with positivity and excitement. The group received praise from the library staff too this week, with staff so impressed with the work that they requested to put it on display in the library - the group were evidently thrilled with this and everyone left the session encouraged and invigorated.”*

*“By the end of the week 5 people were really proud of their work and told us how they had been sharing their progress with family and friends. It was also notable how much participants cared for and missed those people who had been unable to complete the course due to health problems; showing that a real sense of community had developed within the group.”*

*“People were really proud of their own work and all were really interested in what others had done and supported and encouraged each other throughout the process. It was very uplifting.”*

*“Session 5 really highlighted how far the group had come in their ability to share topics that ran that little bit deeper. The connectivity of the group was even stronger following a group sharing of each box, and the group departed, eager to return for another 5 weeks, focusing on a new project, with group members sharing telephone numbers and planning to meet outside the workshop sessions.”*

*“The group were always given the opportunity to stay or leave for the mindfulness meditation, and each week, all members remained (except for one lady) and said they felt real benefits from taking the time to 'just be'.”*

**Weeks 6:** Weeks 6 – 10 focused on the creation of personal mandalas. In session 6 the theme of mandalas was introduced to the group with a short slideshow. The group were then invited to create a large scale group mandala using natural materials (flowers, leaves, lentils, twigs, shells, spices). The act of sorting saw the group intermingle, all with a shared goal, and they collaborated and negotiated their way around the large flower-like design.

Artists' observations & comments:

*“This group exercise supported the group's cohesiveness and balance, seeing the image unfold with natural harmony and colour. The session closed with a mandala themed visualisation that the group said made them feel very relaxed.”*

**Weeks 7-9:** In these sessions the group members developed their own individual mandalas, using mixed media which allowed for the group to further expand their artistic expression.

Artists' observations & comments:

*“Each material offered varying levels of self-expression, but for one group member, the freedom to use acrylic paints allowed for her to create an abstract design that grew organically and saw her become so absorbed that she almost lost all contact with the group in the room. As she painted she appeared to adopt a meditative pace to her movement, absorbed in observing the brush make the strokes across the board. And when she appeared to be more conscious of her surroundings she was almost shocked at what she had produced, like she had created in a trance-like state that she hadn't been fully aware of.”*

**Week 10:** In the final session finishing touches were made to the personal mandalas and then the group was visited by the Cultural Co-ordinator for Adult Social Care & Health Gary Conley. Gary offered the group an ongoing membership to a community group they could establish to make visits to galleries, exhibitions and much more.

Artists' observations & comments:

*“The group agreed to make the first group trip to the Creative Alternatives Christmas party that was held in Southport just before Christmas. 6 of the group made it all the way and took part!”*

*“I was dubious as to how much could possibly be achieved in 10 weeks with a group, having had the luxury of 6-9 months with CA Sefton's programme. But, I feel with the knowledge of the limited time on the programme, the group speed up the steps and processes they might make at a slower pace, if they were on a longer programme. The beauty of the group all starting and finishing at the same time meant they were all facing the same end date, and put measures into place for themselves to sustain their contact with each other following the end of the 10 week programme.”*

*“My observation of the group, from having met them on the first week, pale faced and feeling rather hopeless in their home and community settings, the same group members left ten weeks later, looking happier and healthier. No doubt this was helped by the bond they had forged as a group, extending their connection with the world that bit further.”*

*“It does make me think, that in the 10 weeks we truly delivered on all aspects of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, and we have (in some way hopefully) paved the way for each person's continued growth to greater wellbeing.”*

### Appendix 3: Referral agencies

<b>Referral agencies</b>	<b>Type of contact/marketing/promotion</b>
St.Helens Libraries/Arts Service	Information and leaflets circulated across all libraries Library manager briefed all staff CA stall at WMHD event in Central Library
St.Helens Recovery Team (on behalf of 5BP)	Info sent via email & flyers 1-1 meeting with O/T Coordinator Presented to 2 x staff groups
5 Boroughs Partnership	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Coordinator for Social Inclusion
St.Helens CCG	Info sent via email & telephone call with Mental Health Commissioner CA promo stall at AGM Face to face meeting with Lay-Chairperson of CCG
Open Mind (Primary Care Mental Health Team)	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with manager
Healthy Living Team (Public Health)	Info sent via mail, information then circulated to service managers
Health Improvement Team	Email, face to face meeting
Health Trainers	Information sent via email
Early Intervention Team (5BP)	Info sent via email, leaflet drop off at Harry Blackman House
Adult Social Care	Info sent via email Invited to present at staff team meeting with Gary Conley
Healthwatch St.Helens	Info sent via email, subsequently circulated via Healthwatch Magazine
GP Practice Nurses	Presented at staff meeting after making contact at CCG AGM event

GP Practice Managers	Presented at Practice Managers Forum after meeting with Lay Chair of CCG
GP Practices	Leaflet drop offs made at 15 of the GP Practices in the borough
St.Helens Mind*	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Service Manager 4 x promo sessions at various service user groups
Learn to Grow – Learning on Prescription Programme (Adult & Community Learning, St.Helens Council)	Regular face to face meetings with team Invite to Celebration event to promote CA to their learner
Priority Families Team	Presented at Family Workers Team meeting
The Hope Centre	Info sent via email Leaflet drop off
Chrysalis Centre for Change	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Centre Manager Promo session with CCC Client Group
St.Helens Addaction	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Recovery Coordinators Promo session with service users
St.Helens Mental Health Forum/ Carers Centre*	Info sent via email Telephone meeting with Carers' Centre Manager
Time to Change*	Info sent via email
Social Inclusion Network (SIN)*	Info sent via email Presented at SIN Meeting Attended 2 subsequent meetings to promote CA
Making Space	Info sent via email

	Met at WMHD event, exchanged provider information
St.Helens Coalition of Disabled People	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Self-Help Development Worker who subsequently has supported clients attending taster sessions
Wellbeing Enterprises*	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Senior Wellbeing Officer
The Royal Voluntary Service (Staying At Home Project)	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Senior Service Assistant
Helena Partnerships	Info sent via email Face to face meeting with Health & Wellbeing Project officer Delivered 3 promotional sessions to residents groups

## **Appendix 4: Reflective Practice notes**

Creative Alternatives employs art therapist Siân Hutchinson as a 'Reflective Practice Facilitator' who supports the artists and administrative team in their work, offering a private space for reflection. Siân recently published a short paper on her experience of Reflective Practice within Creative Alternatives which can be viewed here:

<http://www.atmag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Pages-from-Newsbriefing-December-2015-1.pdf> (see pages 24/25).

Sian has contributed the following observations of Creative Alternatives' processes in St. Helens :

“Programme participants experienced the opportunity to express themselves visually through the use of creative activities. While in the process of creating, participants seemed to experience being able to focus, a sense of freedom (to loosen up) and the ability to talk while having another focus (i.e. the art work being the focus while talking about other things). This is due to the type of activities and techniques on offer. Having the opportunity to talk about their creations seemed to give the participants the opportunity to talk about a positive theme common to the group, something other than their difficulties. They had the opportunity to be heard and acknowledged. This also gave the participants the opportunity to hear different stories and viewpoints and see different perspectives (something people often find difficult to do when experiencing mental health difficulties).

As the team are extremely experienced in working within this type of programme, they seem to know how to make the participants feel welcome and comfortable. They demonstrate their caring personalities in their verbal interactions while motivating and encouraging participants. While there may be a number of particularly vulnerable people in a group, having two facilitators in the group enables one facilitator to be able to manage a potentially delicate situation while the other continues to run the group and allowing facilitators to rotate this role throughout the sessions if necessary.

Having a robust, tried and tested referral procedure helps to ensure the group members are suitably matched to enable successful dynamics and signposting. Although the staff are freelance, they have expressed a sense of connectedness, referring to themselves as the CA family which demonstrates a strong, committed team. Building up a professional relationship with referral organisations and specific community groups, getting to know the needs of the community and

ensuring the service is adapted to meet these needs takes time. This can ensure appropriate referrals are made. E.g. there seems to be a number of people with challenging physical ill health on the programme, demonstrating there might be a local need here and this might also have had an effect on retention rates.”