



art at the heart of the RUH

**November 24 - April 25:
Mid-Year Review**



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Introduction

“Art at the Heart of the RUH,” (AATH) has long been a cornerstone of patient care and wellbeing at Royal United Hospital Bath.

As national recognition of the value of arts in acute hospital settings continues to grow, AATH stands as a leader in the field, demonstrating how creative expression can enhance the healing environment, support mental health, and foster a sense of community for patients, staff, and visitors alike.

Throughout the pARTicipate arts programme, Art at the Heart creates and engages with young and older patients, staff members, volunteers, visitors as well as parents, families and carers.



Programme Overview

pARTicipate: Mission

Artists Charlotte Stowell and Catherine White offer their creative talents to young and older patients, through person-centred approaches that truly put the needs of the patient first. Their art sessions are designed to support mental wellbeing by giving patients the opportunity to express themselves, find joy in creativity, and focus on something positive during their hospital stay. Charlotte and Catherine take the time to get to know their patients, adapting their methods and materials to suit each person's preferences and abilities, fostering a sense of comfort and personal connection.

*'Participatory arts is the process of people making and taking part in the creation of 'art'. In health and care research, participatory arts offer great opportunities for service users and patients to share and create experiences and shape research by 'bringing their experiences to life'. 1) *Participatory Arts in Health and Care research (PAIR), NIHR (National Institute for Health and Care research*

Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders of the pARTicipate Art programme include:

1. Art at the Heart of the RUH: The primary organisation running the pARTicipate art programme, responsible for its overall management and coordination.
2. Jessica Brown (Participation and Audience Development Coordinator): A long-standing member of the programme since 2011, Jessica coordinates all the participatory art projects for patients, staff and visitors at the hospital.
3. Charlotte Stowell (Professional Artist): Charlotte's background is in design and craft. Her expert knowledge in the use materials and techniques provides patients with an opportunity to explore creative processes and ideas to produce their own imaginative work.
4. Catherine White (Professional Artist): Catherine is an ex-paediatric nurse and has a BA Hons Degree in Fine Art. She brings a lively imagination to her workshops on the wards, often spontaneously tailoring activities to patients needs.
5. RUHX: The official charity for the RUH providing Charitable funds and support to continue the pARTicipate art programme.
6. Bath Spa University Art & Design students: We offer work placement and internship opportunities to the students at Bath Spa University.

The need

“The Artsparks sessions are crucial, as they provide routine, structure and something for the patients to look forward to. It also provides familiarity; experience and the artists are able to work without support which is really important for the medical team and play team so that they can support patients in their own roles as the ward is often chaotic and very busy and this can often mean that the play team are busy with referrals and inpatients and therefore not able to supervise the artists, which is why it is important that they are experienced and familiar for the children and the ward.” Play Specialist

The need for participatory creative sessions for young patients in hospital is higher than it has ever been. The number of mental health admissions continues to rise. The time spent on a ward with a professional artist is not simply a 'nice thing to have' but **an essential part of a young person's**

recovery. Patients struggling with their mental health are extremely vulnerable and benefit so much from the opportunity to take part in a participatory art workshop or work 1:1.



Oncology patients and families organise appointments and treatments on a Wednesday as knowing that there is a workshop taking place in the playroom on the Children's ward really helps them so much at what is an incredibly difficult time.

"The arts activities really helped my daughter's stay, she is 11 and has bone cancer and spends a lot of time in hospital. Having activities like this makes so much difference. Thank you." Parent



Mythological creature Playroom wall display

“We are so grateful for the positive impact you have had on our chemo journey. We love seeing you every Wednesday and have so enjoyed your art and your company during these tough days. I'm not sure how we would do it without you.” Message to Artist from a Parent

The Art at the Heart pARTicipate programme has become increasingly essential in meeting the evolving needs of patients, ensuring that their emotional and mental well-being is supported alongside their clinical care. This initiative not only enhances the patient experience but also strengthens the overall sense of trust and continuity within the hospital environment.

Target Audience

Artsparks workshop sessions are specifically aimed at young patients who can take part either in a group setting in the playroom or 1:1 at their bedside. Art workshops for young patients and their families/carers makes a real difference to their overall experience and hospital stay; which also supports the clinical teams and in turn reduces pressures across the ward. These sessions are so valuable and make such a difference to a child's experience in hospital. Children often start workshops shy and unsure but leave with huge smiles and an enormous sense of achievement. Inevitably, this makes the whole ward a happier place.



The sessions ran weekly until the end of April 2025 but unfortunately have had to pause due to not having funds to continue this incredible work. The professional artists offer a wide range of creative projects and materials to inspire young patients each week. Artsparks sessions are based in the Playroom, on the bays and in side rooms to include everyone, whatever their abilities or additional needs. The intention is to allow children to enjoy the freedom to produce their own artwork in a safe, supportive and non-judgemental setting.



Stitch in Time workshop sessions are for older patients and their carers or supporting staff. Combe Ward staff have said how these sessions help improve mobility, independence, motivation and confidence for patients who can decline quickly in hospital. OTs find it useful to observe patients taking part in workshops, as a way of assessing abilities. A clinical research nurse observed how patients benefited from the stimulation and social activity during the art workshop, she thought offering this on other OPUS (such as Waterhouse) to reach more patients would improve low mood and anxiety, which is common for this older age group.

'Arts enabled older people of all capacities to engage in meaningful social participation and make a valued contribution to their relationships and communities, indicating the potential of participatory arts to alleviate loneliness and social isolation.'

2) *The impact of participatory arts in promoting social relationships for older people within care homes, Perspect public health, 2020, Jun 7, National Library of Medicine

"It's good for you using hands, eyes and mind" (Patient- Cheselden)

Activities & Highlights from Nov 24 – Apr 25

Artsparks usually takes place on Wednesdays. It has been beneficial for the Children's ward to have two artists in alternate weeks to offer patients a variety of arts and craft activities. Highlights include making lucky cat puppets for Chinese New Year, making large daffodils for display during Springtime, decorating keepsake boxes, making characters from fimo clay, Treasure Island and Mythological creatures wall display for the Playroom.

Stitch in Time takes place on a Thursday morning in Combe ward dayroom but our artists also visit other OPU ward areas such as Cheselden and Waterhouse where there is a need for art activities.



"We spent the morning making daffodils on Combe ward. Two female patients came to the day room and worked with Julia our dementia befriender and Lizzie our student. I worked at the bedside with another female patient who was very pleased to be making flowers as making flowers from paper was her specialty back in the day. She told me all about how she used to make roses and hyacinths out of paper." Catherine White, Artist

'A number of studies have reported findings of applied arts and cultural interventions and measured their positive impact on specific health conditions which include dementia, depression and Parkinson's disease'

3) *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society – An Evidence Review, March 2014



Artist, Catherine White's Spring daffodil workshops were popular on both the Children's and Older Patient wards. It was a very successful day with many positive comments from staff members who were grateful that their patients were being kept occupied and to see a bit of colour on the ward.

"Patients made dragonflies, I'd prepared the basic frames in different sizes and covered uneven edges on the bamboo with masking tape to make a smooth shape. The frames were covered with glue and coloured tissue paper to fill in the wings, bodies wrapped with yarn, shiny details added with metallic paint and sequins." Charlotte Stowell, Artist

Patients also made some paper sculpture lizards from tightly rolled newspaper wrapped with tape to make the bodies, tail and legs, then covered with small pieces of decoupage paper for a mottled effect or painted them.



VE day was a highlight and this particular Stitch in Time workshop was busy all morning with patients, visitors and staff painting model spitfire planes, there were 15 people in the day room at one point and other staff popping in to see what everyone was doing.

Artist Charlotte Stowell prepared some simple MDF wooden planes on stands for patients to paint and add camouflage patterns and to paint a base. The finished planes looked great on the windowsill. Patients shared what they remember about VE day and what their parents or grandparents were doing during the war. The

husband of a patient said he thought it was wonderful to have activities like this, ***'it's really helped to lift the mood in hospital'***.



Art in a Bag

Art at the Heart developed an "art in a bag" service for young patients, which includes high-quality materials and an accompanying QR code to access workshop videos. This initiative has been especially popular when the Playroom is unavailable during evenings and weekends. The creative kits provide patients and families with a way to engage in activities together, offering a source of joy and distraction. Additionally, themed displays



featuring patient artwork have been created in the Playroom, bringing the ward environment to life and connecting patients to larger cultural events and themes, such as seasonal celebrations and festivals.

Feedback

pARTicipate art workshops have received very positive feedback from staff, patients and visitors.

On a scale from 1-10, my enjoyment of the workshop is...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not much Average Lots

Artsparks Workshops

Date: 19 02 25

Are you a:
Patient
Carer
Staff member
Other

Did taking part in this workshop make a difference to your stay in hospital?
Yes No

Did you try using different materials?
Yes No

Did you learn a new skill?
Yes
Nearly
No
Skill

Thoughts | Ideas | Feedback

This is a delightful unexpected extra and has changed the tone of the hospital visit. Charlotte is a very kind and accommodating teacher and has clearly planned activities based on children's needs.
Thankyou

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'The workshops are a highlight and makes coming into hospital a much more positive experience'. Patient, Children's ward

'Our daughter has had a fabulous day doing artwork. With a chronic illness she spends a lot of time in hospital. Extra events like this provide huge relief to the long, difficult days. Thank you!' Parent

"The art session was amazing! Patients, staff and doctors were still talking about it today so thank you so much." Senior Sister

'Charlotte has really helped me and my daughter to bond through art play. We have been here most Wednesdays for nearly 2 years, each Wednesday Charlotte hosts many different workshops, allowing us to immerse ourselves in creativity. A very effective therapy, Thank you Charlotte!' Parent

'This is a delightful unexpected extra and has changed the tone of the hospital visit. Charlotte is a very kind and accommodating teacher and has clearly planned activities based on childrens' needs. Thank you.' Parent



'Our particular group of patients attend hospital repeatedly and often for difficult and challenging treatment. It simply cannot be overstated the benefits that the children get and the relief to their parents of getting involved in a proper art project during this time. Children quickly get to know which days Artsparks will be happening and actively look forward to getting involved on those days, thus taking some of the stinging out of coming into hospital.' Consultant in Paediatric Oncology

'I didn't expect to be good at this but I've really enjoyed it'
Patient, Combe Ward

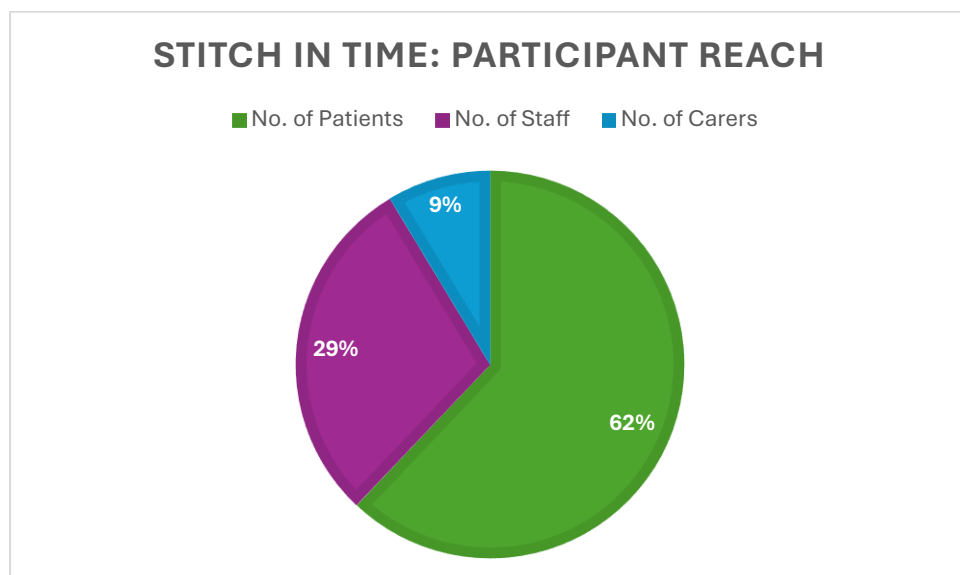
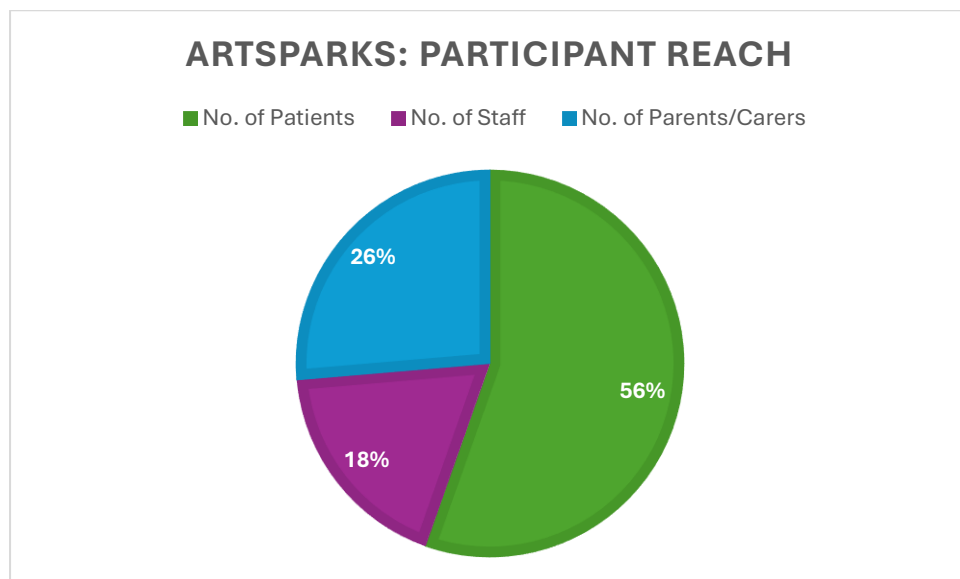
'It's the first thing you see, it's wonderful, they're beautiful'
Patient talking about window decorations made in workshops, these can be seen across the bays on Cheselden Ward



Numbers and Statistics

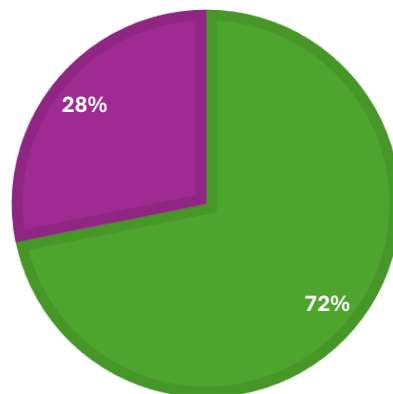
The Professional Artists have delivered 45 workshops and reached a total of 412 participants from November 24 – April 25.

In Artsparks, 164 patients have been directly reached and in Stitch in Time sessions, 72 patients have taken part alongside staff members, carers and family.



PARTICIPATE: ARTS WORKSHOPS

■ No. of Artsparks Participants ■ No. of Stitch in Time Participants



The Artsparks workshops reach a higher percentage of participants across the ward and a wider audience with family members and support staff such as Norland Nannies, Junior Doctors or Medical students taking part. The act of engaging and making something with the young patients can make the children feel more at ease and in some cases the staff can assess them a lot more efficiently too.

Artsparks and Stitch in Time has had a significant positive impact on both patient wellbeing and staff morale, creating a more uplifting and engaging hospital environment.

'The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.' *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry, July 2017*

Impact on Patient Wellbeing and Mood:

'You can lose yourself, you can carry on and use your imagination. If you've got a big enough table you can do so much, look how much we've achieved' Patient

An achievement no matter how big or small is empowering for many of us. Being able to deliver something that brings joy to a patient's day is why we do what we do. A patient's wellbeing and overall experience in hospital really makes a big difference. The mood on the ward lifts. The atmosphere brightens. The Stitch in Time workshops enable elderly patients to sit around a big table together and interact with each other whilst creating something new. The weekly themed art sessions spark conversations and reminiscence for all to enjoy.

Similarly, in Artsparks sessions, young patients take part together or with their families around the table in the playroom, or the artist can deliver materials to a patient's bedside and work 1:1. The Hospital Play specialists say ***“Artsparks is a vital service providing therapeutic outlets for all patients and their parents/carers, promoting recovery, encouraging mobilisation and fine motor skills, as well as encouraging self-esteem and self-worth and is fun!”***

‘There is an expanding body of research and evaluation to support the case that the arts have an important contribution to make to health and wellbeing.’

4) *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry, July 2017

Impact on Staff Morale and Engagement:

The artists work very hard alongside staff members such as the Play Specialists on the Children's ward and The Dayroom to Doorstep facilitator on Combe ward (OPU) to ensure that the activities are suitable for all patients and are delivered safely. The art sessions can help to boost staff morale as well as lift patients mood which is all so important to deliver the best possible care.

‘The difference these sessions make to the ward areas is huge for patients, staff and families. It is important that we offer additional support during a hospital stay other than the ward routines. The ward comes alive with the activities and it promotes socialisation, conversation and can also be used to encourage drinks and snacks before, during or after these sessions.’

Dementia Coordinator



Staff have commented how the routine of having art workshops every week gives patients something to look forward to and how the decorations in the dayroom made by patients with the artists really brighten the space.

Looking ahead

We are in the process of applying for longer term funding for our participatory art projects. We are excited about the possibility of future growth and expansion of our creative services in response to increasing demand. Extending our Stitch in Time programme to a full day each week, would enable us to regularly reach a wider range of wards, including Cheselden, OPUSS, and Waterhouse, and provide more regular access to creative activities for older patients. This regular engagement will enhance the therapeutic benefits of art for patients, enriching their hospital experience.

'This shows someone cares' Patient

We are also proud to offer volunteering and student placement opportunities, which foster engagement and learning while supporting the overall programme. With the valuable assistance of dedicated Friends volunteers and Bath Spa University student placements, we have been able to enhance the experience for both patients and artists alike. The programme has seen positive interest, with three new enquiries for placements and volunteering this year.

'Let's stop trying to 'prove' the value of arts interventions in health care only according to narrow scientific assessment models. There are limits to what can be known through a randomised control trial. Let's invest our energies instead into agreeing and meeting performance standards, monitoring the effects in straightforward, comparable ways and trusting the judgement of artists and audiences about quality. Art and science are not the same – and it's in the differences that they have most to offer person-centred health care.'

5) *Both sides of the coin: The Distinctive Value of Arts in Healthcare, Arts and Health

Thank you's

Thank you to all participants, staff and supporters of our pARTicipate programme. Thanks to our professional artists for delivering these sessions and to Bath Spa student Elizabeth Royle for her student placement with Art at the Heart and for assisting in our participatory art workshops.

Thank you to our core funders RUHX charity. We will be applying to Trust and Foundations with the support of RUHX to continue the valuable work of our pARTicipate Art programme.