

# Create arts projects for patients

*Elizabeth Gates* examines how funding for art projects in health settings lies in the balance

Amid current economic stringencies, funding lies in the balance for many arts projects in health and social care settings. Yet GPs across the country may want to offer patients an arts project option, and funding may be accessible.

Some practices have sourced funding from arts organisations. For example, at Bedminster Family Practice in Bristol, GP Dr Gillian Rice helped organise a creative writing project called Creativity for Confidence, which was entirely funded by Lapidus (lapidus.org.uk), an organisation promoting the creative use of writing and reading in health and social care settings.

## Local authority funding

But the manager for the Bristol-based project Artshine, Louisa Newman, also advises: 'PCTs and local authorities also provide funding for a huge number of different arts and health initiatives.' Artshine was launched in September 2010 by NHS Bristol, in partnership with Bristol City Council.

As arts on referral project manager, whose role is to provide arts and health opportunities within general practice, Ms Newman explains there are three levels of funding GPs can apply for:

- National bodies – for example, lottery funding (which would involve the creation of neighbourhood partnerships).
- Community – local authorities may have funding for projects relevant to their communities.
- Private trust funds that target the use of arts in healthcare.

## Community arts projects

Artshine assists with GP referrals to community arts projects and is widely experienced in this field. Ms Newman advises GPs to prepare their funding applications with care.

She says: 'There are different pots of funding for different criteria. Your proposal needs to target specific groups defined by strict criteria based on need, setting (inner city or rural) and access needs.'

'If you can say 80 per cent of participants come from this [specific] target group, you are more likely to succeed.'

At Bedminster Family Practice, which has a long history



Dr Rice: creating outlets for creativity can help patients with mental health or emotional problems

## CREATIVITY FOR CONFIDENCE PROGRAMME

### THEME: WATER

- Week 1** Harbour: safety and ground rules.
- Week 2** Resources: personal and external.
- Week 3** Leaving the shore: journeys and risks.
- Week 4** Exploring the ocean floor: relating self to other people and the cultural landscape.
- Week 5** Diving for pearls: exploring the essential self versus other people's interpretations.
- Week 6** Sharing our treasure: closure, creating an anthology of participants' work and evaluation.

## PROGRAMME'S BENEFITS FOR INDIVIDUAL PATIENTS

- Identified from Creativity for Confidence general feedback questionnaire and pre- and post-course Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing evaluation forms (available online).
- Working with the critique and supportive insight of others (literary ability not a benchmark).
  - Revisiting the ability to 'share'.
  - Improved social skills and social confidence.
  - More confidence to be creative.
  - Freedom of self-expression in a safe environment. ('It's better to be angry on paper than elsewhere.')
  - Letting go of unhappiness.

links with other GP surgeries in the region.

'This umbrella group could apply for quite a large pot of money which would allow each GP to set up their own specific project.'

'This sort of grouping depends on how good the GPs are at networking but can give them much more power than they would have acting on their own.'

She adds that they can also share resources, cross-refer patients and support each other in many other ways.

## Practice-based arts

The results can repay any investment in administrative time, space and practice team's energy. Successful examples of practice-based arts include Bedminster Family Practice's Creativity for Confidence programme.

Dr Rice says: 'As busy GPs, we don't have a lot to offer people with mental health or emotional problems. We can offer anti-depressants.'

'We can sometimes offer counselling, which may resolve issues. But an arts project is now something we can offer.'

Claire Williamson, a creative writing project facilitator, adds: 'The main aim of the Creativity for Confidence programme (see boxes) was to free up people who were feeling emotionally battered and encourage them to share creative work and feelings in a safe environment.'

'Although one patient became too ill to carry on after the first session, by the end of the programme, the seven other participants all noted improvements in their wellbeing.'

According to Dr Rice, an arts project can help patients become more future-focused and more 'can-do'.

'Creative self-expression helps us understand who we are, or what our values or beliefs are, in a way that conventional medicine can't,' she says.

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of arts projects, applying for funding usually falls to Dr Rice. She warns: 'You have to be prepared to set aside time for the application processes – to prepare your proposal and then rewrite it if it fails.'

Ms Newman also suggests that if GPs are interested in setting up an arts project within their surgery but their organisation is too small to attract funding on its own, they can make



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Dr Gillian Rice