

# Project eARTh evaluation

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## EVALUATION REPORT 2020-21

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# Introduction

Project eARTh is a community arts for health project operating in the High Peak area. It has now been running for over 10 years. Prior to March 2020, the project ran two weekly groups, meeting in New Mills and Buxton. Inevitably, the Covid 19 pandemic altered Project eARTh's ability to run its planned programme, and many changes had to be made. However, the project has adapted to the new circumstances and continued to deliver an arts-based programme for participants.

As many participants did not have internet access, or feel able to use platforms like Zoom, the project quickly established a system of postal and door to door delivery of arts projects for participants to do at home, where possible maintaining the ethos of collective working towards a common goal and creating artworks for others. This was supplemented by phone calls for a chat; setting up a WhatsApp group for those who wanted to join and had a suitable phone/laptop; and emails to those with email addresses. In the third lockdown (winter 2021), there was also a weekly Zoom chat for the few participants with access to this.

During periods between lockdowns when group activities were permitted, and from late April 2021 onwards, face-to-face workshops were held once more. However, for safety reasons, each group was split into two, so as to limit numbers, and allow for participants to be sat 2 metres apart at separate tables, all wearing masks and bringing their own drinks etc. Each participant was also provided with an individual 'kit' so as to avoid sharing equipment and materials. This kit included a set of instructions to allow participants to continue their artwork between fortnightly sessions. This also meant that those regular participants who did not yet feel confident to return to face-to-face delivery could take part at home.

## Projects June 2020 – June 2021

This evaluation report includes projects carried out within the year June 2020-21. These are briefly described below.

### **Ugly Bug Ball (spring/summer 2020)**

This embroidery project, led by artist Amanda Whewell, began in April 2020, but continued into the summer. The idea was to create a quilt for Reuben's Retreat in Glossop by combining individually embroidered squares on the theme of the Ugly Bug Ball. Ninety-three embroidered pieces were received from participants, volunteers and community members who heard of the project. These were sewn together with tied dyed fabric in between, to make a large quilt, three cushions and a wall hanging. The quilt and cushions were delivered to Reubens Retreat in October 2020. However, as with other projects completed this year, it was not possible to organize a community unveiling event as would normally have been the case.



### **Pom Poms and Paper wreaths (spring/summer 2020)**

Aware that not everyone could engage with the embroidery, Project Earth also sent out some simple, fun craft activities to do at home – such as making pom poms, and making decorations from stripy paper bags. In addition to the written instructions, photos and materials in the post, the artist Deb Rogers made some ‘how to’ films for those who can access them.



### **World Artists for World Kindness Day: (June/July 2020)**

Artist Amanda Whewell devised a ‘kit’ of materials, equipment and information which could be delivered door to door. Each week focussed on an artist from around the world as inspiration, with activity sheets and how-to films. The pdfs and videos were also made available on the HPCA website for anyone who wanted to join in. A selection of finished artworks (one from each participant) were printed onto 500 sets of 12 double sided cardboard coasters, given away to local foodbanks for World Kindness Day in November 2020.





### The Felted Fall of Leaves (autumn 2020)

Led by artist Carol Wilson, this project was started in face to face workshops, and finished at home in the November lockdown. The project had an autumn theme, with felting inspired by autumn leaves. Carol has framed the 36 completed felt pieces in groups of 9, for a community venue.







### Five ways to Wellbeing Bunting (December 2020-February 2021)

Led by artists Deborah Rogers and Sam Mace of The Cultural Sisters, this project was based on the theme of the 5 ways to wellbeing, to make bunting using a masking tape resist method. It started in face to face workshops in December and was completed at home during lockdown in January/February. Again, instructions were available on the HPCA website and Facebook.



### #ShowtheLove (February 2021)

In this mini project, participants decorated postcards for the Climate Coalition's #showthelove project – which were then made into a window display for the office of Robert Largan MP over Valentine's weekend and then displayed in the windows of High Lea Hall.



### Mexican Embroidery (spring/summer 2021)

This was another post-out project led by artist Amanda Whewell and inspired by embroidery in the Otomi region of Mexico. The project was in 2 parts, so that everyone could be involved in the design phase – and then those who did not wish to embroider could post back their designs for the Project eARTh team to send out to those who do. Those who enjoy embroidery could embroider their own designs and also other participants. This phase will continue throughout spring and summer 2021, alongside other projects. This project again had films and pdfs available, and other community members could request a kit of calico, hoop and threads to join in. The pieces will be used to create a wall hanging.



### Blue John Weaving (spring/summer 2021)

Led by artist Carol Wilson, this post out weaving project was inspired by Blue John stone. The weaving is done on small card looms following instruction sheets available on the HPCA website and Facebook. Again, participants can complete this at their leisure, over the summer, to put together in the Autumn.



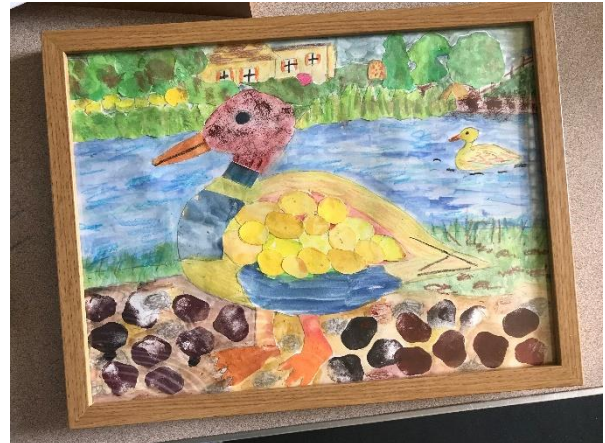


### Nurture Nature (April-June 2021)

This project was started with the return to face-to-face workshops from April 2021. Led by artist Amanda Whewell, it is a collage and print based project, inspired by the work of artist Mark Hearld who creates art based on British wildlife and flowers. There are at-home kits for those not wishing to attend face-to-face yet. Participants create 3D cards, garlands and finally, their own A3 or A4 collage to be framed.







## Evaluation methodology

Just as the project itself had to be adapted in response to Covid restrictions, so too did the evaluation. Data were collected using the following methods.

### **a. Participant surveys**

Short baseline and follow up surveys were completed by Project eARTh participants in summer 2020 (or when they joined the project), then at approximately six-monthly intervals. The survey is divided into three sections: making connections; confidence and resilience; and wellbeing, each consisting of a series of Likert type scale questions, plus space for open-ended comments. Surveys are administered by the mental health support worker or other Project eARTh staff. Participants also have the option to self-complete the survey online.

### **b. Workshop feedback forms**

At the start and end of each session, participants are asked to complete a short form asking them to rate their mood at both points, as well as providing open-ended comments on the session. For each session, participants' pre- and post- ratings were compared using matched pairs t-tests.

### **c. Observation of sessions**

The number of face-to-face sessions has of course been limited this year. Nevertheless, 5 sessions were observed: 3 (2 New Mills, 1 Buxton) during autumn 2020, and 2 in New Mills in spring 2021. In total sessions from three different projects were observed. Social distancing made informal conversation with participants a little more difficult than would otherwise be the case. It also made it tricky to arrange in-depth interviews with selected participants as had originally been planned.

### **d. Interviews with artists**

Following each commission, interviews were conducted with artists involved to gather their feedback on the sessions – and particularly how they had needed to adapt activities in response to Covid restrictions. These interviews were conducted online. Four artists were interviewed.

### **e. Interviews with volunteers**

Five Project eARTh volunteers were interviewed during the course of the year to explore their views on the project. These interviews were conducted online or by phone. The way in which the project has had to adapt to Covid, as well as their own personal circumstances, meant that a number of volunteers had not been able to be as actively involved as in previous years.

**f. Feedback from organisations where artwork is displayed**

Organizations receiving artworks created through Project eARTh were contacted by email and asked to provide feedback about the artwork. They were also asked about any impact or responses it had provoked, although this was inevitably limited by the fact that most venues were closed (or providing very limited access) for most of the year.

**g. Feedback from steering group meetings**

The evaluator attended the Project eARTh steering group meeting held in January 2021.



# Findings

## Baseline survey

In late summer/early autumn 2020, 40 Project eARTh participants completed a baseline survey: 24 from the New Mills group and 16 from the Buxton group.

### Making connections

Figure 1 shows responses to the 'making connections' questions in the baseline survey.

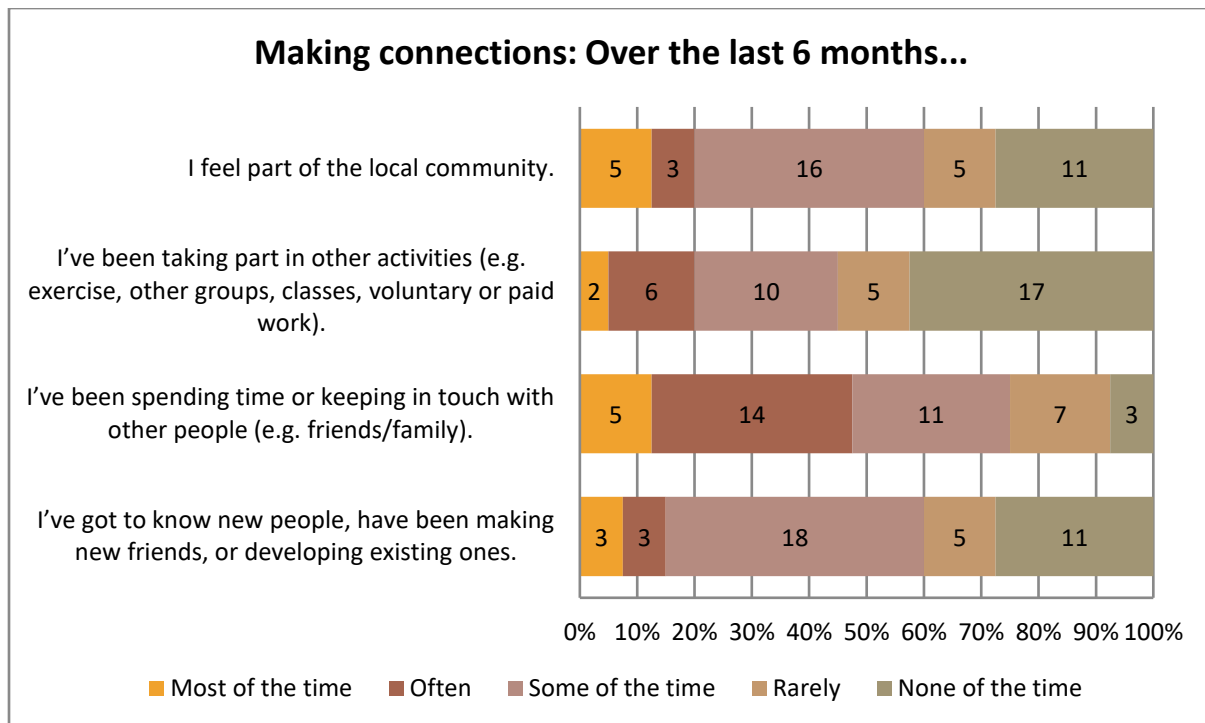


Fig 1: Baseline – Making Connections

The impact of lockdown and social distancing restrictions due to Covid 19 had clearly had a major impact on many participants:

*Felt very distant as shielding at the minute. Miss seeing people and interacting in the community*

*Not seen sister and brother. Very depressed. Been on my own for months.*

*I've had periods where I've just felt too overwhelmed to contact anyone. I sometimes feel part of the community and sometimes really isolated and not part of anything.*

Some, however, had been able to keep in touch with friends from Project eARTh even though the sessions had not been running, and this had helped to make them feel less isolated:

*I've made a point of keeping in touch with my close friends within the group. We work as a peer wellbeing group during lockdown and can talk honestly when feeling down instead of feeling that we need to put a brave face on.*

*Members have been staying in touch by phone and email keeping spirits up whilst in lockdown. Like having a second family. It's good to have people who care about you and people to care for.*

### Confidence and resilience

Figure 2 shows responses to the 'confidence and resilience' questions in the baseline survey.

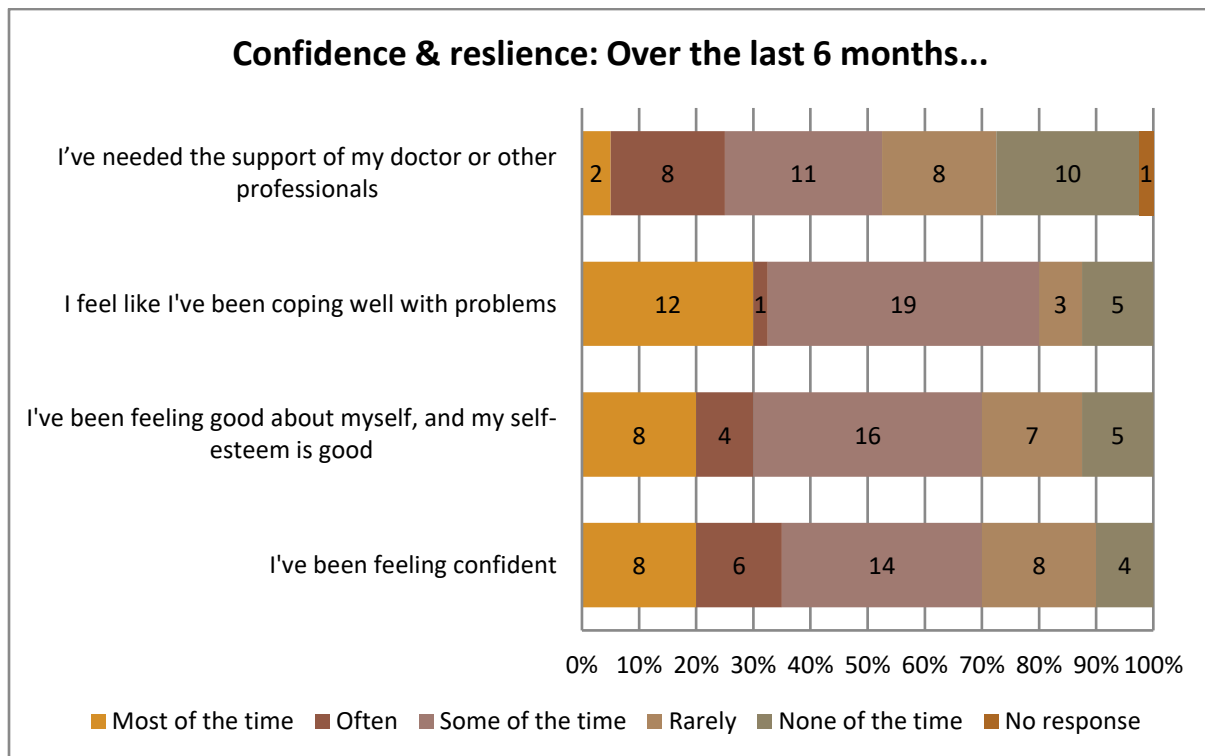


Fig 2: Baseline – Confidence & resilience

Again, Covid restrictions had a notable impact on many participants' confidence levels:

*Being isolated for months has made me lose confidence in general. I've possibly needed medical support, but fear of catching Covid 19 has put me off seeking their support.*



*I have been talking to a social worker. Going to class is my chance to meet people and work on lovely productive art sessions. But being afraid of the coronavirus at home whilst isolated creates the opposite. I can't wait for the day that we can go back if that's possible.*

*Losing motivation the longer we're locked in, sleeping more and not got much get up and go.*

Some, however, reflected on how Project eARTh had still helped them to feel more confident despite the difficult circumstances:

*The projects give me a purpose, a way of doing something for someone else. A connection to the outside world.*

## Wellbeing

Figure 3 shows responses to the wellbeing-related questions in the baseline survey.

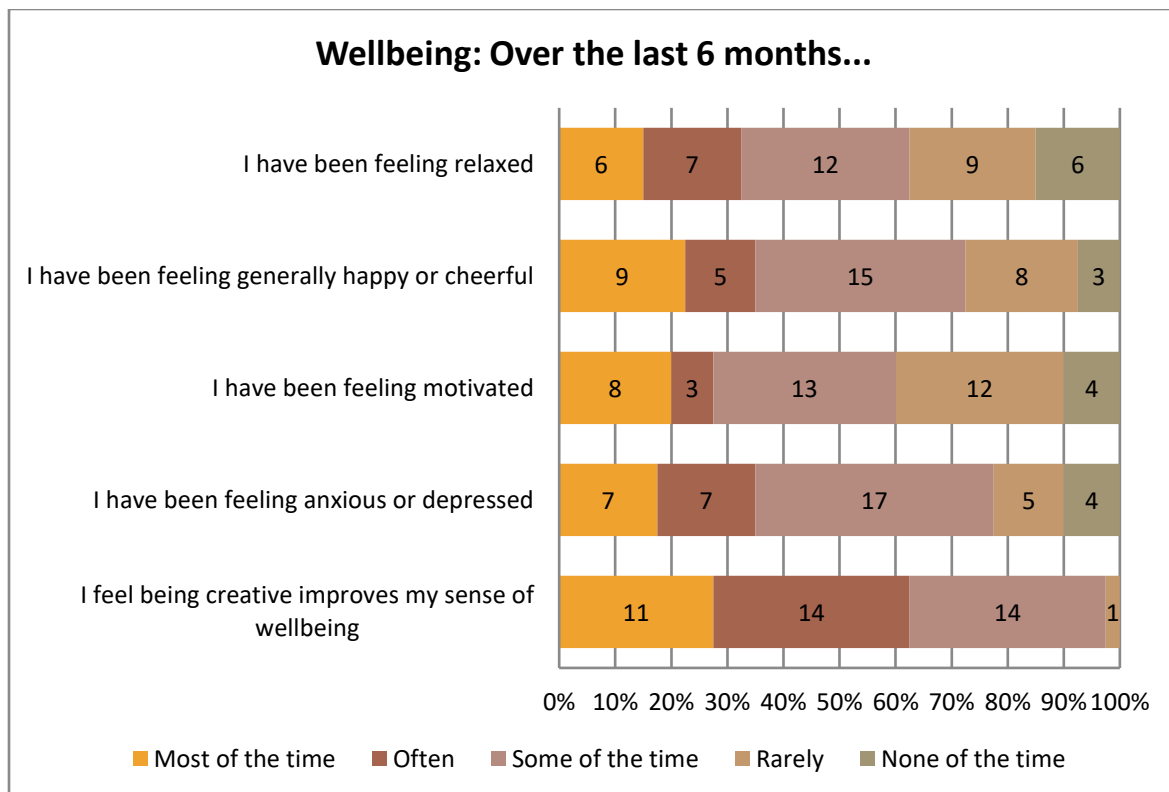


Fig 3: Baseline - Wellbeing

In this section, participants described the impact of Covid 19 restrictions on their wellbeing:

*Anxiety is the worst feeling. Isolation escalates it, often leading to depression.*

*Due to the Covid 19 I have not been able to spend time away from the home and it has made my depression worse.*

However, a number commented on the ways in which Project eARTh at Home had helped to improve their wellbeing:

*I have really enjoyed the activities arriving in the post. [The artist] came with the latest project today; it was like my birthday getting a present. It's fun to have a go at something new. It's a time for me to have fun. Not feel guilty I am not getting a job done. Time disappears alongside everything else; there is just you and paint brush or needle and thread.*

*Thanks to HPCA. They have kept my mind occupied which has really helped in this horrible time.*

*The instructions through the post have been excellent. A lot of work has been done to keep in touch and lift our spirits during lockdown.*

Nevertheless, whilst they appreciated the 'at Home' activities, many participants said they were missing the face-to-face sessions:

*I have been finding it hard to concentrate and have not done anything creative. It was going to the class that I liked.*

*I can't wait for our sessions to restart. [The project co-ordinator's] done a great job keeping us in touch, but nothing can beat personal meetings.*

*Hope we get back to the art group soon as I miss seeing people.*

## Follow up survey

In winter/early spring 2021, 36 Project eARTh participants completed a follow up survey. 31 of these had also completed a baseline survey. There were 20 responses from the New Mills group and 16 from the Buxton group. The only question where there was a significant difference between the participants from the two locations was "I have been feeling anxious or depressed", with members of the New Mills group more frequently experiencing anxiety or depression, but this is in line with the composition of this group and is therefore unlikely to be related to any differences within Project eARTh itself.



## Making connections

Figure 4 shows responses to the 'making connections' questions in the follow up survey.

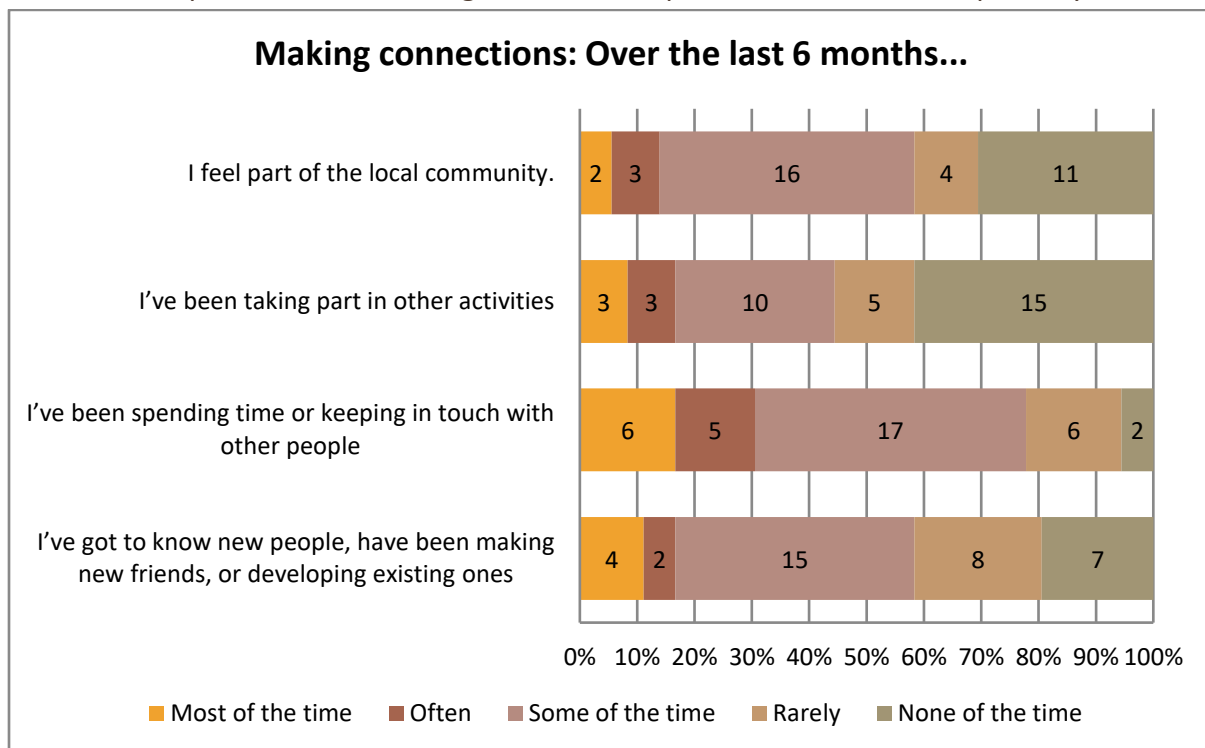


Fig 4: Follow up – Making connections

As in the Baseline survey, participants described the impact of Covid restrictions on their opportunities to make connections:

*Due to the pandemic I have not been going out or seeing people.*

*Due to Covid I have not seen anyone except the staff & residents in my group home.*

For those who do not have access to (or enjoy) communicating online or by phone, this time has clearly been challenging, but others, took advantage of technology to stay in touch with the group whilst face-to-face meetings were not possible:

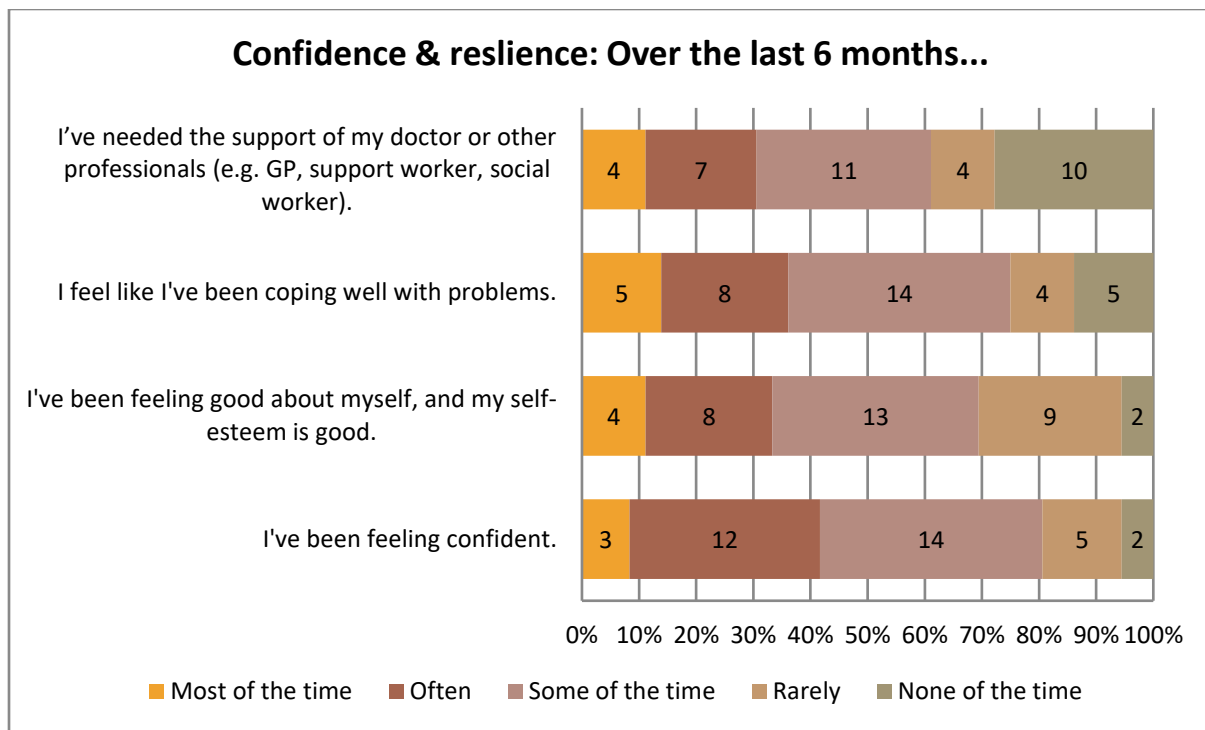
*I have got to know a couple of people much better by talking on the phone regularly during lock down. Zoom has helped seeing other members from each group.*

*Friends in the group have kept in touch. Learnt to use Zoom due to HPCA.*

*Close friends from the group phone on a very regular basis to provide peer support.*

## Confidence and resilience

Figure 5 shows responses to the ‘confidence and resilience’ questions in the follow up survey.



*Fig 5: Baseline – Confidence & resilience*

As with making connections, the pandemic had also impacted on many participants' confidence and resilience:

*The isolation of the pandemic has also had a negative impact on my mental health.*

*I have felt very anxious during the pandemic. I am fed-up & frustrated. I want things to go back to normal. I really miss the art groups.*

*Lock down and health issues have taken some of my confidence away.*

An extended period of reduced social contact had left some participants worried about how they would cope:

*My anxiety has increased since the pandemic and not being able to go out. I am looking forward to the groups starting again, but I am very apprehensive about going, due to my anxiety & being indoors for so long. I was very nervous when I started the group and I hope I will not feel the same now that I know people.*

A few of those who were struggling reported difficulties getting help at this time:

*I need support but don't feel there is much from GP etc*

*I have had difficulty accessing mental health services, so I really appreciate the support I receive from project eARTh; it reminds me I am not forgotten!*

However, a few participants did report more positive experiences:

*I have been in a good mood and keeping busy with my own projects/activities at home.*

In particular, some described how the Project eARTh at Home activities had helped them during this time:

*I have been enjoying doing the art projects at home and I have been accessing the 'how to' videos on-line. I have just started the embroidery project. I did attend some group sessions before the lockdown and these helped me to get going with a project, like the bunting.*

## Wellbeing

Figure 6 shows responses to wellbeing-related questions in the follow up survey.

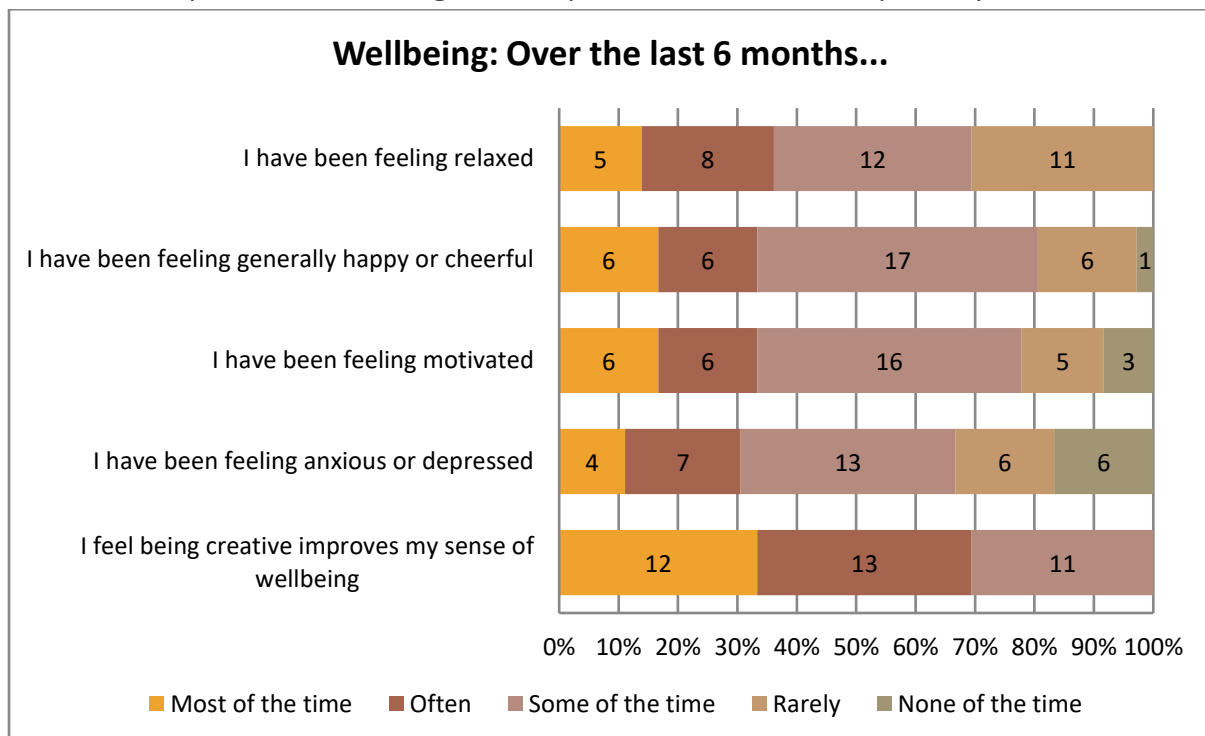


Fig 6: Follow up – Wellbeing



Participants described how art and craft activities had helped to improve their wellbeing during this time:

*Craft projects really help lift my mood and feel good about myself*

*I have managed to do some drawings in the sketch pad that came with my 'remote' art project & this has relaxed me.*

*I enjoy being creative and it can relax me or distract me from my negative thoughts.*

However, some found it difficult to concentrate at home and many clearly missed the group interaction of face-to-face sessions:

*I don't feel creative working by myself. I need people around me to motivate and inspire me.*

*I enjoyed going to the few sessions during the pandemic and did some art, but I find it difficult to continue doing an art project at home without people to help me.*

*Starting a new project at home on your own is quite daunting, I need encouragement and motivation.*

*The outreach work from Project eARTh's kept me going through lockdown but I have missed the physical stimulation of our usual meetings.*

Others (especially those without internet access) found it difficult to follow the instructions on their own and because they felt less motivated outside of the sessions:

*I have received the remote art packs to do at home but I cannot follow the instructions and I do not have access to a computer/internet to view the 'how to' videos.*

*I have been given the remote art projects but I have not done them as I find the instructions too confusing and I have less motivation to do them when I am on my own.*

However, it is worth noting that, even if they did not actually do the 'at Home' activities, participants appreciated the efforts Project eARTh had made to keep in touch and remind them they were not forgotten:

*I think High Peak Community Arts is very supportive, especially due to these exceptional times (Covid 19). Even if you don't always feel like doing artwork or you haven't got access to Zoom, you realise you are not on your own, even in darkest days! WhatsApp is helpful, it reminds you of the projects. Also support workers and tutors etc keeping in touch, personal visits with arts projects, and phone calls, all help with mental health and isolation. It is much appreciated.*

*Thank you for keeping the group going. It's been a beacon of light in these difficult times.*

## Comparison of baseline and follow up surveys

In total, 31 participants completed both a baseline survey in autumn 2020 and a follow up in early spring 2021. Of these, 16 were from New Mills and 15 from the Buxton group.

The following table shows the number of respondents whose follow up rating was lower, higher or the same as their baseline rating (when the Likert scale used to measure frequency is converted to a 1-5 numerical scale). The table also shows the mean difference (average follow up rating minus baseline rating).

Statement	Follow up rating lower than baseline	Follow up rating higher than baseline	Follow up rating same as baseline	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	9	12	10	0.26
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	11	8	12	-0.16
I've been taking part in other activities	7	10	14	0.19
I feel part of the local community	14	10	7	-0.03
I've been feeling confident	10	15	6	0.06
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	10	12	9	0.06
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	12	8	11	-0.1
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals	13	10	8	0.3
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	7	8	16	0.1
I have been feeling anxious or depressed	14	5	12	-0.42
I have been feeling motivated	8	10	13	0.13
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	8	7	16	0
I have been feeling relaxed	5	9	17	0.19

Table 1: Baseline and follow up ratings comparison

At the time of the follow up interviews (winter/early spring 2021), in comparison to the baseline in late summer/early autumn 2020, on average respondents were *more* likely to have been:

- getting know new people, making new friends, or developing existing ones
- taking part in other activities
- feeling confident
- feeling good about themselves and having good self-esteem
- feeling being creative improves their sense of wellbeing
- feeling motivated
- feeling relaxed.

On average, they were *less* likely to:

- have been feeling anxious or depressed
- need support of their doctor or other professionals
- feel like they were coping well with problems
- have been spending time or keeping in touch with other people



- feel part of the local community.

Of course, some of these changes are likely to be related to the extended Covid lockdown in force at the time of the follow up survey. As a result, it is unsurprising that respondents are less likely to spend time with other people or feel part of the local community. It is, however, encouraging that they are, on average, feeling less anxious or depressed; less likely to need support from healthcare professions; more relaxed; more motivated; more confident; feeling good about themselves; taking part in other activities; and getting to know new people *despite* the challenging situation.

It is important to point out that the differences are small, and only in the case of ‘feeling anxious or depressed’ is the change between the baseline and follow up surveys statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), but again, this is not surprising given events of the last year overall.

## Feedback on workshop sessions

Whilst the baseline and follow up surveys gather data on participants over the longer term, workshop feedback forms help to demonstrate the immediate impact of attending Project eARTh sessions.

The workshop feedback form asks participants to sum up in a single word how they feel at the start of a workshop, and how they feel at the end. Figure 7 represents their ‘before’ responses as a Wordle. The most frequently mentioned words were ‘tired’, ‘anxious’ and ‘apprehensive’. However, participants also described themselves as feeling ‘good’ and ‘happy’ – perhaps in anticipation of the session. Overall, 62% of participants used negative words to describe their feelings at the start of the session; 18% used neutral words (e.g. ok); and 20% used positive words.



Fig 7: Wordle of ‘before’ words

Figure 8 represents participants' 'after' responses as a Wordle. The most frequently mentioned words were 'happy', 'awesome', 'invigorated', 'relaxed' and 'brilliant'. Overall, 87.5% of participants used positive words to describe their feelings; 9% used neutral or indeterminate words; and only 3.5% used negative words.



*Fig 8: Wordle of 'after' words*

As well as using words to describe their feelings, participants were asked to rate their mood on a scale of 1-10 at the start and the end of each session. Across all Project eARTh activities (at home and face-to-face) carried out throughout the year, participants reported an average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after doing the activity of 2.54 (a statistically significant difference;  $p < 0.01$ ). Participants reported feeling better after taking part in a Project eARTh activity on 93% of occasions.

The following section reports on the ratings given by participants for each of the projects organised by Project eARTh during 2020-21, alongside qualitative responses provided on the workshop feedback forms where participants were asked to comment on what they had liked, disliked and learnt during the activity.

## Project eARTh at home activities

### World Artists (June/July)

Overall, participants reported feeling better after the World Artist activity on 89% of occasions. The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after doing the activity was 1.98 (a statistically significant difference;  $p < 0.01$ ). The percentage of participants feeling better after the activity, compared to before, ranged from 67% to 100%, and the average difference in scores ranged from 1.0 to 2.25. Looking at the activities individually, the increase in scores after doing the activity was statistically significant for 5 out of the 7 activities.

Activity	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores? <sup>1</sup>
Sonja Delaunay	11	100%	2.18	Yes ( $p < 0.01$ )
Paul Klee	8	100%	2.25	Yes ( $p < 0.01$ )
Frida Kahlo	6	83%	1.0	No
Jivja Some Mashe	7	100%	2.14	Yes ( $p < 0.05$ )
Emily Kngwarreye	8	75%	2.13	Yes ( $p < 0.05$ )
Patrick Heron	6	67%	1.5	No
Hokusai	8	88%	2.25	Yes ( $p < 0.01$ )
<b>All World Artist activities</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>1.98</b>	<b>Yes (<math>p &lt; 0.01</math>)</b>

Table 2: World Artist activities

The range of activities and artists included in this project meant that participants learnt about a variety of artistic skills, including:

- Working with colours
- Using different artist tools (e.g. painting with a cocktail stick)
- Mixed media techniques (e.g. gel, wax, crayon, felt)
- Knowledge of unfamiliar artists and art forms.

Some participants also reflected on positive impacts the activities had on their wellbeing:

*I enjoyed doing the pattern work with Sonia Delaunay, it was helping to try and relax.*

*It was therapeutic, very stress free (Emily Kngwarreye activities).*

<sup>1</sup>  $p < 0.01$  indicates strong evidence of a statistically significant difference;  $p < 0.05$  indicates some evidence of a statistically significant difference. Calculated using matched pairs t-tests.



When asked what they had disliked, most participants reflected on aspects of the art techniques they had found tricky, for example:

*When I printed in my sketch book sometimes it doesn't come out quite right (Hokusai activities)*

*I found the acrylic paint difficult to use with a cocktail stick (Jivja Some Mashe activities).*

It was noticeable that these types of comments were much more common for the 'at home' activities than in the face-to-face sessions where participants could ask for help if they were struggling with some of the activities.

### **'Project eARTh at Home' activities (Jan 2021 onwards)**

18 participants completed feedback forms for various 'Project eARTh at home' activities carried out from January 2021 onwards. 89% of participants said they felt better at the end of the activity than they had at the start. There was a statistically significant difference in ratings given, with an average difference of 2.11.

No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
18	89%	2.11	Yes (p<0.01)

Table 3: At Home activities 2021

Although there was a statistically significant difference between participants' before and after scores for the Project eARTh at Home activities, the difference was not as great as that reported overall for the face-to-face activities (reported below). Whilst many participants enjoyed the 'at Home' activities, this is clearly not the same as meeting face-to-face as a number of participants commented in the baseline and follow up surveys (reported above).

The qualitative comments provided during this period mostly related to the Mexican embroidery project. Whilst this project was focused on embroidery, participants described how they had developed a range of artistic skills, including:

- Designing/drawing animals
- Cross-hatching
- Copying/tracing
- Stitching

- Blending colours.

In common with other activities, participants said they this project helped them to relax and be creative. In addition, several said it had helped them to concentrate. As with the previous 'at home' activities, most of the aspects participants didn't like related to difficulties with particular techniques, and having to work on their own.

## Face-to-face activities

### *Felting project (autumn 2020)*

Across all session feedback forms returned by both Buxton and New Mills participants (n=67), there was a strong statistically significant difference ( $p<0.01$ ) in the average before and after scores (out of 10); the mean difference in scores (how much better people felt) was 2.49. On 97% of occasions, participants said they felt better (had a higher score) after than session than they had before.

#### New Mills

Overall, New Mills participants reported feeling better after the activity on 95% of occasions. The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after a session was 3.54 (a statistically significant difference;  $p<0.01$ ).

In all sessions except one, the percentage of participants feeling better after the activity compared to before was 100%. The average difference in scores ranged from 1.67 to 3.9. The increase in scores after doing the activity was statistically significant for all sessions with Group A. (For Group B, the small numbers in each session make statistical analysis tricky, but a statistically significant difference was observed when all sessions with this group are analysed together: mean difference 2.5;  $p<0.01$ ).

Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
10 <sup>th</sup> Sept (Group A)	10	100%	3.7	Yes ( $p<0.01$ )
17 <sup>th</sup> Sept (Group B)	3	33%	1.67	No
24 <sup>th</sup> Sept (Group A)	10	100%	3.9	Yes ( $p<0.01$ )
1 <sup>st</sup> Oct (Group B)	2	100%	3.5	No
8 <sup>th</sup> Oct (Group A)	9	100%	3.89	Yes ( $p<0.01$ )
22 <sup>nd</sup> Oct (Group B)	3	100%	2.67	No
<b>All Felting sessions</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>Yes (<math>p&lt;0.01</math>)</b>

Table 4: Felting activities, New Mills

## Buxton

Overall, Buxton participants reported feeling better after the activity on 100% of occasions (excluding those with both before and after scores of 10). The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after doing the activity was 1.2 (a statistically significant difference;  $p < 0.01$ ).

The average difference in scores ranged from 1.0 to 1.33. The increase in scores after doing the activity was statistically significant for two individual sessions (small numbers attending make analysis of most individual sessions difficult).

Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after <sup>2</sup>	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
14 <sup>th</sup> Sept (Group A)	6	100%	1.33	No
21 <sup>st</sup> Sept (Group B)	4	100%	1.25	Yes ( $p < 0.05$ )
28 <sup>th</sup> Sept (Group A)	6	100%	1.17	No
5 <sup>th</sup> Oct (Group B)	3	100%	1.33	No
12 <sup>th</sup> Oct (Group A)	7	100%	1.14	Yes ( $p < 0.05$ )
2 <sup>nd</sup> Nov (Group B)	4	100%	1.0	No
<b>All Felting sessions</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>Yes (<math>p &lt; 0.01</math>)</b>

Table 5: Felting activities, Buxton

Across both New Mills and Buxton groups, participants said they had enjoyed the process of felting, including designing their piece and learning about stitching, but they also liked being back in a group after the initial lockdown:

*Being back with the group, loved the step by step teaching with [the artist]*

*Working in the same room as others, very warming.*

Whilst a few said they didn't enjoy particular techniques or activities (e.g. working with needles, unpicking), other participants commented that they didn't like the ongoing limits on interaction due to social distancing:

*Not being able to work around a table with others due to social distancing*

<sup>2</sup> Participants with both a 'before' and 'after' score of 10 are not counted when calculating the percentage feeling better because it is not possible for their 'after' score to increase.

*Not being able to see faces and be more sociable.*

Several participants had done wet felting before, so this project acted as a recap for some, but for others it was a new technique. Other skills participants said they had developed through this project included:

- Learning new stitches (e.g. fly stitch)
- Sewing beads
- Layering different fabrics
- Felt making in different cultures.

### **Bunting project (winter 2020-21)**

After an introductory session in early December, the bunting project had to move to an 'Project eARTh at Home' delivery model due to increased Covid-related restrictions.

#### **New Mills**

For the one face-to-face session that was possible at New Mills, 100% of participants felt better at the end of the session than they had at the start. There was a statistically significant difference in scores for this session, with an average difference of 3.78.

Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
10 <sup>th</sup> Dec (Group A)	9	100%	3.78	Yes (p<0.01)

Table 6: Bunting project, New Mills

#### **Buxton**

At Buxton, 100% of participants from both groups felt better after the session than they had before. The average differences were 2.5 and 2.33 for Group A and Group B respectively. The small numbers attending at Buxton mean it is not possible to demonstrate a statistically significant difference in responses.



Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
7 <sup>th</sup> Dec (Group A)	2	100%	2.5	No
14 <sup>th</sup> Dec (Group B)	3	100%	2.33	No

Table 7: Bunting project, Buxton

In the qualitative comments from both groups, participants said they had enjoyed the bunting activity, and in particular learning about the masking tape resist method, but being together in a group was clearly important:

*Being with my friends, chatting, listening, being with people, being out of the house.*

*Seeing everyone and being part of the group again.*

However, being socially distanced in the sessions and “sitting apart from everyone” continued to be a limitation for some.

### **Nurture Nature project (spring-summer 2021)**

Project eARTh returned to face-to-face sessions with the Nurture Nature project from late April 2021 onwards.

Across all session feedback forms returned by both Buxton and New Mills participants (n=30), there was a strong statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the average before and after scores (out of 10); the mean difference in scores (how much better people felt) was 3.5. On 97% of occasions, participants said they felt better (had a higher score) after than session than they had before.

### **New Mills**

New Mills participants reported feeling better after the activity on 95% of occasions. The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after doing the activity was 3.86 (a statistically significant difference;  $p < 0.01$ ).

The average difference in scores for individual sessions ranged from 3.38 to 4.6. The increase in scores after doing the activity was statistically significant for all sessions (except that for which only one form was returned so statistical analysis was not possible)

Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
29 <sup>th</sup> April (Group A)	8	100%	3.38	Yes (p<0.01)
13 <sup>th</sup> May (Group B)	5	80%	4.6	Yes (p<0.05)
20 <sup>th</sup> May (Group A)	8	100%	3.88	Yes (p<0.01)
27 <sup>th</sup> May (Group B)	1	100%	4.0	N/A
<b>All Nurture Nature sessions</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>Yes (p&lt;0.01)</b>

Table 8: Nurture Nature project, New Mills

### Buxton

Overall, Buxton participants reported feeling better after the activity on 100% of occasions (excluding those with both before and after scores of 10). The average difference (out of 10) before and after a session ranged from 1.5 to 3.5. The average difference in ratings was 2.5 (a statistically significant difference; p<0.01). Small numbers in each group make analysis of individual sessions difficult.

Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
26 <sup>th</sup> April (Group A)	2	100%	3.5	No
10 <sup>th</sup> May (Group B)	4	100%	1.5	No
17 <sup>th</sup> May (Group A)	2	100%	3.5	No
<b>All Nurture Nature sessions</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>Yes (p&lt;0.01)</b>

Table 9: Nurture Nature project, Buxton

As with the other face-to-face projects, participants said they enjoyed both engaging in art and being back together in a group in a 'normal-ish' way. Arts skills that participants developed through the project (during the first month) included:

- Using wax resist and water colour (layering)
- Stencil- and stamp-making
- Collage techniques.

Several said they were keen to continue the activities at home. Having something to concentrate on, and becoming 'lost' in the activity was mentioned as a positive aspect of the project:

*I could get completely lost in the project which was very good. I concentrated on the project.*

## Future projects

Amongst participants who had suggestions for ideas for the future, watercolour painting, weaving and pottery were the most popular responses. However, participants suggested a range of ideas as illustrated in Figure 9.



Fig 8: Wordle of ideas for the future

## Participant interviews and observations

Observations of face-to-face sessions and short interviews with participants also demonstrated the ways in which Project eARTh supports connections; confidence and resilience; and wellbeing.

### Making connections

Many participants commented that Project eARTh was the only, or main, contact they have with other people:

*It's the only contact I have with other people*

*I don't know what I'd do without it; it gets me out.*

A number commented that the suspension of face-to-face meetings due to Covid had made them even more aware of the value of meeting and making connections within the group:

*I've realised how much we gain from being in this room – it's not just the artwork; it's the support we give one another that's priceless.*

*...there's no substitute for doing art with other people in a dedicated space.*

Participants described how knowing that “everyone’s in the same boat” made it easier to share how they were feeling honestly:

*...talking to people who were concerned about how I was feeling. I felt there was a lot of support.*

However, conversations were not always about wellbeing of course; participants also talked about the importance of sharing ideas about the artwork they were creating:

*People encourage you to carry on and have confidence in what you’re doing.*

Linked to this, the notion of creating something *together* was important; the group was about more than individual artwork:

*I’m always amazed at the end of a project – not surprised that people can produce work of that quality, but it’s heart-warming to see everything we’ve created together*

*The best things we’ve done have been ambitious team art.*

Maintaining a connection whilst face-to-face meetings were not possible had been challenging, but participants described how they had kept in touch with each other by phone, post, social media and socially distanced visits. Some felt that this had helped them to make stronger connections to other people in the group. As a participant said, maintaining that type of social contact was something she would not have felt confident enough to do before coming to Project eARTh. Another participant explained how she had kept the usual Project eARTh day as her ‘art day’ to help her to feel a connection to the group:

*I kept Thursday morning as my art day [in lockdown] and my family knew that. It gave me colour and fun and connected me with the group knowing other people were doing the same things.*

It would be understandable if the coronavirus lockdown and subsequent restrictions on social interaction had an impact on the ways in which participants made connections within the group. Whilst some were keen to return to face-to-face meetings, others were understandably anxious. Indeed, it was noticeable in the observations of sessions shortly after the lifting of lockdown in autumn that participants were a little reticent, but a couple of months later, the atmosphere was much more relaxed and participants seemed more comfortable being in a group setting again.



However, as several participants commented, they were “looking forward to being more communal again” when restrictions are eased and they are able to sit at the same table and work together.

### **Confidence and resilience**

There is an obvious sense of pride when participants talk about, or show, the artworks they have been involved in creating, especially those that were prominent in community locations. Being involved in the creation of art that was seen by, and gave pleasure to, the local community was an important outcome for participants:

*It feels like you're giving something back to the community, especially if you can't work so you lose your sense of self esteem*

*... we're doing something worthwhile rather than just making something...*

In addition, the sense of achievement from succeeding at something they had not expected to gave participants a feeling of greater confidence:

*At the start of a project, I thought 'I'm not going to be able to do it', but I was really pleased with it and I wanted to keep the piece!*

Some were aware of how the artists (and other Project eARTh staff and volunteers) helped to engender this confidence through the way in which they supported the group, but also their expectations of what participants were capable of achieving:

*Some artists [I've met in the past] have limited expectations of what the group are capable of, but [artists we work with regularly] always want you to do the best work you can...You want the artist to help you, but not treat you like children.*

A participant described how the group liked to “work with” an artist, not simply be taught by them.

Participants spoke about new arts skills they have develop through the project, such as ceramics, metalwork and mixed media, and others discussed how they had gained the confidence not to simply follow the examples given, but to ‘put your own slant on it’. Several said that Project eARTh had inspired them to take part in more art and craft activities outside the session. For some, this was a return to, or extension of, a previous interest, but in other cases, participants who did not consider themselves ‘arty’ said the group had given them a push to be creative. As one described:

*It's made me feel freer to do stuff...given me permission to let go...I've translated it into every aspect of my life.*

Whilst some participants had struggled with online activities, others had taken advantage of the increase in online course provision over the last year (beyond Project eARTh). A participant explained how she had taken several online art courses. Her experiences of Project eARTh had given her the confidence to enrol on the courses and she had been inspired to take a course about artists from around the world after the World Artists for World Kindness Day project.

Inevitably, some participants had found it more difficult to take part in Project eARTh at Home activities because they struggled to follow the instructions or to motivate themselves outside of the group sessions. However, the blended approach adopted when groups could meet, but numbers still needed to be limited presented fewer problems for participants who were more able to persevere with activities between sessions once they had started it within the group:

*It was easier to keep going at home [in the 2<sup>nd</sup> lockdown] because we'd already started it in class.*

## **Wellbeing**

All participants spoken to during the observations said that Project eARTh has a positive effect on their wellbeing:

*It takes my mind off what's happening*

*You always feel better when you've been.*

Project eARTh supports participants' wellbeing in two key ways: Firstly through involvement in creative activities:

*I like doing art; it takes my mind off things.*

*I got absorbed and carried on with activities into early hours!*

And secondly through being part of a supportive group:

*It's good to mix with other people who have mental health problems.*

Taking part in a 'normal' social activity was also an important benefit for wellbeing. A husband and wife who attend together commented:

*We can do something as a normal couple rather than carer and caree.*

Of course, the importance of these two aspects, art and social interaction, varied for individuals – some had a strong interest in art outside of the group and felt this was an important aspect of their lives, whilst others placed more emphasis on the social benefits of attending. However, for most it was the combination of these factors that, together, helped to improve their wellbeing. Whilst the Project eARTh at Home activities were enjoyable, many participants found it hard to motivate themselves when the group was not meeting face-to-face; it was the doing artwork *as a group* that was the most beneficial aspect of Project eARTh for most participants.

*Being with other people who are creative inspires me.*

## Artist interviews

The arrival of Covid 19 in the UK meant the Project eARTh artists needed to adapt their ways of working. This included new experiences such as making instructional videos and creating ‘kits’ of materials with everything participants would need for a project.

Whilst this undoubtedly presented challenges and was time-consuming, the artists interviewed felt that developing new ways of thinking and working had brought benefits and helped them to develop:

*It made us practise and learn how to do things differently. And I love that as well. I love a change and a challenge...after 25 years was really great to be able to kind of like go, how can we make this work? What can we do, you know, like you had to kind of set different parts of your brain in action to think about it. I liked that like that a lot.*

Adaptability was a key theme of the Project eARTh commissions this year – unsurprisingly as projects had to move from face-to-face to at home activities and find new ways of working that were safe within a Covid environment:

*They were going to do a mixed media workshop, and each week do a different art form, and create some images to make the coasters and, but some of the things we were going to do couldn't really be done at home. So it was just a case of sort of trying to rethink how we could still do it.*

*I often try and get them working in groups when I do projects. So there's a lot of discussion about the design and, and choice of colours. And...people working together, saying, I do this bit, and you do that bit or whatever, you know...and then because they will sit round in a group of six or something like that there is more conversation. And so that was very different having everyone spread out on their own.*

When evaluating the success of the 'at Home' activities, it is important not only to consider how many people did the activities and their reactions to them, but also how the act of distributing and collecting materials helped to maintain some of the social aspects of Project eARTh at a difficult time, as an artist described:

*I did find that with seeing people when we were dropping this stuff off and picking it up. How important it was to them. This sort of social side of the group came out a lot...it came across quite a lot how and they were so pleased to see me...I just got such a lovely response from everybody. And on some doorsteps I was standing there for ages chatting...*

Artists described how they tried to incorporate options into activities to suit the different needs and interests of participants. Whilst in face-to-face workshops this is something that could be done by observing participants and adapting sessions accordingly, for remote activities it required much more planning and forethought. This included providing instructions in different formats. As well as videos demonstrating techniques, participants were provided with illustrated written instructions as many do not have Internet access.

It was not only participants themselves who took part in the Project eARTh at Home activities. An artist described how the project had enabled participants to make more connections with family and friends:

*That was a nice thing that one lady had done it and done one with her grandchild, made one with her. And another one of the younger men in the group had designed a piece but his mum had stitched it, so there was quite a little bit short of sharing going on, which was nice.*

In some cases, a sharing element was deliberately built into the project. In the Mexican embroidery project, for example, some participants drew designs that were then sent to others (who enjoyed embroidery) to stitch.

Artists praised the way in which HPCA had handled their relationships with artists during the pandemic. Continuing the project, despite all the challenges, meant they had work, and received payment, at a time when many other opportunities for artists dried up.

*[Before Covid] I did a couple of hours after school clubs, and then, you know, social workshops, or adult ed workshops are there as well. So a lot of them had to just be completely cancelled. And so it was really nice to have some purpose to my weeks, you know, so it was great to be able to, you know, spend time thinking about it, planning it, working through the process. And then, so it, so it was good for my wellbeing as well as the participants'.*



*I was just sitting there going, "I don't know what my purpose is anymore". I'd got I have this dreadful lack of motivation, and really didn't know what to do as an artist in the world that works face to face...then [the Project eARTh co-ordinator] got in touch with me and said, you know, if you can think of any things that we can do remotely where people can do things at home, get in touch..., it gave me a sense of like purpose and, and it kicked my brain back into action again...So, for me, that was really good for my mental health and wellbeing as well.*

As artists described, Project eARTh participants vary widely in both artistic ability and working speed, so trying to design activities that cater for all needs can be challenging. An artist who has worked with the Project eARTh groups over a number years described how she designed activities to build on and develop artistic skills the group had learnt in previous activities:

*we may have been repeating skills, but we would using them in a different way, or taking a progression. So we did some very bold collage pieces. Whereas when we've done collage before, it might have been much neater and smaller. And we were looking at taking a whole page and just like ripping a piece of paper and sticking it down in big bold things. So I think they are learning all the time...*

Another artist described how the length of projects was also helpful in allowing participants to develop skills and produce high quality work.

*...the fact that they aim for long projects, you know, eight weeks, six to eight weeks is a nice long project. That is a really good time for people to really, really learn skills. It's not a tickbox, it's a real involvement and engagement, I love that approach that they take. And it really shows in the work that comes at the other end as well you can tell that there is it raises the quality, I feel.*

## Volunteer interviews

Due to Covid restrictions most volunteers have not been able to support the project in the ways they usually would for much of this year, although some had attended sessions when they were able to run and others had helped to keep in contact with participants during lockdown, for example, helping with the WhatsApp group. Most of the volunteers have a background or interest in arts and/or caring professions. They described how the types of support they provide for Project eARTh participants varies: some people want practical support with activities; others want to discuss ideas; whereas others want emotional support – and of course, this can vary for different individuals at different times.

Volunteers commented on the impact they witnessed on participants who took part in Project eARTh:

*As long as they're in the group, they can, you know, have some social life. As you can see them, their confidence blossoms over the weeks. You know, they might come in and be very quiet and withdrawn. And then, you know, slowly they start to come out of their shell. And others just love, love doing the artwork thing.*

They also spoke about the pride that participants clearly felt when their artwork was displayed in the local community:

*... people get pleasure about the...things that they've made, and also the people who've made it can see, you know, their creations in a public place, which I think is very fulfilling for them.*

Volunteers themselves gained skills through involvement in Project eARTh. This might be art or craft skills that were new to them, or interpersonal skills gained from working with people with diverse needs:

*...this group, it's much more, it's much more led by the individual and what they need, rather than what I need to import. And I think that was probably the biggest learning thing for me. It's not about what I'm trying to get across, it's about what they need.*

## Feedback from community organisations

As there have been no unveiling events this year and completion of some projects has been delayed due to Covid restrictions, the amount of feedback from community organisations hosting artwork created by Project eARTh is more limited than usual. However, feedback was received from Reuben's Retreat – recipient of the Ugly Bug quilt and cushions:

*At Reuben's Retreat, community is everything. We are based on an army of love and compassionate hearts, and wouldn't be anywhere without our community. We feel like the quilt captures the essence of community beautifully...When we first held the quilt, we were taken aback. It is clear to see how much time and effort has gone into this project, and we think it is just wonderful. All the staff commented on the creativity and the kindness of this gift. Once we are in a position to open our activity wing and bring families back to Reuben's Retreat, we will be more than happy to send over further feedback from our families...This amazing work of art that you have kindly gifted us has moved us all, and we know it will bring a huge sense of comfort to many vulnerable families in their times of need. Thank you High Peak Arts.*

As their feedback indicates, plans to share the quilt with services users have been delayed – once again due to Covid. However, once restrictions ease, they hope to hold an Ugly Bug Ball for families

whose children face an uncertain future with the Ugly Bug quilt as the centrepiece of the event. They intend to base activities around the quilt, drawing inspiration from its design.

## Feedback from community members

In addition to regular Project eARTh participants, the 'Project eARTh at home' activities were made available to members of the community via kits with written instructions, YouTube videos etc. Comments provided via feedback forms indicate the positive response of community members to these activities, and in particular feeling they were part of a larger community project (at a time when many people are likely to have been feeling isolated):

*My 13-year-old granddaughter...enjoyed her first experience at embroidery and is happy to have another go if you still need more pieces for the quilt*

*The quilt is a lovely idea and I am pleased to Have been a tiny part of it.*

*Enjoy helping others while on lockdown to take mind off stuff.*

# Conclusions

This section outlines the ways in which Project eARTh has met its outcomes over the last year.

## **Bring people together and build strong relationships in and across communities**

Bringing people together has, of course, been challenging this year. It is a significant achievement that Project eARTh has continued to run, in some form, throughout the year, helping to maintain connections within the group. The strength of relationships within the group is demonstrated by the way in which group members have supported each other during this time, even when they were not able to meet. The option of bringing people together online has not been possible for Project eARTh as many participants do not have internet access and/or IT skills, so the project has needed to operate in other ways. Participants in Project eARTh stress the importance of coming together as a group and this has become even more important this year when most other activities or social gatherings have had to stop.

## **Improve the places and spaces that matter to communities**

With the limitations on community engagement and the use of community spaces over the last year, this outcome has also been more challenging than usual. However, feedback from Reuben's Retreat demonstrates the value of artworks created by Project eARTh participants to organisations in the local community. Hopefully this aspect of the project will be able to resume as restrictions ease as creating art for the local community is clearly a source of immense pride for Project eARTh participants and also members of the wider community who participated in the 'at home' activities.

## **Enable more people to fulfil their potential by working to address issues at the earliest possible opportunity**

As described above, Project eARTh has continued throughout the year whilst many other activities and services have not been able to. This has meant participants have benefited from regular contact with both the Project eARTh team and their peers from the groups. This has provided an opportunity for participants to share their concerns and struggles and better manage their wellbeing than may otherwise have been the case.

## **Participants report feeling less isolated by accessing meaningful activities and developing relationships**

This theme came through strongly in participants' feedback on the project over this year. It has been a time when many have felt isolated. Project eARTh has helped to reduce feelings of isolation through providing a continued programme of activities, ongoing contact and face-to-face meetings whenever possible within government guidelines. Participants have maintained, and even deepened,



relationships within the group over lockdown and have been able to access a social activity in a Covid-safe environment whenever it has been possible to do so.

### **Participants gain confidence and self-worth by learning new skills and working collectively to create art works for the community**

Participants described how they have learnt new arts skills through the project, but also have gained the confidence to think more creatively in their everyday lives. The act of working as a collective to create a work of art is one of the most important aspects of Project eARTh; for many, this is more meaningful than creating their own individual art alone. In addition, the fact that the artworks created will be seen and enjoyed by the local community is a source of immense pride and supports participants' development of self-worth.

### **Improvement and maintenance of psychological wellbeing of participants by regular involvement in positive creative activity.**

There is strong evidence of positive impact of involvement in Project eARTh on participants' psychological wellbeing. At the time of the follow up survey, participants reported feeling more confident; good about themselves and having good self-esteem; motivated; and relaxed, as well as less anxious and depressed.

An interesting aspect of the evaluation this year is that it has been possible to separate the creative and social aspects of the project to some extent, as the former continued at times when the latter could not. This has demonstrated that, whilst creative activity has positive benefits in its own right, for Project eARTh participants, being involved in creative activity *within a supportive group setting* is key in supporting wellbeing.

### **Participants report improved resilience by regular involvement in positive activities and developing relationships.**

In a year where participants' resilience is likely to have been tested, Project eARTh has played an important role in helping them to cope by maintaining regular contact and providing positive activities. Even those participants were not able to take part in activities commented that the ongoing contact and support from the Project eARTh team and their peers in the group had been valuable at a difficult time.

## **Recommendations**

It is difficult to make recommendations for the future development of the project as Project eARTh has had to operate in a very different way this year due to the impact of Covid 19. Hopefully, the

measures that have been put in place can soon be lifted. Nevertheless, there are some suggestions that may be useful to consider.

1. Projects kits and instructions: It may be useful to continue with these in some form, even when they are no longer required due to Covid, as they allow people to take part in activities if they have to miss sessions, or work at a slower or faster pace than the majority of the group.
2. Sharing learning: Few projects supporting participants without internet access have found ways to continue during lockdown. It is therefore important that that experiences from Project eARTh are shared to help other organisations and artists looking for non-digital ways to sustain projects during periods of restrictions.