

# FABRICA

**A Creative Approach  
to Health and Wellbeing**



**Established in 1996, Fabrica is an arts organisation that connects people and creativity to provide inspiring arts experiences and improve lives.**



**25**

The arts make a powerful contribution to people and their communities. We are passionate about ensuring everyone, regardless of age, background or circumstances, enjoys the benefits of the arts.

Each year we work with over 30 cross-sector partners, including community groups and organisations, social housing providers and GP surgeries, to deliver arts and cultural activities that improve the health and wellbeing of thousands of residents across Brighton & Hove and beyond, who are facing health, income, social or age-related disadvantage.

We are part of UOK, the only arts organisation in a network of 16 organisations supporting access to mental health and wellbeing services in Brighton & Hove.

We were invited to share our expertise at the 2017 All Parliamentary Group Inquiry on Arts, Health and Wellbeing and at the 2020 More Culture Less Medicine conference.

We are featured in 'The Art of Good Health', Brighton & Hove City Council's 2018 Public Health Annual Report and Baring Foundation's 'Creatively Minded Directory', a compilation of arts organisations working in mental health. We have contributed articles to Engage's Sharing Practice and Arts Professional. We also feature in a Baring Foundation's publication and directory about arts and older people.

Celebrating  
25 years  
1996 – 2021



# Improving health and wellbeing is a focus for the whole team and is integrated into all our work programmes

Our artistic programme invites health and social care professionals to explore important human questions with us through co-commissioning, special events, artist residencies and other joint working.

Our learning and community-based programmes use creative approaches to improve the health and wellbeing of participants. These activities are underpinned by specialist training and peer professional development initiatives which are creating a deep expertise throughout our engagement team. This approach is exemplified by 'Explorers', a three-year programme of events and exhibitions, aimed at people with complex needs and those who support them. And 'Growing an Older Audience', a three-year arts engagement programme aimed at older adults, which influenced Fabrica to make a long-term commitment to older audiences, and led to Fabrica being awarded the Fantastic for Families national Best Age-Friendly Welcome 2019 award.

Our exceptional volunteer programme has been honed for more than 20 years. We provided opportunities to over 100 individuals annually, supporting people to develop transferable skills and confidence, and have cultivated a network of like-minded people that is intergenerational and diverse.

Our learning and community programmes provide a wide range of events and workshops, much of it targeted at those who do not regularly participate in the contemporary arts. Furthermore, input has also been sought from these participants in commissioning artworks and increasing the accessibility of Fabrica's volunteer programme and other services, ensuring Fabrica can be at its most welcoming and can support everyone in enjoying the benefits of creative participation.



# Five Ways to Wellbeing

We use the New Economics Foundation's Five Ways to Wellbeing as a guide for planning our artistic and engagement programmes:

**Connect** Using the arts as a starting point for conversation, fostering friendships based on shared interests, and creating opportunities to widen social and support networks.

**Be Active** Supporting people to get out of the house and explore accessible venues and places of interest in the city and its surroundings, for positive and stimulating experiences.

**Take Notice** Using the arts to encourage participants to be curious, look more closely, appreciate things in greater detail, and be more present in the moment.

**Keep Learning** Inspiring participants to develop new interests and skills through our creative programmes, and discover new places and points of view through outings and conversations.

**Give** Participating in social and community life through projects that benefit the whole community, in sharing ones skills, knowledge and time, and valuing each other's contributions.



# 25

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# Projects

Over the past 25 years we have consistently delivered projects that support those who face barriers to creative participation to explore their creativity and enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts.

Our projects are designed to reduce barriers to participation, are considerate of access, location and cost to participants, and use communication methods that are suited to the specific group or individuals we are inviting to participate.

Most of our activities are free for participants to join, but those who wish to contribute can donate, volunteer their time or share their skills.



# Chomp At Fabrica (2016 - present)



Chomp at Fabrica is a creative lunch club providing a healthy, nutritious meal and artist-led hands on making activities for children from low income families and their parents during the school holidays.

The school holidays can be a very challenging time, impacting children's health, wellbeing and personal and academic development <sup>1</sup>. Chomp at Fabrica provides an opportunity for adults and children to come together with other families, ensuring they can continue to eat well and socialise during the school holidays. Every child is treated as an artist, encouraged to express themselves and explore their own creativity. Parents are encouraged to join in, and the activities and meals are designed to be easily replicated at home.

Since 2016 Chomp at Fabrica has provided over 1,500 meals and 310 hours of free arts activities to over 150 families.

<sup>1</sup> The Cost of School Holidays for Children from Low income Families, Glasgow University, 2018

“These workshops make our children dream and become the best they can.”



# Men In Sheds (2017 - present)



Fabrica's Men in Sheds Kemptown project first opened to the public in April 2017, providing a fully accessible wood-working workshop and social space for men struggling with low mental health and/or at risk of social isolation. Over the past 5 years it has provided over 5000 hours of contact time to more than 50 men and welcomed 25 organisations to the space.

As well as working on their own personal projects, 'Shedders' have contributed to several community projects, including building shelving and storage for residents in Brighton & Hove Seniors Housing and making bird boxes, bird tables and insect hotels for the Albion Community Garden in central Brighton.

Joining the Shed is about having fun, meeting like-minded people and gaining a renewed sense of purpose and belonging. As a by-product, Men In Sheds reduces isolation and feelings of loneliness, rebuilds communities and supports men in dealing with the mental health challenges in retirement and remaining independent.

“To be able to come to the shed and work and help others gives me a great deal of satisfaction: I feel a great sense of worth and love the way we all work together.”

# Men Who Make (2020 - present)



Men Who Make was set up to meet increasing demand for our Men In Sheds Kempton project, while testing new approaches to reaching and supporting adult men at risk of social isolation and low mental health.

“It’s been wonderful. You roll along and wonder how things can change...Then you do something like this, and you think, oh, tomorrow doesn’t have to be like today.”

Brighton & Hove has the third highest rate of death by suicide in England with men over 35 being particularly at risk, due to a complex set of factors<sup>2</sup>. Men Who Make provides free courses of weekly creative workshops in arts venues and green and blue spaces across the city, encouraging participants to connect with the outdoors, develop new skills and make social connections. Craft and making sessions have included printmaking, photography, woodwork and stone carving and have taken place at Fabrica, ONCA Barge, Stanmer Park and South Downs National Park.

In its first year, Men Who Make delivered 36 creative making workshops and provided 300 hours of contact.



# Woven By Us (2017 - present)

Woven By Us (previously called Textile Flow) is a creative textile making project aimed at reducing social isolation and improving wellbeing in older people, including those with complex health needs, frailty and visual impairment.

Workshops make use of textile processes with elements of repetition which are known to help to support group dynamics and facilitate the experience of mindfulness. Sessions are explicitly inclusive with access requirements and abilities supported through, for example, the development of specific tools to support those with limited mobile dexterity. The sessions provide a creative, sociable and flexible group setting to meet others, learn new skills, share experiences and build confidence.

Woven By Us has taken place in various settings, providing over 42 sessions (for a total of 254 participants) at Woodingdean Community Centre, Woodingdean Medical Centre, Wish Park Surgery, Leach Court Senior Housing (Brighton & Hove Senior Housing) and at Fabrica.

More recently it was delivered in partnership with

Woodingdean Medical Centre to alleviate demand on the local health care sector, in particular the number of doctor visits made by people who are lonely and/or in need of social stimulation.

“You don’t know how much these sessions have changed my life, honestly. I feel more confident and I feel happier. I look forward to them every week, they are the best part of it.”



# Going To See Culture Together (2011 - 2023)



Going To See Culture Together used the arts as a starting point for forging new friendships at a time in life when many feel marginalised and socially isolated. Monthly sessions introduced participants to new cultural and creative experiences and supported them to explore the city, to keep active, continue learning and create connections in older age.

Established in 2011, Going To See Culture Together provided over 100 outings to more than 250 residents aged 60 and over. Participants visited over 40 venues in Brighton & Hove and Sussex and enjoyed a broad range of activities including visits to theatres, galleries, museums, cinemas and heritage sites, as well as workshops and talks.

“Going To See Culture Together has sent out an inspiring lifeline to those of us in the Brighton community who probably would not have normally ventured into many of these experiences alone”



# Drawing and Making for Dementia

## (2018 - present)



There are over 1800 people diagnosed with a dementia living in Brighton & Hove<sup>3</sup>, and one in fourteen people aged 65+, and one in six people aged 80+ are at risk of developing the condition.

Drawing and Making for Dementia is a programme of dementia-friendly art workshops. The sessions: themed tea-parties with varied creative activities on offer, encourage participants to experiment with different processes and materials which develop as the sessions progress; providing a safe and supportive environment for participants to grow in agency, creativity and confidence. The tea-parties present floral and food displays that draw participants in for socialising, stimulation and fun. These sessions work to alleviate fears around art-making, instigate conversations and share memories and interests.

In its first two years, 23 weekly sessions took place at Brooke Mead, Brighton & Hove City Council's dementia-friendly housing scheme and at Fabrica and provided ongoing engagement opportunities for over 20 participants and their carers.

“It’s the companionship that’s so important, and doing this gets the old brainbox going, otherwise you get locked in.”

# Creative Connections (2016)

Acute loneliness has been estimated to affect 13% of older people in Brighton & Hove<sup>4</sup>. In a city which is largely perceived as young, it's common for older adults to be left feeling isolated and marginalised.

Creative Connections was a five-month programme of creative activity, delivered at Brighton & Hove Seniors Housing in Kemp Town and Whitehawk, aimed at reducing social isolation for older residents who were referred to the project due to their high levels of need and/or risk.

Through one-to-one creative sessions and outings that focused on building trusted relationships with an artist-facilitator, participants were able to grow in confidence and capacity to develop connections and interests and visit new places based on those interests. Participants were encouraged to make suggestions or lead the sessions and two residents decided to carry them on independently after the end of the project.

Creative Connections also connected residents to one another to grow new social relationships based on personal interest rather than circumstance. Though the project was short-term, it was influential in developing Fabrica's approach to participatory practice for at-risk individuals.

“I really look forward to these events as I don't speak to anyone during the week. It has been great to meet others who I live close to but have never met and I love all the laughter we have together”



<sup>4</sup> Public Health Annual Report, Brighton & Hove City Council, 2017



# Click Into Culture (2020 - 2022)

Click Into Culture provided online culture tours for adults who find it difficult to get out of the house due to physical or mental ill health. Each event welcomed up to 18 participants and combined a virtual viewing of an internationally-renowned cultural venue, discussion about a selected artwork, and creative or meditative activities that encouraged mindfulness.

Click Into Culture was designed during the Covid-19 pandemic, following a research and development period with CAST, whose work aims to create a more responsive, resilient and digitally-enabled social sector. Fabrica wanted to create a new, bespoke online opportunity for isolated people to connect around arts and culture, but were keen to design something which would still be relevant to specific audiences after lockdowns had ended.

“When I look at this I can  
smell the forest”

# Fabrica Volunteer Programme

## (1996 - present)

Fabrica has a long history of delivering exceptional and accessible volunteer opportunities across its programme. Fabrica provides the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and social connections.

Until 2022, Fabrica was supported by Arts Council England to provide a volunteer programme that was able to support over 150 volunteers to engage with contemporary. Volunteers have been involved in all aspects of Fabrica, working closely with the team to inform and develop our artistic and community programmes. They have been offered regular specialist training and develop skills front and back-of-house, introducing visitors to the exhibition, supporting events and workshops, helping with the installation of exhibitions and supporting office roles. Throughout the year volunteers are invited to social events and outings and are involved with a host of projects, most recently conducting research for a publication about the history of Fabrica's building and developing and delivering heritage tours of the space.

From 2023, we continue work with a small number of volunteers who support and benefit from our programme, taking part in our Chomp creative lunch clubs, regular film screenings, and heritage tours.





“Fabrica’s genuinely inclusive ethos has enabled me to be involved in all sorts of projects: contributing to the Response magazine, supporting children at Chomp and even performing with Serge Attukwei Clottey during his exhibition; and I have met amazing volunteers and staff who share a sense of community and love of creativity”

Fabrica Volunteer

“It’s an incredibly tolerant environment and I have met so many different people through volunteering - it has enriched my perspectives about my life and wellbeing.”

Fabrica Volunteer

# FABRICA

## Credits

Quotes are from our project participants, 2011 - 2021

Photographs by Andrew Brooks, Phoebe Wingrove and Fabrica

## Acknowledgements

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