

Creative Journeys

Responses To Mental Health in Hackney, Present and Past



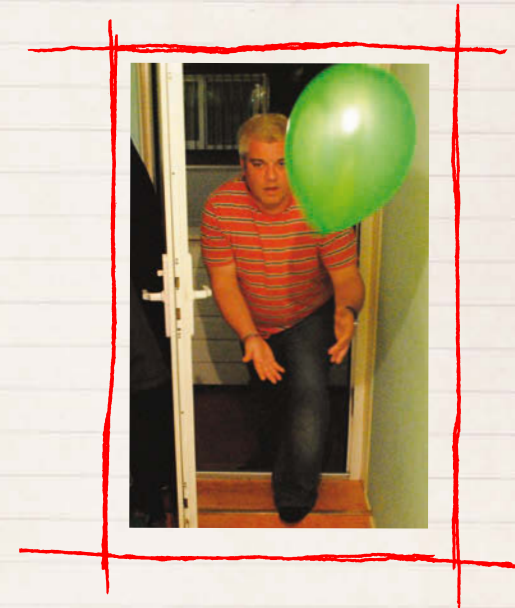


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This book is a collection of testimonies relating to the creative journeys undertaken by those who have suffered severe and enduring mental health issues. Featuring members of Core Arts, the East London charity that promotes positive mental health through participation in the creative arts, the book is companion to the exhibition at Hackney Museum that ran from February to May 2013.

Presented alongside each person's testimony is their art, which ranges through painting, sculpture, photography and installation. The artwork dispels clichés regarding arts and mental health and reflects Core Arts' groundbreaking approach to the subject, where pigeon-holes that categorise into 'outsider' or 'therapy' are strongly avoided; individuality and creativity are respected. The artists have been supported along their creative journeys; individual strategies and responses have been encouraged and emerge strongly in the personality of their work.

Each testimony, except those by Jack Haslam, Jane Smith and Mark Roberts' notes on *Mad Pride*, was transcribed and edited from recordings of individual interviews; one tells the story of Core Arts through the words of its founder and director, Paul Monks. The experiences described are diverse and reveal a common thread; creativity emerges as a vehicle for mental well-being and thus as a model for an emotionally healthy society.



Alex Ingram

I was first in hospital when I was nineteen and that's also the first time I was ever sectioned, before that I think there were signs of me having some kind of mental health issues. I was at Glasgow Art School when that happened and I think that environment is a strange environment to come down with a mental health issue, because it's not easy to detect, because you're doing creative stuff at art school and you're given a lot of leeway. It's all seen as you just making work, or getting carried away. When I had my first breakdown it was over the summer holidays. Then I went back for my third year and that whole third year was very kind of up and down. It was a difficult year and by the summer I'd just lost it completely, quite delusional, all the kind of 'normal' things that happen when you're mad – I realise it's quite strange to say normal – but things like, messages from the TV, paranoia, getting quite frightened, a lot of stuff really.

I took two years off art school and came back in the last year and during those years I'd been getting into photography, so kept on doing that. **Luckily there was a very wide remit, I'd been studying sculpture and it was seen as a very open subject and I was encouraged to develop it in my own direction. When I was doing my MA the videos came about and I thought the link running through them can be that I'll be in all the videos and that gave me a lot of freedom. So I got into video, performances and painting.**

I can remember the beginning of my mental health issues, but I haven't thought about the whole history, because at one point I felt I had to prove, like, what had happened to me, to say: 'this is me, this is what's happened to me.' I did list every hospital I'd been in and every episode and all the medication I was on, but it's all rough figures and I don't list it anymore, now I'm just really past that. The only point you're making is to yourself and once you realise this you have to say: 'that's enough, I've done that, I know what I need to do to keep myself going.' I try and keep the responsibility of maintaining the medication of it and just try to get on with life. I try and make it as little a part of my life as possible. There's years that go missing, if you like, and I don't try to keep track of them, they're just years that have gone now – that's just the way it is.

My key worker said I should check out Core Arts. At first I found it very over-stimulating 'cos there was a lot going on and I found it hard to fit myself into something. But the thing about Core is you have classes, workshops, so if something interests you, you can just pop along. There's no pressure to do anything, but you can take it as far as you want to take it. I did a bit of portrait painting, it became a project to document my videos and I try and write some poetry every week for the poetry group.

That and the stuff I've done over the years has got published in books I've made – *The Spaceman Cometh*, and *I've Done Nothing Wrong Today* which I published through Chipmunk Publishing. *100 Over The Horizon* is the latest one I'm working on. I've just had a painting show at Core Arts and some films shown at the Rio Cinema in Dalston.

The paintings are like exercises for me, I just start one and see where it goes, it's just a case of having choices. When I start a painting all the choices are there and the same choices are there with the photos, videos and installation, but in different time frames and different mediums. With photographs I like to think of the photograph as if it's just happened, as if it's just appeared to me or just been taken as a snapshot. I think what I'd say is: there shouldn't be any real rules around what you do, it's good

to have a process to make work but I like not to know what I'm going to do before I do it. **Any focus that you have that allows you to make choices and that you can see something of yourself in, or see a positive result, is beneficial. It could be anything – art, sport – it goes through different mediums, through writing, photography. For me not knowing what you're gonna do till you've done it is very freeing. It helps me stay in the moment. It means I can just enjoy doing it.**

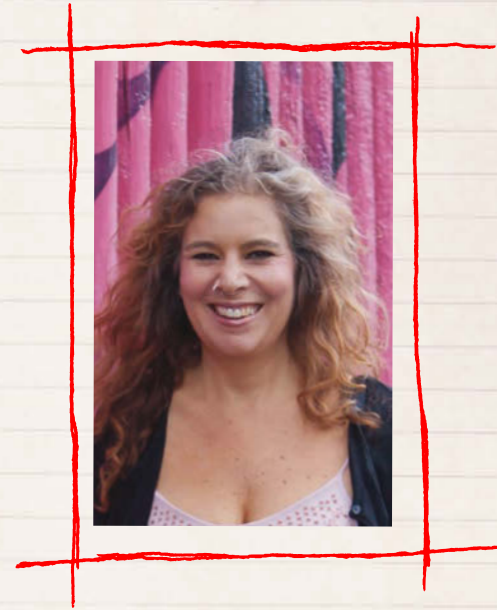
The way I feel about the psychiatric services is that it's person-led. It really is psychiatric care and the things you remember are the people that you meet along the journey. As in all professions, there are good and bad doctors and nurses. The people that are detrimental to you are the people who cannot show a caring side in that profession. I've had nightmare doctors, who are very shut off – you wonder why they are doing it, you imagine doctors are there to provide some kind of support, some kind of help, care. To say that though, at the moment I have a really good team; they've got to know me. I think that even when I was last in hospital, which wasn't that long ago, two years this February, there were some nurses that were ridiculous, they were awful, they treated patients not with much respect, but the ones that shone through were the nurses that took time to talk to you even though you might not be making much sense at the time. Looking back now you can say that, but at the time they were there, just being there for you, y'know?

When I first got ill I had no clue about benefit and I remember queuing up for hours at housing benefit, and there was no support from the psychiatric services saying you can claim this, you can claim that. It wasn't too long ago, I didn't really know what I was entitled to, as someone with a psychiatric illness, but right now I'm really sorted. I have a good intensive team of advisers, the Assertive Outreach Team who have sorted it out. My psychiatrist and CPN at Mellmead House have been very supportive as well. The staff at Core are really understanding, they just stress the work really, people can be going through a hard time and you know you're not gonna get judged for it.

The one thing I always go back to is art. When people talk about art and therapy, I think art can be, in a good way, a distraction, something to focus on and allow other things to come through that. You might not mean to express what you see when you do something, but it does come out – I think you need that direction, a sidestep to see something come out.

Really, mental health isn't so marginalised. It isn't a thing that doesn't affect everyday people. Whether they know people who have had it, or if it happens once in their life, or is a recurring issue; it's not something small and it's quite a common thing. There isn't a fixed answer, it's like art – you can get glimmers of answers, but in a couple of weeks it might not be the answer. So I would say the main thing in all this is choice, if you've got the choice to live a happier life, take it. No matter how bad it gets, don't end it. That's always a mistake. No matter how bad it gets it will end, and become something else. Something will come out of it.

I would say to professionals: give that extra inch, come and see an event or an exhibition. It's beneficial to our health, so take that extra step, if you are interested, come and have a look. You don't have to beat the drum, just take an interest.



Angela Morris

When I first found out I had mental health problems I was devastated - I questioned myself philosophically, and thought why me? What have I done? I felt I was the 'lowest of the low'. Someone who no longer fitted into the social norm - we are so often judged by our material wealth, rarely for our inner beauty. My perception of mental illness was typical of many people's: 'look at her, glad I don't look like that, there's someone who's doo-lally and has completely lost the plot of life', you know, the usual stuff. **But although it's such a traumatic thing to go through (and I can assure you I've experienced nothing worse) it has been an incredibly enlightening experience as well.**

I had my first breakdown in 1991 but wasn't formally diagnosed till 1998. That was the year I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. The experience changed my life. I had had my daughter and I think I just 'saw through' things and for the very first time saw my then husband in his true colours - I was in an abusive relationship and bringing up a child. I suffered with postnatal depression and felt completely isolated, it was not long after the birth of my daughter I had a psychotic episode, this time I sought medical help and was admitted to Homerton Hospital. It was such a positive experience, I met such nice people, real characters and a place where I felt comfortable, which is somewhat of a contradiction considering my circumstances. People there who made the difference were non-judgmental, open, honest. I was given a diagnosis for my experience and when I found that I had an illness it was a relief, because all this stuff I was thinking had no substance: it was a mental illness.

I came to Core Arts and did drama originally and thoroughly enjoyed it, and the tutor at the time was really good, she was the one who originally introduced me to Core. I suddenly met a hub of people - so called people with mental illnesses - but also people with nothing to hide, they were people cut from the same cloth, if you like, and far more switched on than many other social groups I had met before. I wanted to hang out and make friends, start to socialise. My understanding was that these people I was meeting, so-called misfits, had no other way, other than to go up. In the early days I tried out all the different workshops and classes, however I really enjoy textiles, ceramics, portrait painting and photography. Core Arts is totally different, it's loose and broad creatively and tutors, volunteers and members are treated as one. Twelve years since I first started, it is only now that I've found my true passion, fashion. Originally I never thought of myself as being creative, I've always been quite good at putting my clothes and outfits together, I never thought of that as being creative. I've always been into making clothes and in the past have been to college and done some fashion stuff, I particularly love putting together second hand clothing I find in charity shops, I have a real eye for this kind of thing. If I hadn't got involved with Core I don't think I would have developed in this way. Core has been very supportive on many levels. Creativity has undoubtedly helped with my mental illness, it's like a key that unlocks the door to a room. A room filled with madness and mayhem that makes no sense, however by opening that door we can unravel some of this madness.

I see myself going back to work and finding my own niche, just little steps on the way, in the meantime I am doing creative projects to further me along this path. I had a recent exhibition, and although it's on a local scale, I think it's way big-time to do it on this level. A lot of people came up to me who saw my work and said they were inspired. I know I mentioned this - but I've met some really amazing people through my experience of mental illness - have had and shared experiences that I would never have had. You meet people who have had extremely traumatic lives and who have survived and are around to tell the story. It's a privilege to know such people.

If I was just going to work in regular jobs I wouldn't meet them, it's a totally different ball game, not just other people with mental health issues, but also people who work in the system too, tutors, psychiatrists, who have an understanding and who would also, I'm sure, say it's a privilege to meet these people too, because they are people who have *lived*. Once you've had a mental illness life takes on a new meaning. I know people who have overcome their demons, and say they would never change their past and what they have been through, I too would say this at this point but with trepidation. When you deal with mental illness you don't really worry too much about whether you've got the latest fashion and there's no stereotypical way a person with mental health issues looks or acts; I've learned about myself and found my path through having mental health issues, and I think that's what we are more about - living, mortality. It's made me who I am today, this path is my destiny (although it's not for the faint-hearted) **For me, spirituality really comes into it, you reach a path when you're ready for it. What's the point of living if you haven't got a hardship? Accept your challenges, trust your inner voice, if you can come through this, and make a recovery it develops you and can change your life. Even if you don't overcome it - what's the point of living, if life is a breeze, if life isn't challenging?**

I hope you have gotten something out of reading this, and my artwork - all I ask is for you not to judge me by my cover. It's such a well known saying, but how many people actually do this?



Delroy Alexander Williams

I suppose this game started for me, in this direction, from 1985 onwards. I was seventeen and I was working part time in a supermarket to support my studies towards an Art Foundation. I was invited to a party with some friends and at the party one of the party-goers got stabbed. Everybody just stood back and watched the guy, literally dying on the floor. Me and a couple of my friends took it upon ourselves to help him out. The weekend had passed and I went back to my A level art class on the Monday and one of the guys who took me to the gig showed me a newspaper saying that the man had died. After that my tutor got wind of what I'd done to try and help him and thought she could take on the role of getting me interviewed by a Police Constable. It was from that point onwards that my relationship with my tutor changed. I just started to concentrate on Design Studies and started to bunk off her lesson, because of my disgust at the way I had to interact with the policemen - in the days when Black people's relationship with the police wasn't very nice.

That was the first downfall. I lost myself in my job for three years because I didn't know what to do with myself. During that time I gained a lot of experience of retail. I was taken on as a wines and spirits manager. I did that for a while, then I started to feel the vibe of being in a rut. A new girlfriend came into my life and it was easy for her to say I was in a dead end job, but at the time I was so engrossed in the job that I took it personally. That lead to breakdown number one.

I make music and it has been a mixture of success and failure. **There was a dance craze for a scene called Hardcore Jungle Techno. It started off as Hardcore - originally Hardcore House. The stepping stones - as I remember the introduction of the names - are: House, Hip House, Hardcore House, Hardcore Jungle Techno, Jungle Techno, Jungle Drum & Bass then Drum & Bass. In 1995, on the grapevine, people heard that I could do what I could do.** So I did a brief stint with a record label and by this time I was at university doing a degree in retail. So I thought I was moving on.

But that spectre of the breakdown came back again when I was bogged down with an essay and a deadline for getting a song out. I took it personally and took my anger out on the record label and fell out with them. I had a week to think about what I was gonna do next, during which time I was on self-destruct. I froze my degree, took my turntables back and told the label where to go. After about six months, once I came back to my senses, I tried to re-contact them, but they didn't want to know. During the seven days I had had to deal with all those things, I hadn't slept. That used to be the typical symptoms of my illness, but they aren't as present these days. It's just the politics of my circumstance: because I've been on a Section, if I show any symptoms, I could get recalled. You're subject to the terms and conditions of the Mental Health Act and although they tell you're only having episodes, those very episodes can put you away for six months.

From there, you get to the present day and I've been doing things independently from that point onwards.

The year that I froze my degree I met Paul Monks and I saw the Core Arts premises at the old Hackney Hospital - at first I thought it was pretty basic - a little Atari, a couple of draughtsman's boards, people making things with plaster - I turned my nose up at it a bit. And then, all of a sudden, it was like a community of people that *corralled*. People with the same kind of interest, outgoing in nature and internal in terms of art, music and creativity. It was what we would call in my culture a catch: somewhere to come sit down, drink a cup of tea, light a cigarette. Talk about arty-farty type of things, but at the same time, get something done, and prove to others. When doctors were calling you grandiose and delusionary...

I don't deny my abilities, even after failure. Once I get back into the world of work nothing is going to stop me - I was good enough to be taken on by a label. I can't deny my interest in music is a lot deeper than art at the moment, I think art is the front cover and the music is the content. I was a fan of the music before I was trying to make the music. I didn't have a midi keyboard at the start and so I can write on piano keys or by arranging the wave forms, which is not something new, it's developing something old - step time. Making music is my comfort zone and I don't know when I will stop. Someone told me a long time ago: don't wait for a dream to fall out of the sky, just catalogue what you've done, chart your musical history - whether or not it's good enough to be commercial - until you are in a position to release it. For me, the next phase of my life is to become fully self-employed.



Etching A Tree of Life by Frank Bangay 4/p



Frank Bangay

My experiences with mental health issues go back to the early 1970s, sometimes I've been able to work through it and sometimes I've been unable to work. Various things have played a part in causing it and it's not always been that positive. The situations we are under sometimes are overbearing. **I started writing poetry at around the time this was happening, poetry is like a way of expressing myself and being creative has helped me through it.**

I went onto medication when I was twenty one or twenty two and the overall experience of that wasn't very good because at first I didn't get on with what I was put on, but then they changed my medication and that was better. I tried to carry on working as a hospital porter and store porter at a branch of Boots the Chemists in the West End. I was drinking heavily and just fell to pieces when I was working there. I found hospital can be like a refuge in a sense and that's good and bad, but there are a lot of practices in psychiatric hospitals that aren't altogether good. Electro Convulsive Therapy is bad, very damaging and certain hospitals still use them. I never had it but a friend did and it very badly damaged her memory and she killed herself in the end. Some people say it has helped them and fair enough. The overuse of medication can be quite a destructive thing, but if you are in a difficult time it can help a lot. Long term use of major tranquillisers can lead to Tardive Dyskinesia, a condition where your hands or the mouth go into involuntary contortions. Lithium can damage your liver and kidneys, so it's a mixed bag. In those days they had things like art therapy, where your work is read into, which could be OK. Things like Industrial Therapy were very prominent then, a little bit of money, ten pounds or a pack of cigarettes for some mundane work, that was very much how it was then. I remember living in a hostel at the end of the 70s and part of your rehabilitation was finding a job and it wasn't easy in that situation. The idea was that work, regardless of what it might be, was keeping your mind active; art and creativity outside of the occupation therapy department weren't seen as being of any value.

I kept at my writing, you can't always write when you are in a bad state but I kept at it as much as I could and I started drawing toward the end of the decade. Using crayons and felt-tip pens and things, I immersed myself in drawings.

In the 1980s I started to get involved in mental health campaigning work. I started organising benefit gigs with poetry and music and found there were lots of survivor poets out there, who I got to hear, it was like a voice for us. I was aware that on the alternative cabaret scene there were a lot of comedians who would get up and pretend to be mad. **That world was full of drunken hecklers and the comedians would have a smart one-liner to give back and sometimes they'd pretend to be a 'loony' or take the mickey out of disability and it used to make us very angry.**

So I kept going with the campaigning idea and I got involved in a group called PROMPT: Promotion of Rights of *Mental Health Patients and Treatment* then it changed its name to CAPO: Campaign Against Psychiatric Oppression. PROMPT and CAPO were very much outside the system in some senses, we had a crisis phone line and we did help a few people and had plans to re-establish crisis houses, but we weren't big enough to manage that. Before PROMPT there was the Mental Patients Union, with branches in Notting Hill and North Kensington, Kentish Town and Hackney. A lot of these groups

operated from squats, working alongside the squatting community of those days. I found PROMPT through reading their booklets and got involved with it all. In the 1970s The Mental Patients Union organised a sit-in at the old Hackney Hospital, the idea being to form a Trade Union for patients within the hospital. It never succeeded, but it was attempted and in a way it was the forerunner of the Patients' Councils. If a member of staff had a complaint about a patient or their work they could go to their Trade Union, but if a patient had a complaint about a member of staff or conditions in the hospital they had no voice at all. So the idea was to get these issues sorted out. Patient Councils came into being in the 80s but were pioneered in the 70s in an alternative way. It all goes back to the early 70s, when the Mental Patients Union started. There were also campaigning groups in Scotland and Manchester at the time. The Manchester Mental Patients Union published a very good book called *Know Your Rights In A Mental Hospital*. There was group called COPE: Community Organisation for Psychiatric Emergencies which ran crisis houses in squats around North Kensington. Obviously not the ideal situation, but **the counter-culture was engaging with these issues, whereas the mainstream culture wasn't.**

In 1985 there was a MIND conference in Brighton, where they had invited down a lot of mental health professionals and there were survivor groups from America and Holland and other places, but no one from England. So we went down and set up a stall by the door and we got to meet the Dutch people who got us a decent stall and got us into some conferences and parties and things. That was like a turning point: from it a group called Survivors Speak Out started, it grew pretty active and became well known.

I was performing poetry in the 1970s at the famous folk venue The Troubadour Coffee House at the Monday poetry evening. There was lots of different poets and musicians there, with some real characters as well. There was also a group at Battersea Arts Centre called The Junction Poets. I got to hear Kevin Coyne in the early 1970s and got into his music and went to lots of his gigs. He worked as an Art Therapist, suffered a breakdown himself and the mental health thing ran through his songs till the end. He was very much on the edge: there was a sense of danger about what he was doing on stage that was an influence on Johnny Rotten. I started to speak to Kevin at gigs and in 2004 was asked to interview him for a magazine: *Mental Health Today*. But he got really ill with a complaint called lung fibrosis and sadly he passed away before the interview was published. I saw a gig he did in October 2004 and he came on stage with a small oxygen cylinder and breathing tubes up his nose, but he put on a fine gig, brave man.

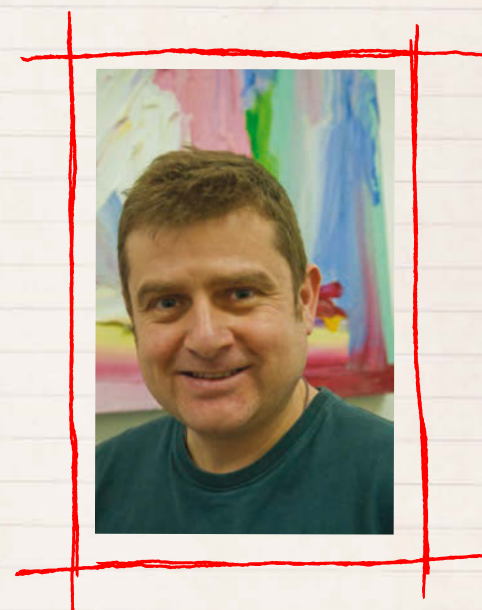
I had collaborated with some other people on publishing some magazines of poetry and artwork by people who had been through the psychiatric services and this, along with the benefit gigs that I organised, helped to inspire the funding of Survivors Poetry in 1991. It got funding from the Arts Council and a lot of things became possible. When I was working with Survivors Poetry, the Borough of Hackney gave us some money to start some workshops in the area. They took place at a day centre called Homerton Friends Lodge. When the funding run had finished, people wanted to carry on meeting. I had heard of Core Arts so I popped in and asked if they were interested in me setting up a poetry group, they agreed and I set up the first Core Arts poetry group. I ran it for a few years until someone else took it over and it's still going strong today.

Being at Core has helped me develop my work. I got a chance to work in the studio with a variety of different musicians and my first CD 'A True Voice Singing' came out at the beginning of the century. I've done five CDs now, all have been recorded at Core except for the 'Topsy Turvy Band' record, which was more of a live thing. I started playing harmonica and really, my musical career started at Core. My next project is a CD and booklet celebrating the work of Smiley, who I met at Bunjies Coffee House in the West End and suggested that he came to Core and record. On it I've been working with Dave Russell a guitarist, poet and songwriter who's been around since the early 60s - which in a sense was the era Smiley was relating to - that rebellious world. I save up money and release my records myself, apart from the first one, which Core helped fund. There will be another CD of my own this year and I also write punk-gardening and blues articles for The Big Untidy, and record reviews for a magazine called Louder Than War.

Anybody can have a nervous breakdown, I do believe in what they call the 'social model' - that something in someone's life might trigger it - for example - childhood, a work situation, an unhappy relationship - can lead to mental health problems. The trouble with psychiatry is, because it's all very much a scientific viewpoint, it can lose sight of the realities people are living with and the hardships of it. **Different cultures and religions can be misinterpreted too, if there's not proper understanding. I call myself a Christian and if I told my psychiatrist I prayed and talked to God, possibly he might say, 'Aha! A bit of a...diagnosis?', but people can be very passionate in their beliefs and it can be mistaken for poor mental health.**

Stigma. Maybe you see someone with mental health issues walking down the street, being accompanied by someone, and see how they have been affected by their experiences; and people sometimes feel a bit freaked out about the fact that there is a Forensic Unit on Homerton High Street. What I would say to people is don't fear: there's more to fear in your local pub on a Saturday night than 'us' walking around in the community.





Gary Molloy

I was unwell for the first time at the age of twenty-one. I was studying for a Computer Science degree at University, I had my first breakdown towards the end of my course and that was the first time I'd been in hospital. I wasn't sectioned that time, I was in hospital for observation for a couple of weeks and let go out with a few antidepressants. Sometimes it's considered a one-off when this happens. It was a breakdown, a lot of stress, I was drinking heavy amounts of alcohol, I was a binge drinker, exams, student ambitions, relationship - so it was a big, big, stressful time. That was my first big crash, I was in Homerton Hospital on Conolly Ward for a couple of weeks. The care - the nurses - was very good but I didn't think I was supported very well, I think I was let out far too early and I didn't have much follow-up support.

It literally lasted a few months and then I was just off the medication, not any follow-up support from a social worker or a team and I went back into my old lifestyle again. Drinking heavily, taking dead-end jobs, very stressed out still. I went back to college after about 6 weeks and completed the course and got the qualification, so that was quite a big achievement, but I was still under a lot of pressure and binge drinking heavily. The same incidents were happening, but I wasn't very good at recognising the signs and slowly I started getting ill again, all the same issues were there and it happened again when I was twenty-six. Unfortunately, this time, it was far more serious and the police had to get involved, I became very violent and had to be sectioned for the first time. I got a diagnosis from Dr. Turner - everyone I know in Hackney has had him as their doctor at one time or another - a very well known psychiatric doctor. He diagnosed me as Manic Depressive - which was the term then used to describe Bipolar Disorder - a very frightening term to hear. I thought: 'My God - my life's over'. Terrifying.

The attitude I got from the consultants, the doctors, for me, really, was that it was all over, at twenty-six. I felt that they were telling me: that's it. It felt like the attitude conveyed to me was that I had a recognised defect in the brain or something. I've got a permanent condition and that's it: you've gotta give up now, put on five stone and take heavy medication for the rest of your life. I think the impression I got, hasn't really changed that much now. If you are considered to have a mental condition, it's a power issue, you are presented to a psychiatrist and you feel they're saying: 'you've had your breakdown, now sit in the corner, get fat, give up - you're finished.'

That was the impression I got from every consultant I saw until I recognised in my own mind, intuitively, that it wasn't completely true. Because I'd had a condition where I had been trying to fit into the world, which was chaotic, crazy, stressful, competitive, ego-driven, and I was sensitive and diffident. The world was completely crazy and they were telling me that I was the one that had the problem by trying to fit in, as if the world was normal. It was so pressurised. As a sensitive individual I crashed for a while and then I fought my way back to full health...

I went out of hospital with a diagnosis, I had a bit more clarity, I had something to work with. It's very positive for me, some people class a diagnosis as negative, but my experience of it was a very positive thing to happen because I then knew that I could educate myself on it. I could start reading on Manic Depression, Bipolar. However, I wasn't ready to really go into recovery, so I went back again to the same patterns: drinking alcohol,

going out late at night, taking jobs I didn't like. I got a job in the Civil Service at the Benefits Agency in Hackney, which was totally pressurised. I'd be there on a Friday afternoon and there'd be some really difficult characters looking for their Giro. I live in the area - I live up the road - so they're saying to me 'if I don't get my Giro you're gonna get it, mate'. They had to have really stringent ID - driving licence or passport and a lot of people didn't have that, and they'd say 'alright mate - outside: I'll be waiting for you..'. I'd see these people in the pubs of Hackney, so it stressed me out and I had another three more breakdowns, very severe breakdowns and was sectioned.

It was then that I experienced Akathisia for the first time, an extreme side effect of Halliperidol or Droperidol medication. I was given massive injections in the buttocks at the time. It's a very misunderstood condition, a lot of people describe it as an inability to sit still, which is not really describing the condition. I've researched it and other people have described it more accurately as an inability to sit still, coupled with an inability to move - chemical torture. And it's exactly that. I'm almost sure it was caused by Droperidol, which is now discontinued but also by Halliperidol, its sister drug, which is still used. They are very cheap drugs used in psychiatric hospitals. It's a rare side effect, but it can effect one in a thousand people. Just after coming out of the seclusion room, with just a mattress on the floor, when you're really psychotic and you're kicking-off and you become violent, the nurses have to hold you down. They inject you with a heavy dose of either of those two drugs and the Akathisia slowly comes on. It's mistaken for psychosis, because it mirrors psychosis. So you sit on the floor dribbling and you're in this state where you can't move, function, eat, use the toilet or sleep and you are one hundred percent conscious. It's like the last second of drowning going on for days and days. What happens then is, the nurses carry you around, you fall off the bed - if you're in bed - and squirm your way down the corridor for an hour or two till you reach the end of the corridor, which is quite a long corridor in the Bevan ward. Then three nurses pick you up and carry you back to your bed and it starts again; you do this for a couple of weeks or so. I wasn't sleeping or eating, just my family carrying me around wondering what the hell was happening. I held on to it for years - that happened to me in 1998 or 1999. For ten years or so I was trying to work out what it was about until 2009 when I saw a BBC documentary on Akathisia and I said: 'that's what I had', and began to research it more. Now I'm campaigning to get Halliperidol discontinued.

After a very severe episode in 1999, a social worker suggested I looked round Core Arts and we arrived and went upstairs to the art department. At first I thought 'there's nothing here for me', I just looked around and said 'what can I do here?', I've never done anything like that in my life'. I wanted to get back into work, wanted to look for a job. Finally, I had my last hospital admission in 2000 and that was a voluntary admission. That was a big juncture, a big turning point for me. I then recognised that I could recognise the illness coming on and I went in voluntarily, whereas before, I had been sectioned - which is where you are dragged in kicking and screaming under a Section 2 or 3. **So I started to recognise the illness coming on, I started to manage it and learn how to take measures. I came back to Core, I just popped in and there was an art tutor who said 'come upstairs for a minute'. I'd never done any art and he said here's some pastels, here's some paper. The first painting I made was of a fire extinguisher.** The analogy was 'putting that fire out'. Of years of sections and illness. Of being held down. Of spending months in depression.

Of the inability to breathe. It was extinguishing it all. That was the start of my journey to recovery, finding creativity as a way of managing my condition.

I started attending the art classes, life class, printmaking - taking it very slowly, producing work. At the time Core was having exhibitions in the City and we had some exhibition space at one of the big banks, **so I got the chance, very early on, to exhibit some big abstract paintings and a couple of them sold. It gave me a lot of confidence and self esteem,** I felt on top of the world and the art tutors said 'there's something in this, you've got a natural ability and a talent, so just stick with it'. What came into my mind was, I can't stop now, this keeps me well, I have to do art now. I started attending the poetry group as well and that was a massive influence on me and taught me a lot about connecting to creativity on a regular basis, through words as much as visual art.

When I came to Core I was very vulnerable and I got a lot of support. It was the ongoing support that was fundamental, I could sit in the office and share my concerns, and it made a big difference. Also I had finally got a very good consultant who explained mental health very clearly to me in a way that I could relate to. He said it was a sensitivity in the individual, a diffidence. Spike Milligan, who was a Bipolar sufferer, described it as being skinless. So what other people can take on quite easily - family, relationships, careers - someone with mental health issues struggles with that. When I was young at school, I was a very shy introverted person, I couldn't operate well within those circles, I still hadn't found my voice and even when I reached my 20s I still hadn't found my vocation, my purpose, so I was struggling with life. Anything affected me really badly and they consider that to be a permanent defect or something wrong with the individual, but when you look at how pressurised society is: the world is completely mad.

I have reinvented my world through art and doing talks, education. In recent times I've been educating junior doctors at UCL. I'm talking to them for an hour-and-a-half about all aspects of mental health. Travelling the country, giving talks on Bipolar, recovery and what really works for recovery. Medication can be really important, but it's not the answer, it's only part of the solution and the psychiatric services make it so much more

than it is. **Diet is important, drinking enough water, exercise, mindfulness. Creativity is powerful because it exercises the right side of the brain,** most people who are ill are living solely out of the left side of the brain, the logical side, and that's damaging for an individual with sensitivity, mental health issues. If you're not challenging that right side, you're gonna face trouble and I did until I was able to connect with that, the intuitive peaceful side. Some call it the feminine side but it's the logical, masculine side, that society promotes so much.

I think the services haven't moved on as much as they could have done in the twenty-odd years I've been engaged in them. A lot of my experience was being handed Lithium and not being given any education or pointers as to what it was I was given. They said 'here's your Lith' - come back in three months and we'll see if it is working'. It's not going to have any benefit at all unless you take into consideration all causes of the problem. **The analogy I like, is of the dripping tap: you don't need to keep putting a bucket under and keep changing the bucket as it fills up, it's worth turning the tap off.** The psychiatric systems, if you present ill, will treat the symptoms rather than the causes.

I'd like to take my art onto the road and talk about the journey alongside some of the paintings, about leading an authentic life and creating art. About the journey, the benefits of art on mental health and how you marry the two. I want the opportunity to make the difference in mental health, help people see the benefits of creativity; be a catalyst for change within the system. When someone does present with mental health problems, the quicker they learn to self manage, to use self management tools and techniques, the better they are going to progress. I think Core Arts is unique, promoting positive mental health through creativity.



Jack Haslam

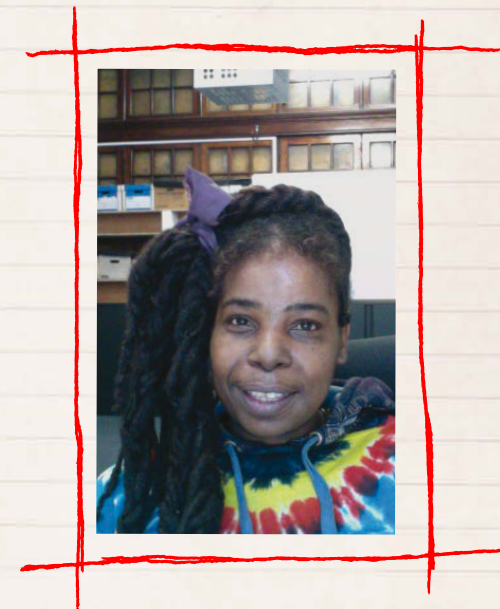
I have several mental health problems running at the same time. It has been difficult to find the correct type of medication needed for me and we have been trying for over four years. Some of my problems will never get better some hopefully will improve. I have an anxiety based problem, O.C.D., intrusive thoughts and sometimes can get psychotic. The medication often makes me feel numb but does offer some relief.

I have been a service user since I was a child. I received therapy at the Winnicott Centre, John Scott and St Leonard's hospital. My therapy has always had a creative element. Firstly role play with a dolls house and then visualisation with C.B.T. My need to create things using dolls and models is a direct result from my early exposure to art therapy which indulged my need to live in an imaginary world.

I have spent many years at home, usually not feeling very well, trying to get my mum to help me unravel my thoughts. Therefore I have been able to collect together a large quantity of work for my portfolio. **All the years of taking photographs, drawing and making models has now started to pay off and I have started to exhibit my work in galleries in London.** I feel I have lost a lot of time when I should have been out enjoying myself like any young person, but I can now gain the self-esteem I really need by people seeing my work. I can at last feel pride in myself that something good can come out of all the pain and struggle.

The model represents my need to create a feeling of security, comfort and control in my life. I like to eat and watch films, every film has its own routine involving the specific food for that film. I like rituals and the model is of me watching The Incredible Hulk eating two iced buns. I will do this many times. I have attempted to re-create the feelings I have on an everyday basis in order to survive the limitations of my condition. I can then indulge my need for repetition.

I find it very difficult to explain the way I feel a lot of the time. By organising and documenting my activities and thoughts I can keep order and refer back to past issues by looking at what I have created. **I think role play through images and art therapy, just like my model Iced Buns with The Incredible Hulk will break down barriers and will get people talking and identifying with things they do not want to acknowledge:** so more art therapy for all.



Jacqueline Chin

It was about 1990 and I started to hear voices, I really didn't know how to cope with it so I admitted myself to hospital simply because the voices were tormenting during the night and I needed to go into hospital to rest. I told them my true story, that I did hear voices and what the voices were doing. They suggested I started taking medication, which they said could help reduce them and probably send them away. They told me that I had to stay into hospital for a little while, to be assessed, and, if they thought that there was nothing wrong with me, I could go home. We had a few tests done and when the results came back they said everything was positive and there was nothing at all wrong with me, I was just imagining these voices and it was an illusion. I persisted that, no, it was not an illusion: I was hearing voices that were not my voice.

Because the doctor said there was nothing wrong with me and I kept saying there was something wrong, I suddenly became under the Section of being schizophrenic. I was told that I would be staying in hospital for about 3 months and then I could come out, but I was there for nearly a year because the medication they were giving to me was not actually sending away any voices. **How I saw it, the medication, the tablet, was just a thing, whereas the voices was a living thing. So I said to the doctor how could a tablet send a living thing away?** Can the tablet talk to the person? So they said, 'OK...keep taking the medication...' I took it and took it, but it would only reduce the voices, it would never ever send them away.

I was under the mental health for a couple of years trying to get rid of the voices. In the end I just had to learn how to cope with them. At no time at all I felt supported, because they were only interested in giving me medication. They sent me to a top hospital and they said 'We'll check your head'. They put these things on your head and said, 'We'll find out if you've been affected from your childhood or upbringing', or something. They said the test was done. It came back negative - there was nothing at all wrong with me - but I was still classified as schizophrenic for saying: 'listen I am not imagining these voices'.

From there, because I was on all these medications it felt like I was away from home, far away from home, knowing I was telling a true story but being drugged every time I spoke of it. The more I spoke about them, they reckoned, 'Oh she's hallucinating' - that everything I said was just a hallucination, but to me it's so real. Currently, today in this room, I can hear these voices, and, with everything I do, there are voices around me.

I felt abandoned from the truth and classified schizophrenic and that is how I became an artist. I missed home, it was like being taken from home to a medication department and until I stopped saying that I heard the voices, I was always drugged. I was locked in the hospital in a room for medication. **There was no green around me, no blue skies, no fresh air, no sunlight, no nothing. I was missing all these things and I would paint it onto paper. Tears were coming - I missed the grass that I grew up on, I**

missed the sunshine and I would always paint it. Instead of not seeing, I painted it. When they saw my paintings, to them, it felt like my paintings had meaning. They said, 'It seems like we can just walk into each painting' or, 'It seems like we've seen these places before, we know they are out there'. That sort of encouraged me, I was painting things from my head from memory, the services loved my work and they would come and look. I thought 'So they don't believe in the voices - even though the voices make the paintings look like they do - but they do believe in the paintings'. I was still in hospital, but started being allowed out to paint at an art group at St John's Church. I also heard about Core Arts, I heard that you could make your own music there and make art. When I first became an artist Core was the best place for me to come and develop my art. It was great to progress. I would sketch the buildings, the trees, sketch from travel agency books - which I love - and I would go to the art lessons to learn how to mix the colours I wanted. I have used different media and worked digitally as well. I've had exhibitions at Core and a solo exhibition 'I Remind' at the Friends Lodge. I have sold work and I've had my work exhibited in a group exhibition for the Prince's Trust, in the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

I also make music, I used to write songs and have been playing piano since I was twelve or thirteen when I went to Jamaica and there was a piano in the house where I lived. I played it and just kept developing and Core Arts gave me keyboard lessons, because I had the talent to play by ear but not to read notes. As I learnt, I progressed and a lot of my music developed through Core and through public presentations. From time to time I would also get one-to-one sessions to see if I was OK. Core has helped my art and music get to places I never dreamed: gigs, festivals, performing live with orchestras, professional singers and musicians. I use Logic in the studio at Core to mix my songs down. I'd like to get a record contract. I am now an artist, songwriter and a composer and I'm presenting a radio show once a month.

When I get all these negative thoughts about the voices, the paintings seem real. Because of the emotions I feel, 'cos of the voices, that is what I express in the paintings. I had to run away from the voices, I had to do something positive and I discovered I had a talent, that I could paint. I try to encourage many more to paint, if they say, like I said at first, 'I can't do it', I say: 'Yes you can'. I would say to anyone, especially in Hackney, if you are in the mental health services, try Core Arts, because they will classify you with schizophrenia in a hospital, but when you go to Core and other mental health workshops you can turn out to be anything you want to be. You come out the place saying, 'Cor, this is art'.



Jane Smith

I am a local artist and illustrator living in Hackney and have over the years been prone to periods of anxiety and sometimes depression.

About three years ago, during a particularly bad one of these bouts, I went to my GP and he prescribed me a particular antidepressant which I started taking. I began to feel worse pretty quickly, but was aware that with some of this family of antidepressants that is to be expected, and I was prepared to ride out the bad time to wait for things to get better.

I felt terrible - I lost my appetite, was sleeping badly, my mind was racing and I was completely unable to relax. I began to find doing everyday tasks difficult and was unable to concentrate on anything much.

Such was the overpowering effect of the medication that I began to lose the concept that I could have been suffering from a reaction to it and began to believe that I was going crazy and losing the ability to function. Getting up became harder and sometimes I would lie in bed or on the sofa all day feeling a huge weight on me and it seemed physically impossible to get up. Going to the shops became a massive ordeal and I would wander around the aisles, having forgotten what I had gone to buy.

This went on for a few weeks and a suicidal feeling gradually took hold, which would give me a temporary feeling of relief as I saw it as a way out of the dreadful place I was in. The only thing that made me feel good was writing a comprehensive list of all my contacts, bank details etc to make it as simple as possible for the poor person who found me. I tried to write a will, and half managed it, until I was told that I needed proof of mental stability from my GP and I knew that this was impossible at the time. To this day it has stayed half completed in my in-tray and I know it needs addressing.

Various trips to my local GP practice left me more confused than ever, with some doctors recommending that I increase my dose, others that I reduce it and when I asked whether I should change to another medication they asked me what I preferred to do. In my state I was unable to make informed decisions. When I said I had suicidal feelings I was glibly told that it must be an underlying trait and that seemed to be that. I did eventually change to Fluoxetine, and I think the cocktail in my system made me even worse. I was also prescribed sleeping pills on top, took double the recommended dose and still had no sleep. I began to drink neat vodka by the glass in the hope of even ten minutes' relief before my heart started thumping again. It felt as though I had an engine inside me that never stopped and all this time I was still losing weight and not sleeping. My flat and garden began to feel like a dark cave.

In desperation one weekend I took myself to A&E at Homerton. I just wanted to be put in bed, and knocked out with something strong, and looked after. However, they just sent me home and suggested that I go to my GP on the Monday.

I knew that various friends and family had landmark birthdays and weddings coming up, and, although I wanted a quick exit, I didn't want to ruin these events, so somehow kept going for longer. I remember the point, cycling home, when I felt as though I had fallen over the other side, and believed that this was forever and there was no turning back.

'This is it, now' I thought, and took myself off to the local shop to buy a large bottle of vodka. I came home and tried to cut my wrist with a Stanley Knife, but it was blunt. I didn't make a comprehensive job and just made a mess and have a small scar to remember it by.

A few days later, at about lunchtime, I tried again. This time I left the door on the latch, took fifty Paracetamol and a bottle of wine, hastily scrawled a goodbye note and passed out.

Some time later I come round to find my friends and an ambulance driver standing by me. I unusually felt pleasantly drunk and thought we were going to a party although I knew something didn't feel right. In the back of the ambulance the dreadful realisation came over me what was happening and what I had done. It is hard to imagine how it must have felt for them.

I was taken to A&E and had a stomach pump, though memories of this part are hazy, thankfully, but I remember my friends watching, obviously traumatized, and my saying I wanted to be sectioned, thinking that it would feel safe. Presently I was wheeled unceremoniously away to a ward, my bag dumped on top of me, and left for the rest of the night, quite unable to believe that what I had done was real and I had failed.

The following day I was moved to various wards until my friends arrived and had meetings with various health professionals. Crisis care was arranged, various professionals checked up on me, the day passed slowly and by the evening I started to feel more relaxed, watching the World Cup on TV. I will never be able to hear the sound of a vuvuzela again without a reminder of this. We patients got chatting, and I realized that there were people in a far worse way than I was. **For the first time for months I felt a fleeting glimmer of what I could almost call happiness, and with the help of a sedative, I had the first good night's sleep for possibly weeks. I would go with another lady to the gardens to chat and watch the birds while she smoked.**

The next day I was discharged; my friends were there to look after me and settle me back in, the fridge filled with supplies. It was very odd to be at home again and part of me felt disappointed in my failure and that I was back where I started. The NHS Crisis Team were monitoring me and I was not allowed to go far for the next few days and they rationed my medication. It was the nearest thing I imagined to house arrest. Having one health professional after another on my sofa, ticking boxes and talking to me without any seeming idea of who I really was felt strange. It took another week or so for the suicidal feeling to begin to wear off as the Fluoxetine started to kick in and the other medication began to leave my system. I remember going for a run for the first time in months and it felt like a huge achievement.

Slowly, as I was advised, I took baby steps. One day I cleaned the fridge, a couple of days later I cleaned the windows - not big jobs in themselves but massive achievements in the circumstances.

Having relatively recently found it almost impossible to venture out of Hackney, **in the Autumn I treated myself to a trip to Italy to see my friends and to celebrate being on the path to recovery. They took me to San Gimignano where I drew this picture, (later to be manipulated digitally) and it was the start of a new direction in my work.**

I steadily recovered, and to this day the depression has not returned, although I intend to stay on the Fluoxetine indefinitely as it helps me enormously. The disadvantage is weight gain but at least I can think relatively clearly, feel more creative and sleep well.



Joe O'Connor

I come from a little village in the countryside between Oxford and Banbury called Deddington, very picturesque. I was born there, then lived most of my childhood in Oxford. I was a very wild kid, I used to run away from school and go into town and join gangs of kids - we used to have little hideouts and that sort of stuff, but then, when I was about seventeen years old, after getting involved with drugs, and getting myself into a little bit of trouble, I became psychiatrically ill. I had a disturbing episode of psychosis. I couldn't help myself, I was just mentally unwell - hearing voices and having delusions - so I was admitted to a hospital which I didn't like at all. After the first day in the garden, I just ran and climbed over barbed wire, ended up out in the street, was picked up, taken to another hospital and I stayed there. Eventually I became more well and was released. After that I just went out and joined my friends again, but I didn't really fully recover, so I was in and out of hospital a lot as a young kid.

I remember being in an old Victorian asylum and it was a very scary place, it had lots of little rooms going off main rooms, I was annoyed about the fact that they didn't let me out for walks to start off with and that was very frustrating because I found myself cooped up. But it also had very nice grounds that you could walk around, which, when I was allowed outside, I enjoyed. You just chilled out and walked around, which was very nice. However, they didn't really warn me about whether I was doing anything right or wrong so I didn't have any way to know whether I was doing things to improve my condition. It was like an old fashioned asylum, you were just left in a room and ignored and if you got angry you would get put in another ward and you stayed there for a bit. **Some of the doctors and nurses were really nice but some of them weren't. Some people progressed there, but I didn't progress. Obviously the system's improved since then and that hospital is just one of many.**

I moved to London when I was twenty-five after having lots of hospital admissions - I don't think I was progressing in the hospital that I kept being taken back to. It was like going round in a big circle, so I was moved to London, to a privately owned hospital funded by the NHS - Redford Lodge in Edmonton - and had a really good time. There was lots of things going on, art groups, a gym, some sport, a garden I could go out in, a local cafe, where we could meet the locals and I found Edmonton had a good little arty community.

I stayed for three years in North London then I was moved to supported accommodation which was quite basic, just a room and kitchen staff who were there some of the time. Then I was moved out to a less supported house and I really liked it - it was good for me. The head of my house in supported accommodation brought me to Core Arts in 1999 or 2000, just after they'd moved from Hackney Hospital and I started to take art seriously. I've always done art, when I was seventeen or eighteen I went to an art college but I only stayed there a year because of my mental ill health - or I didn't quite glue to the course. **At Core I did a lot of painting and printing and I don't think I would have recovered if I didn't have art, if I didn't have a way to express myself. I think it makes you feel good, makes the mental health better. I make paintings, drawings, wood carving - I pick up skills from others and tutors, then I use them to make art in different mediums. Core is a nice supported environment, it's non-judgemental, it's friendly.**

I want to carry on making art acquiring new skills, I'm making a transcription of a Titian painting *Diana and Actaeon*. I like all different art and I visit galleries every week with my brother. I have regular exhibitions and I'm doing some little bits of voluntary teaching as well - I want to build up my confidence as a teacher - hopefully going on to run an art group. **I'm doing some work for Family Mosaic charity and I graduated from a PGCE in education a couple of years ago - I want to do more teaching and apply for jobs. The main thing is my art and not letting mental ill health get the better of me, I want to work, but I need to get my self esteem up - don't like to feel the pressure to get a job straight away and volunteering is a good way of getting back into it.**

Most people are lucky: they got to hospital and they recover, and they're fine, and that's it, but I had a relapse about a year ago. Things got too much and I didn't know how to cope, I was on a negative. Even though I had a relapse and was probably a bit ill at the best of times, I still feel that I ended up better-off from that experience. I didn't like being in hospital again - I was only there for a month, wasn't sectioned and I do feel the service has improved, but I didn't like being there and I'm glad I came out the other end. Even though I had a relapse, I feel I learned from it.

I think there is a lot more understanding than there used to be with mental health, I think most people don't have a 'thing' about mental health, but to some, mental health is still a taboo. People need to work to improve the Mental Health Services continually and to have a lot of ideas about how to do that. It's also important to motivate yourself, to do something creative. Don't hang around - get involved, whatever you like, music or arts.



Jonathan Shears

I didn't have any mental health problems till I was about twenty seven, when a couple of significant things happened. My dad went missing and at the same time my marriage broke up. I started hitting the bottle, I got signed-off sick from work and that's where it really started going wrong. I started getting quite badly depressed and I started going in and out of hospital with kind of minor suicide attempts, quite a bit of self harm. I had my first big admission in Homerton Hospital. That was about fifteen years ago. They diagnosed me as Bipolar, but more like depression, with manic periods in between.

I didn't mind my diagnosis, in a way, because I got referred from hospital to art therapy. It was when Hackney still had an art therapist: they had a little arts therapy centre down near Columbia Road and I used to go down there once a week. Next time I was in hospital I got referred to Core Arts so I went along. **I'd never really done any of my own art before, never got an O-level Art or anything, but I started drawing. After a while I got into the music more than the art, because I used to DJ a lot. From that I very quickly got into helping about, volunteering with the admin. in the office and I really loved it.**

Around that time one of the art tutors encouraged me to do some more art and I went up to the studio, they built some one and a half metre boards for me and I started working on them. Because I'd had a lot of self-harming and had a lot of scars, I began using a knife to cut into the boards and then putting oil paint on them and taking it off. They kind of looked interesting, they were quite violent, but also had a bit of beauty to them. I did about three or four of them and they were put in a Core Arts exhibition in one of the city banks. I wasn't well at the time, I think I was in hospital when Paul Monks the director of Core came in and said 'you know your paintings sold before the exhibition opened'. I thought, this is interesting. So, with the encouragement of the art tutors of that time, Rossan and Lottie, I carried on. I learned how to make my own boards and how to make the traditional painting surface, Gesso, to work on. That was the beginning of the journey really.

As a spin-off from that, I set up a little group of artists at Core called 'I Am Here'. We got constituted, so we could open a bank account and we applied for a grant from Hackney, which we got, to build a sculpture. I was into typefaces at the time, so we had some large letters built which we covered in Gesso and they travelled round the community, the hospital and a few estates as a kind of graffiti project, with people carving into them. It tied in with my own carvings, which had started to incorporate graffiti in them. I got ill again so that project came to an end, but the letters were finally displayed on the roof at Core.

The follow on from that was that we got commissioned to work on a park in Bow, to build 3.5 metre letters saying Chiltern Green, which was the name of the park. The garden won awards. Again, I got ill and the project was completed in my absence. A lot of the time I have started projects and the illness has forced me to stop, but they always get completed in the end. At the same time I was selling my own work in the external group exhibitions Core organised, or people would come round to Core and see my pictures and ask to buy them. It's a good validation of what you do.

About three years ago I had mental health problems again, not in terms of overdoses or anything dramatic, but a proper deep depression, and that lasted three years. I couldn't make art or do anything, I watched arts shows and things on the TV and magazines, but I was virtually bed-bound at my mother's. When I got really bad they would take me into hospital and bring me back, and so forth. **The hospital has been like a safety net, when everyone has tried everything else and it's not working and I'm out of control, don't want to live, it's the best place for me. You can become a burden on people you love and there comes a point and you think I'm better off there. You don't want to be there, but in a way you do because you feel safe and contained.**

I was never sectioned, I always admitted myself voluntarily, it's not the kind of place you would want to be if you were well. The nurses try, obviously you get good ones and bad ones, like anything else in the world, but they are burned out - there's too much for them to do and not enough time. The ward I was on is Conolly Ward and the person that paid me the most attention in the two or three years I was there was Annie who is the cleaner. Her and me and my mum got on really well and she spent more time with me, chatting, asking how I was doing. Before Core I was a qualified social worker, sometimes, because they knew of my background, I'd have nurses telling me their problems.

I'm working for Core Landscapes at the moment - I think gardening is a form of art in itself, without a doubt it's a very creative process. I've also started painting again now, it's been really nice revisiting that process again, after a break. I sold a piece of work to a collector from the recent 'Over The Radar' show at Core. I'm writing too, which is more to do with me and personal stuff.

For me the art is like a meditation and it allows me not to fly off with big ideas, just to come back to the one thing, the piece that I'm working on. I get into the minutiae of it, the tiny little changes, colours that I want. That stops me flying off with too many ideas, which is my problem. **Core has supported me with mentoring and with practical things to do with my mental health, it's a two way thing, I have done a lot of volunteering there, I was the centre manager for a while and the events coordinator.**

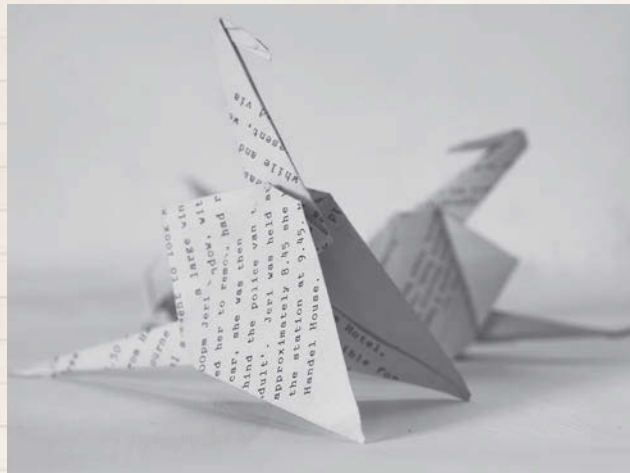
Try not to get caught up in the stigma of mental health. It's a traumatic thing, but we're all people and it can happen to anyone, so don't be afraid of asking for help. In someways you've got to almost kick the door down to get the help - that's the problem - but keep on at it. I've had friends who have been pulling their hair out because they know a person who should be in hospital and they can't get them in. **Keep pursuing it, sometimes hospital seems like a terrible place to be, especially for family who are visiting, but it is a place of safety when you're out of control. It's not forever, you'll come out of it.**



Jorge Barros

I am from Chile. In 1974 I was sentenced to twenty years in jail for being an opponent of the country's dictator Augusto Pinochet. I am not ashamed of this, I was imprisoned like many people at this time in Chile for their opinions, or just for being poor and everyone in these jails were tortured. I served three years of my sentence and then I was transferred to a more 'posh' prison in the Chilean capital Santiago, where I was eventually allowed to apply to the British government for political asylum. I came to Britain and I was OK for a few years, but then I began to become unwell in my mind, because of my experiences in Chile. I was in hospital in Hackney for a year and looked after very well. Whilst I was there, I met people who attended Core Arts and they suggested I join. It's very good for me to keep my mind occupied and Core supports me with my artwork - **I'm a painter, a potter and I write poetry. I want to continue to make art and to write, all year, every year. My only advice to people is: be truthful.**





Karen Eliot

I was first diagnosed as having Bipolar 2 after I was in Mile End for three months in about 2008, but I had previously been told I was depressed. Being diagnosed was a curse and a blessing all at the same time. In one sense, I understood things about myself that I'd struggled with before, but in another sense I was a 'nutter'. I've never really managed to find a balance between those two things since.

I always had really good relationships with my psychiatrists up until I moved to Hackney. I've had a breakdown in the last two years and I found that if it hadn't been me referring myself to Core Arts, I really don't know what would have happened, because the Hackney North Mental Health Team, for whatever reason, withdrew their support. I've really, really, struggled with them in the past few years and it's made me want to totally disengage with services and find my own way.

Since I came to Core, my art practice has completely changed. I've gone from being an adequate graphic designer, who got into it by pure fluke and by chance, to feeling like someone who maybe could make art and move in more fine art worlds. I just make stuff constantly, I'll learn something new or go for walks with my camera and something will catch my attention and I'll go home and research it for hours and that will spark it off. It's always a bit scatter-shot, journeys within journeys; Russian dolls.

The piece of work in the show, came about because I'm a walker and I discovered the term *psychogeography*. Through an interest in that, I heard a radio show about a walk around Ilford, the place I had been in care as a teenager - to me it was a grim place, but the walkers loved it - and it made me want to confront my own memory and experiences, so that maybe I could be more objective, rather than being negative about them. So I started to take the walks, map them photographically and go back over the photos and colour code how I felt at various points of that journey. I realised I really needed to confront my experiences there, so I got my notes from Social Services...

My identity was formed very much in those years of being in care. In my head I became a 'scruffy little herbert' in the care of the Local Authority and that's partly why I thought I could never be an artist, my world was quite closed. Scruffy kids from children's homes don't go to St Martin's - they just don't. Now I've realised actually nothing's closed, it was just my perception of it and how I've seen myself as a result of that time and place.

It's been hard work: three foolscap folders. The authorities didn't retract a single name or address, so I've had to go through and do it myself. Reading every sheet carefully has had quite an impact on me - it can be like really horrible therapy, but you know it's worth it. **Folding hundreds of Origami birds, folding away bad memories, negative ways of looking at yourself, turning them into something pretty and then getting rid of it. Art is a tool for well-being, in this work in a very conscious way.**

I have a thing about destroying the artwork I've made: I don't want to make art you can sell, I don't like the way it's commodified. I don't like that relationship. That's very much the only art world I've known since I first started going to galleries, it has been about business and art's relationship to the built-world. That's one reason why I took the name Karen Eliot, it's a multiple use name, that anyone can use for an artistic and activist endeavour.

Another reason, and probably the main one, that I chose to take that pseudonym was to demonstrate that, despite my work being of an obviously personal nature, we *all* have hang-ups, things we could get rid of. **You don't have to be diagnosed with a mental illness to experience pain or sorrow - these things are universal.**

It's political as well, because of all the changes in East London, I don't want to be part of something that is getting rid of people like me, I don't feel right about it. I want my home to be fair for everyone. If you can fit into this new creative class you can survive the gentrification, but I'm not one of these people. I don't feel the need to be a 'professional' artist, but I'm gonna carry on making things for the rest of my life.

Core has really given me a purpose for my creative practice. I was talking about hanging these birds up in my house but a friend said, 'If you do that they will section you - do not cover your house in Cranes!'. Now I have a legitimate place to show them; suddenly I'm allowed to fold thousands of Cranes...



Karl Matthews

I'm Karl Matthews, musician. I began playing concerts at Core Arts and producing my own music in their studios in 2000. I write about things I see and hear in everyday life and on the TV – I like 'EastEnders'. My track 'Kat Slater' started with me playing guitar in the studio and then someone I was jamming with added a key change – it really worked. I wrote the lyrics there and then, about a kind lady on the bus I had a conversation with earlier in the day. The songs about 'EastEnders' come about because I love all the different characters and conversations on that programme. I've visited the studios and I'm known as the man who sings about its characters and the cast. **I release the tracks on 12" vinyl, promoting them myself and I'm known in the community, church and on the internet for my music. I made music before, but Core Arts is where my journey began.** I'll never stop making music – making music makes me happy – and I make it to make other people happy.





Kerry Hudson

I got diagnosed in 2005, but even before that I would get pulled out of school into the Special Needs class for a chat with the tutor, then they would just put me back in my class, because back in those days you didn't have mental health awareness in schools, you just had learning difficulties. I got diagnosed with Bipolar Type 1, prior to that I was diagnosed on and off with depression, because you go to see your GP when you're low, but you don't go and see your GP, not when you're high as a kite, you just enjoy it...for a bit, before it becomes hypomania or psychosis. I had a diagnosis done twice, I went private and I got it done on the NHS. **I knew something was up and it was good to have a name for it. I know people don't like labels, but I found it useful, because now I knew what type of medication would work, what type of therapy would work, where I would go from here:** I wasn't just a bit weird, or a drunk, or a bit annoying, I was Bipolar.

A lot of people say they hate it when they get diagnosed, but I actually felt quite safe and then you can learn more about your illness yourself. I worked in mental health for about ten years on and off, I worked with people who were Bipolar and I didn't see it in myself, for a second, because everyone's Bipolar is completely different. I've been really lucky, I have a really good psychiatrist. However, the way it often works is that you have three main psychiatrists in your team and they've each got three Senior House Officers (junior doctors undergoing training) and the SHO's move around every three months, so you will never see the same person. They change every three months, so if you only have an appointment every three months, you'd see someone different each time and the inconsistency wouldn't work. I've seen people break down over that. I'm lucky, I see one of the doctors and he's always been there if I need him, I've never had to wait.

The second time I was in hospital it was a pretty bad stay, music therapy was a few R'n'B seven inches – you just played them and that was it. Art therapy was one picture that had been photocopied from a children's colouring book. But the last time I went in there were loads of art workshops, group therapy and mindfulness classes. I was worried that it was going to be worse because of the cuts, but it was fine. I got attacked on the ward by another patient, but it was dealt with pretty well. I think I'm quite lucky and I really hate to say that but I've known a few people who've had some rubbish experiences – they can't get hold of their doctor, they don't know who their doctor is and they end up saying the same thing over and over again.

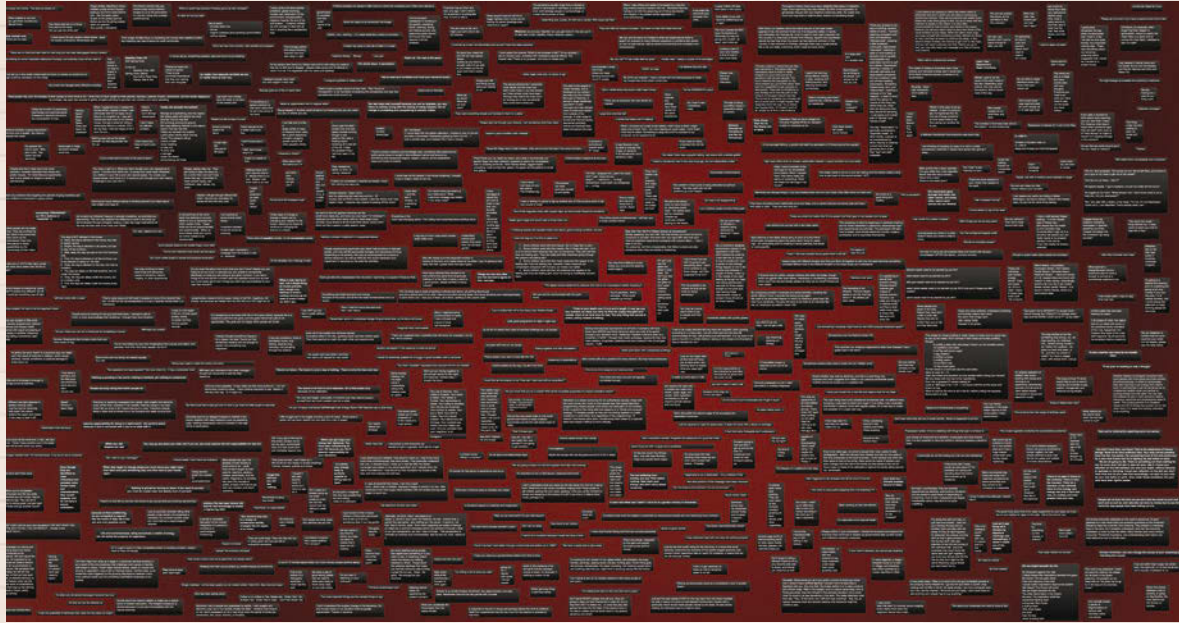
I found out about Core Arts because one of the home treatment staff came over and mentioned the place. **So I got inquisitive because I needed something to do, I was going mad at home and I'm creative. When you are creative and you aren't using your creativity it's a little bit like being**

overweight with ideas, carrying loads of stuff and you can't do anything with it, all the excess baggage. I've always been interested in creative writing and I did a degree in Contemporary Arts. I'm interested in installation art, and music. I play bass guitar and drums, a bit of keyboards. I have a lot of one to one tutorage. I have drum lessons, I learned to play bass at Core, I jam with other musicians and have gigged at Core, I do a bit of ceramics too. I'm interested in textiles, I learned how to use a sewing machine at Core and got some help from the tutors whilst I was teaching myself to knit. I just got really hooked on making stuff, it's a really good thing to do at home when I am on my own. I set up a little business called Nan's Cabinet with a website so people can buy stuff on line and have a market stall.

Writing I've always done, but I only started doing journalism last year. My background is script writing and I worked with the BBC. I started writing comedy sketches about ten years ago and being a bit high with my illness at the time, I sent them straight to the BBC and they bought them. The guys that were in my sketches were comic actress Sharon Horgan and Nick Burns (Nathan Barley). I was discovered by Ben Miller of The Armstrong and Miller Show. I tried stand up for about a year, but I made better money writing stand up for other comics like Gina Yashere. My agency liquidated and after doing some script consultancy for MTV, I started writing a book of comedy memoirs, but I realised that it wouldn't get published because people didn't know who I was, so I began to write journalism and to contact magazines.

I got a two page piece for the Mail On Sunday, I write regularly for the Huffington Post, N16 Magazine and Uncovered, which became Mental Healthy and I have blog sites. I've now got the book back on-course, colleges contact me asking me to help work with their psychology departments and the BBC have just interviewed me, because they want to know about Bipolar. If I didn't do creative work I would start staring at walls, thinking too much and I would go mad. Core has recently given me my first exhibition since I was at art college, twelve years ago, and it has given me a kick up the pants to do more writing because people at Core are really into it and encouraging. Core has helped with my personal and mental well-being a lot. When I've got really down, no matter how busy people are, they listen.

I think for mental health professionals, consistency is really important, and, given the choice where to refer someone with mental health issues, I would always say an arts centre, even if they have never done art, because they might find something within themselves that they have not been able to explore yet. **People with mental health issues, I would say, should spend time with other people who are experiencing it.** I was in denial for a few years till I came to Core and it was only then that I met people with such similar traits, and, without over-doing it, it's good to talk to other people who know what's going on. Sometimes we sit in the garden or the pub after Core and all have a good whinge about being Bipolar – it helps.



Kris Hillquist

I didn't realise I had a mental health diagnosis until maybe five years ago. I'd had periods of mania and depression previous to that but didn't know what they were, I just got on with it. Then about five years ago I had a severe manic break, to the point where me and reality kind of parted company. Actually, we completely parted company. This resulted in me being sectioned, and, in retrospect I can see this was probably necessary because I had no awareness and I was a danger to myself. Eventually, I was diagnosed as having Bipolar Affective Disorder Type 1, which is the more severe of the Bipolars, this means if I become unwell I hallucinate and hear things other people don't and I have a very tenuous - if any - grip on reality as we know it.

My first contact with the mental health services was when the police took me to Homerton Hospital and I found myself on a Section. And I was not impressed - taken away in a van, put on an indefinite section where they can keep you there until they say you are well. I found that experience of complete powerlessness terrifying, the ward - terrifying. Stuff kept getting stolen, I was threatened by other patients, it was really rough. Simple things, like, I didn't like the hospital food - I got absolutely sick of eating boiled fish and vegetables - so I kept ordering Halal choice so I would get curries, and, in their wisdom, they decided that part of my delusion was being a Muslim. So whilst I was in hospital, I didn't feel supported - I felt supported by my friends who brought me edible food and cigs - but I can't see what they did in terms of support apart from slam me full of medication, keep me out of the public and bring me down from my mania. I don't think they explained very clearly what was happening to me, I just remember them saying that I 'needed to be there'. **Eventually I saw a psychiatrist, who seemed like a nice guy, who said I was Bipolar, but still no one explained to me at this point what this meant.**

I didn't know anything about the illness, I went into complete denial. It took me about a year to begin to accept what they were telling me. I was sat there thinking 'this can't be happening to me it's something that happens to other people'. So I carried on, but I didn't get well, I was compliant, but just barely, with my medication. It was partly my condition, partly my own arrogance, my own ignorance, an experience of a hospital that was neither therapeutic, helpful or supportive and because I felt a sense of shame - the stigma of mental illness. I was self-stigmatising, I thought it was a horrible thing, I was a bad person, a failure, a 'less than'. I just couldn't think about having a mental illness, the way it affected my self-esteem and my sense of self-worth. Therefore 'I didn't have one'; therefore, I didn't really engage and I didn't make much progress for about the first year to eighteen months. Eventually I was discharged and my after care from hospital was much better, I got very good support from the North & South Hackney Mental Health Teams and they began to explain to me about Bipolar disorder.

One day, someone from the team told me about Core Arts and suggested I go down there. At first I wasn't able to engage very much, I was still too ill. I met people, made drawings, smoked. **Slowly I learned how to communicate again: I learned how to speak again, how to sit quiet and have a cup of tea. I learned that, unlike art school, nobody was going to criticise, evaluate and mark my work. I could explore, without feeling the need to get it right first time. I was encouraged to develop my ideas and if I had a question there would be someone on hand in the building to help.** As I began to do more work I got more healthy and I began to engage. Creativity has always been an outlet for my thoughts, emotions, feelings, and a structured way in which to make things concrete. I was an artist before, I have a BA in Sound Art and Design and now my practice is even more developed. A lot of it is focus. Put it this way: I've worked since I was fourteen years old - I was a stable hand, mucking out a hundred horses every morning, went on to run my own business - and when I got ill I was stuck, really stuck. To not have a job, to not have a focus. Now I have my photography, a record release, I have meaning, I have structure, I have goals. I have dreams again. When I got ill I thought my dreams were shattered. I've got new dreams now and I'm achieving them. I come to Core to work, to pick people's brains, to be supported in my creative practice. **It gives me a sense of hope, a sense of direction, of purpose, a reason to get up. Now I consider myself to be a working artist, who happens to have a mental illness.**

And it's going well, I have a record released by Todd Terry the American dance producer, it got me to start my own record label and it gives me confidence, to release my work. I'm really interested in photography, I feel I'm coming up with some really interesting things in that field.

The positive side of all this is, that because my own personal experience of hospital was not good, it's really encouraged me to find out more and take some personal responsibility for my own health so that I never end back up there. My psychiatrist is wonderful, but I try and avoid them, I still feel they've got too much power - to put you in there. But my GP and psychiatrist are very helpful and I trust them to help me make decisions to avoid that happening.

One thing I've learned is, I've nothing to be ashamed of. If I had diabetes I would not hang my head in shame. A mental health diagnosis is not something to be ashamed of. It's not contagious, not something for people to be afraid of. Learn to embrace it and not to feel shame about something that has *absolutely* no shame.



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Mark Roberts
Mad Pride Notes

In 1998 East Londoner Simon Barnett, who had been chair of Survivors Speak Out was voicing what he saw as a need for a Survivor Liberation organisation. Survivors Speak Out had been formed partly on the back of numerous scandals of the 60's onwards surrounding the old Victorian psychiatric hospitals or asylums. There had been a lot to speak out about but the asylums had now almost all closed and people who had made it out - with vestiges of sanity - faced new difficulties of stigma, poverty, unemployment, and side-effects of medication in the community. Simon went that year to the annual Gay Pride London event. And realising that Gay people had faced similar discrimination, scorn and legal obstacles, Simon coined the term Mad Pride. The name was catchy and edgy - the more so because "mad" of course was a term of abuse.

So a fledgling organisation was born, to begin with great support from non-survivors. Our first formal meeting was held at NHS London's HQ in Eastbourne Terrace. And Mad Pride's first chair, was Professor Ray Rowden who also headed up the Special Hospital Authority - comprising Broadmoor, Rampton and Ashworth. He drove a Rolls Royce. Mad Pride from the outset was odd. Well it was mad, what else would you expect? Most of the non-users of mental health services stepped down when Mad Pride got going and gathered together a bunch of survivors.

There was one lesson, we had learned from other user organisations, that in order to organise, we should not debate endlessly, and fracture the movement with arguments. So we just looked around for like-minded people, rather than try to establish an elaborate democracy, and Mad Pride had very few policy objectives.

What would Mad Pride do? Well it would campaign - hopefully in an imaginative and creative way, but it would also be about having fun. There wasn't an awful lot of fun in mental health, nor in survivor organisations. So we looked for some common interests - and found that most of us liked pop music - in particular punk, indie, reggae and soul - particularly punk. Punk suited Mad Pride somehow. We would organise gigs we thought. So we did.

An early highlight was the Mad Pride Festival at Clissold Park in 2000 when we managed an All-Dayer with two stages. Alabama 3 topped the bill - and when Hackney Council turned off the electricity at seven o'clock, they carried on acoustically away from the stage. In fact the Festival took nearly a year to organise.

Founder member and Southwark MIND stalwart was Hackney resident Robert Dellor. He organised an editorial committee and the publication of a book of essays and short fiction - *Mad Pride A Celebration of Culture*. Everyone was astounded when this book - which proclaimed Madness as being the new Rock and Roll, got Book of the Week in the Guardian.

Meanwhile though, there was the name Mad Pride. Quite a few people objected to it - perhaps not understanding that we were "reclaiming" the word mad (as well as crazy, loony, bonkers and so on), just as Black people had reclaimed black - originally a term of abuse. But many more liked the edginess of the name. It was clear the thing would spread by itself but there was no way the originators could organise on the scale it deserved. So it was policy to encourage other groups to use the name. And they quickly did. Especially MIND Freedom in the USA. But also there were groups in Spain, the Netherlands, Australia. Today 2013, some of the most

thriving groups are Mad Pride Ireland and in Ghana. If there is a time of year associated with Mad Pride, it is the week surrounding July 14th - Bastille Day.

An early chair of Mad Pride, was founder member Pete Shaughnessy. A charismatic and powerful speaker, Pete could be ferocious in debate. He saw Mad Pride akin to the official IRA. The provisional wing on the other hand was a highly secretive organisation called Reclaim Bedlam. These people were so secretive that none of us knew their identities or their whereabouts. However Mad Pridesters did organise quite a large meeting at one of the former sites of Bedlam - the Imperial War Museum much to the museum's bewilderment. Future Lib Dem deputy leader Simon Hughes famously stood on a chair and addressed the assembled multitude (Tragically Pete died, it set us back quite a bit. But then tragedies are far too common in the survivor community).

Stop the Suicides was a campaign started by Pete. Artists at Core Arts in Hackney fashioned a full-size pillar box - where people could post letters to the departed. Another excellent campaign was the demonstration to counter the Maudsley and Royal College of Psychiatrists celebration of sevenhundred and fifty years of mental health care. We found this to be bigging up psychiatry on a grand scale and just about as obscene as a celebration of Auschwitz would be. A service of thanksgiving at St Paul's Cathedral attended by members of the Royal Family was the final straw. We picketed St Paul's, put daffodils on the steps and Pete leafleted the Duchess of Kent. Good one.

Then the good people of Highgate decided to celebrate the centennial of the Bridge over the Archway Road. But they failed to mention the large number of people who had jumped off that bridge onto the A1. Nor did they reference its nickname "Suicide Bridge". So Mad Pride assembled on the bridge for a candlelit vigil and an impromptu pop concert at a bus stop.

In 2010, Welfare Reform and the dreaded cuts in the name of Austerity were looming large. Mad Pride organised a demonstration at Hyde Park Corner - site of Tyburn the place of public executions, in which a huge effigy - bearing the face of David Cameron and George Osborne was hanged from a tree. The body was "disemboweled" revealing sausages which were then cooked and eaten. Gruesome, no? Organising Meetings had been held at Sutton House - the oldest house in Hackney. Mad Pride UK seems to like history.

Meanwhile the gigs continued, and there have been many many memorable ones. Legendary punks like UK Subs, Subway Sect, Alternative TV, The Long Decline, Citizen Fish, indies like Jowe Head, The Arlenes, The Fish Brothers, Alabama 3, Edgar Broughton, Inner Terrestrials. There have been allied festivals like the Camberwell Bonkersfest, and a spin-off organisation Creative Routes. And because Mad Pride was somewhat male dominated, then there was Mad Chicks too.

In 2013, not only do survivors of the mental health system face an uncertain future amid welfare cuts, and massive cuts to services, but sympathetic charities like Bipolar Fellowship, Rethink and MIND are feeling the pinch too. If there is one thing Mad Pride has done to counter impending doom and depression (even if it discovered this by accident), it is to strike a balance between hard campaigning and having a bit of fun.

Mark Roberts - founder member of Mad Pride UK.



Paul Monks

In 1992 I was an artist in London, with little money, looking for a free studio. I heard they were closing Victorian psychiatric hospitals, so I sent a circular letter to all the psychiatric hospitals in North and East London. I got a call from Hackney and they said, yes, they had an empty room I could use. I went along and set up an easel. I was making my paintings in a free studio which was heated, so it was fantastic, but on a four weeks to quit notice. There was no contract, no agreement for me to do anything, **I wasn't there as an artist in residence, it was just an empty ground floor room in an administrative block that no one was using, as the hospital was being wound down.**

The room was next to an old waiting room and was a junction point where people would cross, so there were loads of chairs that no one was using, apart from a couple of elderly patients. Further down the corridor there was a small room that was being used as an Afro Caribbean drop-in. It didn't take long for people from there to walk past and see that there was somebody in my room and I was soon asked, very politely, 'what the hell I was doing there'. I suddenly had to find a way of trying to express what I was about to a group of people who had not been to art college and weren't anxious about being one of ten thousand artists in East London. These guys weren't interested in any of that, but they were curious, because as it happens they were already making some art themselves. Not official art therapy, just stuff on their own, from doodles and drawings, to writing poems. **So people started to drift in. I had a big box of paints and we would talk, paint, smoke cigarettes and so forth. I was trying to find some common ground with them, the common ground being recognisable skills as artists - and so I basically changed my way of working, from making my conceptual paintings to painting portraits of them.** With the simple idea that if you paint half decent portraits people think, 'oh you're a proper artist aren't you, you're all right'.

I began to enjoy working in that way and to question the value of 'Art', I realised it could really make a difference to somebody, even if I thought they weren't 'high art' paintings. One example in particular springs to mind, which also shows the kind of condition the hospital was in. It's the story of Sid, a guy who asked me to paint his portrait one day...

Under the hospital, were narrow, doorway-width, arched-top Victorian service tunnels that run across the twelve acres of the site. Because they were warm and eighty percent of the site was empty - so there was a lot of quiet space - a few patients and ex-patients lived there. It was a safe place too - safer than the streets where you might be abused.

Sid lived in the tunnels and had a whole complex set of needs and issues. He was homeless, HIV positive, heroin addicted, alcoholic, schizophrenic and on this day spitting blood from the night before when the police had picked him up and given him a 'little going over' for his troubles. He would come up from the tunnels, to hang about in the 'studio' and enjoy the relentless and un-self-pitying 'craic' with the other patients - who on this day made him laugh so much about his predicament that he was in tears, because his ribs were broken. Not long after that event, things went downhill for him: he tried to end his life by burning himself, but failed. Eventually he jumped in front of a train. I got a call. He'd been admitted to the psychiatric unit soaked in blood, with severe physical injuries and

locked up there. The reason I'd been called was that he wanted the painting I had made of him to be with him while he was there. Slowly, things went even further downhill for him and he was transferred from unit to unit, and in each case that painting had to be delivered to him - and woe betide any member of staff that tried to take it away. Finally, just before he died, it was sent to his dad. I realised that in that guy's last weeks and days, a simple painting on canvas of him had made a huge impact on his life and it made me think about the reasons why I and others made art. **It showed me that there was a huge value in art that I hadn't considered and it led on to me looking at artistic activity in a very different way.**

Around this time I had a small show in a disused shop in Soho and so I asked the artists from the hospital to put some work in it, we exhibited alongside each other - their own work and my portraits of them, the effect was mutually beneficial. I had also started moving about the hospital more - you would hear that someone from our little group was back on the wards and you would visit them. I was going on the wards to visit and I was intrigued, I found there was a whole different culture there, from ward to ward, even. I moved around the service areas, the fire escapes, the tunnels, semi derelict blocks that were still inhabited and found strange and disturbing stuff: three or four inches of pigeon droppings all the way up stairwells, blocked fire escapes and on the other side actual wards where people were receiving their 'care'. All the infrastructure of the hospital was falling apart, but the practicality of it was that because the institution was running down and because the word had got out on the wards about our 'art studio', the hospital authorities began to recognise the value of what we were doing and I could ask for fifty quid here, fifty quid there for paint and paper, etcetera. Slowly, we were able to go from a small room making art, to a whole ward, to a whole block, till we were given a whole section of the hospital and were able to give people who wanted it, their own studio.

After about two years an organisation, Social Action for Health, led by Elizabeth Bayliss spotted us and she helped put together a funding bid. It was successful and we went from a few hundred pounds to significant funding overnight, still housed in the old hospital building. We had to come up with a name and we had to be a constituted organisation and so it was all very quickly arrived at. We all sat around a table and came up with the name Core Arts and the logo in five minutes flat. Of course, my role was the 'white middle class guy' who could then knock on the doors for money, but, crucially, what we did, right in the beginning, is set up the trustees for the charity. Who were and have been ever since, comprised of more than sixty percent of the users or beneficiaries of the service. This was our main case and it is still one of the strongest things about the organisation.

With proper funds, we were able to set up the first workshop - a life class on a Tuesday afternoon suggested by a patient who wanted a 'rhythm' in her day to day life - taught by artists coming out of the wards, who started sharing their skills for the first time, because they were suddenly provided with an environment in which to do it. It's still going strong now, nineteen years later. We set up studios in people's homes so they could paint when they weren't at Core. It was about creating a lifestyle - you never know when you are going to be creative, when you need to do it. We still try and do that, except now there are over fifty different workshops. We brought in

music, with 'Big' Steve Pulford a gigging musician, who had never worked in this field – but none of us had and I think one of our benefits was that none of us had any psychiatric qualifications or a clinical approach. **I didn't even have any personal knowledge or experience of mental health problems, even though the statistic is one in four. The whole thing was new to me, but that's what's interesting, not having read books by R.D. Laing or anything, having been kept away from it, means that your dialogue has to be very in tune with the people who are coming along.** It's still the priority today, how you support people to get the most out of them. We made friends with the technicians who ran bits of the buildings and got things made for us, our frames, easels, canvas stretchers, they did lots of things to help. Staff and administrators helped and nurtured us, often turned a blind eye to red tape. Looking back on the hospital years, it was a bit of a 'wild East' – I can't imagine the scenario of what we did then, happening again, in an institutional environment. We were there for an eventful four or so years until our time ran out in 1996 and we moved to temporary accommodation across the road in an industrial unit, until we got the lease on the back-end of St Barnabas Church Hall in 1997.

We finally had a home and once you get that, things become a little more secure, you can begin to apply for more money and we did. We've been doing exactly the same things ever since, trying to improve the quality and the range of our service. Not creating a 'mental health ghetto', but something that's part of someone's journey, not the only thing in their life, but a place to come and learn skills, make friends. All the positive psychological benefits that come with that, will hopefully feed into other parts of people's lives, through learning, through performance – which I'm still astonished by – I still find it difficult to even talk to a voice recorder and I'm always amazed when people get up on stage and pump their stuff out. The journey has been good and we look increasingly more to what people can do outside of Core. I think that we have helped a change in attitude towards mental health. We are more integrated in the community. People just accept Core Arts and that it and mental health are perhaps something to be interested in, not to be scared of. A healthy community is one that isn't prejudiced against mental health and this has been a parallel piece of work that has gone on all the way, with our internal and external events and exhibitions. The benefits to individuals is just astounding: to see somebody who's locked on a secure ward get a three hour release to lead a twenty-piece percussion band at a packed Shakespeare Globe...small things can have a huge impact on people.

We want to continue with more of the same, but unfortunately it's difficult times, funding is being moved about and reduced. It's now up to us to explain, sell to GPs what we do, why we do it and what the benefits are to the people they are dealing with. This can be difficult to explain, because we aren't seen as doing 'traditional' therapy, we are doing art and people can be prejudiced or ignorant towards the arts and the value therein. **But traditional approaches cannot always provide the breadth of service that we offer and are a lot more expensive. One-to-one is a very expensive support system. So, the ongoing challenge is how to improve the care pathways.** How to integrate more with the mental health services and provide a more considered approach to discharge and continuing care. We were once described as 'taking on those people who did not access the other services'. A lot of the services the hospitals offer to people with psychiatric problems – from

medication to therapy – are not necessarily best suited to people's needs and cultures. For example, we were originally ninety-five percent Afro Caribbean and most of the funding goes to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and relates to something not necessarily young, schizophrenic, Afro Caribbeans can relate to. Yes, you could go to CBT sitting, but alternatively you could learn to play in a band – and there's a similarity about being in a band, having a dialogue with the other musicians, putting on your show, getting on stage – that can have the same positive effect as other forms of therapy. More recognition and integration with and from the mental health services would be a positive thing for all of us. Some things have started to change for the better and you can see replication of our approach across the board, the hospital has a recording studio now too – it's housed in their old ECT room.

The current rhetoric is that there is a little bit for everyone in society, we all have access to some basic services and those that need the mental health services can get what they want: they can *choose* what aspect of the services they need. If it goes down that path, and it isn't just empty rhetoric, then we will continue to do what we do best, **because people choose to come to Core Arts, but at the moment the government agenda and local implementation aren't set up to provide everybody with that choice.** The rhetoric is there, but is the will?



Rudolph Lindo

I draw women, men, toddlers, kids; people I recognise, people I don't recognise. I've just done two different cars, I see new cars, but I prefer the old ones in the 1940s, I've got a car book at home. I like 80s music, especially The Thompson Twins, The Police; I like The Beatles, The Monkees, Bob Marley. I really like making art, I'd like to get some money for it. I would describe it as an art technique. The words on them are what people have said, what they might be thinking. **They're people I see around, black people, white people. I just draw their image, I give them names: this one I'm doing is Maria, this, Mr Jones, a detective; fashioned from my brain, I make my own decisions.**

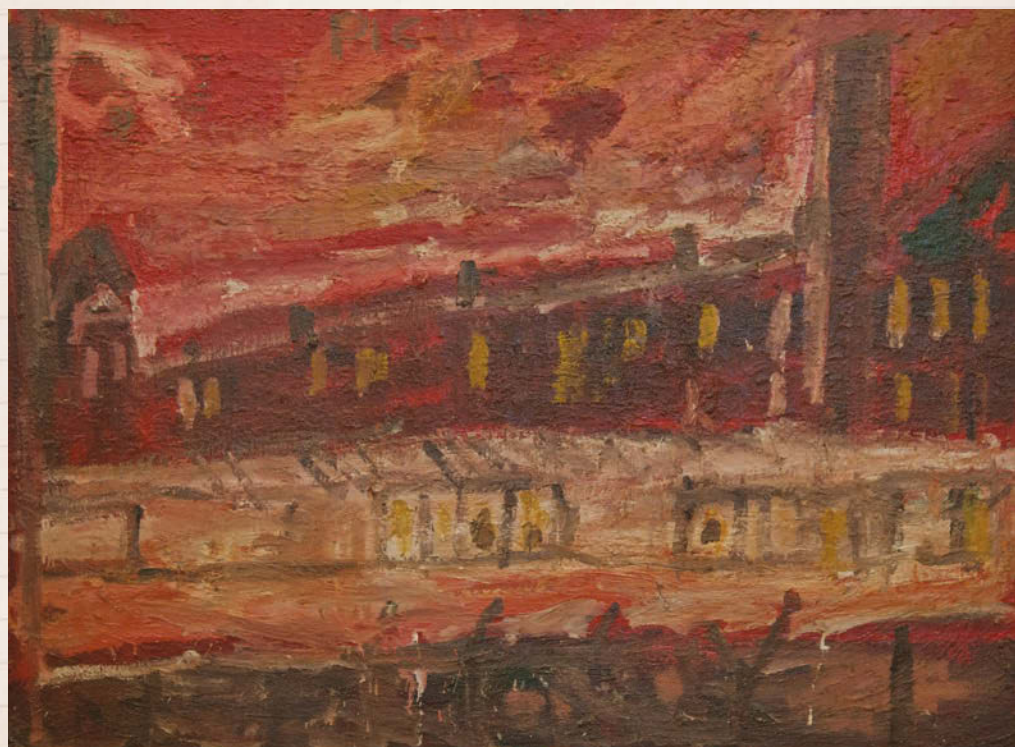




Sophie O'Neill

I moved to London and I studied Graphic Design but I always wanted to be a fine artist. I started being ill in 2003, up until a couple of years ago and I was referred to Core Arts. Coming to Core has been a really good opportunity to learn more about art, get better at it, and it's had a massive impact on me in terms of learning and support. Anyone who is at all interested in art or music should do it - **for me, art and creativity makes me happy because it's what I want to do and it has a very positive effect on my well-being.** At the minute I do many things - painting, ceramics, metal casting and photography. I've just had a solo exhibition of my paintings at Core and ultimately I want to be a professional artist, find work in the arts and exhibit with a gallery.





Steve McCann

I got into art through mental health. I'd been involved in the mental health services for about four years before they introduced me to art, but I'd been painting since 1977.

I was a bit of a dropout, I played guitar a bit. Then I met a guy who was a big influence on me, he was a registered heroin addict and we both wanted to hang out and smoke, take gear, but he was an artist, a comic artist and I was fascinated by his work. His art was very graphic but he would talk to me about the Rembrandts at Kenwood Gallery. **He was very wise and he didn't think the way he'd gone was a good road to go down.**

So I started going to the Whittington day hospital, I just went into the art room and bang. That was it. Someone said 'your paintings are really good'. People accepted me and they didn't look down on me. I knew that there was something in me that stopped wanting to destroy myself and I stopped drinking and drugging. After a while they said 'we've done what we can do the rest is up to you'. So I thought sod it, I stayed in doors for about a month, then I crawled along to the adult education on the Holloway Road. In those days they had a bit more money, you could get a grant. I took every art course they had, the teachers liked me, because I was dedicated.

To me it was like getting rid of one thing but putting something very positive in the place. I went to AA meetings and I knew that I had to get out of this place I'd been in. **Immediately I felt a little better anyway because I felt like I was trying to crawl up out of the hole instead of going down it.** Obviously stopping drinking and drugging was important but the art was, and still is, a big thing in my life.

After that I did five years in an art college and got a distinction, I got in the Royal Academy Summer Show and other shows, won a prize from the GLC for a painting of the Angel, Islington. After I left College in 1984, I knew I had to work on my own at home and that was tough, but eventually **I had a very good exhibition that the painter Leon Kossoff came and saw and he backed me as my sponsor. He sent me eight five litre tins of paint every month, that lasted me about ten years. He'd heard about me through the model we both used who said everyone was raving about my work. He inspired me and he's very hard to please. He came to visit me and gave me good advice,** he really liked the painting I made of the North Circular Road at night which Steve Lowe, who runs L-13 (Gallery), eventually bought.

I wrote to Frank Auerbach and he wrote back, gave me a crit of my work and gave me good advice too. Later I went to a place called the Florence Trust in an old church near Highbury for about a year and had a studio and sold quite a bit of work, but an artist always finds it difficult to get money. I had so much art, I didn't have the space to store it and I let too much of it go cheap.

After I left the Florence Trust I started going to Core Arts, I was going to see a consultant and he told me what was available and I got involved and had a little studio up in the old Hackney Hospital, near the secure psychiatric unit, until Core moved. **It's so organised what Core is now, to when it started, it was sort of like a candle in the wind then. What they have done is fantastic.**

I started painting brothers, I did Reggie Kray around the time his brother died, I had a thing about brothers at the time, 'cos I've got a brother who did a bit of time inside. Core was very good, they helped me out with my personal stuff too, helping out with my benefit and stuff, telling me what was what with that.

I started working in my flat again and still do, it's not ideal but if you ain't got the money then that's what you do. The main problem is space and the smell of paint all the time, it gets on my partner's nerves.

I see my artistic journey as an unpredictable book - it can be good and bad, when it's good it's very good - that ends when you end. Ideally, if I had the money, I would have a bigger studio and I would be painting every day, that would be my wish, but this is the way it is at the moment. I paint a lot of local scenes but I would like to paint something that I could really give myself to the painting, something big.

I don't want to be a crusader for mental health, because what is it? It can be many things. Some people don't fit in and they can be the best going, but only after a period of time people understand them. So an artist has to go along with the feeling that he might be wrong, that maybe your work won't ever be worth anything to anyone.

You don't have to be mentally ill to be a painter but I've got a slight feeling a lot are. Freud said they have to create and then destroy like a child playing with its faeces, maybe when you're an adult that turns into something else. I quite like Jung but he's not into the artist for the art, he's into the art being therapy, but I don't do it that way, not as a therapy.

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