



# CREATIVE SPACE

Impact Report  
March 2024  
CRANE ARTS

Funded by



HM Prison &  
Probation Service

Delivered in collaboration with

Probation  
Service



# Creative Space

## Introduction

‘Creative Space’ was a 6 month project, funded by HM Prison and Probation Service and delivered by Crave Arts in two Probation settings; Elgar House in Worcester and the Redditch Probation Office between October 2023 and March 2024. The aim was to bring a variety of arts activities to women on Probation in Worcestershire, in order to increase confidence, improve motivation, build skills and contribute to reducing re-offending.

This project saw a return to Probation for Crave Arts’ Directors, Debbie Birch and Steve Wilson who had previously delivered a West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner funded arts project for 4 years in the CRC, called ‘Inspiring Futures’. ‘Creative Space’ was to follow a similar model.

Over 3 separate 8 week blocks, women on Probation in Worcester and Redditch attended workshops in creative writing, visual arts and film-making. With the support of 3 different artists, they wrote poems and prose, created artistic items using eg: clay, felt and beeswax and collaboratively made a film. A ‘showcase’ session was held in Worcester following the writing and visual arts courses, and one was held in Redditch following the film-making course. Women were presented with certificates and shared the artistic products that they had made, as well as their feelings about the experience.

Although women already met as a group on Fridays in Worcester, the Redditch group was completely new and created for the purpose of these workshops. The group will now continue to meet.

This report includes feedback from the women who took part and their Probation Officers. It also includes the results of the women’s self-assessment rating of their wellbeing, confidence, ability to manage emotions, new skill development and crime free life before and after workshops took place.

A film was made about the project which can be seen here [\[add link once film ready\]](#)



# Project aims and achievements



Project Aim	Project Achievement
Deliver creative writing, visual arts and film-making workshops - 8 weeks each, 24 workshops in total	24 workshops delivered covering creative writing (8), visual arts (8), film-making (8)
Minimum of 5 participants per arts block	6 women PoPs attended creative writing; 10 attended visual arts; 4 attended film-making (new group)
Hold an end of project showcase/celebration session	Two showcase sessions held - Worcester and Redditch, with participants, probation officers and artists in attendance
<b>Use scaling chart to measure participant assessment of certain aspects of their lives - overall change shown here from 0-5</b>	
Improve mental health and wellbeing	Average increase of 1.5 on 5 point scale
Increase confidence	Average increase of 1.2 on 5 point scale
Improve ability to manage emotions	Average increase of 1.3 on 5 point scale
Develop skills	Average increase of 1.8 on 5 point scale
Contribute to a crime free life	Average increase of 0.3 on 5 point scale (many stayed the same already at 5)
Other notable achievements	One participant inspired to return as a peer mentor to other women; another to become a prison visitor; another to explore a college course. The women's group in Redditch, set up for this project, will continue to meet.

# Creative Writing workshops

## Workshop content

Steve Wilson led 7 of the 8 the creative writing workshops, with Debbie Birch delivering 1. Steve was the first male facilitator for the women’s group, chosen after discussion between Probation Officers and with the women in the group. It was decided that a positive male role model could be of benefit.

Over 8 weeks, the women listened to excerpts from famous poems, novels and plays and used this to inspire them to write their own work, with Steve’s help. Topics included writing dialogue, writing biography, being ‘in the moment’ and writing about nature, focusing on minor characters in fairytales and emulating poets such as John Cooper Clarke, Mary Oliver and Chief Dan George. The women’s writing was then published in a short anthology, entitled Bring Colour to Your Soul (a line from one of the poems a participant wrote).



One participant’s artwork was used as the cover image and another participant’s photos of nature were placed throughout the book. Each participant received several copies at the Showcase Session and were happy to read out their work in front of others - a significant increase in confidence from the first week.

An ebook version is on Crave Arts’ website: <https://online.pubhtml5.com/frwd/fbaf/>

## Scaling chart results

We asked the women to complete a scaling chart at the start and end of the creative writing block, measuring from 1-5 their self assessment pre and post the writing course. This showed all women felt the writing workshops contributed positively to their lives:

Mental Health and Wellbeing	Average increase of 1.3 on 5 point scale
Confidence	Average increase of 1.7 on 5 point scale
Ability to manage emotions	Average increase of 1 on 5 point scale
Develop skills	Average increase of 1.3 on 5 point scale
Crime free life	Average increase of 1 on 5 point scale

# Creative Writing workshops

## Participant views

*'Great sessions. Inspiration. Gave you a chance to move out of yourself, be in the moment all together'*

*'I love the sessions, it's a highlight of the week. So good to feel creative and positive rather than negative and caught in your own head'*

*'I love feeling part of a group and writing, even if I struggle to write much. But I think these sessions are really helpful. So grateful. Thank you'*

*'I feel more confident when presenting my work. I have really enjoyed this unit with Steve'*

*'I have enjoyed the plays and will continue to watch and hopefully take the group to see a play together'*

*'At first I thought it was too hard, but then I really enjoyed writing and creating characters'*

*'I love this group as it brings out my creative side'*

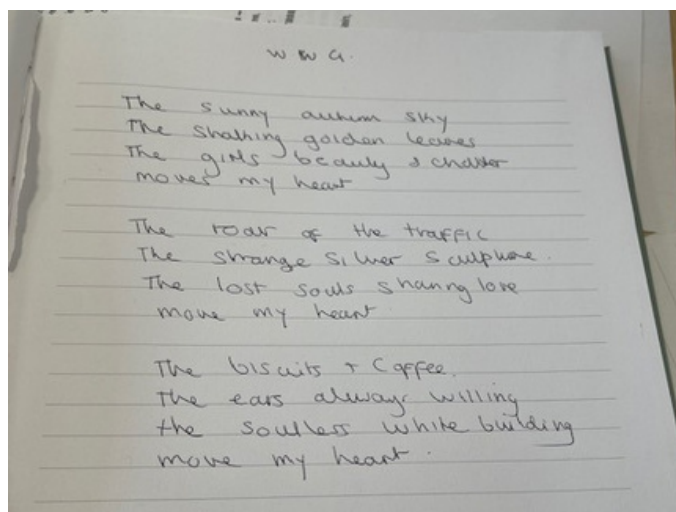
*'Positive, creative, fun, honesty'*

*'No matter how good or bad the week has been those two hours are precious positive time where I feel happy'*

*'I feel empowered to tackle tasks when I had previously felt low and introspective'*

*'The writing has been a great outlet for emotions and I feel steadier and calmer afterwards'*

*'My offence was closely linked to my mental breakdown and so these sessions put me into a more positive and self confident frame of mind'*



# Creative Writing workshops

## Probation Officer views

*'I have heard nothing but praise for the sessions from both the women and the officers. They really seem to be getting a lot from it'*

*'Enjoyed the individuality and variety. Everybody sharing and supporting. Kind encouragement = motivation'*

*'The sessions were engaging and inclusive, allowing for the women to share without feeling judgement. This supported improvements to their mental health and well being'*

*'The women in the group are very supportive of each other. Everyone is able to express their feelings'*

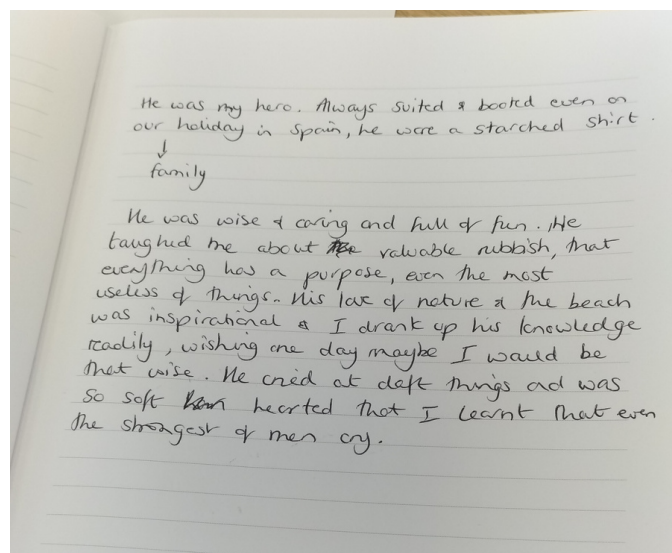
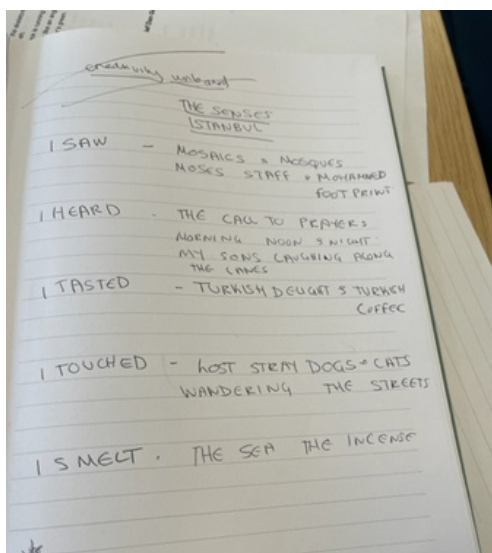
*'All attendees contributed, speaking up in a safe space and sharing work created in the group which they might not have done otherwise'*

*'I think it has allowed participants different way of showing their emotions in a safe way. I think having to read their writing out and people being positive about it really helped their confidence'*

*'I am aware of two participants who have expressed an interest in seeking out a role as a peer mentor in order to continue with the group, welcome new members and provide support. One in particular intends to make enquiries about becoming a prison visitor'*

*'Very enjoyable sessions, great to see all the women getting involved right from the initial session'*

*Re crime free life: 'I am not aware of any arrest information in relation to the participants of the group which is a huge indicator of the impact of the group'*



# Visual arts workshops

## Workshop content

Sarah Edwards of Spare Room Arts was selected by the group at a taster day with several artists to deliver the arts workshops. Over 8 weeks she showed the group how to create artwork such as mandalas, clay sculptures, beeswax candles and felt items. The women had choices about what to make, could focus over several weeks or chop and change and could proudly take their items home with them.

Sarah said: *'I saw lots of changes, especially with confidence not only with creativity but with their own abilities. Two participants are using the skills they have learned to continue arts based development outside of probation. Highlights were a participant wanting to do an art course outside of probation as a direct response to the sessions; a participant having the confidence to volunteer locally; a participant taking materials home every week and creating whilst she is at home'*.

## Scaling chart results

We asked the women to complete a scaling chart at the start and end of the visual arts block, measuring from 1-5 their self assessment pre and post the visual arts course. This showed that all women felt the arts workshops contributed positively to their lives:

Mental Health and Wellbeing	Average increase of 1.3 on 5 point scale
Confidence	Average increase of 1 on 5 point scale
Ability to manage emotions	Average increase of 1 on 5 point scale
Develop skills	Average increase of 1 on 5 point scale
Crime free life	Stayed the same at 5



# Visual arts workshops

## Participant views

*'Sarah has been inspirational. I have learned so much from her.'*

*'I love Sarah's art group. It's brought the creative side out in me again'*

*'Not at all intimidating. Can Do. Lovely group atmosphere. Therapy in action'.*

*'It's good to get out and talk to different people'*

*'It's a good group and I am made welcome'*

*'New skills - I've done pottery and candle making'*

*'I am very motivated and wish now to use my teaching skills in a positive way'*

*'The sessions have been so valuable and rewarding. My confidence has grown and I feel I am now able to use my skills to inspire others'*

*'Sarah has been amazing and very supportive. I have really enjoyed these sessions'*

*'Very very motivated to move on and grow'*

*'If I've had a bad week and feel low this recharges me and motivates me'*

*'I feel more confident when I leave the sessions than when I arrive'*

*'I feel calmer and happier so not caught up in the vicious circle of feeling low about things that have happened to me'*

*'I am not offending'*

*'It's helped me not feel so isolated'*





# Visual arts workshops

## Probation Officer views

*'I think having an activity to focus on made people more open. As they were doing something positive whereby they could see the results'.*

*'The women have benefitted from having the mutual support of the group. Having an activity to focus on has opened up conversations and enabled them to share their experiences in a non judgemental environment. In addition, undertaking the activities and learning new skills has increased their confidence and motivation for the future. This has impacted positively impacted upon their well- being and mental health'.*

*'The group has been open and accepting of each other, enjoying the creative activities and doing/creating things that they may not otherwise have done. It's encouraged positive interactions in a supportive environment'.*

*'The group have encouraged each other to participate and have all been able to voice themselves'.*

*'S has applied to do volunteering work and doing an art course. T- loves doing felting which has help with her mental health when at home by herself'.*

*'I think being able to come to the group and do something productive helps them to want to come to probation which results in better engagement.'*

*'All of the participants have engaged better with their Order. The experience has enabled them to have conversations with their Probation Practitioners that they may have not felt able to do in a more formal setting. This has led to an improvement in the supervisory relationship'.*

*'The group has been run in a non judgemental, encouraging and supportive way which has enabled the women to develop confidence and trust'.*



# Film-making workshops

## Workshop content

Nicola Prestage of Tigerfeatures brought film-making to a completely new women’s group in Redditch. Sessions started in January, to allow time in late 2023 for women to be encouraged to attend. Although the group was small (4 attending, 3 regularly) they quickly bonded and worked together collaboratively to make a clever film about the assumptions we make about other people and ourselves. The women took on all roles in the filming process; story ideation, storyboarding, writing, directing, acting, filming and editing. They learned techniques they can carry on with their phones and they grew in confidence.

## Scaling chart results

We asked the women to complete a scaling chart at the start and end of the film-making block, measuring from 1-5 their self assessment pre and post the film-making course. This showed that all women felt the film-making workshops contributed positively to their lives:

Mental Health and Wellbeing	Average increase of 2 on 5 point scale
Confidence	Average increase of 1 on 5 point scale
Ability to manage emotions	Average increase of 2 on 5 point scale
Develop skills	Average increase of 3 on 5 point scale
Crime free life	Stayed the same at 5



# Film-making workshops



## Participant views

*'The course has given me a feeling of being part of something. I don't feel so secluded and feel I am being treated like a person. My mood has been lifted'*

*'I look forward to coming each week. It's isolating being on my own but Fridays are my day for me'*

*'I've found the creative side in me again'.*

*'I was unhappy and felt excluded. The course has helped me to feel I can be myself because the group has been supportive and open. Helps manage my stress'.*

*'I have learned a lot about film-making as Nicky has been amazing. She is such a lovely sincere person, I have felt valued as a person'.*

*'Gave me something to look forward to'*

*'I feel like I know my Probation Officer a lot better'*

*'Filming has given me so much confidence'*

*'At first I thought I'd just be behind the camera but loved being in front of it'*

*'The group made me feel very welcome and at ease as I was very nervous about coming as it's hard for me to leave my house'*

*'I really enjoy taking photos more and paying attention to what needs to be in the shot'*

*'Sad this course is over but look forward to new adventures and living 100% crime free'*

# Film-making workshops

## Probation Officer views

*'After one session, one woman described how she'd had a horrible morning and nearly didn't attend but having done so felt in a more positive place and able to face the rest of the day'.*

*'We got so much from the conversations held whilst the women were busy doing creative work. It's broken down barriers that now we can build on'.*

*'They have described how the group support and activity has enabled them to open up in a non judgemental environment. This in turn has improved the supervisory relationship with their Probation Practitioners'.*

*'All have shown a commitment to the group which is recorded as part of their overall engagement. At least one participant is attending more frequently than previously. Staff felt the sessions were really valuable in developing the human element of the working relationship, away from the focus of court requirements'.*

*'We seek to broaden women's horizons and develop their skills. These workshops have naturally supported that'.*

*'All participants routinely reported improved mood at the end of the sessions compared to when they arrived'.*

*'The participants have all described an increase in confidence in their abilities. At the start of the course one woman was adamant that she would not be in front of the camera and would take an off screen role. However, after a number of sessions her confidence grew and in the end played an acting role. She has since given thought to attending a college course in film making'.*

*'It is to be hoped that the positive shared experience, boost in confidence and self esteem are supporting desistance'.*


## Project learning points

Key learning points were:

- Overall target numbers were met but it takes time to build trust - numbers grew as the group continued to meet for arts activity over time in Worcester - running the project over a longer period would build higher numbers
- Having Probation staff in the room and taking part alongside the women developed the relationships positively between them which then helped with engagement with orders

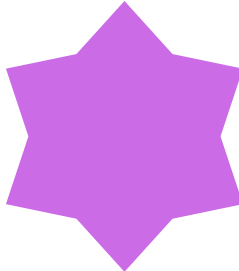
Probation provided case studies of 3 different women - 1 from each group - who had gained particular benefit from the workshops

## **Creative writing group:**

A solid cyan-colored seven-pointed star.


*'T's confidence and well-being has improved as a result of attending the group. Over time she has increasingly been able to share her thoughts and feelings with other members. She has also developed confidence in her own abilities. Her emotional well being and mental health has improved as a result of this and she intends to make enquiries about becoming a prison visitor so that she can support other women who are experiencing the CJS'.*

## **Visual arts group:**

A solid purple-colored seven-pointed star.

*'Attending the group has increased V's confidence in herself. She has enjoyed the activities and found the support of her peers invaluable. She has developed new skills and overtime has become a core member, making new participants feel welcome. She has valued the group so much in terms of the support and positivity of her experiences that she asked to continue as a peer mentor following the end of her Order so that she can support new women joining the group'.*

## **Film-making group:**

A solid yellow-colored seven-pointed star.

*'A began the course having never been part of a group and having no knowledge of film making. She initially came in quite apprehensive about the course and used humour to hide this. She was very clear at the outset that she would not want to be in front of the camera. However, the group bonded really well and were mutually supportive of each other. They encouraged each other to take part and gave nothing but positive feedback about each others contributions. This built up A's confidence to the point that she agreed to take a role in front of the camera. At the end of the course she described her Wednesday Film Making sessions as the 'highlight of her week' and that following them she was always 'buzzing' and feeling positive about herself. This and the skills she has learnt has motivated to her explore a college course in film making. Her daughter attended the celebratory event and described the impact upon her mother's well-being. She commented that at the time of sentence she had been suicidal but could now see a positive change in her well-being'.*

# Concluding comments



Crave Arts have been privileged to return to Probation to deliver arts workshops and to see the impact this has had on the women on Probation. Thanks go to the funder, HM Prison and Probation, and to Probation staff in Worcestershire for their fantastic support.

Some final comments from **Helen Madeley, Senior Probation Officer** and women's lead:

*'When my colleague Richard Beard and I were approached by Crave Arts about the 'Creative Space' project our first thought was that this would be of benefit to women on Probation. We had just launched a county wide women's team with myself as the Senior Probation Officer responsible for overseeing this. For some years research has shown that women who enter the Criminal Justice Service (CJS) have unequal outcomes to men and has highlighted the need for a women's centred approach. In January 2021, the concordat for women in or at risk of contact with the CJS looked at how to improve outcomes for women both nationally and locally through collaborative working.'*

*Statistically, women are more likely to have experienced trauma throughout their lives, whether this be in childhood or later life, and these experiences impact on how they respond and work with professionals. The 'Creative Space' project has joined the Worcestershire team of specialised women Probation Practitioners in adopting HMPPS' vision of enabling safe, compassionate and individualised care for women and have adopted a trauma informed approach to address some of the complex needs of women.*

*I have observed and participated in all of the projects and have seen the increase in the women's confidence over the weeks. As you will see from the work produced, all of the projects have enabled the women to express themselves in a mutually supportive safe way and grow the skills and tools they need to improve their self- esteem and well-being. The feedback from both the participants and staff co-facilitating has been entirely positive, with one woman choosing to finish the project beyond the end of her supervision! We look forward to working with Crave Arts in the future'.*



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