Arts on Prescription: A qualitative longitudinal outcomes study

Abstract

In recent years, participatory community-based arts activities have become a recognised and regarded method for promoting mental health. In the UK, Arts On Prescription services have emerged as a prominent form of such social prescribing. This longitudinal study reports on the findings from interviews conducted with participants in an Arts on Prescription programme two years after previous interviews to assess levels of 'distance travelled'.

This follow-up study used qualitative interview method amongst participants of an Arts On prescription programme of work.

Ten interviews were conducted in community-based arts venues. Each participant use or have used mental health services and were interviewed two years earlier.

For each of the ten participants of this research, a lengthy attendance of the Arts on Prescription has acted as a catalyst for positive change. Participants report increased self-confidence, improved social and communication skills, and increases in motivation and aspiration. An analysis of each of the claims made by participants enabled them to be grouped according to emerging themes: Education: Practical and Aspirational Achievements; Broadened Horizons - Accessing New worlds; Assuming and Sustaining New Identities; Social and Relational Perceptions.

Longitudinal progress has varied between respondents. Whilst ‘hard’ outcomes could be identified in many individual cases, the unifying factors across the sample lie predominantly in the realm of ‘soft’ outcomes. These soft outcomes, such as raised confidence and self-esteem, have facilitated the hard outcomes such as educational achievement and voluntary work. Engagement over a period of time has enabled people to make personal and social identity claims that individuals have experienced as transformative.

Key words

Arts, arts on prescription, identity, outcomes, social prescribing