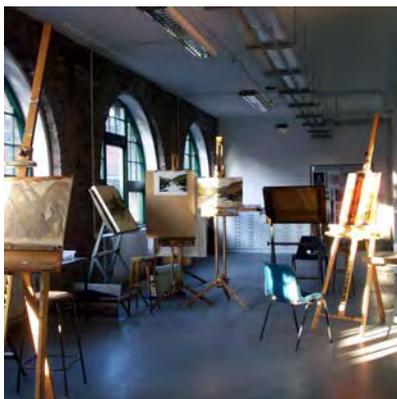


Connect Stories

Project Ability delivered Connect – an arts and mental health programme – from our spacious, accessible, fit-for-purpose premises in the centre of Glasgow, from September 2009 until its closure in June 2012.

We have invited the artists to share their story.



J's Story: J's first encounters with Project Ability were difficult. However, something felt right... and that something made her keep coming back.

Beginnings - I came to the project while it was still in Albion Street. I had done some art therapy and I had done a few NQs at Springburn and at Langside college and I knew about Project Ability. I had known about it for a long time.

When I first came to the project, I hated it, I absolutely hated it because I was terrified, I was terrified and I would come in and I would sit at a desk for two hours then bolt. But I kept coming back, because sometimes you bolt from things and you know that it's just not the thing for you, but here I kept coming back.

So frightened so happy - in Albion Street, I just used to look at other folk, trying to work out how they knew what to do. They just seemed to walk about the place as if they understood what to do and I was scared to ask, or to move, or do anything. But nobody made a fuss or a bother about it. Nobody said 'you know J we've noticed you're quite anxious'. John would speak to me. He said 'I think it would be a good idea if you looked at doing self-portraits just now' so that's what I did and I loathed it, every minute, but I kept coming back. I didn't loathe the people but I was so frightened, so, so frightened but still nobody made a fuss. I think that they just gently let you get on with whatever you were doing. When the place shut to move, I frankly felt quite relieved because I didn't have to go through that once a week... that's what happens for me, I get frightened... and then we moved across here.

I came in for the interview and I spoke to the staff and it was lovely to see them and I came back for the first week. Here you could do workshops... it was a different set-up, people weren't in little cubbyholes, it was a nice place and I was happy.

I stayed from 10 am to 4pm and I was just so happy, so happy.

The delight of junk modelling - J spoke fondly of a childhood of making things and laughs about a primary report card that stated 'J delights in junk modelling' She also described how she had experimented with drawing and painting whilst at Project Ability but felt that she really found her voice in the ceramics room.

It was the ceramics that really fired it for me, I just bonded with it. I enjoyed the sensation of my hands in the clay, I enjoyed... my hands seemed to know what to do with it.

I think the first thing I was introduced to doing in the Trongate was pinch pots and my hands just knew what to do. For the first time, I felt I was doing something that I could do and suddenly, just as I say, things started appearing at the ends of my fingers and I was just so much happier and I was learning gently to tell people what the problems were. I don't mean making a big explanation but just being able to say, this is what happens, this is why I'm not functioning in this room right now, you need to take me through the next step, you need to explain it to me and so obviously when that bit of me started to relax, I could start to tell people what the difficulty was... and they weren't bothered. That freedom allows your creativity to come out, it grows with your confidence and I was having fun, I was having fun and gradually over time... it's taken me two and half years to get to this point, I'm relaxed. I mean, it's taken me that long but again, nobody makes a fuss, nobody bothers and TIME... and God I love them for it (laughing).

A model for mental health - frankly I think it's a fantastic model for the treatment of mental health. I'm not a "wrong" person when I come here. Everywhere else you go, the doctor, the therapist, with anything else you are being told essentially that your way of coping is wrong, the things you are doing are not right but when I come here, there's none of that.

If you think of it purely as a mental health treatment, how fantastic! You know, you have control, you have choice... you have rules and boundaries, you have limitations, you have routine... you're allowed to work through your problems, YOUR life, YOUR way of being... gently.

You know, seriously, I have done other projects where suddenly people would appear and we were told to sit around the table and talk about who in our lives had most influenced us and you know, talk about your self-respect and our self-confidence and I left. I walked out.

I think about the changes I've managed to bring about in my life and it's been due to the security of this place and my own perseverance and knowing, for me, this was the right thing.

Warm bones - J spoke very candidly about her fears of a future without Connect and how she felt the impact of the project closing would have on her. I'm happy here. When I see pictures of it on facebook and I think I'm not going to get back there, it breaks my heart, it breaks my heart. When I'm having a time when I can't talk to people very well and my bones hurt and I'm tired and I go into the ceramics room and it's warm and its lovely and the heat of the kilns seeps into your bones and I relax, I can work away quite happily, I don't feel the need to protect myself all the time... the joy of being here, the light that comes in, the noises outside, looking at the bricks on the wall, just being in that safe place for me. I don't have many safe places and this is one of them.

I asked J what she was most proud of since being at Connect. Coming here, just getting out the door and coming here... I'm proud of some of the work I've produced here and that I no longer think it's silly. I'm proud of the link I am able to make in myself between what happens in my head and that it's valid, that it's okay for me to think like this. That for me, to value my process... that's what I'm most proud of, being able to look at my process, recognise it and utilise it.

Five words: Not patronising, Person- centred and (laughing)...the Smell.

Gender: Female

Age: 46



K's Story: When talking to K, her disappointment about the end of Connect is clear. However, she is sure that the project has left us with healthier, happier people who have a bigger sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

Beginnings - I had approached an organisation called The Glasgow East Regeneration Agency and the person I had a number of conversations with realised that art was pretty important to me, so she told me about this place and although, I had seen lots of posters before it opened two and a half years ago, I thought... no, I'm not going to bother because I had been to the old Albion Street one when I was really, really ill and I thought no, I don't think it's for me. Anyway, I ended up taking myself down one day and making the application and keeping my fingers and everything else crossed that I'd get accepted because by that time, I wanted it.

A pattern of blocks - K described a pattern of creative blocks during her life which had eventually resulted in her thinking that she would not paint again; however, she discovered that with the right encouragement from the tutors at Connect she was able to make and exhibit work.

It's been a really valuable experience for me, I'm really glad I came. I think at that point, I was coming out of a pretty bad depression and isolation and one of the things which had gone from my life was art, which had always been so important... the pattern through my life has been big creative blocks for varying lengths of time... but this had been a pretty big block and I had got to the stage where I thought, I'll probably never paint again. I wasn't even able to do it at home despite masses of materials.

I came here and the staff were really excellent because they understood where I was coming from and the things that were important to me. They encouraged me to bring out what was inside.

It's given me a lot of confidence... because art, if it's important to you, it's a form of communication, it's part of your make up and it's really painful when you're not doing it... it's terribly important for you to do it... and so, it's been quite a journey for me and although there have been ups and downs, I've painted pretty consistently... and a number of works have been put forward for exhibitions and that has been quite pleasurable for me as I haven't had work in exhibitions before. I can see a progression in the work and with coming here, I've been able to do stuff that I never thought I was able to do so that's been a nice surprise.

Equal adults - another thing K felt made the project work, was the mixture of people using the project, from people who have had no visual arts training at all to professional artists. She described how she felt that at Connect, she was treated as an equal not someone tagged with a mental health problem.

The thing that really sets this apart from other mental health projects is the fact that highly unusually and very, very uniquely, it's run by professionals who have a fantastic attitude... and it attracts people who are artists and you just don't get that... I'm sorry, you just don't get that in other places. It attracts people who have had breakdowns or who are dealing or coping with a whole myriad of mental health and or physical health problems and for whom, for one reason or another have had their professional career interrupted. It's also for people who haven't been to art school like myself and who have wanted a professional career. I see it as place for artists in recovery and I bet there's nowhere like

this, not only in Scotland but in Britain... to have that incredible mix of people and yet somehow it works, that is absolutely astonishing.

When I've been to other places which have dealt with mental health, there's no way I could have gone there. One visit was enough because of the attitude... and one of the huge fabulous things about here is that you're not treated as if you have a problem, which is amazing, you're certainly not treated as though you have this stigma, that you have this mental health tag, you're actually treated as an equal adult.

I can't emphasise the importance of that. I really can't because it's astonishing the amount of clinical practitioners who have had such an insulting attitude and I know through conversations, I'm not alone.... it's quite staggering at times, the insulting behaviour or attitude you get and you know that you're seen as lesser but here you're seen as an equal, with huge potential.

Meaning and purpose - K spoke about being astonished in the changes she had seen in herself and in others whilst being at Connect. She also spoke about how her work had developed and how her confidence had increased. She also felt that the legacy of Connect should be recognised.

It's really astonishing to see the improvement in people and the improvement in myself while I've been coming here, people I know and are close to have commented on it. When you are able to practice art and you see your work developing in ways that you wouldn't have thought it would have developed or thought you were capable of... and to see painting come out when you thought that there was nothing there to bring out any more... the sense of meaning and purpose is something that's really difficult to describe because it's a life changer.

It feels like you are getting back to what you were meant to do. Maybe I'll never be a professional or have work sold or whatever but it's a huge core part of me and it obviously is for others too.

When I am painting... I don't just mean for that period of time when I'm literally practising art, it also means I'm more complete and I am surer of who I am. What better legacy could there be? Healthier people, people who are functioning better, people who have a much better sense of themselves because they have this huge meaning and purpose in their lives.

Finally, I asked K what she was most proud of whilst being at Connect.

The fact that I can see a huge development in my work is a massive achievement and that I can come in and actually enjoy people coming up to me because I used to snarl and even storm out if someone had interrupted me. I don't do that anymore and that calmness is in tandem with finally having progressed my work. When you develop some aspect of yourself, there's a duality... so, the opportunity that I've been able to take here to further my art has also in tandem developed and furthered me on from where I was psychologically before I came here.

Five words: Confidence, Meaningful, Purpose, Artist, Recovery.

Gender: Female

Age: 59

J's Story: A history of depression had led J to isolate himself, however, as a newcomer to Connect, J was able to rediscover his imagination and find friendship amongst his peers

Beginnings - it was SAMH initially who raised the idea of me coming here, I'd also heard about it through Turning Point. I had been involved with them and they kept telling me about Project Ability, saying 'it would be ideal for you, get you out the house to meet people, get you painting again'... so, I kept putting it off and eventually... well, the bubble was going to burst with me because I had a severe breakdown so then, I decided to accept any kind of help and guidance from the people who were desperate to help me... and one of the things that was on the table, as far as they were concerned, was to apply to see if I could come here.

It tied into various other things I was doing for my recovery, if you want to put it that way... but it was very important to get some kind of routine... I knew where I was going on a Monday. The routine was very important for me; it gave me a reason to get up in the morning.

Out of that flat - for J, the period before attending Connect had been a particularly difficult one. He described it as a time where he was extremely isolated, having cut all contact with people except support workers.

I know that's why I'm here, because if I wasn't here, I'd still be in that flat, tending to drink too much wine, trying to shut out all my problems... thinking I don't even like myself so why should anyone else. From Christmas before last until this Christmas the only people I spoke to were my support workers, not family, I didn't bother to keep my phone charged... the buzzer on the door was permanently switched off, I had no interest in anything, I didn't think I had any merit in myself but I had to get over that to a large extent before I came here... but coming here has really made me think why did I do that to myself? I could have been out there! Real life's not that bad for goodness sake! You can have a laugh with people.

The sound of my own voice - J described that although he was anxious when he first came to Connect, he found the relaxed atmosphere and the openness of the studio enabled him to feel comfortable and to make new friends. Attending Connect also made him realise that, apart from asking for a paper at the local shop, he hadn't heard the sound of his own voice for days.

The routine was very important to me, the reason to get out of the house ... and to get in here and to actually hear the sound of my own voice in conversation with other people. I have a reputation in the studio for talking too much (laughing) but I just put it down as part of my recovery... but I do like talking to people, people seem to enjoy that kind of companionship and given the kind of back stories that we all have, it's not the easiest thing to do, to break down these barriers. I think a lot of us in the studio have the tendency to be quite insular, quite guarded, so it's good to get a bit of banter going... we comment on each other's work, not in a derogatory way, there's a lot of mutual support going on in there, people getting praise from their peers... what I'm probably saying is that people are willingly contributing to the studio as much as they are taking out.

The return of a vivid imagination - I asked J if he could talk a little about what visual art he was interested in and about his own development as an artist. He spoke about enjoying the work of The Boyle Family and their reconstructions of sections of streets.

Although his life had led him down another career path, he always had a love for the arts and as a child growing up on a farm he had always used his imagination. However, he felt that due to illness it had gone and that being at Connect had in some way rekindled it.

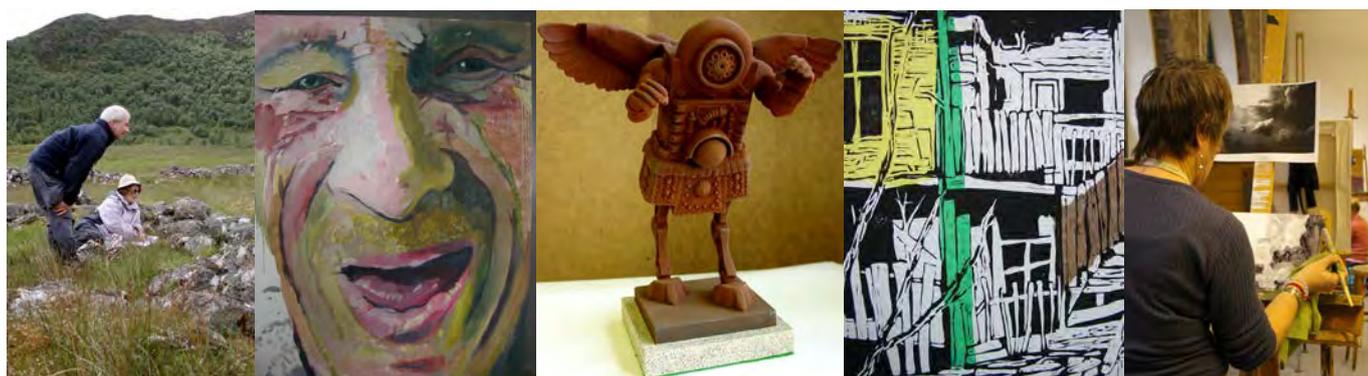
I used to paint a lot as a kid... always... and then when my health started to get a bit dodgy people were trying to get me involved in things... to get to me to re-engage, you know, Christmas would come round and everyone was giving me paints saying 'it's time you started painting again'. I was just saying to M the other day that I decided to go into my cupboard and look out all my paints. I've got the lot, brushes, canvases so there is not really any excuse...but I kind of wondered where my imagination had gone... because as a kid, that's what I lived on... my imagination. Being a farmer's son, there weren't loads of kids in the street to play with so we had to make our own fun. The hay shed was either a castle... or whatever you wanted it to be that day... and that active imagination always came out in my art work, but that seemed to get knocked out of me over the years. I lost touch with that... coming here has rekindled it.

Mills and Boon - finally, I asked J to tell me what he felt was his biggest achievement since being at Connect.

My biggest achievement I think is my self-development ... and having made some friends that I wouldn't have made otherwise. People have respect for me, which is good for me to feel and that's coming from people I respect. It's got nothing to do with back stories or anything like that, it's just that they're nice guys and they like me and I think hey! It's nice for people to like me again. I didn't think that I would ever salvage that out of my life again ... (laughing) that was almost Mills and Boon but I'm being entirely honest with you. It's all about getting some self-respect back, some feeling of self-worth back and places like this are really good at doing that.

Five words: Energising, Re-engaging, Social, Routine, Momentum

Gender: M
Age: 53



L's Story: when L discovered that Project Ability was moving from Albion Street to the new Connect studios, he was glad to find that there were still no boxes to tick and that it was still going to be all about creativity.

Beginnings - when I first moved up to Glasgow, I got a support worker at GAMH... I hadn't been living up here that long and I didn't know many people and we went around looking for various kinds of projects to do... particularly creative activity. Project Ability was one of the things that looked really good so I put my name on the waiting list and eventually got myself a space. It was the only thing that I put in for... all the rest didn't really appeal to me that much. In terms of the setup, Project Ability seemed to be different.

I asked L if he could describe why he felt it was different - a lot of times these projects... these kind of creative outlets for people with mental health stuff tend to be very structured in terms of providing evidence and documenting why it is a positive activity.

This project seemed more about just letting people do it; get on with it... the proof is in the pudding kind of thing. It didn't feel that it was part of the whole system of putting people into a position where they had to tick boxes and talk about how they feel all the time on a scale of one to ten... that kind of stuff. It didn't feel tied into 'back to work' or benefits stuff either. It felt that it was purely about being creative.

No negatives, no pressure - the whole Connect workshops... there was no negative to that at all, in terms of how it's run. I think it was perfect, you know, it just let you be in a space for a certain amount of time every week and make art. There was always a project going on that anyone could get involved with, which had a time line and parameters to it. That can be a good thing sometimes... there would be a set goal in a set time frame and there would be an exhibition at the end and you could work towards that...or you could not... you didn't have to, which is a key point. Sometimes you'd want to do that and sometimes you'd just want to come in and work on your thing. There was never any pressure to work either way. You could just come in and work on your own, on your own thing but if you wanted support, or help, or wanted to ask, you would get help... it was pitched really well in that way. There was no pressure to do anything; equally there was structure because everybody needs certain things at certain points.

You can afford to make mistakes - as an artist primarily working in sound, L has a stop start relationship with painting. But, due to his involvement with Connect's portrait project, L has now been painting consistently for the past year. He also spoke about the freedom Connect has given him to experiment and make mistakes.

I've been doing painting the last year or so... and the reason that I started to paint again was because of the portrait project and (laughing) that's all I've done since. I probably would never have done that of my own back... but I found I really enjoyed that project, it got me back into painting.

I wouldn't have been able to afford to do it without this place... which is another massive thing about this place, you can afford to make mistakes and that is liberating. If I hadn't had the space, the workshops here, I wouldn't have done a lot of this stuff because I wouldn't be able to afford to do it. I wouldn't have been able to work on that scale either... because to buy a big canvas, and to work on it, you better make sure you don't mess it up, there's a ton of pressure... whereas here if you make a mistake, that's OK, it's all part of the programme. It's about experimenting; it's about trying new things.

A road in - during his time at Connect L took part in Connect's artist-in-residency programme. He spoke about the benefits of being able to submerge yourself in your practice five days a week and the fact that Connect has enabled him to gain access to the art world and to show his work.

It's one thing doing art in your flat, on your own and showing your friends and they're like 'oh that's really nice'. If you're a person doing that, in that kind of isolation, it's impossible, or very difficult to get any in-roads into anything in terms of the art world; galleries, exhibitions and meeting other artists. If you've not been to art school, you don't have any contacts at all, which is another thing I'm really going to miss about the workshops is that connection. Here you have that connection with the world at large and your art connects with the art world, which is really amazing. It's really amazing to get paintings into exhibitions, that's a massive thing... for years of not knowing how the hell to do that and trying to do it and it just being ridiculous. You try to get involved in it but you don't know the rules, how to do it, because you can't get a way in... the Connect studio was perfect for that, its respected and it gives you that way in.

I asked L to tell me what he felt was his biggest achievement was since being at Connect

I think probably selling a couple of paintings a few weeks ago (laughing) it's not all about money but yeah, that was amazing to sell. Since I started eight years ago, I've sold a good amount of stuff. It was usually through the art fair, then I had my first solo exhibition, which was over in the old place. That was a really big thing for me, it was really amazing to work on that. It seems like such a long time ago... to have a whole exhibition which was just my work... and I sold a lot of pictures, which was brilliant. It was gob smacking and then selling a couple of the paintings I've been working on recently. It makes it sound like it's all about selling stuff which it isn't but for someone to spend money on something you've done, it really legitimises what you're doing in your own head... of course it does.

Five words: Flexible

Gender: M

Age: 38



P's Story: for P being given a place at Connect and the opportunity to develop his practice from a home practice to a studio one, was an opportunity to 'put a little beauty back into the world'.

Beginnings - when I came here at first, I was just sitting at home more or less. I was doing a bit of drawing. I'd drawn for years and years.

Lots of things happened to me, I was made unemployed and I was getting hassle from the neighbours and things just went downhill from then on. If it wasn't for having this in my life, the ability to do a bit of drawing and painting, I don't know what I'd be doing.

It was through my doctor and Carr Comm that I heard about Connect and they got me the interview. At that time I was pretty low, I came in for an interview with John and Celine and things just seemed to have turned around since then. I started and took to it right away. That was three years ago.

From home to the studio - before I came to Connect, I wasn't using oil paints, it was mainly pastels. I was drawing pictures of my family and landscapes. It was through John, I started to use the oil paints, he showing me how to get started, picking up tips here and there, that was a great help. John's workshops were great. It lifted the depression and I just kept going, however, when I heard the news about the project finishing; that put me back a bit.

Progress and Gary Cooper - although P had the chance to use other mediums and take part in other workshops such as glass and ceramics his interest remained with oils, particularly oil on paper, latterly progressing to working on canvas. He chose to develop his use of oils and his interest in the figure and the use of photography as his subject matter. He took part in a painting project celebrating black and white cinema where he chose to paint an iconic image of Gary Cooper.

The one of Gary Cooper was projected onto a canvas using a projector and then I sketched it out. It was the first time I had ever done that and I was amazed the way it turned out. I prefer to work straight from a picture; I feel that using a projector is kind of cheating although it did help with the perspective. The actual painting came out well.

For P, Connect is a space that hones his artistic skills but also provides a space to be with other people who are going through similar experiences. It is also a place that offers something that works for him beyond the traditional therapy route.

An important thing about Connect, is meeting people. Sometimes you think you are in bad way until you see other people. Some of the guys in the project are great company, they take their work seriously and graft. Working here, to me, it's about a collective effort, it's not about one individual working. You pick up inspiration from others because they're enthusiastic and I think that's important.

Before I came here, I used to go to group therapy. I attended that for about a year. It wasn't suitable for me, I was looking for a one on one and it just wasn't successful. Normally, I'd be sitting at home sleeping all day, if I wasn't doing anything before, I'd just sleep. Then, I got the chance to come here and it's opened up a whole new world for me.

The atmosphere here, being around people, people with the same problems as I've got... you're more comfortable here in a surrounding like this. Art is therapeutic, as long as your painting is going all right (laughing). You can do a bit of suffering over the years through art... you spend hours working on something, then you stand by and look at it and everything is all out of focus, I've had a lot of times like that. At least you can start again.

Concentration and focus. Abstract or realism?

Coming here, my concentration is a bit better, I think that's important... and time flies. You don't have enough time really to work on something. Yeah, the rate I go at, everything has to be right, it takes pains to make something which is a nice picture. To paint something that is natural, the way it should be, not something abstract. If somebody says to me, that's a nice picture, it makes me happy.

There's a lot of depression about... coming here has given me the chance to bring a bit of beauty into the world.

I asked P what his proudest achievement has been since joining Connect.

To see something that I've done hang in an exhibition and to be part of Connect, that's an achievement for me... to be involved in this. Helping other people has been important as well. It's been a real honour and a privilege to be part of Connect and I hope there is a future for it, not just for myself but for everybody connected to the project because it would be a shame if it went under. For people like me it's very important. It's very relaxing; it's something to look forward to every week. If you take it away, it leaves a big gap.

Five words: Companionship, Banter, Contentment, Peace of Mind

Gender: M



S's Story: Connect encouraged S to be ambitious about his creative practice and became the space where he felt 'introduced to his own art world'.

Beginnings - I first heard about Project Ability years ago, maybe about 10 years ago and it sounded like something that might be useful for me to get involved in.... and for one reason or another I didn't really follow it up. It wasn't until about three years ago that my occupational therapist asked me about what kind of activities I wanted to do and she mentioned this and within a very short time I was down here asking Celine what I needed to do to get involved. It seemed very straight forward, I didn't need a portfolio or anything... that was just before Christmas and I started in January 2009.

It really is about being an artist - I just felt really welcome here, I felt... I was surprised, I remember thinking, it's not normally about art, even an art therapy group or something that's run by the NHS or similar body, you know, it is not really about making art, it is not really about being an artist, it's about service users... it's a means to an end kind of thing so I was really surprised that it was about making art. I really liked that that's where the emphasis lay. The emphasis lay on fulfilling yourself as an artist as much as possible. There have been stages that I've been able to accept that and I think it's wonderful but at times I've had to pinch myself to remind myself, that it really is about the art, it really is about being an artist.

My own art world - It was as if I was introduced to my own art world, as if I was introduced to my own being as an artist... maybe it had been there all along but there was a certain amount of acknowledgement by the staff that just seemed to say, yeah why not pursue your art in this way. Artists who come here are encouraged to progress their practice, part of that is the opportunities here... the off-site opportunities, the variety. I mean the most you could expect from another type of art project is a small exhibition and perhaps it would be a one off, whereas here there is a turnover of opportunities. That reaffirms that the notion of practice is important... that your work develops, the style is important... I see it as a way of getting my art practice to fit me. It kind of changes shape... my practice and this is something which is encouraged even if it is unsaid and I certainly don't think you would get that anywhere else.

In the studio - people said nice things about my work and that felt really good. I think what I'm trying to say is that very quickly I started to see progress as an artist and the art I was making was progressing too. I felt as if I was actually on a bit of a journey with my practice and that was quite a rich journey as well... and part of that was the social aspect of the studio... it was good to be around other people engaged in making art, I could see they were being encouraged as well and that they were trying to persevere.

The more that I attended, the more time passed, the more my expectations of what I could do increased... expectations about what I could do as an artist, expectations about what I could do as a person with mental health issues.

A million marks - I asked S if he would talk more about what he had been making whilst being at Connect and why his work looked the way it did. He described drawings, comprised of tiny marks that could be interpreted as either internal or external landscapes, waves of ether or even depictions of sound.

I was making drawings, small drawings prior to attending here... they were about A4... just small drawings in the middle of the page and that's what I brought to the first day of the workshops. I thought, right let's see where this can go. Not since I was at art school have I

had had the opportunity, the time, space or resources, to let my work go to new places.

Inner space Outer space - one of the reasons they look the way they do is that there is so much labour involved in them, they're made of tiny little marks built up over time, I let them evolve. It's a style which allows me to get completely lost and still be around people... to have people sitting around me working away... I like the sound of the activity of a shared studio, I really like that... it felt quite meditative and productive. It feels as if I could think things through or just let them go. It gave me that chance not only to think about what was going through my head at that particular moment but also what the next drawing might be like... I must have made millions of marks since I've been here... (laughing)... well, maybe a million.

Finally I asked S what was the thing he was most proud of since being at Connect.

I'm proud of a few things. I think, I'm proud of working hard at my art, the place deserves hard work... five words? I think one of the key words that came up for me when I first came here was place. I kept thinking that I have a place here. There you go, that's five words.

Five words: I have a place here.

Gender: M

Age: 44



M's Story: For M, Connect was a 'lifeline' that provided a space for her to explore her creativity and where she did not feel she was being tagged as someone with a mental health problem.

Beginnings - I'm not exactly sure when I started, I've been coming for about four blocks or something like that. I suppose I am quite new to the project. I got here through my CPN, she recommended the project for me, she knew that I was looking for something like this to do so I went onto the waiting list and came from there.

Before coming to Connect, I was drawing a little bit at home but not painting or anything like that. I found Connect has been a lifeline to me... absolutely. I've been learning to draw and paint for some of the exhibitions they've put on. It's a great environment. You've got the space there where you can talk to people if you want to, or you can just get on with your work. You can call on people for help if you need it, so it's a really good space for being creative.

I'm actually quite stable now but when I started on the project, I wasn't very stable. I was having problems with medication and Project Ability really helped me come along and focus on something for a couple of hours each week. I've done other things for my mental health but this is something unique for me to do and I didn't feel a mental health tag in the room at all. I didn't feel tagged with that... everybody was really open and friendly.

What's the difference? I don't know why it feels different, it was like an art class and I didn't feel there was anyone judging me. I didn't feel that I was being judged. Celine and John have been great, they don't treat you in any lesser way, that's part of the reason why for me, it worked. There is respect here.

I've visited other places and felt that; No! I definitely couldn't come here. It feels too much like a mental health place. I didn't feel that when I came here so I chose here. It makes me feel well.

Routine and Structure - routine's important to me... definitely. So, to have that structure... you basically know where you are. I have a structure every week, it's very important for me to have that and to come here and to feel that there is another structure. It definitely gives you faith that there's something happening every week... having that structure in the class definitely helps... you can look at the block ahead of what you're doing and see what's happening next.

Signs and new skills - for weeks and weeks I was just drawing. I didn't have any particular project in mind, then they brought up the Sign project... to draw or paint a sign. That's when I felt that I began to learn about painting, once I had a project to focus on....then I found out it was closing.

I was getting started when I found that it was closing. I'm doing another painting and I'm trying to get it finished before the project closes up.

I feel that I'm just beginning to learn new skills through the painting exercises so I don't want to give that up but I don't really know what I can do to keep that going when I leave, it's something I'm going to have to think about...definitely.

I asked M to talk a little bit about what she is currently working on. She described how, with a relaxed and supportive approach the tutors helped her enjoy making self-portraits again.

Frieda Kahlo and me - I had been doing some drawings of Frieda Kahlo. I just became interested in drawing different pictures of her. There is this exhibition coming up and I was going to paint Frieda Kahlo for it, but Celine suggested that I make it a self-portrait and that's when then I thought Whoh!!! I used to do self-portraits but I hated doing them because they never turned out looking like me... but this time I'm enjoying it much more. We're using the projector... so I had a photograph of me as well as a projected image of Frieda Kahlo, so we tried to put the two of them together and I'm enjoying it more this time.

Why Frieda? She's an interesting artist, I just remember reading about her years ago, she had quite a tragic life. She had an accident and she broke her back and she was in a lot of pain so a lot of her paintings were about that as well..... (laughing) not that I'm saying that I'm tragically linked with Frieda Kahlo or anything, certainly not... but she's an interesting lady I think.

Finally I asked M to tell me about her biggest achievement.

Probably the first acrylic painting that I did... the signage project. It was taken from a 1940's poster of a woman with her arm like this (gesturing) and it says 'WE CAN DO IT' at the top. I managed to finish that so that's probably my biggest achievement since I came here...although, I think I'm enjoying the one I'm doing now. Although that one feels like an achievement, I'm enjoying the process this time more, I think I was a bit anxious about it, thinking I'm gonna get it wrong! I'm gonna get it wrong!...this time, I'm enjoying it more...not getting so anxious about it..... (laughing) It's only a painting

Five words:

Focus, Structure, Sociable, Helpfulness, Understanding

Gender: Female

Age: 42



These interviews were conducted by Duncan Wilson.

Duncan Wilson is a graduate of Glasgow School of Art. In 2009, he completed a post graduate in Community Education and since then has worked with the Red Cross Refugee Unit and with Men's Health Forum Scotland. In 2011, he completed an artist in residency programme based in Project Ability's Connect studios. He is currently leading workshops for platForum, a community mental health project based in Govan.

Project Ability

Trongate 103
Glasgow
G1 5HD

www.project-ability.co.uk

SC005226

