

Volunteer Case Study

MILLIE BRIERLEY

5 words that sum up Millie's overall experience of the project

Fun | Friendship | Wellbeing
Teamwork | Creativity.

About Millie

Millie is from Whitstable and signed up to be a volunteer initially because she enjoys working with people older than her. She goes to pottery classes which she loves, enjoys volunteering and is a member of Soroptimists international



Read Millie's personal insights on the project:

- My biggest overall personal achievement.....
- My most rewarding highlights.....
- Changes I noticed: impact & outcomes.....
- How the project helped me: the legacy...

My biggest overall personal achievement

- My biggest challenge was starting the sessions with confidence. Starting a new session or any other project, I always feel a certain amount of uncertainty.
- I overcame all of these challenges and noticed my wellbeing improved a lot.
- I enjoyed being part of a team and working on specific projects which were implemented within a tight time frame.
- Taking on and committing to such a huge project. I am very busy and there were always time constraints. I am very happy that I never missed a session although I still had to manage my diary.
- Since becoming a creative volunteer my own practice has become more creative and the project increased my creative confidence a lot.
- It was wonderful to start a session with a group of clients when there was nothing on the table and to end the creative session with beautiful pieces of art and shared feelings of fun, happiness, friendship and joy.
- Every session was hugely rewarding and satisfying for everyone involved.
- I believe art and creativity are important for the wellbeing of everyone and for the elderly and vulnerable people and children especially'.

My most rewarding highlights

- Seeing the final outcomes and the response from participants.
- I believe art and creativity are important for the wellbeing of everyone and for the elderly especially.
- I already had experience of working with older people and was aware of their resilience and long-life experiences. But, I did not appreciate that with encouragement everyone can be creative and gain lots of confidence and enhance their wellbeing.
- In supporting the older people in the creative sessions, I noticed, over the course of weeks, that they became more open and friendlier, they were ready to 'get to work' and could work independently.

- So many participants said they couldn't paint or do art, but, it often transpired, they had loved art when they were young, but they had forgotten.
- I worked with lots of participants but I particularly remember three lovely people I supported. (see below)

I met 'J' at Age UK Herne Bay & Whitstable

She told me she couldn't draw or do art, but with encouragement she decorated a mug with pretty flowers.

The paints we use look quite pale before they are fired and so it is difficult to imagine how they will look when they are finished.

So, when I presented 'J' with her fired mug, she was totally amazed and thrilled to see the bright colours and her beautiful design.

She looked at me and said, 'this has made me happier than I have been for a long time!'

I was stunned'.

'E' from Age UK Herne Bay & Whitstable was very reluctant to join in, but with gentle persuasion engaged with the project.

I worked with her for several weeks and I could see that she became increasingly confident with painting a mug and creating beautiful ceramic flowers.

We talked and laughed a lot and she told me she was 99!

'E'. also told me that she had worked for the London Fire Service during WW2, responsible for looking after 300 firemen and ensuring they were fed and had somewhere to sleep.

She received the British Empire Medal from the Queen for her services.

You would never know about her exciting life by seeing a little old lady sitting in a chair in a care home'.

Another client I really enjoyed working with was 'C' from the COGS group in Swalecliffe.

'C' has dementia and I think Parkinson's disease. He is a lovely man.

I learnt he is only a few years older than me. His motor skills were quite shaky, but with support he produced four amazing tiles for the COGS mural.

'C' never gave up and always wanted to carry on. He remembered we both had twin grandchildren, which we talked about.

I will never forget him. His big smile, determination and willingness to work with me and try hard. I felt truly humbled.'

Changes I noticed: impact & outcomes

- I definitely saw a huge change in the people who participated in this project.
- They became friendlier, more confident and independent and were 'ready to work' when we arrived.
- I will miss my weekly sessions with all the wonderful people I met.
- I feel very privileged to have been a volunteer and we are all so proud of the participant's achievements.
- I hope very much similar projects can continue with the support of our band of dedicated volunteers".
- This project enabled participants to either re-engage with art and creativity or in some cases to discover that they could do it.

How the project helped me: the legacy

- Right from the start of this ground-breaking project I felt engaged with the aims of supporting elderly people through creativity and art.

- The three training sessions for volunteers were very professional and enabled us to work together as a collaborative project team.
- We knew what we needed to do. The leaders of Our Work of Art were all highly committed and worked tirelessly to make the project happen.
- I felt a great sense of commitment to the project, the participants, to Catherine and Gerry, who I worked with, and to the other volunteers.
- We all felt passionate about what we were doing'. Everyone was extremely helpful and professional.
- This was a massive project and Catherine, Gerry and Fay (and others) gave their full commitment.
- Facebook was a great communications tool. We all knew what was going on and felt that she was being kept 'in the loop.
- For me the project increased my creative confidence, capabilities, skills and wellbeing.
- I really enjoyed Gillian Farrell's studio practice pottery sessions, which were offered to a group of volunteers.
- The project 'made everyone happy and it should be ongoing'.