

Bethlem Gallery

2024-2025 Evaluation Report

By Tialt –There is an Alternative

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the first year of implementing a new Theory of Change and evaluation framework at Bethlem Gallery. Developed in collaboration with research partners – there is an alternative, this framework was designed to centre the lived experiences of artists, staff, audiences, and hospital communities, while aligning with Bethlem's core mission to advocate for equitable, inclusive, and ambitious arts practices within and beyond clinical spaces.

Over the course of the year, the evaluation process has included: documentary analysis; artist interviews; reflective staff sessions; observational visits; and participatory methods such as Head, Hand, Heart. These approaches surfaced powerful stories of personal growth, systemic challenges, and creative transformation. The report is not an endpoint: it is a snapshot of dynamic, relational work in progress, with space for ongoing learning, listening, and revision.

Key findings are presented across three demographic areas: Artists, Partners and Publics, and Wider Hospital Communities. The report also spotlights key programmes and activities where data was collected. Within each demographic area, outcomes are explored in depth, supported by direct quotes, thematic analysis, and case studies that highlight the impact of Bethlem Gallery's programme.

Artists reported strengthening creative confidence, agency, and professional development. Through peer networks, equitable practices, and opportunities to publicly share work, the Gallery supports artists in bridging clinical and cultural worlds while resisting stigma and exclusion.

Visitors describe the Gallery as a site of connection, openness, and challenge. Feedback illustrates how exhibitions and events promote reflection on mental health, expand awareness, and spark creative dialogue. The Gallery is widely valued as an inclusive and thought-provoking space.

Wider hospital communities, including staff and service users, reflected on the importance of the Gallery as a restorative, humanising environment. Creative participation has helped service users express themselves and build confidence, while staff noted the impact of aesthetics and atmosphere on wellbeing.

The report also identifies areas for future focus: embedding partner perspectives more deeply; refining long-term impact measures; and evolving how Bethlem articulates its role, not only as an arts organisation, but as a platform for social change. These insights will guide the next stage of data development, programming, and sector advocacy.

Bethlem Gallery's work affirms that when art is cared for, accessible, and led by lived experience, it can become a powerful force for connection, healing, and transformation.

1. Introduction

Bethlem Gallery is a visual arts organisation rooted in south-east London. It delivers a rich programme of exhibitions, artist-led projects, and commissions designed to spark creativity, dialogue, and participation.

Situated at Bethlem Royal Hospital in Beckenham and active across South London and the UK, the Gallery is committed to supporting the professional and socially engaged practices of the artists we work with. Many of these artists have lived experience of mental health services and face structural inequalities shaped by intersecting forms of discrimination. The Bethlem Gallery's work challenges these inequities and fosters a more inclusive cultural landscape.

Bethlem Gallery acts as a bridge between clinical and creative communities, creating spaces where art becomes part of everyday life and where mental health can be explored openly and without stigma.

This evaluation report (which will be conducted every year) reflects learning throughout the year at Bethlem Gallery. It draws on the experiences of a broad range of stakeholders, primarily artists, audiences, and staff, to capture the depth and nuance of its collective journey. It is not intended as a final assessment, but as a living document that points to future opportunities for reflection and development. The report recognises the importance of embedding partner perspectives more deeply in future reporting, as this remains an area for growth.

The report has been developed in collaboration with tialt – there is an alternative, to support the Gallery in realising its Theory of Change, grounded in the organisations' vision, mission, and values:

Our Vision

An equitable society where art and mental health are a valued part of every day.

Our Mission

We work with artists to lead change in health and society.

Our Values

Advocate: we value and support artists and arts practice, advocate for the position of art and artists in society.

Be Equitable: we strive to act ethically, inclusively and allocate resources, time and care equitably.

Be Ambitious: we aim for excellence in artistic practice and want the best for the

people we work with. We are imaginative, reflective, collaborative, multidisciplinary, and take creative risks.

Case for Support

Through the implementation of its Theory of Change and evaluation framework, Bethlem Gallery continues to strengthen its Case for Support in the mental health and cultural sectors. The framework has enabled the organisation to collect, analyse, and reflect on rich data from across its programmes, evidencing how art: functions as a therapeutic tool; challenges stigma; bridges gaps in mental health systems; fosters community; and supports artists with lived experience of mental health. By drawing on stories and data from artists, audiences, staff and partners, the report offers a grounded yet expansive view of Bethlem Gallery's work and values.

The evaluation process has also supported a consistent and collaborative approach to understanding impact, one that is embedded in the everyday work of the Gallery and aligned with its values of equity, ambition, and advocacy. This method of articulate and evidencing impact supports the Gallery's wider communications and fundraising efforts, securing the long-term stability of its work.

Importantly, the impact narratives generated are not just retrospective. They point toward future opportunities, including areas where further insight is needed, such as more deeply embedding partner perspectives, and inform how the Gallery can continue to evolve and learn in the years ahead.

2. Evaluation Methods & Approach

Bethlem Gallery worked in partnership with research collaborators [tialt](#)— there is an alternative, to design and deliver the evaluation framework underpinning this report (as well as writing the report itself). Over the year, tialt undertook an embedded and multi-method approach including: documentary analysis of previous reports; facilitated staff reflection sessions; observation of sessions with both audiences and participants; feedback surveys for artists and audiences; interviews with artists and key staff; and informal, in-situ conversations with visitors in the gallery space.

This iterative and collaborative process allowed for insights to emerge in real time and across a variety of contexts, shaping the report's tone, structure and priorities. At the heart of tialt's processes were the following key principles:

Iterative: Tialt recognise that Bethlem Gallery holds deep expertise in its own work. Tialt's approach was to co-develop the evaluation framework through ongoing dialogue, feedback, and testing across the first year. This allowed the evaluation to remain responsive to the changing realities of the programme.

Inclusive: Tialt committed to evaluating with, not on, stakeholders. Careful attention was paid to how evaluation activities were received, ensuring artists, audiences, and staff felt respected and informed in decisions around data use and participation.

Creative & Co-Designed: Evaluation tools and language were shaped collaboratively with the Gallery team and a group of engaged artists. Tialt sought to blur boundaries between evaluative and creative practices, ensuring that reflection and analysis felt intuitive and embedded rather than extractive.

Intersectional and Contextual: Across all evaluation activities, tialt recognised that stakeholder roles - artist, staff, participant, audience - are often fluid and overlapping. Tialt's approach prioritised intersectionality and the lived complexity of identity, ensuring the analysis reflected this nuance in its findings and presentation.

Process and Participation

As part of developing a new evaluation framework for the Bethlem Gallery, three artists were engaged across four sessions throughout the year. The artists collaborated to shape the evaluation tools and language used, ensuring the evaluation reflected both the needs of the gallery and the experiences of those participating in the work itself.

Artists were selected to represent a range of perspectives rather than specific skills. They were also compensated for their time and insights, which emphasised the value of their role in shaping the evaluation approach. The sessions promoted critical thinking across the group to consider what and who this framework is for, group reflection, and co-ownership of the evaluation process.

Language

In developing this report and evaluation framework, careful attention has been paid to the language used throughout the research and writing process. Given the complex and often overlapping roles held by individuals involved with Bethlem Gallery, such as service users who are also artists, staff, or audience members, it has been essential to recognise that singular labels rarely capture the full scope of lived experience. Language has been intentionally chosen to reflect the fluidity and intersectionality of these lived experiences, acknowledging that identity is not fixed but shaped by context, relationships, and time. The sections that follow outline key terms used within the report, recognising that these terms may carry different meanings in different settings and for different people.

Service Users/Artists/Audiences/Staff: Across the framework, the above terms are used to categorise different stakeholder groups. It should be acknowledged that these positions, identities and experiences intersect and overlap. Some service users are also

artists and staff members, highlighting the complexity and intersectionality of understanding a wider range of lived experiences. This complexity was deeply considered in the data gathering, analysis, and reporting approach.

Learning & Evaluation Framework: Used as a tool or plan to help capture and explore how a process and impact will be evaluated. It acts as a framework for outlining what methods and sources of data will be used to reflect on an organisation or programme's impact over time.

Intersectionality: We all hold many social identities simultaneously, such as race, gender, and sexuality. Intersectionality examines how multiple oppressed identities interact to create overlapping and compounding systems of disadvantage. At tialt we encourage an intersectional approach to our research which recognises the multifaceted nature of identity and experiences

Outcomes: The shorter or medium term changes that take place because of the activities of an organisation or programme. These can be positive or negative, planned or unplanned

Co-design: A collaborative process that involves multiple stakeholders or voices in the design and development of research processes to inform projects and services that are understanding of people's needs to allow a shared evaluative experience to take place

Impacts: The longer term or larger scale changes that take place as a result of an organisation or programme's activities. Impacts can include the effects of several overlapping outcomes

Bethlem Gallery – Theory of Change Overview

Bethlem Gallery's Theory of Change sets out how its activities contribute to long-term social impact, centering art and mental health as vital to everyday life. Developed collaboratively with artist, the model outlines the connections between what the Gallery does, how it works, and the changes it hopes to see over time. Below is a summa

What We Do

- Support artist development and socially engaged practice, particularly with artists who have lived experience of mental health services.
- Run a public programme of exhibitions, events, and workshops.
- Deliver arts strategy in clinical settings in partnership with the NHS.
- Platform marginalised voices through co-produced commissions and projects.

How We Do It

- With care-centred, co-designed, and inclusive practices.
- By maintaining a public, non-clinical space that is welcoming to all.
- Through creative partnerships across health, academic, and cultural sectors.
- By upholding our values: Advocacy, Equity, and Ambition.

Who We Work With

- Artists (many current/former service users)
- NHS staff, researchers, and hospital communities
- The public and wider cultural sector

What We Aim to Achieve

- People live well with mental illness, with opportunities for visibility, agency, and contribution.
- Mental health is no longer a basis for stigma or exclusion.
- Art is recognised as a tool for expression, community connection, and social change.
- Equitable access to mental health care and creative opportunities.
- The Gallery enhances hospital environments and contributes to positive patient outcomes.

This Theory of Change is both a strategic guide and a living tool - evolving as Bethlem continues to learn, reflect, and adapt to its practice.

3. Key Stats

- Bethlem Gallery held **805 studio sessions** – these include artist-led sessions such as the Bethlem Artists Collective, as well as artist- and staff-facilitated workshops including the writing, art, 3D-making and photography groups.
- Bethlem Gallery worked closely with over **60 artists**, mentoring and supporting them both one-to-one and in group settings.
- Bethlem Gallery supported our wider network of over **150 artists**.
- Bethlem Gallery curated **11 new exhibitions**, welcoming just under **9,000 visitors onsite** and **50,000 visitors** to our off-site exhibitions at the ORTUS centre.
- Bethlem Gallery hosted **200+ events** with a total of **3400+ participants**.

Artist's demographic key stats - Overview of Small Selection of Bethlem Gallery

Artists:

Feedback was collected **from 13 of the 50 artists engaged with Bethlem Gallery on a weekly basis between November 2024 – March 2025**. The feedback was collected via an online survey and **during two regular art sessions**, providing insights into their demographics, identities, and lived experiences. The current data set is foundational for year one of the evaluation process, it is recommended that Bethlem Gallery continue with its data collection both in person and via online survey collection to build a representative understanding of artists, whilst providing accessible formats for those who may need in person support or prefer to share in their own time digitally. Particular attention should be given to engaging older artists and underrepresented groups to ensure the data reflects the full diversity of the artist community.

Below is a breakdown of key demographic data:

Category	Findings	Implications for Bethlem Gallery
Age	- 25–34: 6 artists (most common) - 45–54: 2 artists - 55+: 3 artists - 18–24: 1 artist - Prefer not to say: 1 artist	The gallery engages a wide age range, with strong representation of younger adults (25–34). Programming should continue to cater to intergenerational needs.
Gender Identity	- Female: 7 artists - Male: 3 artists - Non-binary: 1 artist - Unspecified: 2 artists	Majority female participants; the gallery is inclusive of diverse gender identities, including non-binary and queer artists.
Sexual Orientation	- Heterosexual/Straight: 4 artists - Queer/Bisexual: 3 artists - Unspecified: 6 artists	Significant LGBTQ+ representation (23% openly queer/bisexual), aligning with the gallery's commitment to inclusivity.
Ethnicity	- White British/White: 7 artists - South Asian (Sri Lankan): 1 artist - Unspecified: 5 artists	Predominantly White British respondents; opportunity to expand outreach to underrepresented ethnic groups.
Disability/ Health	- Mental health conditions (e.g CPTSD, OCD, depression): 5 artists - Physical/Limitations: 3 artists - Unspecified: 5 artists	Confirms the gallery's role in supporting artists with mental health challenges and disabilities.
Location	- London (Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham): 8 artists	Most participants are London-based, with a cluster in Croydon. Potential to explore

	- Outside London/UK: 1 artist - Unspecified: 4 artists	regional partnerships. (Could be explained due to ongoing work with service users)
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Key Themes from Demographic Data

Mental Health Focus

38% of respondents explicitly referenced mental health conditions, reinforcing the gallery's role as a safe space for artists with lived experience.

Quote: "Bethlem is an escape from my daily problems. I find being around other artists with mental health experiences a source of great comfort".

Diversity & Inclusion

Strong representation of women, LGBTQ+, and neurodivergent artists, but ethnic diversity could be expanded.

Quote: "I have exhibited outside London and worked in other groups. In comparison wary of other groups where they received funding for access but aren't accessible and feel I am a tickbox gain for them".

Age & Life Stage

The majority (46%) are 25–34, potentially suggesting the gallery resonates with early/mid-career artists, seeking creative development and community. However, it should be noted further demographic data by Bethlem Gallery over the next year to build a more accurate picture of the artist demographics.

Bethlem Gallery serves a diverse, intersectional community, with a strong focus on mental health and LGBTQ+ inclusivity. While the data reflects successful engagement with women and younger adults, intentional outreach to BIPOC and non-London artists could deepen understanding of its impact.

4. Key Learnings

This section presents some of the key learnings gathered throughout the year and is structured across three core areas of engagement: artists, partners and publics, and the wider hospital community. These categories help surface the depth and specificity of insights gathered across different contexts.

Bethlem Gallery recognises that these areas are not rigid or siloed, many individuals engage with the gallery through multiple roles or identities. Someone may be an artist, a former or current service user and part of the wider hospital community or the

public. For the purposes of this report, however, grouping insights in this way allows for a more in-depth exploration of outcomes and learning.

Within each of these three sections, findings are organised around the core outcomes outlined in the evaluation framework. This provides a clear structure through which the impact of Bethlem Gallery's work can be seen, understood, and built upon. Whilst some outcomes are not explored in depth due to less data being available in the first year, they will be a key focus for data gathering in year two (therefore the gaps within this report will be addressed in future reports). In Section 6 of the report, *Looking Ahead*, recommendations are provided on how to embed data collection further across the year-round programmes.

Artists

The artist-focused outcomes outlined in this section reflect Bethlem Gallery's commitment to supporting artistic practice that is rooted in lived experience, agency, and care. Over the past year, artists have shared how their engagement with the Gallery has catalysed not only creative development, but also peer connection, confidence, wider opportunity and supported their mental health recovery. From first-time performers to seasoned practitioners, the Gallery provides a platform that values experimentation and growth.

The following subsections explore how Bethlem Gallery has contributed to artistic identity formation, peer support networks, transitions to mainstream arts spaces, and equitable practice. The experiences captured here show how deeply the Gallery embeds relational and inclusive values into its programming, making space for artists to shape both their own journeys and the wider cultural landscape.

The following sections highlight the key learnings and data gathered through the following activities and events:

- Live Lounge participating artists interviews 2024
- Art Group Workshops November 2024
- Writing Group November 2024
- Artists Experience Survey February – March 2025
- Jules Cunningham Residency Programme – February 2025
- (be)longing Conference Exhibition Lead Artist April 2025
- Arts Strategy - Mountsfield Recovery House Artist in Residence Programme, April 2025
- Evaluation Reflection Group – August 2024 – March 2025

Outcome: People develop skills as artists, life skills, have agency, develop profile as artists.

Artists shared that their creative practices have grown significantly through the encouragement, support, and validation they received from Bethlem Gallery. Opportunities to present work through exhibitions and performances not only strengthened artistic and technical skills but also supported personal development and artistic identity. Particularly, these opportunities fostered confidence, artistic identity, greater sense of agency, with some artists noting acknowledgement of their artistic contributions. Together, these outcomes highlight the Gallery's crucial role in nurturing artistic voices and professional growth, both within the hospital context and in wider cultural spaces.

Live Lounge Artists 2024

"I think my art has improved a lot since I've been coming to the Bethlem Gallery... that's really helped me develop."

"It's given a lot more confidence... to be recognised as an artist in both poetry and art."

"The whole kind of workshop environment really helped and I really feel that the gallery sees you first as an artist."

"I felt more able to try things I haven't done before in a supportive environment, I don't feel like I could have done this in a mainstream space."

"I got more into regular practice of visual art making in the studio as part of the Wednesday group."

Writing Group 2024

"I've been inspired to write longer stories and concepts off the back of my writing here."

Artist Experience Survey

"I have given more thought to my work and the effect that being creative has on me and my well-being."

"I had never performed my songs before and didn't believe that was something I was capable of. The gallery has given me the support, confidence and platforms to begin doing that in both the gallery, hospital space and outside in other venues."

"I have got better at drawing and capturing my thoughts. Particularly my portrait drawing has improved and I have explored many different art techniques and media. My line quality is much improved"

"Yes (my) technical (skills) by attending oil painting workshops and sculpture, creative by working with others where uniquely 'allowed' and encouraged to develop"

(be)longing Conference 2025

"For 25 years I have been an artist who primarily uses photography. Since testing out different mediums I've had this sort of imposter syndrome, asking 'what am I doing? Why am I making these strange drawings? 'Knowing that I am having an exhibition at the gallery feels like a sense of permission or an invitation to try out and experiment new practices and new materials in a place that I feel safe. That has felt very exciting."

Jules Cunningham Residency February 2025 – Participating Artists

"I gained insight into how music, movement, and visual expression interact in unique and personal ways."

"Participated in a lot of repetitive movement, stretching and yoga-like poses... poses we had never done before."

"The workshops have given me ideas for things I could implement into my own work."

Mountsfield Recovery House Artist in Residence

Within the Bethlem Gallery's Art Strategy work, the Mountsfield Recovery House Artist in Residence programme played an important role in supporting artist development with understanding the practical parameters and expectations of producing larger scale art works. One artist noted, having clearer guidance on budget and materials at the proposal stage would have been both *useful and interesting*, especially given the cost implications of certain choices.

So what materials can be used and what materials can't be used? I wonder if a little bit of information around that, at the kind of proposal stage would be useful, just in terms of like thinking... knowing budget implications to some of the things that can and can't be done. I would have found that useful, not even just useful interesting,

Clearer parameters from the start can support better planning, reduce uncertainty, and inspire more focused, creative decision-making.

Themes emerging within this outcome area:

- Art as self-expression
- Validation through shared experience
- Increased creative confidence
- Bridging clinical and creative spaces
- Social reintegration
- Artistic Identity
- Guidance and Structure

Outcome: Artists (current /former service users) develop networks of peers who make art and provide peer support.

Peer support is a strong emerging theme, with artists describing how connecting with others who share similar lived experiences has helped strengthen their sense of belonging and resilience. The gallery enables relational and creative peer networks, offering both emotional and professional validation as well as feeling secure in their mental health and artistic identity

Live Lounge Artists 2024

"We've come really close together as a group, me and the other artists like me, we were all together, and already planning what we can do next"

"There's this central togetherness, everyone's just so on the same wavelength."

"I think people here... especially through Live Lounge... felt that kind of solidarity."

"You don't do something extraordinary alone, it happens through collaboration."

Writing Group 2024

"The group encouraged me to research and read more about what others mentioned - authors, books, philosophical concepts, and their personal backstories."

"I felt vulnerable and a little nervous initially, but after hearing how open everyone's work is... I felt much more at ease."

Artist Experience Survey March 2025

"Having the network and support of other artists with lived experience of mental health has helped validate my own experiences of mental ill health and my worth despite and within that."

"I went from never having exhibited my art about my lived experience of mental illness to taking part in solo and group shows and developing my creative confidence and voice"

"Connecting with other artists at Bethlem such as Mark McGowan, has been very inspiring and supportive. Through Mark I have met and experienced lots of new art experiences."

(be)longing Conference 2025 – Participating Artist

"When I've invited artists to be a part of this programme, it's actually in relation to my own arts practice. I've forged a deeper bond or connection with other artists. I do a lot of organizing in my work and by working alongside other artists it's reminded me that I am an artist who has a practice and reminds other artists about my practice. That's felt very rich for me to be able to step back into artist identity. '"

"A very real positive outcome has been being able to use the gallery commission as my match funding for an Arts Council grant... It also has opened up some partnerships. I'm going to be running some creative workshops at Queer Circle for queer people that are estranged from their family, of which I am one."

Jules Cunningham Residency February 2025 – Participating Artists

"I made new friends, and I'm feeling part of a community."

"Participating in the workshops allowed me to engage with other artists, learning their stories was transformative."

Themes emerging within this outcome area:

- Community building
- Peer affirmation
- Identity validation
- Anti-stigma environment
- Emotional Connection

Outcome: Entry into mainstream art opportunities for artists

Artists described taking steps beyond the gallery context, from performing at external venues to initiating their own creative projects within the community. These experiences suggest that the gallery not only supports internal development but also encourages outward-looking engagement and ambition.

Live Lounge 2024

"I had six or seven exhibitions so far... I won a competition at Facebook's Kingston Gallery."

"We're doing a show in January, and that came directly from doing the Live Lounge."

"I've got a big two-year project coming up with Sally Marlow, mapping people's thoughts to music."

(be)longing Conference 2025 - Participating Artist

"The model of being commissioned to curate a public programme running alongside the work has definitely made me think about whether that is a model for me to try and replicate. It's a model that is really generative and nourishing when tackling such personal things around identity and lived experiences."

However, this outcome often emerged indirectly. While several examples point to movement into wider creative ecosystems, further data collection would help to strengthen understanding of how this transition is occurring at scale. Future evaluations could include more detailed tracking of artists' progression into professional or mainstream art opportunities, helping to build a clearer picture of long-term impact.

Outcome: Modelling equitable practice and foregrounding Bethlem artists' perspectives, enabling marginalised artists to feature across and contribute heavily to programme

Bethlem Gallery has demonstrated a strong commitment to modelling equitable practice by placing the needs, voices, and working rhythms of marginalised artists at the centre of its programme. The Gallery resists exclusionary practices by allowing artists to define the conditions in which they work best, and by actively challenging assumptions about who gets to be seen and recognised as an artist.

Live Lounge Group 2024

“For many of us, it was our first time performing, and then we kept going, that confidence came from this space.”

“It’s amazing to have access to a studio for free, studios outside are unaffordable.”

“This place sees you as an artist first... not through the lens of mental health.”

“It’s an important part of lots of people’s recovery... a supportive staff... not always the case elsewhere.”

“Everyone has value and can do something... everything has value.”

“The gallery is a platform... inviting people to naturally grow, create, perform.”

In particular, one artist noted how their own practices and thought processes have become more considered with regard to access and the diverse needs within a group, highlighting a growing understanding of more equitable and intersectional spaces:

“I think I learned more about working with different groups of people with different needs, and how that might be held. I don't know if I really came to any conclusions but became more aware of things, like access clash, vulnerability, being with what it is rather than what you want it to be. I became more aware of all the things the gallery does, and got to know the staff, volunteers, and other people who regularly attend.”

This is echoed further through the artist evaluation reflection group, the group offered valuable insight into how Bethlem’s artist-led and care-based approach shapes their sense of inclusion, confidence, and professional development. Artists described the process itself as thoughtful, accessible, and reciprocal, with a strong desire expressed for more opportunities to engage in this kind of reflective dialogue. The mixed-mode format (in person was also recognised as a positive step towards inclusive evaluation practice.

Evaluation Reflection Group

“This process has made me more thoughtful about evaluation and how I would approach it in my own work.”

“We need to continue to have a bit more space like this for critical reflection, just space to reflect like this has been really helpful, so that we can find ways for everyone to feel comfortable.”

This approach is exemplified by one artists reflection on the care and flexibility he received during a commissioned project:

“Sophie was very gentle in trying to understand what I needed in order to do this, in a way that made me feel supported and safe and cared for. For example, me saying yes, I do want to do the exhibition ... but could I have it in two years? Because I need to work at a pace that works for me... I need it to be like this in order for me to be able to make the work and feel okay about making and sharing the work.”

This ethos of care and co-design not only supports artist wellbeing but also enables more authentic, powerful creative outcomes. It ensures that artists are able to contribute meaningfully to the programme, on their own terms.

Jules Cunningham Residency February 2025 – Participating Artists

“Bethlem Gallery workshops will accommodate every need that you have.”

“Normally dance and movement feels embarrassing, but this felt like a non-judgmental environment to express yourself.”

“I feel in the flow, my brain is working fine.”

Staff also reflected on the impact of these inclusive practices on public perceptions:

“You can see a sort of an assumption of somebody who is in a mental hospital will not have the skills, ability to make good art... then they encounter 'proper art here'... that kind of shifting expectations.”

These reflections illustrate how Bethlem’s approach is both transformative and strategic, changing not only who participates in the arts, but how the sector defines artistic value, legitimacy, and success.

Themes emerging within this outcome area:

- Artist-led pacing and process
- Care and relational practice
- Visibility of marginalised perspectives
- Challenging assumptions about artistic legitimacy
- Institutional modelling of inclusive values

Outcome: More people are involved in making art, overcome barriers, able to be creative.

Bethlem Gallery continues to play a vital role in enabling access to creative participation and supporting recovery. By reducing stigma and removing structural and social barriers, the gallery fosters an environment where more people feel confident to engage in artmaking, many for the first time. Whether through informal drop-ins, collaborative workshops, or commissioned opportunities, participants feel welcomed and validated.

Live Lounge Artists:

"I ended up in the drug and alcohol unit last year... then about September I stopped using and started coming back here a lot more. And yeah, it really helped, that show, but also the whole kind of workshop environment and what they have here, which is really special."

"I didn't used to do that much art before, here is where I discovered my love for it."

"There was open mic every Saturday, I was asked to read my poems, that really helped me grow."

"We had loads of people come – it attracted people who'd never been to the gallery before."

"People stayed 10, 20, 30 minutes... it became a space people wanted to be in."

Art Group Artists

"This place sees you first as an artist, not your mental health... It's an important part of lots of people's recovery... I don't know if there's another place that offers such a supportive staff."

"I felt more able to try things I haven't done before in a supportive environment, I don't feel like I could have done this in a mainstream space."

"I got more into regular practice of visual art making in the studio as part of the Wednesday group."

Writing Group 2024

“I started writing more about mental health and coping with depression.”

“I feel more capable of expressing and expanding upon my ideas.”

Jules Cunningham Residency February 2025 – Participating Artists

“Initially felt uncertain about drawing but found the process engaging and it felt like a form of meditation.”

Mountsfield Recovery House Artist in Residence

Staff reflected on how this inclusive ethos actively shifts expectations:

“They might just have more in them and they start speaking like an artist, or whatever that means, but speaking with confidence.”

Such moments illustrate the power of access not only to creativity but also to being seen and respected as a creator. This outcome points to the Gallery’s success in cultivating a sense of possibility, ownership, and empowerment through creative expression.

Themes emerging within this outcome area:

- Access to creative space and tools
- Disruption of stigma and assumptions
- Confidence through creative experimentation
- Encouragement of first-time participation
- Validation of artistic expression

Bethlem Gallery – Partners and Publics

Bethlem Gallery’s impact extends beyond individual artists to the broader public and partners who engage with its work. This section explores how the Gallery fosters understanding, inclusion, and community dialogue through its exhibitions, events, and day-to-day presence.

Whether through sparking new conversations about mental health, offering inclusive and welcoming experiences for visitors, or shaping perceptions of art’s value in society, Bethlem’s role as a cultural connector and platform for social change is clear. The outcomes below show how audiences and partners are not only recipients of the work, but active participants in co-creating meaning, reducing stigma, and promoting everyday creativity.

Outcome: More people (audiences) know about more issues/subjects raised by and through art projects and processes, encouraging openness and understanding.

The gallery seems to successfully spark conversations around mental health and lived experience through art. Visitors mentioned it as a space for “opening up discussions,” “thoughtful,” “provoking,” and “connecting with experiences of others.”

Descriptions like “educational,” “eye-opening,” and “supportive” suggest the gallery succeeds in positioning art as more than just visual - it’s a conversation starter and reflective tool. Some commented on how the experience expanded their understanding of mental health and creativity, reinforcing the idea of art as a tool for developing practice and ideas.

“Hearing stories from artists helped me reflect on my own experiences.”

“A really lovely experience to see work done by hospital occupants. It is a wonderful opportunity to reach to them through their work.”

“It made me want to find out more about the artists.”

“Better understanding of history of mental health.”

“It shows different perspectives.”

This outcome is clearly reflected in the visitor feedback above. People are not only engaging with the exhibitions but are also reflecting on wider societal themes and personal understanding, especially around mental health and artistic expression.

Outcome: Overcoming stigma around mental health through platforming artists

Visitors consistently recognised the gallery as a non-judgemental, welcoming space that fosters inclusion. Phrases like “safe space,” “enlightening,” “inclusive atmosphere,” and “no stigma here” highlight the gallery’s success in creating an environment where mental health is approached with openness and respect.

Some responses directly acknowledged feeling valued and accepted, regardless of mental health status, while others discussed developing new perspectives. The sense of community also emerged as important, with visitors mentioning the connection between artists and audiences.

“I’m not defined by my diagnosis.”

“Mental health issues can impact anyone at anytime. We need to show patience and understanding.”

“This exhibition is great. It has brought the community together and allowed everyone to express their creativity.”

“The gallery is very inclusive.”

“There are very real things unfolding in my life that I am unpacking I am seeing a therapist about but also I'm a person who understands through making having the opportunity to make as a way to process it's not small. It's quite life changing actually, to have an organisation that supports and understands that. It feels really understood and valued.”

This area is strongly supported. The feedback clearly reflects a dismantling of stigma through platforming diverse lived experiences, making visitors feel welcome, and showcasing mental health through creative and humanising lenses.

Long Term Impact: Art is valued in society as an everyday practice - a tool for opening conversations, supporting communities, challenging and developing practice and ideas, and enabling sense of agency and worth

A few responses explicitly mentioned the role of art in supporting community and agency.

Visitors see the gallery as a place where art is not passive, but a way of exploring identity, voice, and healing - a means of change.

Responses suggest the gallery encourages a practice of everyday creativity that extends beyond the exhibition space.

“The interest in seeing the art from the patient's perspective.”

“Importance of creative freedom especially in mental health complexity.”

“Art can be such a positive for change.”

“It's inspired me in lots of ways. I want to do similar exhibitions and it influences me to hold little community events.”

“The gallery is amazing and a really creative outlet for us, and allows us to express our creativity especially in the studio. There are lots of great resources and amazing workshops and it really helps me with my well-being and to meet others and explore my love of art and writing.”

Strong alignment here too. Visitors clearly see the gallery as a space where art contributes to everyday conversations, individual expression, and supports broader community understanding.

Additional Learning or Themes

Positive reflections and return visits

Many visitors described their experience using positive language like “welcoming,” “enlightening,” “eye-opening,” and “sobering.” Descriptions such as “friendly and inclusive space”, “Very welcoming space, friendly faces,” and “felt very comfortable and relaxed” appear multiple times.

Return visits are already happening: several people mentioned they had been before, and new visitors expressed a desire to return, especially for future exhibitions.

Comments on wanting to bring others next time (family, friends, colleagues) suggest the gallery is creating advocates.

“I will definitely come back.”

“The gallery is very inclusive.”

“I liked the combination of the gallery and museum, will tell friends about it.”

This aim is strongly supported. The feedback shows both appreciation of the experience and an intention to revisit and recommend the space to others.

Inclusivity and access

While overall feedback was highly positive, a few visitors offered thoughtful suggestions for improvement:

“Notes on length of short films/audios/projection would be appreciated.”

“I did have one suggestion to improve visitor/public access: bicycle parking stands, perhaps for those not coming by foot or by car?”

These suggestions highlight opportunities for practical enhancements to improve access and comfort.

Wider Hospital Communities

Bethlem Gallery’s presence within a clinical setting creates unique opportunities to engage hospital staff, carers, and service users in creative and reflective ways. This

section explores how the Gallery contributes to wellbeing, dignity, and expression across the wider hospital environment.

From offering calm, restorative spaces for staff and carers to enabling service users to build confidence and a sense of social contribution, the Gallery helps shift perceptions and create more equitable, human-centred experiences within the hospital. The following outcomes illustrate how creativity supports both personal and collective transformation in clinical contexts.

Outcome: Carers and staff have welcoming, well-considered spaces

Bethlem Gallery offers more than just a space to view or make art, it provides a calm, aesthetically considered environment that staff and carers experience as restorative and respectful. The gallery becomes a counterbalance to the clinical setting, offering moments of quiet, reflection, and connection both for staff and service users.

Feedback from staff emphasised the emotional and psychological benefit of entering the gallery space:

“We had created this space... so welcoming, so beautiful, and people would often say, 'I wish more of the hospital looked like this.'”
“You don’t feel like a professional or a patient. You feel like a person.”

Staff reflection sessions reinforced these findings, highlighting the gallery as a non-clinical, inclusive space that supports emotional safety and trust.

“We had created this space, it feels so welcoming, it’s not clinical, and they trusted that.”

These learnings are further supported by through staff reflections from the Mountsfield Recovery House Artist in Residence programme where a co-designed work was produced for the space with and artists in residence along side service users. Staff reflected on how the artwork contributed to a calmer, more therapeutic atmosphere within the space. They noted that participants often arrive feeling emotionally or mentally overwhelmed, and that even brief moments of visual focus or interest can help ground and calm them.

“And so it serves as some sort of distraction for me and I believe is very good in that sense I think it makes it more therapeutic and that's the goal really for the service as well”

“We need this place to be very calming. So it calmed people down. They (service users) come in here, they need somewhere they can relax, but the art work has done to the whole House is make it very, very calm”

“In this way, the artworks not only enhances the environment but actively supports the service’s therapeutic goals”.

These reflections suggest the gallery is succeeding in supporting wellbeing among hospital staff and carers, offering an alternative model of how care environments can look and feel across a range of spaces, along side the gallery itself.

Themes emerging within this outcome area:

- Aesthetic care and environmental wellbeing
- Non-clinical, restorative spaces
- Equality of experience across roles
- Emotional connection and shared space

Outcome: Service users feel more confident they can make a contribution to society

Participation in creative activities has enabled many service users to build confidence, find new ways to express themselves, and begin seeing themselves as contributors, both within the hospital community and in broader society.

Quotes from participants and staff illustrate this outcome:

“It’s the first time I felt I could speak about my experiences creatively and be heard.”

“When someone shares their work in public, it changes their sense of themselves – they become more than a diagnosis.”

Staff reflections deepened this understanding, revealing that creativity within the gallery supports identity-building, peer connection, and shifts in public perception.

“They might just have more in them and they start seeing themselves differently. That’s a shift.”

“They have a really good way of encouraging each other and celebrating each other’s achievements.”

“You’re there with a bunch of people and you don’t necessarily know what their story is, but you do something together and that’s a bond.”

“You can see a sort of an assumption of somebody’s capabilities, and when you see their work and their words, you can see how wrong that assumption was.”

The Mountsfield Recovery House residency echoed these themes, with service users and artists, staff alike highlighting the power of co-designing processes. The freedom given to service to shape both the creative process and the final outcomes created a strong sense of ownership, pride, and investment in their environment.

“we are now proudly saying to people that this is done for by the people. I mean, in collaboration with the people who have been here before and then not that not that you guys just decided we are the artist who want to do it, but you give the freedom to the people who actually the resident to decide how they want it”.

“I think that they felt a really beautiful sense of loyalty to the space. So, I think the idea that they were gonna make a prominent mark, or like a permanent impact, not only on the physical space but also on the experience of those people kind of coming to be residents in the future that they like that was actually I didn't have to work at that, that already existed.”

This participatory approach not only supported artistic expression but also reinforced service users’ beliefs that their voices matter, strengthening their sense of agency and potential to contribute meaningfully to their communities and spaces.

Overall, these insights highlight how the gallery fosters agency, confidence, and empathy, offering service users a platform to be seen and valued beyond their diagnosis.

Themes emerging within this outcome area:

- Identity beyond diagnosis
- Creative self-expression as agency
- Recognition and contribution
- Visibility and community belonging
- Peer support and connection
- Empathy and shared experience
- Challenging public perceptions of mental health

5. Measuring Impact Over Time

Bethlem Gallery's work is relational and is grounded in the lived experiences of those who access the space, both staff and artists who hold multiple experiences and identities. While not all outcomes detailed in the organisations' Theory of Change were completely evidenced in this first year, the groundwork has been established to build processes that will capture these outcomes more meaningfully. True impact requires long-term change, often nonlinear, subjective, and intersecting experiences with many external factors. Through the exploration of key outcomes, this report offers valuable insight into those emerging impacts and highlights areas for ongoing inquiry and development.

The five current impact areas are:

- Audiences reflect positively on their experience of events, and continue to return to the space.
- Equitable society where people are valued without judgements about their mental health diagnosis.
- Art is valued in society as an everyday practice - a tool for opening conversations, supporting communities, challenging and developing practice and ideas, and enabling sense of agency and worth.
- Equitable society where people are given equitable access to mental health care and support.
- Gallery work supports hospital to contribute positively to patient experience and health outcomes

However, staff reflections suggest these categories may require refinement to better reflect Bethlem's core work:

"Seeing these points siloed like this, I am not sure these first two are an accurate and useful reflection of our ToC impacts. The main thing we do is artist development - support - getting more people engaged in art to support them to live well with mental ill health, develop skills, community, profile as an artist, agency, partnerships."

Challenges Identified Through the process:

In dialogue with the Bethlem Gallery Team, the following challenges have been identified:

Data Collection: Tracking progression over time, especially after artists move into mainstream spaces, requires more consistent mechanisms.

Representation: Ensuring diverse voices and lived experiences are equitably captured across stakeholder groups remains an ongoing goal.

Complexity of Experience: Traditional impact measures may not capture the relational, emotional, and care-led aspects of the Gallery's work.

To support ongoing learning and strengthen the ability to track impact over time, the table below summarises how each of the Gallery's five long-term impact areas is currently being met. It also outlines suggested next steps that will build on the existing dataset and reflective practice.

Impact Area	How the Gallery is Meeting Impacts for 2024-2025?	Suggested Next Steps to further tract impacts
Audiences reflect positively on their experience of events and continue to return to the space	Consistent positive audience feedback, visitors describe the space as welcoming, inclusive, and thought-provoking. Many express intentions to return or recommend the Gallery to others.	Improve feedback capture methods through visitor-facing tools (e.g tablets, QR codes). Schedule quarterly review team meetings to assess data collection and learnings. This will help track audience engagement, long-term cultural impact, and a broader understanding of what resonates with people
Equitable society where people are valued without judgements about their mental health diagnosis	Programming challenges mental health stigma and artists consistent note being seen as artists first, and feel a sense of belonging and connection. Audience feedback reflects shifting attitudes, recognising artists beyond their diagnoses.	Continue artist led evaluation group and further develop artist engagement tools that prioritise choice and emotional care. Include reflective questions in feedback forms that explore perceptions of stigma and identity. Going forward, this will support deeper insight into social attitudes and cultural change.
Art is valued in society as an everyday practice – a tool for opening conversations, supporting	Artists and audiences describe art as transformative and healing. The Gallery facilitates dialogue, identity building, and community connection	Continue to document how creative practice supports agency through experience surveys and schedule artist reflection sessions per exhibition and quarterly for

communities, and enabling agency	through its programmes and practices.	regular sessions. These steps will allow the Gallery to evidence its societal contribution more consistently over time.
Equitable society where people are given equitable access to mental health care and support	The Gallery offers inclusive, non-clinical engagement. Artists report feeling respected, heard and supported, enhancing access to care through creativity.	Continue quarterly monthly evaluation group sessions and gather demographic and lived experience data to ensure inclusive participation. Embed this into a master dataset for analysis. This approach will strengthen evidence of equitable access to creative and mental health support, which is then developed with artists
Gallery work supports hospital to contribute positively to patient experience and health outcomes	Artists and staff benefit from a therapeutic, reflective space. Creative engagement improves confidence, contributes to wellbeing, and enhances the Gallery's human-centred care environment.	Implement shared anecdotal logs and transcribe staff/patient reflections. This will build a strong case for the Gallery's contribution to care and recovery outcomes in healthcare settings.

Building on the impact table above, a structured yet flexible approach is essential, one that embeds evaluation into the organisation's regular rhythms while remaining responsive to the lived experiences it aims to represent. Through the current learnings, the following section outlines how this can be delivered in practice:

6. Looking Ahead: Practical Approaches to Exploring Impact Yearly

As Bethlem Gallery concludes Year 1 of its Theory of Change evaluation framework, reflections from artists, staff, and audiences have helped shape a clear and actionable roadmap for the year ahead, highlighting both achievements and areas for further learning. The upcoming cycle is recommended to prioritise refining evaluation processes; deepening data collection; increasing inclusivity in artistic participation; incorporating partner and carer perspectives; and evolving the programme in close collaboration with hospital communities and external partners.

Importantly, it is recognised that the Gallery team already has a strong reflective practice in place. By building on this foundation and following the steps outlined, there will be space to collectively review outcomes over time and monitor how these contribute toward the Gallery's long-term impacts.

Key Priorities:

- Further develop accessible artist engagement tools, incorporating pacing, choice, and emotional care.
- Expand qualitative data collection to include more feedback from carers, partners, and visitors.
- Integrate evaluation into everyday programme delivery through shared responsibility across the team and creative, non-intrusive methods.

Key Recommendations for Evaluation in Year 2

1. Quarterly Evaluation Framework Implementation

Use quarterly reporting cycles and supporting templates to simplify data collection and align with the Theory of Change

Hold quarterly review meetings with team (before quarterly report deadlines) to review findings across staff, artists, and partners, schedule first meeting for early October 2025.

Continue artist-led Evaluation Reflection Group which can include existing core artists and 3 rotating members. This group should co-lead at least one reflection session per quarter with a Bethlem team member present for support

Yearly review collectively with team of outcomes against key outcome areas

2. Artist and Community Reflection

Pilot bi-monthly artist led reflection sessions for participating artists to encourage ongoing dialogue, community support, and psychological safety.

Embed co-evaluation into staff onboarding so all new team members are trained on how to gather reflective data and use evaluation templates effectively.

Schedule at least one critical reflection session per exhibition cycle, focused on artist experience and learning outcomes.

3. Templates, Tools, and Data Collection

Distribute standardised evaluation templates (by 4th July 2025), including:

Artist Experiences feedback form with embedded reflective questions

Demographic data sheet

Staff reflection log

Visitor feedback survey (print and QR-code versions)

Create and maintain a master spreadsheet to track all qualitative feedback from exhibitions, workshops, and events (to be updated monthly).

Implement a shared anecdotal log for staff to record informal feedback or overheard conversations during public events

4. Visitor and Event Feedback Improvements

Place tablets or QR codes at front of house during exhibitions to capture visitor feedback more easily.

Train front-of-house volunteers to encourage visitor engagement with feedback tools.

Test the “deep hang” method at openings (staff gather artist/family/partner reflections informally), assign specific staff roles for each event. This can be supported through the use of a short topic discussion guide for staff to use during conversations.

5. Digital Tools and Support

Use Otter AI or similar to transcribe artist reflections, interviews, and group sessions. Assign responsibility for review and editing to a staff member or intern (if returning)

6. Partnership Engagement and Sector Tracking

Set up a shared tracker (Excel or Sharepoint) for:

Logging all external partnership requests and the types of requests

Sector facing advocacy or support activities

Conduct annual partner surveys (or structured conversations) with key stakeholders each March to gather input on collaborative projects and advocacy impact.

By grounding evaluation in regular routines and empowering artists and staff across the process, Bethlem Gallery can build a robust and responsive evaluation culture allowing it to review its impact yearly. These steps could ensure that reflection and learning are embedded into everyday practice.

7. Caring for the Emotional Impact of Research at Bethlem Gallery

At Bethlem Gallery, much of the research and evaluation work intersects with lived experience which includes mental health, identity, and recovery. This has made the emotional dimension of the work especially significant in the evaluation process, both for those sharing their experiences and for those listening, interpreting, and holding that knowledge. The iterative nature of the evaluation process and trust held between both Tialt and the Bethlem Gallery has provided a meaningful and thoughtful collaborations where these intersections are understood and have been part of the research process, making for a fruitful learning process:

Here are some key learnings from the research process and considerations for future work for Tialt, who works across many environments. We acknowledge that these are part of Bethlem Gallery's way of working and regularly considered and incorporated into all kinds of work that the team do.

Acknowledging the Emotional Labour Involved: Whether gathering feedback, facilitating reflection, or documenting impact, this work often touches on sensitive, personal experiences. Recognising this emotional labour is crucial, it is not 'just data', but lived realities.

Create Reflective and Supportive Spaces: Build in regular debriefs for staff, artists, and collaborators to process the emotional weight of the work. Even brief, informal check-ins can offer grounding and shared care.

Embed a trauma informed practice: Apply the same values of care, consent, and choice that guide creative practices to all evaluation processes. Allow people to opt out, revisit, or shape how their stories are told and shared.

Be Mindful of Power and Language: Ensure evaluators and researchers approach participants as collaborators, not subjects, and that language honours people's contributions and autonomy.

Protect Capacity and Boundaries: Understand that emotional labour can be cumulative. Build timelines and workloads that respect the mental health and capacity of the team, artists, and external partners alike.

At Bethlem Gallery, the way impact is captured has reflected the same ethos as the art and spaces it creates: thoughtful, relational, and human. Attending to emotional impact is not just good practice, it's central to the integrity and care at the heart of the Gallery's work.

8. Concluding Reflections

This report marks an important moment in Bethlem Gallery's journey - the first full year of testing a new Theory of Change and evaluation framework developed with research partners, tialt. The learning shared here is not a summary of endpoints but a reflection of dynamic, unfolding work shaped by people, place, and purpose.

One of the Gallery's greatest strengths is its refusal to flatten experience into fixed categories. Whether artist, audience member, staff or service user, the individuals who engage with Bethlem Gallery defy simple labels - and this is reflected in the layered complexity of the outcomes described.

The evaluation process itself has been deeply participatory. By involving artists in the design and development of tools, and holding reflective spaces with staff, audiences, and carers, the approach has surfaced multiple perspectives and forms of knowledge. It has also prompted important questions around language, value, care, and power.

As Bethlem Gallery continues into the next year, this report offers a foundation for building a deeper culture of reflective practice, one rooted in the belief that creativity, care, and social justice are interwoven. This work does not aim to measure success in conventional terms but to support learning that is ethical, equitable, and grounded in lived experience.

The gallery's impact will continue to evolve through relationships, collaborations, and context-specific forms of participation. By remaining committed to openness and imagination, Bethlem Gallery is not just measuring what art does, it is modelling a different way of being, making, and supporting others to thrive.

9. Appendix

A. Outcomes Evaluation and Case for Support Table

This table distils key learning from across the report, offering a practical overview of core outcomes from Bethlem Gallery's programme over the past year. It serves a dual purpose: first, as an evaluation tool highlighting what has worked well and where further reflection or development is needed; and second, as a case for support framework aligned with Bethlem's strategic goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). Whilst these may reflect some of what is included in the impacts table in section 5, the section below offers another frame of reference specifically around the Gallery's case for support.

By summarising insights across artistic development, community building, inclusion, and impact, the table provides a quick reference for internal planning, external communications, and future evaluation design. It supports Bethlem in sustaining and evolving the meaningful, transformative work already underway.

Outcome	Evaluation Insight (What Worked / Needs Reflection)	Case for Support (KPIs / Key Goals Alignment)
Artists develop skills, agency, and profile	Supportive environment, exhibition opportunities, and care-led approach were effective. Need more tracking of longer-term development pathways.	Artist development; inclusion and empowerment; agency and skill growth.
Artists build peer support networks	Strong peer affirmation observed. Consider formalising peer support structures through ongoing evaluation group and shared reflection opportunities.	Community building; reducing isolation; informal care networks.
Artists enter mainstream art opportunities	Some artists branching out; tracking mechanisms for external opportunities could be strengthened.	Career progression; sector integration; raising artist visibility.
Modelling equitable practice and platforming marginalised artists	Well-recognised inclusive ethos. Consider clearer communication of how this models sector change through partnership work and research	Sector influence; inclusivity; ethical leadership.
More people are involved in making art	Widespread positive feedback. Explore accessibility and reach for underrepresented groups who may not currently be represented in the current data collection	Increased access to creativity; social inclusion; mental health support.
Audiences engage with complex issues through art	Feedback indicates meaningful engagement. Evaluate depth of reflection and long-term audience learning.	Public education; advocacy through art; increasing empathy.

Overcoming stigma via platforming lived experience	Environment described as non-judgemental and inclusive. Need ongoing checks for accessibility and language use in evaluation reflection group.	Anti-stigma impact; platforming marginalised voices.
Carers and staff access welcoming, restorative spaces	Strong emotional impact noted. Potential to expand engagement beyond gallery visitors.	Wellbeing of staff and carers; humane clinical culture.
Service users build confidence and sense of contribution	Positive identity shifts noted. Track sustained change beyond the programme duration.	Contribution and belonging; shifting self-perception and stigma.

B. Case Studies

Feedback was collected from 13 artists engaged with Bethlem Gallery, providing insights into their identities, practices, and lived experiences. The following case studies offer deeper insight into how participation in specific projects shaped creative growth, confidence, and community.

Case Study One – Writing Group Session (November 2024)

Bethlem Gallery's regular Writing Group invited participants to reflect on their experiences using the Head, Hand, Heart method. Eight participants contributed, exploring the personal and collective value of the group. Key learnings are grouped below:

Creativity and Skill Development

Participants shared how the group encouraged them to move beyond perfectionism and engage in ambitious, playful approaches to writing.

“This group has changed how I see writing and helped me grow in ways I didn’t expect.”

“I’ve become more confident in sharing my writing and learning not to be too precious about words.”

“The speediness of each topic is also a really fun challenge.” “I’ve been inspired to write longer stories and concepts off the back of my writing here.”

Awareness and Growth in Understanding

The group prompted new ways of thinking about writing and success.

“I’ve learned to listen more and hear the intent in others’ work.”

"I found unusual thoughts and feelings in common with others that I wouldn't normally explore."

"I've learned to change my definition of 'finished,' letting unfinished work be a starting point or a way to capture an idea."

Emotional Connection and Belonging

Participants described the space as safe, inspiring, and affirming.

"I felt vulnerable and a little nervous initially, but after hearing how open everyone's work is... I felt much more at ease."

"Everyone has such a distinct voice, and it's wonderful to hear."

"I feel more capable of expressing and expanding upon my ideas."

Personal and Collective Transformation

The Writing Group facilitated deeper connections to personal creativity and to others.

"I feel more connected to my younger self when I used to write a lot."

"The group encouraged me to research and read more about what others mentioned - authors, books, philosophical concepts, and their personal backstories."

"The way others deliver their piece is very much like performing a service... intimate."

Case Study Two – Live Lounge Participants

The Live Lounge project brought together a diverse group of artists for a series of collaborative creative activities. Drawing on interviews and reflections using the Head, Hand, Heart method, the case study below highlights the key learning areas.

Creativity and Skill Development

Artists experimented with new mediums and practices including music production, painting, and poetry.

"I painted the museum for the album cover, using fabric and everything. It was fun and nice to do."

"I started writing more about mental health and coping with depression."

"You see people making extraordinary stuff, and everything has value."

Inclusivity and Community Building

The Live Lounge fostered a supportive creative environment.

“We’ve come really close together as a group... it was nice meeting people who came to sing, perform, and share their poems. We learnt a lot from each other.”

“The project created a group-building environment where everyone felt safe and valued.”

“It was my first time performing in front of an audience... I was shaking, but it was nice reading my poems, and I felt supported by everyone.”

Personal Growth and Confidence

Participants experienced increased confidence and a stronger sense of artistic identity.

“It gave me a lot more confidence... I’ve had my poetry and paintings in exhibitions.” “The gallery sees you as an artist first, not someone with mental health issues. That respect really helped me.” “I felt more able to try things I haven’t done before in a supportive environment – I don’t feel like I could have done this in a mainstream space.” “I got more into regular practice of visual art making in the studio as part of the Wednesday group.”

Access and Equity

Artists developed deeper awareness of access needs and systemic inequalities.

“I think I learned more about working with different groups of people with different needs, and how that might be held.” “I reflected on my privilege in feeling welcomed in certain spaces, which made me think more about equity and access for others and my role in that.”

Collaboration

Collaboration was central to the Live Lounge, leading to original cross-disciplinary projects.

“It’s just so cool... you have the space, the people, and the ideas all in one place.” “You can make something great on your own, but together, it’s extraordinary.” “Mark created something that gave space for people to be themselves and feel safe to explore sound, develop their music practice, participate. Generosity. Doing this together was magic.”

Role of the Gallery as a Facilitator

Bethlem Gallery’s support was seen as crucial to enabling artist development.

“Studios are so expensive... it’s amazing to have this space where you can produce art for free.” “The gallery invites people but lets them

create and perform at their own pace.” “They facilitated something extraordinary, which isn’t always easy.” “It’s not the most important thing, but being able to sell my work and being seen as artist has been really, important to me. Seeing my work in the exhibition with others, has really helped my confidence, especially as someone who taught themselves, I never studied art, I learnt how to do this here.”

Artist Case Study - One

One artist’s experience at Bethlem Gallery highlights how artistic practice, when rooted in care and community, can play a central role in mental health support and personal restoration. As a movement-based artist with a growing visual art practice, their involvement in a residency hosted at the Gallery and regularly engaging with its programming offered both professional development and emotional support

The artist immersed themselves in regular art group sessions, co-facilitated a workshop for Pride Month, and helped organise *Live Lounge*. These opportunities marked a shift, not only in developing new skills, but also in developing their capacity to lead and take up space as an artist.

“I felt more able to try things I haven’t done before in a supportive environment, I don’t feel like I could have done this in a mainstream space.”

“I felt really welcome (which is often not what I feel). A community was growing out of the Live Lounge set up.”

The environment created by Bethlem Gallery was described as one where both art and emotions could be expressed without fear. For example, the artists who carried out a residency at the Gallery, commented on the open structure which allowed the artist to fully inhabit the space with others, rather than segment or contain their process, which they described as being rare in more conventional art spaces and contexts

“It’s nice to fully inhabit somewhere... often in a dance studio you’re just dealing with a bit of it, carving space, packing it away. This felt really different.”

Holding space for others also surfaced emotional complexity. The artist candidly shared moments of difficulty, including witnessing others in distress and feeling the responsibility of maintaining safe, inclusive spaces. These experiences, while challenging, were also acknowledged as opportunities for personal growth and reflection on collective care.

“It’s really hard to hold space for everyone and not exclude some people.”

“I think I learned more about working with different groups of people with different needs, and how that might be held.”

The artist also spoke about the importance of feeling trusted and not judged, something that is often fragile when navigating mental health challenges. Their reflections suggest that the residency allowed them to show up fully, including with vulnerability, without compromising their artistic agency.

Their participation sparked new artistic opportunities, including conversations with external venues interested in hosting future iterations of their work. But more than that, it contributed to a sense of validation and belonging.

Artist Case Study – Two

For one artist, curating and participating in Bethlem Gallery’s programme has been a transformative experience that has supported both artistic practice and mental health recovery. Having returned to the Gallery after a difficult period of relapse, the artist shared openly that they had been “really struggling” and “contemplating suicide” before re-engaging with the gallery’s programme.

“I ended up in the drug and alcohol unit last year... then about September I stopped using and started coming back here a lot more. And yeah, it really helped, that show, but also the whole kind of workshop environment and what they have here, which is really special.”

The *Live Lounge*, an artist-led, multi-week participatory performance space, became both a creative outlet and a source of stability for the artist. Through music, spoken word, visual art, and collaboration, the artist facilitated a space that invited others to contribute freely and safely.

“The people who come every day, they’re the exhibits, they’re the participants... You build something extraordinary by being collaborative.”

This ethos of collective creation and peer support was deeply meaningful. The artist spoke about the importance of being seen “as an artist first,” without judgment or pathologising their mental health history, a crucial shift from experiences in other institutions. *“This place sees you first as an artist, not your mental health... It’s an important part of lots of people’s recovery... I don’t know if there’s another place that offers such a supportive staff.”* The gallery offered a platform not just for making and

showing work, but for building relationships, trust, and confidence, including through external projects that grew directly out of the *Live Lounge*. One new work, a video performance created with another artist, will be shown in an alternative arts venue, a clear step forward in the artist's professional journey.

Importantly, the gallery space also supported emotional regulation and resilience. The artist described learning from the process of managing the intensity of the ongoing event, understanding others' emotions, and feeling empowered to hold space, all of which contributed to their personal recovery and renewed confidence.

"It's not just about the art... It's a bridge to normal living. You find your people. You feel like you belong."



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