



# The Mental Health and Wellbeing Awards 2024



Create

Innovative proactive wellbeing activity

Provide a short summary (max 149/150 words) of the organisation and their contribution for use if you are shortlisted.

Founded in 2003, Create is a multi-award-winning charity empowering lives, reducing isolation and enhancing wellbeing through the creative arts.

Create's guiding principle is that *people need to create*. Creativity impacts emotional and mental health. It builds skills, brings joy, reduces isolation. It inspires, empowers, raises aspirations, allows us to express ourselves and to be heard. Create provides free high-quality creative arts experiences for children/adults facing challenges in their lives. Delivered by the charity's professional artists, these improve the mental wellbeing of those who need them most. Projects are delivered in partnership with "community partners" (eg: carer service).

*creative:voices* is a multi-artform programme that enables adult carers to take a creative break from their caring responsibilities, build trusting relationships with their peers and develop social skills, new interests and confidence. Creative arts workshops give them the opportunity to explore their creativity and to improve their mental health and wider wellbeing.

Introduce your organisation or context of the entry in the space below

*"Many of our carers experience isolation and ill mental health due to their caring responsibilities. Create's workshops offer a chance to connect with people who are going through similar struggles and gives carers an outlet through creativity. They leave the projects feeling more positive and peaceful, and they say that it makes them better carers." (Carer service staff)*

Create is the UK's leading charity empowering lives through the creative arts. We work nationally to deliver professional, tailored creative arts experiences that meet the specific needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The charity delivers inspiring, sustainable programmes in areas where provision is poor and engagement in the arts is low. All are underpinned by the NHS's Five Ways to Wellbeing model and take a trauma-informed approach.

### **Creativity and mental health**

The positive impact of creativity and arts engagement on mental health and overall wellbeing has been firmly established by decades of research. In 2019, [the World Health Organisation reported](#) that 3,500 studies had shown the widespread health improvements that came from arts engagement, from neurological disorders to child development.

[Research by UCL](#) has demonstrated that people of all ages benefit physically, emotionally, and intellectually by being creative.

Create recognises that it is often the most marginalised people in society who are excluded from gaining the benefits of the creative arts. To address this, the charity provides free creative arts experiences for marginalised children/adults. They are given a chance to meet others and boost their mental wellbeing through music, dance, painting, photography, drama and a host of other artforms.

### **The impact of caring on mental health**

Adult carers are disadvantaged, marginalised and hidden, often leading to poor mental health. They provide unpaid care for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems. The impact of caring goes beyond "just" a commitment of time and energy: many carers also experience social isolation and believe that their physical and emotional health has been negatively affected by their responsibilities.

Carers UK research in 2022 estimated that the number of unpaid carers could be as high as 10.6 million ([Carers UK, Carers Week 2022 research report](#)):

- 4.7% of the population in England and Wales are providing 20 hours or more of care a week.
- Over the period 2010-2020, every year, 4.3 million people became unpaid carers – 12,000 people a day (Petrillo and Bennett, 2022).
- One in seven people in the workplace in the UK are juggling work and care (Carers UK, Juggling Work and Care, 2019).

Many are unable to take a break from their caring responsibilities and 42% say that their personal relationships, social lives and leisure time have been restricted. Adult carers often feel a sense of guilt, stress and isolation connected to their caring, which makes access to appropriate support and carer programmes essential to maintaining their emotional wellbeing.

[A 2023 Carers UK report on carers' health](#) found that:

- A significant proportion of carers said their mental health has been affected by caring.

- 79% of carers feel stressed or anxious, 49% feel depressed, and 50% feel lonely.
- 27% of carers said their mental health was bad or very bad. 36% of these said they had thoughts related to self-harm or suicide.
- 61% of carers said that being able to take regular breaks from caring would be a challenge over the coming year.
- 61% of carers said they needed more support to be able to look after their health and wellbeing.

### **Improving carers' mental wellbeing through the creative arts**

Create designed *creative:voices* to alleviate feelings of isolation and enhance mental health and wellbeing, enriching carers' sense of belonging in their community and increasing their confidence in themselves and their abilities.

It enables adult carers to take a creative break from their caring responsibilities, build trusting relationships with their peers and improve their mental health/wellbeing. Each project gives adult carers the opportunity to explore their creativity and self-expression through high quality creative arts workshops led by Create's professional artists.

Create piloted *creative:voices* in 2011 with Carers Lewisham. Over the next few years, it developed its learning through in-depth consultation with carers and carers services and ran projects with a small number of carer services each year. Fundraising for this strand of work proved challenging.

The pandemic highlighted as never before the inequalities and isolation faced by adult carers and, thanks to a significant three year grant in 2022 from the Comic Relief/Walkers Smiles Fund for projects improving mental wellbeing, Create was able to expand *creative:voices* to nine services that year. The programme has continued to expand: project with 18 services are being planned for 2024/25.

### **Between 28/04/22 and 30/03/23 *creative:voices* delivered 89 creative workshops in blocks of six, weekly sessions that enhanced the mental wellbeing of 157 adult carers.**

During this time, Create worked with nine carer services, exploring seven artforms:

- Enfield Carers (Ceramics; Creative writing)
- Harrow Carers (Ceramics; Music)
- Age UK Islington (Visual art)
- Carers Hub Lambeth (Painting; Jewellery making)
- Carers Lewisham (Jewellery making; Photography)
- Manchester Carers (Music; Ceramics)
- Sefton Carers Centre (Visual art)
- Wigan and Leigh Carers Centre (Creative writing)
- York Carers Centre (Photography; Visual art)

The programme successfully supported carers' wellbeing during the challenging socio-economic period following COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis. 90% of carers said that their wellbeing improved. 100% of carer staff said their project successfully enhanced outcomes for the carers: enhanced wellbeing, feeling connected, increased confidence, feeling listened to, and development of creativity/artform skills).

Adult carer Renee (57) from Islington, who took part in six weekly visual art workshops in September and October 2022, said:

*"Projects like this help carers with our mental health. They give us somewhere to go. There's a lot of fear. You don't really know what we're suffering because we're all in houses by ourselves. We're all in isolated little pockets, so unless we come together, we don't know what's happening for other people."*

Adult carer Elena from Lambeth, who took part in six weekly ceramics workshops during February to March 2022, said:

*"When I look at all the pieces I made on this project, they look beautiful. I feel relaxed, it was a good experience. I'm excited to take them home, and to take some clay home to use with my children. We can try different things, it's relaxing and good for your mind."*

**Between 05/23 and 03/24, 186 carers took part in 126 creative workshops that delivered 10 different artforms with 11 partners:**

- Imago Community Kent (visual art)
- Enfield Carers (ceramics, visual art)
- Carers Hub Lambeth (printmaking, visual art)
- Harrow Carers (creative writing, visual art, photography)
- Age UK Islington (music, dance)
- Manchester Carers (photography, ceramics, visual art)
- Manchester Carers Forum (3D model making)
- Sefton Carers Centre (visual art, mosaic)
- Carers Trust Hillingdon (animation)
- Wigan and Leigh Carers Centre (creative writing)
- Care for Carers Edinburgh and Glasgow East End Community Carers (photography)

96% of carers said their wellbeing improved. Carer staff rated all outcomes at 100% (bar teamwork at 95%).

Adult carer Lia, who has taken part in several of our *creative:voices* projects, said:

*"I enjoyed the project and found it therapeutic. It always brightened my day when I came here. You don't know what creativity you have until you try it."*

Please confirm the following for the nominated service (enter n/a if not appropriate):

Is it regulated by appropriate bodies (e.g. CQC or OfSTED)?	N/A
Is it a registered charity or a registered social enterprise?	Yes
Does it have a safeguarding policy/risk assessment/clinical governance policies and procedures (including the protection of staff's wellbeing)?	Yes (as relevant)
It is GDPR compliant?	Yes
Is there any action being taken by a regulator against you?	No

Describe in the space below how do you/they go above and beyond the expectations.

### **NHS's Five Ways to Wellbeing**

The design, delivery and evaluation of *creative:voices* is underpinned by the **NHS's Five Ways to Wellbeing** model:

- **Give:** participants give their time to do something for themselves and be part of a group; to support one another during activities; and to give positive feedback to one another.
- **Be active:** participants play an active role during workshops that often include elements of/are centred around physical activity (eg: dance; drama; film making; photography).
- **Keep learning:** participants work interactively and experientially with our professional artists and one another to build new creative, artform, technology, and social skills.
- **Connect:** participants meet one another and our team. Their ideas and feedback are at the centre of every workshop; and social/small group time is built in.
- **Take notice:** workshops give participants time for themselves, to enjoy new experiences, be present in the here and now, and notice what is going on around them, in their surroundings (eg: seeing their home in a new light through a camera lens). By engaging with the artistic process, they are also able to take notice of 'themselves', their thoughts and feelings, and to discover a creative talent and/or passion.

### **Clear positive impact on mental wellbeing**

**96% of carers and 100% of carer staff said that carers' wellbeing had improved.**

Feedback demonstrates the effectiveness of Create's approach to project delivery based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing. This addresses the impact of caring responsibilities on adult carers' mental wellbeing by providing a fun, skill-building, creative, collaborative emotional outlet, enabling them to feel connected/keep learning/take notice/give/be active.

Feedback from carers:

- *"I feel happy after each workshop. Making art has been very therapeutic."*
- *"I haven't moved to music in well over a year and so I feel quite emotional. To feel free in this busy, busy life is amazing – this is the most important thing I will do today because it has freed my mind."*
- *"My family have noticed I am happier in myself."*

Feedback from carer staff:

- *"All participants mentioned the workshop helped them relax and helped them mentally and emotionally."*
- *"All participants have expressed feelings of improved wellbeing to me at different times. They will really miss it if we don't carry on."*
- *"This is the first time that I have been to something like this. It is so nice to see everyone's inner child and how enthusiastic everyone is."*

**99% of carers and 100% of carer staff said that carers felt more connected to each other, reducing isolation.**

Feedback demonstrates the effectiveness of Create's approach to enable carers to FEEL CONNECTED through collaborative activities delivered in a supportive, safe space that encourages social interaction, self-expression and shared understanding, helping carers to develop relationships with each other and with carer staff.

Feedback from carers:

- *"It's so peaceful here and I feel connected to others and re-connected to the old me."*
- *"It has been very isolated so making conversation was a new beginning."*
- *"There is great camaraderie in knowing we are all in the same boat and can relate to each other and encourage each other."*

Feedback from carers staff:

- *"The social aspect of the sessions was something that carers really enjoyed about them. Being with and talking to other carers from around Manchester as well as being creative helped to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness amongst carers."*
- *"Definitely brought people together who may never have met."*

**91% of carers and 100% of carer staff said that carers developed their confidence and self-esteem.**

The project enables carers to TAKE NOTICE of their surroundings and their thoughts/feelings, leading to the discovery of a creative talent/passion and development of skills, increasing confidence.

Feedback from carers:

- *"It has helped me with my anxiety and improved my confidence."*
- *"Feel more confident and able to express myself. Less anxious of being in a large group."*
- *"Have found myself smiling and saying 'hello' to more people in my neighbourhood."*
- *"Feel proud of what I have achieved. You don't know what creativity is inside you."*

Feedback from carers staff:

- *"Their confidence levels have been boosted tremendously."*
- *"It has helped carers to be confident and to feel valued as writers. They all seem to have been writing separately at home and sharing work has boosted self-esteem."*
- *"They were able to share and build confidence and feel valued."*

**98% of carers and 100% of carer staff said that carers' ideas were encouraged, listened to and incorporated in the creative process, helping them to feel valued.**

Feedback from carers/carers staff demonstrates the project's success in making carers feel encouraged, listened to and valued. It enables carers to GIVE their time to be part of a group, exchanging positive feedback of one another's work and being incorporated in a collaborative, participant-led process. Their ideas are listened to/incorporated by Create's artist/staff.

Feedback from carers:

- *"Everyone's contributions were valued and everyone really tried to listen to each other."*
- *"The feedback sessions showed everyone's appreciation of everyone else's ideas and expression."*
- *"I wanted to make mosaic and my wish was granted."*

Feedback from carers staff:

- *"The artist asked everyone what they wanted and was so friendly and helpful."*
- *"Being more involved in the creative process will have helped carers to be more immersed in the whole experience and is probably one of the main reasons why the majority of the carers came to all of the sessions!"*

**87% of carers and 100% of carer staff said that carers enhanced their creative thinking and 97%/100% their creative/arts-based skills.**

The programme enabled carers to explore their creativity and to KEEP LEARNING through interactive activities led by Create's professional artists that develop artform skills (eg: composing a photograph, writing poetry).

Feedback from carers:

- *"It's got my brain cells ticking – I've loved it. It has brought back beautiful memories of my mum dyeing fabric in Nairobi when I was a child. I had completely forgotten."*
- *"It's opened up my world! [There's] opportunities to make new friends – they encouraged me to reconnect with literature and now I just signed up to learn to type!"*
- *"It has a great impact on me. Now I am a dancer, I dance all around the house!"*

### **Bespoke design and rigorous testing**

In line with Create's overarching model, *creative:voices* is developed and delivered using a well-established methodology, and rigorously evaluated throughout.

Every *creative:voices* project is co-created with a carer service that has specialist knowledge of local needs/ priorities/ its group of beneficiary carers. Working closely with each service ensures a sense of local ownership, ensuring projects are uniquely tailored. Services have in-depth knowledge of the challenges faced by the carers who use their service, enabling projects to be designed to meet their needs/interests, and project formats to be designed so carers who might otherwise lack time/confidence to attend can be supported to do so.

Our bespoke approach enables us to respond to our partners' own priorities, increasing impact. At the end of each project partners report whether 'their programme of activities has been enhanced' and whether 'they would like to work with Create again'. In 2023/24, 100% of staff said their programme had been enhanced and they would like to work with Create again. Responses are monitored and feed into our project evaluation/future plans.

Projects can be delivered online via the *Create Live!* platform if this is necessary to enable carers to take part. This takes projects into participants' homes where they are unable to leave the loved one who they care for. Online delivery has also been used to bring carers from different geographical locations together.

### **Led by professional artists and experienced staff**

To join Create, artists must have a high-quality professional practice AND extensive experience in workshop leading. They are asked about their commitment to sustainable practice and DEI. Two Senior Project Managers interview them/then assess them delivering a workshop. References/DBS are checked.

Our artists use their artistic and facilitation skills to enable participants to achieve key outcomes (social and creative skills development/ wellbeing/reduced isolation). Projects have a high artist/staff:participant ratio ensuring carers receive the individual support and attention they deserve.

Projects are managed by Create's experienced Project Managers, who oversee to the highest standards: planning with the artists/ partner organisations including risk assessment and safeguarding; onsite delivery; managing volunteers; monitoring/evaluation.

Categories 1 and 2: Describe how the work is innovative (e.g. ground-breaking or different from similar services).

Category 3: Describe how the work has had an impact over time.

Category 4: Describe how the work has had an impact on a large population.

Category 5: Describe how the work has made an impact to people during the pandemic.

### **Uniqueness of creative arts engagement to enhance wellbeing**

The effectiveness of creative engagement in achieving improved mental health and wellbeing is evidenced by official research.

Studies, such as UCL's recent [The Impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health](#), have found that arts and cultural engagement supports emotional regulation, enhances mental wellbeing, and reduces the risk of developing mental health problems. Arts group participation (eg choir, dance, photography, theatre, and music groups) is associated with multiple positive aspects of wellbeing including life satisfaction, positive affect, purpose in life, and perceived mastery.

*"Because they operate simultaneously on the individual and social, as well as physical and mental, levels, arts-based health interventions are uniquely placed to address the full complexity of the challenges that being healthy and well are increasingly recognised to present."* (WHO, 2019)

### **No other organisation engages carers in this way**

Create is unaware of another multi-artform organisation that uses professionally-delivered creative arts projects to enhance the mental wellbeing of carers across the UK in the way that *creative:voices* does. Other carer-service specific arts projects that do exist appear to be predominantly either short-term (eg: half day craft session), single artform, paid for, or not professionally led (eg: led by amateur volunteer).

By working across different artforms, Create maximises participants' creative potential and provides creative opportunities that meet different participants' interests and needs (eg: dance and music transcend language barriers). Create's approach is individually tailored to meet the objectives of each carer service and the unique needs they have identified for their carers.

[Studies](#) suggest that those who do not regularly engage with the arts can find traditional arts spaces intimidating. Create takes its professional practicing artists to the venues where participants feel comfortable and safe, enabling them to be creative in their everyday lives. Where appropriate, once trust has been built, Create then expands their horizons by taking them to inspirational spaces where they can enjoy new experiences (eg: photography project at Kew Gardens). Create's programmes are always free of charge to the end user and carer service, ensuring they reach those who lack provision and are most in need.

Other organisations produce issue-based theatre/art/music in response to participants' experiences. Although Create may on occasions address these experiences through artistic expression, where this is the participants' express choice, the charity more often provides an alternative for the people it works with, giving them a break from the issues. For example, projects for carers are designed to fit around their caring responsibilities, giving them a well-deserved break and respite from their day-to-day challenges. Themes are selected in consultation with the carers, such as a nature-themed project to inspire and enhance wellbeing.

Carers' achievements are celebrated via sharing sessions at the end of each workshop block, attended by friends and family of participants, as well as staff. Some projects culminate in a larger showcase event. An exhibition of photographs taken by adult carers in



Scotland was held in Edinburgh in June 2023. The project had been run online since the pandemic and participants, who became friends through taking part in creative sessions together for several years, were able to meet in person for the first time at the exhibition.

### **Engaging an underrepresented group**

Access to the creative arts is not evenly distributed. Often it is groups of people who are already marginalised that lack opportunities to engage in creative activities, thus further compounding their disadvantage.

A 2023 nationwide survey commissioned by Create and our partner Jacksons of Yorkshire, found that 93% of people in the UK say that having the space and freedom to be creative is important to their wellbeing. People also reported a variety of obstacles to being more creative, however, including a lack of inspiration or, more worryingly, money or time. People relish the opportunity to be creative when given the chance, but many are simply unable to access the creative arts. Carers often lack both the time and money.

To tackle this problem, Create provides free high-quality creative arts experiences for carers, helping to improve their mental wellbeing. Due to their caring responsibilities, they are an underrepresented group. Create has been very successful at engaging this group through *creative:voices*; meeting all intended outcomes. 100% of carers and 100% of carer staff rated their Create project 'successful overall'.

*creative:voices* is now a key part of partner organisations' provisions: 100% of carer staff said the programme enhanced their programme of activities and that they would like to work with Create again.

### **Participant-centred approach**

Create's approach of delivering bespoke interventions in close collaboration with carer services differentiates the charity. We work closely with these services to encourage carers, who are often hard to reach, to take part. Strategies include:

- consultation to identify barriers to participation;
- developing long-term relationships with partners;
- production of promotional materials (eg short films) for recruitment;
- tailoring projects to carers' preferences;
- including social time (eg shared lunch);
- delivering projects in warm/familiar/safe settings (often in carer services' own venues);
- offering projects in-venue, digital or blended;
- all projects are free of charge to carers;
- encouraging peer endorsement;
- promoting final sharings to peers;
- implementing recommendations by carers/carers services.

We also implement a range of initiatives aimed at improving consultation with carers:

- Carers' ideas sought during project planning and delivery;
- 100% feedback policy;
- Collect case studies, with in-depth feedback;

### **Trauma-Informed approach**

Central to Create's approach is running creative workshops that place participants' lived experience at the heart, ensuring they feel safe, connected and empowered.

Consequently, a Trauma-Informed approach underpins our projects:

- **Safety:** rigorous risk assessments and safeguarding; warm, safe workshop spaces; support from Create and carer service staff; language that creates feelings of trust and belonging; development of strong, positive, trusting relationships.
- **Choice:** carers are involved in pre-planning; ownership over activities and creative outputs; clear safeguarding and safety messages/procedures.
- **Collaboration:** projects are planned, developed, delivered and evaluated with carer's input; carers work interactively with artists, carer service staff and one another.
- **Trustworthiness:** clear guidelines and boundaries are set and maintained; artists provide carers with clear, accessible instructions during workshops.
- **Empowerment:** projects are designed to prioritise skill-building; carers' opinions and ideas are sought and used at the heart of the creative process; where possible, they are given opportunities to take control and lead processes; their work is celebrated in performances and exhibitions; their voices are at the heart of the evaluation process.

*"The sessions always bring out the better version of me. It affords me the "me" I crave. It is time used to realise my abilities with my caring role. I thoroughly enjoy being in the company of other carers and I can share without being judged."* (Carer)

How is the impact sustained over at least two consecutive years? This might include data, testimonials, feedback or other types of evidence. (for the pandemic category, please describe how you have found innovative ways of providing or growing services)

### **Sustained engagement over multiple years**

Create has delivered *creative:voices* with isolated adult carers since 2011. In 2021/22 it was awarded a significant three-year grant by Comic Relief to expand the number/reach of the programme from 2-3 services in London each year:

- *creative:voices* engaged 157 adult carers across nine services in 2022-23
- *creative:voices* engaged 186 adult carers across 11 services in 2023-24
- *creative:voices* is expanding to 18 services in 2024-25
- The programme expects to reach 620+ adult carers by the end of 2024-25, as intended.

*creative:voices* has successfully supported carers' wellbeing at a time when the UK has faced the challenging socio-economic period following COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis. The project has over-achieved against all intended outcomes in 2023/24 with 90% of carers saying their wellbeing improved. 5/5 outcomes for participants were rated as 100% successful by carer staff including wellbeing, feeling connected, increased confidence, feeling listened to and developing creativity/artform skills. 100% of carer services said they would like to work with Create again. *creative:voices* is now a key part of their provision: 100% of carer service staff said it enhanced their programme of wellbeing activities for their carers.

Adult carer Cindy (61) from Harrow, who took part in six weekly ceramics workshops during September and October 2022, said:

*"You're so engrossed in what you're making, you tend not to dwell on the negative aspects of your life as a carer. You're having fun, you're in a different place and I think that's the main objective. The project has taught me that I need to do something at home when I get time so I'm not obsessing about things that are going on in my life, with my kids, and myself and my limitations. Rather, I can do stuff if I just put my mind to it. I think it's very important to be creative because we are such stress buckets, and I think we just need to empty our mind sometimes. We all have that potential to be creative, everybody does, no matter what it is that you're creating."*

### **Ongoing engagement with carers and partner organisations**

Create will continue to enable adult carers to access/engage with the creative arts via *creative:voices* projects by:

- Designing/planning/delivering the project in collaboration with carer services – choosing artforms/themes in consultation with services/carers to reflect their interests/encourage engagement and ensuring participants have creative lead in workshops.
- Increasing its reach yearly - maintaining previous partnerships and working with a total of 18 services in 2024-25.
- Implementing recommendations from participants and carer staff - identified via feedback circles and detailed questionnaires - to ensure *creative:voices* effectively meets adult carers' needs/aspirations.
- Continuing to gather data on barriers to access from consultation with carer services and addressing these in project design/delivery.