

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN / CULTURE

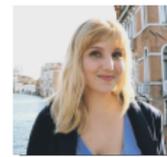
Art is a therapeutic tool but it can also give everyone a voice in our society

Macrobert Arts Centre recently became the first arts centre in the UK to receive the National Autistic Society's Autism Friendly Award.

Our journey as an arts centre toward receiving this recognition has been a wonderful experience in learning how to support adults with autism through creativity. The Autism Friendly Award is distributed by the National Autistic Society (NAS) to organisations and businesses across the UK who adapt their programming and operations to support the needs of individuals with autism.

We started our journey by introducing Autism Friendly film screenings back in 2013. Since then, we've developed relaxed pantomime performances, launched a sensory storytelling project and developed a visual guide to visiting our venue. Along the way, we've developed important partnerships that have helped us learn how best to tailor our provision to the needs of people with autism.

To mark Autism Awareness Day in April 2015 we worked with Scottish Autism to deliver training to more than 20 members of our staff, and last year we liaised with the King's Theatre in Glasgow to develop our Autism Friendly Panto. These developments inspired us to create a programme of artistic workshops that are not only inclusive, but are spe-



Macrobert Arts Centre has received an award for its support for adults with autism, explains Samantha Gurrey

cifically tailored to the needs of participants with a diagnosis of autism. These workshops are more open and less structured than our mainstream provision, allowing each class to be shaped around the needs and interests of the participants, so that everyone feels supported, empowered, and able to fully participate.

My role as Creative Learning Officer at Macrobert Arts Centre isn't to lead these sessions, but rather to take part in supporting the participants. Over the course of my time working on these activities, my understanding of the impact that autism can have on individuals has changed drastically. A lot of the work that came out of these projects evoked an urge to tell a story through a non-verbal language.

Artists tell stories through imagery and visuals and quite often this is a medium where individuals with autism can really flourish. More than anything, I believe that art is a therapeutic tool and can give everyone a voice.

One particular individual named

Danny has been with us on our journey over the past year. Danny found out about the activities that Macrobert Arts Centre offers for individuals with autism through NAS. He used to be a part of the NAS Coffee Club in Stirling, a group that encouraged adults with autism to meet regularly, creating a support network for each other.

Danny came along to our pilot series of creative workshops, beginning in September 2016. Through those workshops, he joined a six-month photography project which culminated in a group art exhibition called Too Much Information held in Macrobert Arts Centre's Arthouse exhibition space.

In this exhibition participants told stories about their painful experiences with eye contact, noise and chaos in hopes of educating their audience and communicating their anxieties. Danny had always been keen to try new activities, but he was new to the arts and hadn't had the opportunity to take part in art classes that were catered towards his needs. These activities have

strengthened his self-confidence in his ability to create artwork and have equipped him with creative spatial awareness.

We created the Too Much Information photography project in partnership with the National Autistic Society and Agilent Technologies – a local business who have raised over £3,500 this year for the National Autistic Society of Scotland through their charity of the year scheme. Professional photographer

Graham Miller – whose focus is on challenging stigma and celebrating individuality – led a series of photography sessions over the course of six months.

Participants were encouraged to tell a story about their own individual experiences of being on the autistic spectrum. They took photos of their trigger points and moments that might reflect how they personally felt in particular situations. The title of the exhibition, Too Much

Information became a metaphor for finding out what is too much for them individually and sharing these experiences with the community.

For Macrobert Arts Centre, supporting the project and exhibition was an important expression of our inclusive ethos. Macrobert Arts Centre was presented with the Autism Friendly Award at the Too Much Information exhibition launch on the 4 April 2017. We are so pleased to be the first arts centre

in the UK to receive this award and we are looking forward to continuing to develop our venue and widen access, becoming more inclusive for everyone in our community. Coming up soon, Macrobert Arts Centre continues to host relaxed film screenings on a monthly basis and our Christmas relaxed Pantomime performance is scheduled for 7 December 2017.

Samantha Gurrey, Creative Learning Officer, Macrobert Arts Centre

↑ A group art exhibition called Too Much Information held in Macrobert Arts Centre's Arthouse exhibition space

Macrobert Arts Centre
University of Stirling



↑ Young women in the Heritage and Inclusion Project at Drummond High

Throughout June, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh is hosting an art exhibition featuring works created by a group of young women from Action for Children Scotland's Heritage and Inclusion Project.

Since July last year, Action for Children Scotland has been working with young women from different cultural backgrounds in Edinburgh to reduce the levels of isolation they face.

Part of a two-year programme funded by the Heritage Lottery and in partnership with the Scottish National Gallery, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, Napier ENSA and Edinburgh University, the project will work with 50 young women, of 18 different nationalities, in four schools. Its

aim is to make these young women much more aware of their own heritage while helping them better engage with their own, and wider, communities.

Although still in its first year, it has had a very positive effect on those involved, with one young woman describing it as being exactly what she needed and coming at just the right time for her.

A lasting legacy will be created through shared learning with their classmates, the wider community and a series of public events, exhibitions and a documentary film.

Recently, the young women have been working to develop an art installation based on Judy Chicago's famous The Dinner Party – one of the first pieces of feminist artwork that

symbolised the history of women in Western civilisation.

Following a launch event at The National Gallery of Scotland, the exhibition can be seen this month at the National Gallery of Modern Art Scotland. The artwork aims to celebrate women, champion female role models and promote greater cultural awareness.

Local families from wide cultural backgrounds will attend the launch event, promoting heritage and raising awareness of the available services.

Each and every participant has thrown themselves fully into this art exhibition. With the support of the excellent local artist Morwenna Kearsley, the young women have taken inspiration from the iconic

feminist artwork, but also from identifying and investigating strong female role models. Through learning about historic women leaders from migrant backgrounds, the young women have reported feeling a much greater sense of identity and that the whole process has helped them think more about diversity and inclusion.

It is hoped this project will go a long way towards reducing many of the barriers they face – while inspiring them to play a more prominent role in their communities.

Taking part in the art exhibition has proven a wonderful experience for the young women and we hope as many Scotsman readers as possible will make it along to the exhibition, view the artwork and hear their

stories first-hand. The exhibition runs during June at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 75 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3DR.

Khaleda Noon is the service co-ordinator at Action for Children Scotland's Heritage and Inclusion Project.



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Young women embrace the art of connecting with their community

Project brings girls of different cultures together, says **Khaleda Noon**