VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

An exhibition of art and poetry created by the Rowan Alba CARDS community during the covid-19 pandemic
Foreword

At Rowan Alba we believe in engaging our community in meaningful ways. The Rowan Alba CARDS’ Art Project is a testament of this tenant. This idea started with a piece of research called Photovoice done in 2013 in partnership with Edinburgh University using photography as a medium to convey the lives of hard-to-reach groups. Workshops were funded with the National Galleries of Scotland Education Department and sessions were held inviting CARDS service users to come to the gallery and enjoy using art to communicate their experiences. This is where we met our now artist-in-residence Sam Rutherford. Her commitment to our charity secured many years of funded guided tours of exhibitions and a self-management style CARDS Café held in the Portrait Gallery and The Botanic Cottage, leading right up to when the pandemic hit in early 2020.

Sam and Rowan Alba CARDS quickly manoeuvred their resources and encouraged members to submit artwork of any medium for a new monthly magazine that was sent through the Rowan Alba network. Our service users immediately responded positively to this call to action and the arts and culture aspects of CARDS has since taken on a life of its own.

Creating art can be therapeutic for many reasons. Our community found that making art for the zine has helped them express parts of themselves they did not know how to articulate with words. Sam has since organised cultural trips and talks at various museums and galleries around Edinburgh, which are very popular. Even through a global pandemic, Sam found ways to engage our community through the help of Zoom, hosting online gallery tours and most importantly making one to one contact to continue the encouragement and find new ways to help people express themselves. Despite the national lockdown being difficult for our clients with the absence of their weekly volunteer visits, they produced so much art that we decided to create our very first art exhibition.

We would like to thank Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland for their flexibility with their funding and to our other donors: The Austin and Hope Pilkington Trust, Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, Edward Gostling Foundation, Hope Trust, Independent Age, Tudor Trust, and NHS Scotland. And of course, a big thank you to Sam Rutherford, this simply would not be possible without you. We hope you enjoy this document just as much as we enjoyed creating it.
COVID-19 deeply affected and further isolated our Rowan Alba CARDS community during the lockdowns of 2020-21. When the CARDS Café events which had been a lifeline to new experiences and relationships for our clients were no longer possible, we needed to find a way to keep these connections alive.

Our gallery visits had been created with Sam Rutherford of The National Galleries of Scotland to connect art to the support of a person’s wellbeing. By switching our connection to a Zine and online groups we were able to help our community to take part in regular activities and share the artworks they had created.

Sam created art project packs that she posted to those who expressed interest, and with the support of the CARDS team our clients continued to make art throughout the lockdown periods. Sharing these pieces of art was an important way of realising the resilience within some of the most disadvantaged groups in society.

In September 2021 we hosted a one day exhibition at the Botanics Cottage in Edinburgh comprised of works our community created during the previous 2 years. We chose the title View from the Inside as it reflected how the artists felt during this time.

Rowan Alba always strive to connect the individual with the community. Everyone who participated has expressed they felt a sense of belonging in sharing their art with the community first through our monthly zine and now with partners, friends and family at our exhibition.

None of this would be possible without the whole Rowan Alba family of Staff and Volunteers and the funding support of Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland and Independent Age. The ongoing partnership with The National Galleries of Scotland and the Royal Botanical Cottage Edinburgh will allow us to hold more art groups in 2022 and beyond.

We all recognise that we aren’t going to be able to solve the health challenges in society by working in silos. We have to work in partnership by building these relationships and coalitions together.

We are very lucky to have organisations like Rowan Alba who really believe in people. People who for no fault of their own, have found themselves in these situations and are looking for love, support and understanding.

Professor Aisha Holloway
Chair of Nursing Studies, University of Edinburgh

Tracey Stewart
Rowan Alba CARDS Service Leader
About the Art Project

Throughout the duration of the COVID-19 lockdowns Sam Rutherford, CARDS’ artist-in-residence sent over 50 packs of basic art supplies to service users across Edinburgh. Materials included markers, coloured pencils, paper, paints, and single use cameras.

The initial idea of sending these art supplies was to encourage our community to keep occupied during a difficult time while receiving the benefits of creative expression. Our artists were eager to share their works with the rest of the community so we decided to publish them in our monthly zine and specially made poetry booklet so our 180 “subscribers” (CARDS community, volunteers, and employees) could enjoy.

View from the Inside is a celebration of being able to gather after months of isolation, but it is also a reminder of how one’s personal environment can impact recovery. Now that COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, we continue holding in-person art sessions, gallery visits, trips to the Royal Botanical Gardens and cultural tours with CARDS service users and volunteers.

Activites / inputs

- One-to-one sessions with Artist-in-residence for creative guidance and encouragement
- 50 basic art packs sent out to all at CARDS at the start of project
- Personal cards drawn and sent out to participants engaged with art project
- Materials sent to participants depending on their individual interest and needs
- Up to 180 monthly zines sent to all service users, volunteers & staff
- Zoom art sessions with NGS
- Event celebrating service-users

Zine content

- Artwork, poems and writing from service-users
- CARDS info on upcoming outings & events
- Suggestions from all of CARDS community
- Pet portraits
- Signposting for mental health/ additional support
- Introductions to the team
- Quizzes
- Tips for eating plans & devices that can make a difference

As the zine has developed over the months, the ownership shifted to service users content making up the majority of the booklet.

Self management

The existing CARDS service works to many neurological, medical and general health outcomes. The CARDS Art Project was set up to concentrate solely on a list our community came up with as being the most important for self-management of long-term health conditions. Items on the list included:

- Meet more people.
- Be useful.
- Go places I used to go or have never been
- Talk to people about day to day stuff not connected with me or my health, the weather, tv, local news.
- Belong to a group and be invited to service user activities and meet other people who use the charities services.
- Connect with life outside the home, in my community and practice getting out and about more.
- Have a better understanding of how my health relates to the support I need

These learnings were shared with a broad range of health professionals at our art exhibition and continues to be shared through our community zine.
Gallery Visits

At the core of CARDS, we work to re-integrate the people we support into society. Part of this is hosting gallery visits with our clients and volunteers.

The National Galleries of Scotland has been a tremendous partner in helping us arrange guided gallery visits and talks. Our members can receive quality cultural experiences while building social connections with one another. These visits not only get our clients out of the house, but it helps reignite their love for our city and feel part of their own community again. Most of the group had either never been to an art gallery or had stopped going when their health became an issue. The realisation that these are safe places to consider visiting alone or with their volunteer was a significant shift for many which gave them confidence to consider visiting again alone or with their volunteer. Being able to share these experiences with peers helps them to build relationships and feel part of something again, which not many have had the opportunity to do in their recent lives.

“What a laugh playing with the props. It’s been a while since I played with anything. I had to look around when the guy opened the door for me when I managed up the steps. I thought someone was behind me. He smiled at me and he said goodbye too.”

CARDS Cafe Visitor
The Royal Botanic Cottage Manager Laura was involved with our project from around 2019 and had kindly set up a series of monthly visits to the cottage with activities, information sessions and guided walks around the gardens.

Everyone enjoyed the safety of having a comfortable space to relax and set the right environment for embarking on a creative task set up for them on the day by Laura or Sam. The main reason people stated enjoying these sessions was the warm welcome they received and the thought that had gone in to preparing for their arrival. The commitment from Laura and her team has secured us a new set of dates set for 2022 in the Botanic Cottage and the promise of many more good days ahead for our group.

A member of our group sadly passed away and some of her last days were spent in the gardens with Laura and our team picking leaves for an art project she never got to finish. She described this experience as her “last good day.” We are forever grateful to Laura for providing that smile to greet her at the other end.
Zoom Groups

Due to the government restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic CARDS had to get creative with keeping our community engaged.

To replace monthly gallery visits Sam started Zoom Café Hour so CARDS volunteers and their clients could continue to bond over art and culture. During these virtual sessions, Sam invited guest artists, including international photographer Chris Leslie to talk to the group about their practice. These sessions gave time for attendees to share their progress on their works of art. The intimacy of these sessions gave service members something to look forward to during lockdown while giving them an opportunity to socialise. These sessions were only accessible to those who had access to a phone or a laptop and WIFI. Rowan Alba have since secured funding from SCVO to purchase mobile WIFI devices, smartphones, and tablets to work on tackling the digital inclusion gap.

“...it has meant the world to me to see people. I can’t wait to get back to the meetings. I’ve enjoyed doing the art and loved getting things through the post. CARDS Community Member”
Acrylic paint on paper by Constantine
ARTIST

Constantine

I believe to completely address homelessness (an impossible task) society must first address the issues behind people’s homelessness (no matter how personal), the old adage prevention is better than cure.

But society must also recognize that there are people, who don’t need or require a permanent residence, but I believe have as much right to daily assistance, help and dignity as the rest of society.

Sam’s perspective

Constantine told me about when he was homeless and had a bus pass which allowed him to travel all around Scotland. Visiting Kelvingrove art gallery and seeing Salvador Dalí’s Christ of Saint John of the Cross had a huge impact on him.

I sent him a postcard of the painting and some watercolour paints. He has been really experimental with them.
Gavin felt listened to and loved getting high quality art materials through the post.

His poem gave a great message of hope and he was looking forward to returning to his writing group. He spoke with such enthusiasm about his days at art college.

Sam Rutherford CARDS Community Art Co-ordinator

Gavin

Gavin’s work is part of the National Galleries of Scotland online exhibition

You are here / 2020: Stories, Portraits, Visions online exhibition.

Click here to see highlights from this exhibition on the National Galleries of Scotland’s website.

A man in a bottle by Gavin
Coloured pencil on postcard
George

It’s brilliant to get involved in the project during lockdown and a great way to get people out there and focus on places to take pictures.

I’m not one to be shut in, and photography has taken over as my main hobby. It’s a great incentive to make special trips.

Sam’s perspective

Photography is an honest, accessible technique that has enabled members of the CARDS community to build on individual projects of interest, tell their stories and for us to check in with what matters.

Using disposable cameras has been a successful way through lockdown to reach those who were stuck inside and encourage those able to go out and about to plan trips.
I may have found a portal into another world.
This is a photo of some “art work” that I used to help me with anxiety during my recent hospital stay. Created by repeatedly drawing around objects I had to hand - a water glass and a wee medicine tub - moving them around the page, then colouring-in the resulting shapes. I’m not a fan of colouring-in books but this really appeals to me (I think because I could make it up as I was going along so it engaged my brain more?) and helped me stay calmer.
So... I need to get more photography and art in my life and to remember how these things might help when I’m down or anxious! (I can find it really difficult to try arts and crafts as I get really stressed when I can’t “do them properly” which is something else I need to work on 😛)

I have now joined an online arts and crafts club for autistic women 😊

“…I also wanted to thank you for telling me about the Great British Photography Challenge with Rankin (and Chris Packham) I really enjoyed it and you actually made me have a good think after our conversation. I really struggle terribly to get myself to do things, especially alone, or be interested in things and I often say that I don’t actually enjoy anything but then I realised, between my conversation with you and listening to some of the things people on that TV programme said, that I do love light and shadow and colours and shapes - something that wouldn’t come to mind if someone asks what I enjoy! Also, that it’s perfectly ok to just take photos on a phone and not have fancy equipment.
Plane
Acrylic paint on plastic model by Kerry

Thee end
Ballpoint pen on paper by Kerry
Poetry

Some of our CARDS clients showed a liking towards the art of the written word. We have gathered a small collection of poetry they have written related to their recovery journeys during lockdown.

These poems were part of a collection published by Rowan Alba for our event at the Royal Botanic Gardens Cottage in September 2021.

For a copy of this booklet please email cards@rowanalba.org; all we ask is a donation to support the future of our service.

Recovering

I’m all alone and feel I’m smothering
it’s because of the addiction I’ve been covering.
Why does the chaos never cease?
All I need is a little peace.
I feel so beaten down and weak
Yet all day long it’s booze I seek.
Today I’ll try a brand new scene
It’s to my heavenly father I’ll lean.
I prayed so hard with all my heart
I heard him say “You’ll have a fresh start”
For now I’m held in his hand
Life is a lot easier to understand.
I’m not alone and no longer smothering.
I’m just an addict truly recovering.

Donna
**Love**

What can I possibly say about this emotion called love?

Love makes you glad, love makes you sad

Sometimes even emotionally mad.

Your reasoning gets blurred

Your common sense gets smirred

It’s quite unsettling, this emotion called love.

But nothing can be changed and nothing can be touched

We, the human race, have been gifted

With this emotion called love.

**Foxy**
Embrace the unbreakable bond
In my eyes you can do no wrong
Never can we drift apart
Even in death
You are my heart
To sing to you is my music
My music is just for you.
I love you,
I love you Gran.
Foxy

Andrew

Out today that wind
came out to play
Bullies at the door
get knocked to the floor.
Andrew

We’re in a good time and place,
looking for someone to pray for
but we’re not lost,
I got CARDS,
a good place,
keep calm, it’s not a race.
Andrew
4. Future of the Art Project

We hope to continue our reach with the Art Project with your help. In addition to continuing our zine, we would love to take our service users outside of Edinburgh on art gallery and museum trips.

Our CARDS staff and service users have already given us fantastic ideas for the future, and we would love to implement them. There are demands for more art supplies, in-person group art sessions/classes, and more interactions with artists. However, none of these things are possible without funding and without those who have a passion for art and want to lend their talents to CARDS. If you would like to host in-person art sessions for our service users to create together, or if you work within the creative sector and would like to improve access to your galleries for isolated and disadvantaged groups, please get in touch. We are always looking for volunteers to assist our group with individual projects and help with practicalities on our group outings. There is nothing too little that would help continue our service users with healing and recovery through art.

“There really does feel like there has been a shift in allowing people to make art... it’s more about the process than what the product is.”

Sam Rutherford CARDS Community Art Co-ordinator
For more information about this project and the work CARDS does, please contact:

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