

# Evaluation for Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust

December 2017



Social Change  
& Innovation

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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to New Zealand Red Cross for funding this evaluation. Ihi Research and Development would like to thank the artists at Ōtautahi Creative Spaces for generously sharing their stories of transformation and creativity for this evaluation. This appraisal was made possible through the support of Kim Morton and Alexia Martin at Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust.

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# Ōtautahi Creative Spaces

## *Executive summary*

Ōtautahi Creative Spaces (OCS) contracted Ihi Research and Development to undertake an evaluation of the impact of the Creative Spaces programme. This qualitative evaluation sought to understand the impact on participants' lives in relation to six key outcomes. These were wellbeing, social connection, strengthened families, cultural connection, community participation and post-disaster resilience.

Twenty participants, of varying ages, ethnicity and roles and responsibilities in relation to Ōtautahi Creative Spaces were interviewed. The majority were participants at OCS's studio Room 5 at the Phillipstown Community Hub.

Analysis revealed the profound impact the programme had on participant wellbeing and general health. The different elements of the programme enabled these people to develop new positive identities as practising artists and to be viewed as valued family and community members. Findings indicated the programme provided a collective art-based, strengths approach to facilitating mental and physical wellbeing.

Put simply, it was the process of being deeply engaged in creative practices that enabled participants to develop new mindsets, learn new skills, and have pride in accomplishing something different and challenging. The safe, inclusive, highly resourced and supportive psycho-social environment of the programme was emphasised as contributing to positive wellbeing and general health. Participant artists felt accepted and welcomed, despite their personal mental and physical health challenges. They socialised with people who were both similar, and different, to them, which extended their socialisation skills. Their art making was supervised by highly skilled and supportive practitioners who encouraged and challenged the participants to stretch their skills and knowledge; research and learn about other artists and display their work in public exhibitions.

Recommendations for further research are highlighted. This study focused on programme recipients and their perceptions. It would be useful to gain further insight from tutors and friends/family members, as their perspectives could shed further insight into the enablers and inhibitors of change. Interviewed artists were clearly a diverse group and the programme may have had more positive benefits for some over others. Further investigation could reveal which aspects of the Creative Spaces programme were more effective in strengthening wellbeing and what else could be done to enhance this for artists with more complex needs.

Finally, it is important to share the impact and success of the Creative Spaces programme with other social agencies which are working to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of New Zealanders. The unique, creative art-based community approach provides an important and effective method to strengthening wellbeing and continuation of the programme is highly recommended.

## *Background*

Ōtautahi Creative Spaces was set up in Christchurch in 2015 with a goal of boosting wellbeing, social connection and resilience through creativity. Its purpose was to respond to the high levels of mental illness, distress and earthquake trauma following the earthquakes by using a creative practice shaped to support vulnerable people to live full, aspirational and creative lives. The establishment of Ōtautahi Creative Spaces followed a research phase funded by Creative New Zealand which examined access to creativity for people who had experienced mental illness. It concluded that unlike other parts of the country, people in Christchurch had little access to creativity to support their wellbeing and recovery and there was a need for creativity programmes which are tailored for this group.

## *Context*

There is currently no government policy framework in New Zealand for arts and health programmes, but there are a number of arts and health organisations around the country. There is great diversity in the communities they support, the nature of their creative practice, and the funding they receive. In recognition of common goals of achieving social and health gains, a national network of Creative Spaces has recently been established under the leadership of Arts Access Aotearoa. Ōtautahi Creative Spaces is an active member of the network.

Following the Christchurch earthquakes Pegasus Health undertook a review of international evidence to support arts and health programmes (Bidwell 2014). They found there is increasing interest in the provision of participatory art programmes in the community for people of all ages. They appear to be particularly beneficial for those who lack opportunities for meaningful contributions to society, particularly those who are isolated because of lack of social support, and mental or physical impairments (p.3). Further evidence suggests participating in creative arts can result in significant benefits to psycho-social health, including improved self-esteem, confidence, self-efficacy, improved

social connections and overall quality of life. Internationally, there is a growing evidence base for the impact of arts and health programmes with a landmark report released in the UK in 2017 by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW, 2017).

The key messages from the report support the creative art programmes as they:

1. Keep communities well, aid disaster recovery and support longer lives better lived.
2. Meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health.
3. Save money in the health service and in social care.

### *Ōtautahi Creative Spaces kaupapa*

Ōtautahi Creative Spaces aims to support artists to achieve transformation in their own lives through creativity. The foundation for the work is Te Whare Tapa Whā, with the four dimensions of health tinana (physical health), whānau (family health), hinengaro (mental health), and wairua (spiritual health) supported and in synergy. Core values include manaakitanga (hospitality), auahatanga (creativity), kotahitanga (unity) and whakawhanaungatanga (relationships). These values underpin core practice.

### *Characteristics of creative wellbeing practice*

The stated approach to creative wellbeing practice is artist centred, which is strength-based and shaped for people with experience of mental illness. Artists are encouraged and supported to explore their whakapapa, identity, story, life experiences and beliefs through the art forms they choose and at the pace they decide is right for them. The aim is to support artists to build a sustainable creative practice, based on the evidence that creative expression is an important ingredient in supporting identity and wellbeing – the creativity effect. The role of art workers is to ‘walk alongside’ artists, to provide technical help, encouragement, and to facilitate an environment in which the artists can inspire and support each other.

There are two strands to Ōtautahi Creative Spaces work: artist mentoring and creative wellbeing groups. Together these groups form a community of artists, or artists’ collective, where people can interact with other artists with similar experience, access opportunities to engage in contemporary art practice and feel a sense of belonging.

Artist mentoring is offered to artists with a strong creative practice, regular engagement and goals they want to work towards. Mentored artists receive tailored individual support and studio sessions with their peers and their mentor. Ōtautahi Creative Spaces aims to broker opportunities for engagement in the contemporary art world through exhibitions, tertiary study, specialist workshops, volunteering and employment.

Creative wellbeing groups are offered to artists who enjoy being creative in the company of like-minded people. Artists can work on their own projects, or on creative activities and collaborative artworks led by the facilitators.

For participants to be included in the programme no formal mental health diagnosis is required – although people can be referred by Canterbury District Health Board mental health services, with whom the organisation has a close relationship. They also have relationships with two mental health services: Kakakura Health Services, through its residential home Te Korimako and Totara House, CDHB’s early intervention in psychosis service for young people.

Room 5 at the Phillipstown Community Hub is the studio base and creativity groups are also run in various outreach locations.

# Methodology

A strength-based, collaborative approach underpinned the research methodology. The study sought to understand the impact of Ōtautahi Creative Spaces work from the view point of the participant community; the practising artists. The data collection and analysis focused on their experiences and perceptions as related to six key outcomes that had been identified by funders. These were:

1. Wellbeing
2. Social connection
3. Strengthened families
4. Cultural connection
5. Community participation; and
6. Post-disaster resilience

The research methodology strictly adhered to key evaluation principles, as identified by the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (2015). These included: respectful, meaningful relationships and an ethic of care, responsive methodologies, trustworthy results and competence and usefulness. The research process also followed important culturally responsive elements as Māori artists were included within the practice community. We followed Pihama's (2015) advice to create "accessible texts" (p. 11) that could provide insight into the impact of the Creative Spaces programme on the wellbeing of participating artists.

## *Participating Artists*

Twenty participants were interviewed. They were a diverse group ranging in ages, ethnicity and roles and responsibilities in relation to OCS. Most were participants at OCS's studio Room 5 at the Phillipstown Community Hub. Three were participants at OCS's outreach programmes at libraries or other community venues. A health worker, teacher and librarian who were closely involved with OCS programmes were also interviewed. All spoke about the positive impacts and outcomes associated with Room 5 and OCS's outreach programmes.

## *Ethics*

It was essential the research adhered to the strictest ethical standards ensuring informed consent and avoidance of harm to those who volunteered to take part in this research. The research process was carefully explained, and care was taken to answer any questions artists might have about the research process and the nature of their involvement. Written information and consent forms were provided to each participant. Care was taken to ensure that consent was voluntary and there was a clear understanding as to what would happen to the collected data. Artists were then invited to take part in the evaluation and had the opportunity to decline. Written consent was gained (A copy of the information sheets and consent forms are provided in Appendix 1). Participants were given the opportunity to check the accuracy of their interview transcripts. In this report all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

## *Data collection and analysis*

### *Interviews*

Most interviews were conducted at the Phillipstown Community Hub where OCS's studio Room 5 is located. One was completed at another location at the request of the participant involved. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. A copy of the interview questions is included in Appendix 2.

### *Analysis of interview data*

The interview scripts were coded using inductive and deductive processes. Deductive analysis was used to determine evidence of outcomes and impact related to the six key performance indicators. Codes were also constructed inductively. These themes are grouped under the general heading 'lessons learned'. It's important to note that many of the themes related to more than one category and are inter-dependent (for example wellbeing is dependent on/has a relationship with social connection and vice-versa). Quotes from participant interviews are used to illustrate major themes.

## *Limitations*

It was clear from analysis that the artists who were interviewed believed their engagement in the Creative Spaces programme had resulted in many positive outcomes and benefits. Individual differences may mean the programme had more impact on some than others. Furthermore, it is difficult to know how lasting the beneficial impacts would be once the artists left the programme. Further research over a longer period would provide insight into this.

# Outcomes and Impacts

Qualitative analysis highlighted the inter-dependent and dynamic relationships of the main themes. The diagram below highlights this relationship. The outer circles influenced the inner ones and vice-versa. Results revealed there were many therapeutic and positive impacts associated with becoming/being an artist in a highly creative, resourced and safe community of practice. A key lesson was that being engaged in individual and social art making activities positively transformed identities and strengthened general wellbeing. This in turn encouraged these new practicing artists to become more connected to others and more resilient as they took risks and learned new creative techniques, and improved their social skills, both within the creative programme and also in the wider community.

The following sections describe the evidence associated with the six key outcomes;

1. Wellbeing
2. Social connection
3. Strengthened families
4. Cultural connection
5. Community participation; and
6. Post-disaster resilience



# 1. Wellbeing

Identifying wellbeing statements within the data revealed several states of being and dispositions that the artists identified as contributing to improved wellbeing. These include; hope, flow, identity, learning and accomplishment.

We have described the general tone of these categories and selected quotes from the interviews that best illustrate these.

## 1.1 Hope contributing to wellbeing

Attending Ōtautahi Creative Spaces has clearly given many of the artists who were interviewed significant hope that they can work to a new lease of life. Many explained that previously they had been unable to work due to their mental health. Since being involved in the programme they had experienced considerable benefits including having sense a purpose to their day, and having a positive activity to look forward to during their week.

*“I was pretty much off track when I came, I didn’t have a life really. I had just got a new place around the corner and I knew nobody and with no money I couldn’t do anything, I was pretty much stuck... so this place gives me a whole new lease of life.” (John)*

*“It’s what I look forward to. It’s the highlight of my week. So, I do all my shopping on a Monday and make sure that I make all my appointments and get everything done so that my Thursday is free for me to go.” (Pip)*

*“Just coming here has made such a difference to my life, it’s given me hope and that’s something I’ve never had before. My experience in the past has been self-harm and things like that and just not being very well, and this place is so special. It’s like when someone said we probably wouldn’t be alive without places like this. This place has made such a difference. I wish there was more of this, more of it everywhere, because it’s so helpful to people. I think it would lessen people’s time going to hospital and hurting themselves and just beating themselves up in general.” (Pania)*

The arts programme provided a structure into the week and life of these participant artists. They explained that creating art gave them something creative to think about, providing a type of therapy. This provided a distraction from their mental health condition and the opportunity to concentrate on something positive.

*“I was diagnosed with schizophrenia, PTSD and anxiety and I have regular weekly appointments with mental health services. Being in Room 5 I’m able to concentrate and while I want to achieve, it’s given me a therapy at the same time. It’s given me something to look forward to while I find it hard to get a job, keeping myself busy is something that I need to do and knowing that there’s something here for me every week....” (Julie)*

The benefits of directing their thoughts to an art making activity was repeated often in the data. Being immersed in art making is consistent with the concept of flow.

## 1.2 Flow contributing to wellbeing

Flow has been described by internationally renowned psychology Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as a state of being in which one is totally immersed in an activity. His research into ‘optimal experience’ highlighted how people experience this state of consciousness. During flow, people typically experience immense enjoyment, creativity and total involvement in the task at hand. Csikszentmihalyi describes 8 characteristics of flow:

1. Complete concentration on the task
2. Clarity of goals and reward in mind and immediate feedback
3. Transformation of time (speeding up/slowing down of time)
4. The experience is intrinsically rewarding, has an end itself
5. Effortlessness and ease
6. There is a balance between challenge and skills
7. Actions and awareness are merged, losing self-conscious rumination
8. There is a feeling of control over the task.

Qualitative analysis of interview data highlighted how being in the creative space also supported artists’ general health and wellbeing. The act of producing art and entering into a voluntary practice based activity where participants were immersed had significant demonstrable outcomes on the artists’ personal wellbeing and life. The following quotes illustrate this:

*“The artwork... it relaxes me and I can really switch into this different kind of place where I’m in the zone of this drawing and I don’t have to really be thinking, I just do it. I just draw so easily and I won’t even realise, ‘Oh I’ve already finished now’, and I’ve been doing it for ages.” (Richard)*

*"It (Room 5) has calmed me down... when I am doing art I don't have to worry about anything else. Whenever I go away I take my paints with me, my friend thought that was hilarious that I had taken all the primary colours and that. I don't go anywhere without my visual diary, and I've got my pens and pencils or something in my bag... (when I visited my sister) sitting in the wop-wops... I had my block of wood and a wee rusty tin as the water thing and she was over there getting drunk. And I was painting her a birthday present listening to Elvis." (Terry)*

Being able to take the process of making art out of the Room 5 context and into participants' daily lives appears to have provided an opportunity for the artists to engage in a positive activity that provides more enjoyment for them than negative activities and some escape from their mental health focus as Max describes;

*"I've found that expressing myself (in my art) is really important, just to stay well and to have a clear mind and stuff like that. And I've sort of tried over the years to do that but I haven't sustained it and I think just because of the supportive environment here is that I've been able to and I've actually enjoyed it which is also very noticeable. I've taken charge of something and motivation's always been a real big issue with me but I'm proactive about doing stuff now, like I do art at home and then I come here and I look forward to coming now." (Max)*

### **1.3 Transforming identity contributing to wellbeing**

Qualitative analysis revealed the transformative process of becoming and/or being an artist and the multiple benefits for the artists through their engagement in art making activities. This was particularly important for those who had previously viewed themselves as having deficit or deficient identities.

The relationship between positive self-identity and wellbeing are well known (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Negative stereotypes or labels can do damage by making people feel they do not belong (Dweck, 2017). Deficit identity, whereby people are viewed as being somehow impaired or deficient, contributes to low self-esteem and low expectations by others, because there is a belief 'damaged' individuals cannot achieve or contribute because they have nothing of value to offer others (Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005).

During the interviews, artists often disclosed personal experiences of harm or trauma (for example sexual assault, domestic violence, childhood abuse). Many talked about their experience of the Christchurch earthquakes and the resulting changes in their personal situations (loss of secure and safe housing, homelessness, job losses, family break-ups). Others described the lifelong struggles they had experienced with their mental health (for example bipolar, anxiety, depression, isolation, self-harm) or with general health issues (pain, diabetes, arthritis etc). For many, they had experienced rejection by social institutions (such as families, social agencies and/or schools), as well as the negative stigma associated with having a label. They had become accustomed to disappointment and so didn't expect, or think, they deserved a good life. These experiences amplified feelings of worthlessness or failure, which in turn encouraged them to socially isolate themselves from others.

Artists described how the process of making artworks over time enabled them to develop more positive mindsets; something very different to the dark, negative feelings they had before:

*"Sometimes I put in my own experience (in my artwork)... it used to be quite negative, but now it's starting to be more positive. It's not such a dark experience... it used to be quite dark (my artwork) but now it's not... I think it's because of where my headspace is in now." (Peter)*

Being perceived by others as being worthwhile and having value is essential for self-esteem and for social inclusion (Hardré, 2015). It was clear from interview analysis that many believed they had developed new positive, artistic identities because of their engagement in Room 5 and the Creative Spaces programme. Being engaged in art making activities enabled these artists to feel more confident. Having a new artistic identity was considered positive and enabled them to view themselves differently; as being an artist, as having a valued contribution to make rather than as someone with 'a problem'.

*"Well one of the tutors said I'm a good artist and I thought gee that doesn't sound like me, but she was saying it genuinely. I see myself as getting more confident with art and more as an artist." (Cindy)*

Having the opportunity to engage in creative acts was liberating and enabled these artists to express their inner thoughts and feelings through art making:

*"I think anything that you do creatively reflects what's inside you. You know sometimes you want to share that with people, you want to take it out, what's inside you and represent it to people. Sometimes it can be a way of showing people how you feel, what's inside you... and it's about identity, finding out who you are artistically." (Sam)*

## 1.4 Selling art as an artist contributing to wellbeing

For many the opportunity to become involved in group art exhibitions was transforming. Selling an artwork strengthened artists' sense of accomplishment, pride and confidence. This provided them with a new self-image; that they were able to make things that were valued by others. Being viewed as an artist, working and exhibiting alongside other artists, was particularly motivating:

*"I had a series of horse paintings and I sold one. Sold my first one, the other one wasn't for sale because I only had two... I never thought I would sell an artwork... I've made heaps more and hoping to do an exhibition this month... it's going to be a whole lot of first artists, like new artists coming up so they can get a feel of putting things in an exhibition, even though we did it as a group. I'm... a new and upcoming artist, yeah." (John)*

*"I never used to paint and I love it now... and I'm amazed people want to buy what I paint... I sold a wee painting at an exhibition at Eastside Gallery... and I loved that exhibition and when I sold it... I was like floating on cloud nine for weeks. It's a good boost because I didn't think I was good enough. And it's the group thing too... that we're sharing our artwork with people too." (Terry)*



Calum Hay, Janis, woodcut print on paper.

*Janis relates to Janus the Roman god of new beginnings, often depicted as having two faces. One forward looking, the other facing the past. I have illustrated Janis as being one side in the day, the other in the night where geometric shapes emerge from the darkness speaking of crazy tribal dreams, a spiritual non-physical state on mind. The night side of Janis' face speaks of the past, of memories, but with the day comes a new beginning, a face yet to be painted, with the impressions left by experience and action. Janis speaks also of the duality of mental illness: well and unwell, crazy and sane, the spiral and lightning bolt versus flowing lines calmly depicting the contours of peace, for after every 'episode' comes a new beginning. So, Janis is a complex being, one side painted by night, the other fresh, unencumbered by the wild cares of experience (which are always a reference), ready to be described by what the day might bring.*

## 1.5 Learning new skills contributing to wellbeing

As well as completing work, the artists commented on how the process of learning new skills contributed to an improved sense of wellbeing. Not only learning new art processes and skills but transferring those to projects in their homes, or other parts of their lives, provided these artists with a sense of pride and achievement.

*"I have gained a lot of skills all just through art classes and having the ability that you can do anything you want. Pencils, pastels, paints, just a whole variety... so now I am planning, I plan it out prior... I am doing the air-brushing. I've started all that by myself." (John)*

*"I've begun scrap-booking again. Sorting out my photos, ordering it all because my stuff's been a bit disorganised you know... I've started reorganising all my craft stuff and thinking, 'Well I can do that'... And I've started making paper flowers... planning my Christmas theme, it's going to be white this year, all white handmade things." (Pip)*

*"I'm a lot calmer than I used to be at home. So, I think (the programme) has helped me here and at home really. I think it's improved me, it's made me a better person." (Sam)*

Artists explained how the process of learning new art making skills had impacted other aspects of their lives, such as reducing smoking and getting fitter:

*"So now... I really like the printmaking and learning how to do calligraphy... that's what I'm saving up for and I want to be able to do that. Well (recently) I reduced smoking to three a day. I was smoking 20 a day. If I was having a bad day where my brain wasn't doing what it was supposed to be doing, I would smoke more. I started using cigarettes as a way of dealing with stress, so now I am trying my best to skip it all together. I run, I exercise, I keep busy... and I'm actually out doing something." (Julie)*

### **1.6 Being inspired to make artwork contributes to wellbeing**

It was clear from interview analysis that these artists felt inspired to make artworks. Seeing diverse artworks being made by others stimulated their interests, which contributed to ongoing engagement in art making activities. Being part of an art making, practice based community encouraged and engaged class members and the connection, or reconnection, with creative interests was satisfying and fulfilling:

*"Well suddenly I have got more engaged. It's been really interesting... I can feel my energy going 'oh heck I like doing this.'" (Jean).*

*"I would never have thought of making a dream-catcher unless, you know, I saw ones that somebody had done here, so that was great. Examples have shown me what other people have done, it's like 'Wow. That's great. I want to do that too.'" (Pip)*

*"I thrive on being pushed, as long as I am pushed in the right direction of course. So, I like to try new things, I love to be inspired... and when you come to class, and you can see different forms of art and it's an actual introduction to something new... because that's why I started stencilling because I had seen a piece of art that (the tutor) had done and it was like 'Oh my gosh that is so cool.'" (Julie)*

*"I've learned how to use my pencils in different ways... (my tutor) she taught me about negative and positive space. So, if you're looking at a tree it's looking at the gaps between other things and the tree... and just suggesting to me, 'oh are you going to try that with colour, or does it look just right as it is?' and 'how about trying it from a different way, maybe using pencil, maybe using pen?...' just being encouraged to try something different." (Pania)*

The reconnection to the arts and art making was transforming and satisfying for those who had previously been creative, but who had somehow lost that aspect of their lives:

*"I can feel a lot of my old self coming back. It makes me realise that I have to be creative if I want to be satisfied with my life. And I've struggled, I've known that intellectually for a quite a while. Suddenly I have found myself with a connection that allowed me to start bringing it (creativity) back into my life." (Jean)*



Melody I B Jones

True Belonging

Acrylic on canvas, stencil

*Written in our souls, depth of heritage and pride illustrated, the leaf bearing such beauty, denoting the truth and passion of the essence of our ancestors. The origin of our Indian genealogical links lives inside of us.*

### *1.7 Accomplishment contributing to wellbeing*

It is not only the process of attending Room 5 once a week that improves the artists wellbeing but also the process of art making and producing a piece of art. Many described this as providing a sense of achievement and fulfillment as they produced work they are proud of:

*“Well for me, I find that coming to Room 5 has really pushed me... and it’s about wellbeing and I think wellbeing is very important and it’s increased my power... and it fills an incredible space for me, because I’m on my own at home. For me it helps bring out stuff that’s perhaps trapped inside and when I go home and look at the things I have done and I’m so proud of my work.” (Vera)*

For some the accomplishment of finishing completed works provided a sense of achievement:

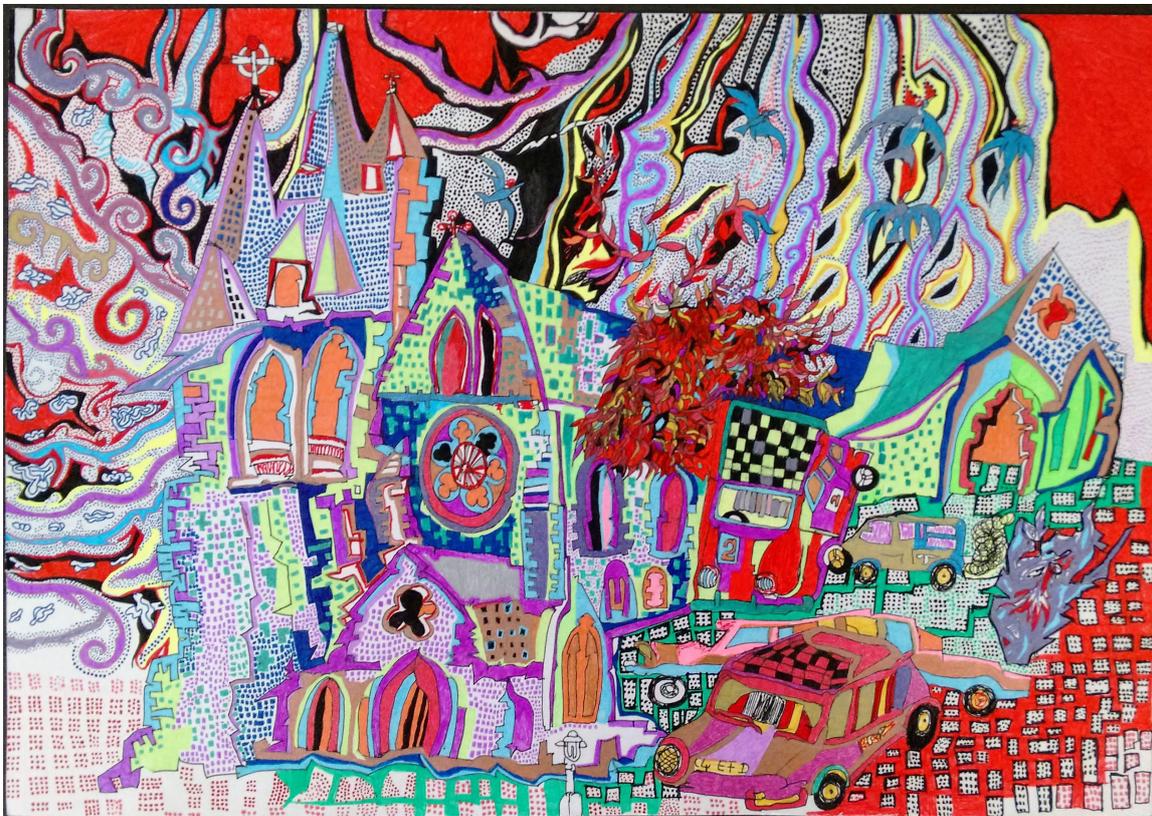
*“I have finished things... I did the weaving and they’ve got that hanging up and I’ve made a start on those cards with wool and I’ve done the painting. I did the pallet knife work – you know that was great. I’ve never done it before. That was in the vase, loved that. I made myself some gift-wrapping paper, just using different dots and that was great... I feel good about what I’ve done and I’m proud of the things I have created.” (Pip)*

Creating artworks for exhibitions gave participants a sense of purpose and accomplishment, whether they sold their artworks or not:

*“(The exhibition) It just felt like it gave me a purpose and I really, really enjoyed making things for that.” (Maree)*

*“We had the exhibition a while ago and that was the coolest thing ever, it was the first ever exhibition I’ve ever been to and I had work in there. It didn’t sell but that doesn’t matter, it was just the experience and there were so many people and it was a little bit daunting at first because of all the strangers, but it was really done in such a good way that it felt safe... and all of us really made a bit of an effort (dressing up) within our budgets and it was so good seeing other people’s artwork. And even the people they invited as guests to do some of the speaking, both in Māori and in English, they were really cool too and it was just an acknowledgment of how the art is an expression from us of what we’ve been through, what we’re going through and maybe even like where we want to go in the future.” (Panía)*

Having the opportunity to engage in creative acts was liberating and enabled these artists to express their inner thoughts and feelings through their art making.



Carmen Brown, *The cathedral and the wizard's car*, coloured gel pen on paper.

*I relate the wizard to the cathedral with the spire and the wizard's car. It's a blessed picture. The wizard has a back-to-front car. I only saw it once. I put the wizard's car in there to make the drawing spiritual with lots of bright colour, metallic and flames to make the cathedral a happy rainbow place. I love the most that the drawing looks quite amazing and colourful - just like the wizard.*

## 2. Social connection and wellbeing

Being socially connected to others is considered essential for psychological and emotional wellbeing (Holt-Lunstad, et al 2015; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). Low self-esteem, depression and/or anxiety contributes to social isolation and loneliness through perceived, or real, rejection by others, which in turn contributes to low self-esteem (Leary, Schreindorfer & Haupt, 1995). Living alone and having few social contacts are markers of social isolation and are strongly associated with detrimental mental and physical health (Holt-Lunstad, et al 2015). The artists who were interviewed often described how socially isolated they were before becoming involved in the creative arts programme:

*“(Creating things) contributes to my wellbeing... it gets you out of bed, it gets you coming here. Because before... I wouldn’t do anything during the day. I wouldn’t go out anywhere. I wouldn’t be social.” (Alan)*

*“(Before) I went into a massive, everyone can suck it stage... and it was one of my attitudes, ‘Screw you all’. That was how my psycho stage went. And I was watching a lot of TV, by myself at home... and kind of watching DVDs, all of them which I’d watch over and over again... and just wasting my day really... and it all kind of went downhill... I had problem after problem.” (Sonya)*

*“I shudder to think where I’d be now (if it wasn’t for this programme) because all of those creative areas were closed down, they were sort of repressed, and I had no area to branch out. I was just like secluded at home and I think my art would have just died with me really.” (Sam)*

It was clear from analysis that many believed their participation in Room 5 activities had enabled them to increase their social connections which greatly improved their general wellbeing and mental health.

### 2.1 Encouragement to make new social connections

Qualitative analysis highlighted the importance of the Creative Spaces programme’s support and encouragement to interact with others. Being part of a supportive art making community encouraged these artists to stretch themselves socially and meet new people. Being able to connect with others in new and meaningful ways contributed to their sense of purpose. This was a strong and recurring theme throughout all the interviews.

*“I think because I am getting so much out of this and there’s a lot of encouragement and stuff. I just feel like I’d like to persevere and maybe keep going and just take it to the next step and things like that... putting some more work out into the public eye... I think just in general my mental health probably wouldn’t be where it is now, I just feel like I have more purpose and connection to life itself. Yeah it’s pretty big.” (Max)*

*“I like being in the class with others, I like having noise surround me, like people... I was a bit nervous at first, but everyone was so nice and it wasn’t a big class and there were lots of tables so I could spread out... it was a friendly environment, it was not stressful at all, after like at least the second or third time, it was fine... and I found this person that does kind of graffiti art and the characters that I loved so much and... they gave me inspiration to start making characters.” (Richard)*

*“Well it’s the various projects that I have on and I look forward to completing those and I look forward to meeting the people as part of my socialisation... I used to be a loner. I still am to some extent, but nowadays I’m more interested in people than I used to be.” (Jules)*

The supportive social climate was evident in all areas of the Creative Spaces programme, and in the daily interactions that artists experienced.

*“I think it’s a really good positive space to be in to be able to create art and stuff... and real, helpful people throughout the whole hub, the lady at the office, they helped us to do the photocopying and what not... and they’re helping a lot more people with anxiety and all different sorts of reasons, illnesses and stuff... and it’s the support, the support from Creative Spaces.” (John)*

Having the opportunity to interact through a shared interest with others who have had similar experiences with mental health was a positive experience for all the artists:

*“Room 5 has helped us because it gives us somewhere to go to be with people who may have had the same type of experiences, who will support us and who will help us with creating this awesome artwork and then we get to even put things together, like the exhibitions, which are amazing.” (Maree)*

## 2.2 Safe connecting with others through art making activities

For people with social anxiety, exposure to safe social situations gradually increases their ability to be able to manage that anxiety (Kawachi, & Berkman, 2001). There is significant evidence that supports Ōtautahi Creative Spaces as a safe place for participating artists to socially connect through art as a medium of engagement. Artists described an improved ability to be able to tolerate social anxiety and manage themselves in new and different social situations:

*"I wouldn't say I've made close connections but that's part of who I am, but whenever I walk into Room 5 people say 'Hello' and that kind of thing and that's kind of a new thing for me, because I'm very quiet and I try to keep out of the way and stuff but it's actually a nice feeling and it's kind of like being connected but within my comfort space, so it's safe connecting for me... and I think people just play a bigger role in my life now and I've realised actually that is probably something I need but in a safe way." (Max)*

*"Well at first I wasn't sure if I wanted to carry on because it was hard being in a room full of people. I found that difficult, but now I don't... (I had to) build up tougher skin, forming a callous, you know mentally I mean... it's good news for me." (Jules)*

*"It's given me that push and that drive to be around people. My anxiety meant that even a year ago if there was more than three people in the room I would have a panic attack and leave, so now I can be in a classroom environment with more people, so it's really helped... I can come to class and be looking forward to it." (Julie)*

## 2.3 Social connection contributing to wellbeing

Increased social connection contributed to participants' sense of wellbeing and this was a common experience for many artists. The process of making artworks in a supportive and encouraging social space enabled them to connect with people who were both similar and different to them. The diverse social activities connected to art making enabled new friendships to develop alongside a general sense of belonging:

*"I've just observed people in the art space and I know there is a log of research on how creativity can help mental health and I just see it every time I'm there (Room 5). I think we can all have some experience of mental health in common but it's not even something we really talk about - just people are there for the art and you can see the enthusiasm in people when they finish a painting or whatever. It's just really awesome to see and if you see it, experience it, then I think it kind of speaks for itself, how important it is for people, with whatever's going on for them, and it does work. I think I'm an example of that." (Max)*

*"For a lot of people this is a place to belong to and in life that's what people need, a place to fit in, to belong to and it's probably the worst kind of feeling to have when you feel you're not part of something. And that's how I felt before, I felt it didn't matter what talent you had if you've got nowhere to go." (Sam)*

Art and art making was the medium which enabled these artists to connect with, and bond with, others. It was the process of art making that mediated the relationships – not their mental illness or challenges. A shared and common interest in art and art making within a supportive and encouraging environment empowered these artists to meet and connect with others:

*"It's social... it's the art, the people, it takes up some of my time so I'm not at home lazing around and stuff... (I haven't missed a day), I've been here every week... I keep coming because it's social, I get to see the boys again... they're all in residential accommodation with (Māori Mental Health provider) ... I used to live there but I moved out three months ago and got my own place. I love it. It's awesome but I wanted to get out of the house and just give this a go and it's been pretty good." (Alan)*

*"The art is helping me... it's helping me, encouraging me to be out and meet other people and to experience new things. I mean it's so hard, in most other cases I wouldn't have got into a class at 9.30 in the morning... because I wouldn't have felt well enough to do it... but this helps me function in a good way." (Pania)*

## 2.4 Improved social connection: Making new friends

Establishing connections that exist outside of Ōtautahi Creative Spaces demonstrates the impact of the intervention (art making and socialising) on participants' lives. New supportive friendships and social connections were established and maintained outside of the art space:

*"I knew nobody here really. So now I've got actual friends that are artists that come here, there's one lady that I go and visit... it's been a big change (at Room 5) they're all very supportive and it's good when you are like pretty lonely and you haven't got friends and social people and it's put me into quite a sociable network. I look forward to Mondays and coming to art... gets you fired up and you're ready to go." (John)*

*“(I have met new people) that was probably my main weakness... my social interaction with people... I was kind of socially isolated and I’m a bit misanthropic... I have problems trusting people so making friends wasn’t my strong point. This year I invited (a person from Room 5) along to my birthday and he came along to my party so I have had a bit to do with him. So, I think the more you get to know people the more comfortable you feel in that sort of space.” (Sam)*

This was significant for participants as they commented on how their experience at Ōtautahi Creative Spaces differed to other mental health interventions they had attended. It appears the purpose of coming together and making art, took the focus of the ‘problem’ off mental health and created a positive opportunity for likeminded artists to connect.

*“Well before... I did try anxiety courses but the art thing’s different. Before I came here I’d just sit at home and pretty much do jigsaws and that was it, smoke pot, do nothing. Now I am never home.” (Terry)*

## ***2.5 Improved social connection: Being someone who can help/Volunteering and supporting others***

Another important impact to emerge from the artist interviews was how the process of making artworks and being involved in Ōtautahi Creative Spaces had encouraged participants to volunteer their time and to reach out and help others.

*“I have given volunteer time at Eastside Gallery... after I came here... that was part of my art sort of social ability... and I have given lots of people advice of coming... just telling them to come and see what’s available and how good it is, how good it is for you.” (John)*

Being an artist and seeing themselves as having something to offer others was essential for participants who had previous social trust issues:

*“I was a bit negative (when I first joined), cynical and I didn’t like being around people. When I saw people, I thought ‘Oh no’. But now it’s sort of like I can actually give help to other people. I can help them with ideas and get ideas off other people, which is good. (Before) I just thought ‘leave people alone to do their own thing’ and then they’d leave me alone... I didn’t trust people. I thought there was nothing good about humanity and it was all selfish... So now I want to be involved, now I want to do stuff that will benefit other people and I can use my art to do that... and it’s kind of scary talking about it because now I’m making it real.” (Sam)*

The supportive and encouraging social atmosphere of Room 5 meant participants were encouraged to accomplish new and different things, such as undertake new study and engage in different community events or activities:

*“(I have achieved a Certificate in Arts and Creativity) I am so proud of myself. I didn’t think I could ever do anything like that. I had a lot of anxious moments but everybody in Room 5 was so supportive and everyone just encouraged me to carry on and then I started encouraging others to sign up to do the course as well... and Sarah signed up for it as well... the encouragement that I could do it... and it helped with (the Room 5 tutor) encouraging me and saying she wouldn’t put me into a situation she didn’t think I could cope with and yeah, I just had to believe in myself and once I signed up that was it... I remember that very first day though, I walked into the room and I burst into tears thinking ‘what have I done?’ But I’ve done it. I passed all four papers... and I’m graduating and even though the graduation’s not until next April in Wellington... I’ve decided that I am going... because it’s a big thing for me.” (Terry)*

*“Also, I went to a woman’s thing at the polytech for self-esteem... I wouldn’t have even gone there to be honest but... because one or two people in my Room 5 class had actually done it... and they spoke to me about it... that sort of encouraged me because I know these other people in my art class had done it and so it must have been safe. So, I was able to do that.” (Pania)*

## ***2.6 The importance of safe, structured opportunities to socialise and connect with community***

The artists valued the chance to connect with the wider community through safe, structured opportunities at Ōtautahi Creative Spaces. Several noted they had attended Phillipstown hub community events and creativity programmes in libraries, and saw the potential to create more opportunities for social connection.

*“We’ve met tourists, a lot of tourists come into the library and I love meeting people from all over the world, different languages. I love one lady, she’s from Japan and we had great conversations and we just chat away while we’re doing our artwork. At the moment I’m making those air-dry things for our dream catchers and we’ve been doing that together and discussing it and helping each other out with that. That’s been great. It’s lovely and I’ve met other people... it’s quite a cool group. It really is, and it changes too which is great and then you get your old familiar faces and I really enjoy that aspect too.” (Pip)*

### 3. Strengthened families and wellbeing

Being a valued member of a family or close social unit is essential for health and wellbeing (Christensen, 2004). Families/whānau and friends can provide important social support for members who have experienced mental illness by valuing them and their contributions and including them in social events. Family/whānau encouragement of positive self-expression can strengthen an individual's psychological wellbeing and sense of belonging (Christensen, 2004).

It was clear from interview analysis that the process of being an artist; of making artworks in the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme and sharing artworks and art making experiences contributed to stronger family connections. This in turn encouraged these artists to feel their art making was valued by family members, which also contributed to their sense of accomplishment and wellbeing.

#### 3.1 Strengthened families through art making activities contributing to wellbeing

Many artists who were interviewed, described how they are now making art works for family members and they felt encouraged and motivated to do this. Family members were described as enthusiastic and thankful for the programme, particularly as they saw positive changes and improved wellbeing:

*"My Mum was really happy (since I started here). I think she was quite thankful for this programme as well because she's seen like... me change... it's kind of made me a lot happier too..." (Peter)*

*"I shared my artwork with my parents and also I had a couple of family members come along to the exhibition... which was a bit confronting but they all had this positive insightful feedback which actually meant a lot. So, it was another way of connecting for me and still being safe... and I think my parents notice the enthusiasm because every week I look forward to Room 5 on a Monday." (Max)*

The process of sharing and making artworks for family members and being encouraged to do so was beneficial for participant wellbeing:

*"This new piece of art that I've started in Room 5 is one for my family. So, it's inspired by the mandala flower and it's for my mother... my mum's very encouraging and my sister wanted to make sure she got a mandala flower... so she's like 'Don't forget about me. I want one too'." (Julie)*

*"I showed them (my family) my artwork and it was my sister's birthday and she wanted me to just make a massive picture and I did that for her, it turned out pretty cool." (Richard)*

Art and art making became the subject of new family conversations and enabled these artists to share their new knowledge and expertise with family members:



Rebecca McNab, *When I dream I see stars*, Acrylic on canvas.

*When I paint it takes me out of my head - it's just me and the paint. It offers an escape from depression and anxiety into a vast space where my mind can wander free. This painting represents escape from the real world into a dream world. A spiritual, transcending never-ending space to explore. No humans, no pain, it's pure beauty.*

*"I went up to Wellington to see my sister and she wanted to know about my artwork, so I told her about it and I ended up sending her a couple of my prints in the post because she had seen my framed one online and on my Facebook page, so I sent her some and she was pretty rapt." (Alan)*

Below, Sam describes the impact of being able to make artworks for a family friend and how this had contributed to new positive social connections:

*"She's a young girl, ...probably 19. A friend of my brother. She has some mysterious illness, got really close to death and they didn't think she was going to make it. She was in the paper and she just miraculously pulled through... And I did a picture of an angel with hope written on it. My brother took that in and then she was so sort of happy about trying to meet me and she wanted me to do drawings and the hospital said I could because the ward... they're going to redo it, refurbish it later next year... So I was allowed to do that... and it was kind of an honour... and she loved it... and I went up and visited her, normally I don't visit people." (Sam)*

Being able to exhibit work and demonstrate achievement to family members was particularly noted and contributed to the artists' sense of accomplishment and wellbeing. This in turn strengthened connections to family members as art making efforts were valued and shared with others:

*"And she (my Mum) was real proud on the night (of the exhibition) it was the first thing of mine she'd been to that I had work in and she said if that one doesn't sell 'can I have it please' because she wanted to have something of mine up on the walls of her house... she asks me about what's happening in the classes and stuff. She's wanting to see all the photos on Facebook... she started following the main Facebook page, the Creative Spaces one." (Peter)*

*"(My friends and family) they think it's really good. A lot of them turned up at the art exhibition, all of my children turned up and even my ex. So, a lot of people came, and they're involved in my life and they see my art... and now they're able to see me express it more. You know I have access to materials that I can use, and I think they're quite proud of it really." (Sam)*

### **3.2 Art mediating relationships**

Interviewed artists described in some detail how the Creative Spaces programme was impacting on their lives; giving them a greater sense of purpose, helping out other family members who might need it and strengthening family relationships. They described how attending Room 5 gave them something to talk about with their children and in some cases an opportunity to connect through making art.

*"I've actually set up my spare room at home to do it (continue with the art-making) ... and seeing something where someone's got something all set up and yeah that's an idea. So, then I did (make something) ... I did two stones for my nieces and they love them... so it was a way to help me connect with them because they're kids under a lot of stress as well and I try to support them as much as I can... so this has helped strengthen my relationships within my family as well." (Jean)*

The Creative Spaces programme provided a positive medium that participants could share with their children. Having the opportunity to talk about, and share, art making experiences helped strengthen parent-child connections:

*"Whenever I get home the first thing I talk with him (my son) about. 'Look what I made today' and he's really enthusiastic about it. It's really good, he loved my pallet painting and he said, 'Let's put it on the wall Mum'. And he sees all the things I have been making because I hadn't done it for such a while, what with the earthquake and things like that. I had put a lot of my stuff away. So now I am getting it out again. But that's good and he's really enthusiastic and encouraging... I'm encouraging him and he encourages me. And I relayed the story of the woman doing the Manga [Japanese caricatures] ... there's a woman in her 80s doing Manga and he was really impressed with that." (Pip)*

*"My son he comes to the art courses that are in the holidays as well. So he's in Dunedin... they don't mind him coming... he's 13 and he loves art as well. So, it sort of runs in the family." (John)*

### **3.3 Educational achievement first in family**

As indicated earlier, being involved in Ōtautahi Creative Spaces encouraged some artists to undertake further study with the support of the staff. Completing courses and receiving certificates strengthened participant identities as an 'achiever':

*"Most of my family have been really encouraging, especially since I completed the certificate, because none of my family have ever graduated..." (Terry)*

## 4. Cultural connection and wellbeing: Expressing identity

Results indicated the interviewed artists were able to express their unique identities, feeling and values as a positive outlet through their art and art making. As explained earlier, the relationship between positive self-identity and wellbeing are well known (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Unfortunately, deficit or pathologising approaches are quite evident within mainstream, social institutions reflecting New Zealand's attitudes towards mental and physical illness. This has been particularly harmful to Māori communities (Bishop, 2011; Penetito, 2010; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). Historically, New Zealand schools and other social institutions including hospitals were designed to eliminate cultural differences and teach diverse Māori tribes to be more like White European settlers (Penetito, 2010). Mainstream programmes of intervention typically reflect an 'anglosphere' context, that continues a colonising presence (Penetito, 2009; 2010). A key concern has been the damaging and lingering effects of racism most evident in deficit theorising, which lays the blame for ill-health, unemployment and/or underachievement with Māori participants and their communities (Bishop, 2011). Therefore, it was essential the evaluation focused on how Māori artists viewed the impact of the Creative Spaces programme on their cultural identity as Māori and general wellbeing.

### 4.1 Expressing Māori identity

Analysis indicated that for Māori artists their engagement in specific, culturally located art making activities enabled them to re-connect back to important cultural values, which strengthened their confidence to re-connect to their whakapapa, their tīpuna (ancestors) and te ao Māori (the Māori world). This expression and reconnection strengthened their cultural identities and improved their general wellbeing. The link between language and culture and strengthened Māori identities is well known (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Māori artists spoke of the kaupapa (wider purpose) of the art making, which extended beyond just the process of making art to a process that involved sharing kai (food) and a whānau approach. They expressed their pride in their work, particularly in the group projects they were involved in:

*"I think that's why I like doing (the artwork) so much because it... reflects my Māori culture and I have to put effort in to doing it.... And we'll all do the dishes, set up the tables and stuff and get a feed out of it... I just enjoy what we get to do here... As soon as we did the first day on our carving that was it, I just kept coming because it was so enjoyable... (In terms of the carving these are two pou that will sit at the gate) So we all come in and for probably the last eight weeks... and it's been a team effort, everyone who comes here on a Wednesday has helped... we all had input (into the design) so it was kind of like a group situation where we had input and then we decided on the concept and the meanings... so that is Maui's hook, so Tangaroa and this is more like the maunga or land. We haven't installed them yet because we have to put concrete and stuff down but it's going to start there where the doors are... it's cool... they look good outside as well. They're nice and tall." (Alan)*

Being able to participate in a class that was directed at Māori and facilitated positive engagement in te ao Māori significantly contributed to transforming these artists' identities and wellbeing. The programme drew on the 'cultural assets' of Māori artists and the communities they come from. This reconnection through a strength-based approach was deeply motivating for artists, and encouraged them to learn more about their tribal connections:

*"It must come from somewhere inside me... it reflects me somehow... (it helps to connect me with my culture) I just love the whole cultural thing and particularly the Wednesday class... it's Māori based... more about Māoritanga and Māori tikanga.... And I had to do a great big art piece, we had to relate it back to our family tree so I actually did my whakapapa... so you know what I say when I get up on the marae, the mountains, my river... my iwi... and it made me realise that I know jack-shit about my own iwi, but I am going to learn... so it's deeper... it's more spiritual... it's the wairua." (Terry)*

Being able to participate in cultural art making activities, led by experienced and knowledgeable Māori tutors enabled Māori artists to feel safe:

*"With (my tutor) he has that cultural knowledge and that mana... just listening to him... I could have listened to him for hours.... Because he was talking about my tīpuna... with the carving that's usually the man's domain and I was worried about stepping on toes with like Māori tikanga... but then I thought he would know and he would have said if it was a problem... you know I could have been there for hours." (Pania)*

*"We've been doing carving with (Tutor's name) from Lyttelton... he's awesome, I like him... " (Alan)*

It's important to note how interrelated the themes are, but also how diverse the interviewed artists were. For Māori artists, the supportive social and cultural context which drew on cultural assets enabled them to engage in cultural art making activities, connected to other related themes, such as participating in a community of practice (refer

to page 21) and the quality of tutor/student relationships (refer to page 16). The programme's ability to provide a strength-based/cultural approach and a safe, art making space for Māori artists to engage was greatly valued and contributed to individual, and collective, wellbeing.

#### *4.2 Art reflecting the self*

For non-Māori artists too, the ability to express themselves meaningfully through their artwork was therapeutic. The artists often described the personal meanings within their artworks and how their art expressed things about themselves, that could be difficult to explain verbally:

*"(I can think of an artwork that reflects me). The piece I call 'My conscience'. That's the bit I am working on at the moment... it's got to be done and I have to finish it... you know as long as that meaning is in there for the artist, because I think the artist creates primarily for themselves at first... it's interesting insight. It can be almost intimate at times, people laying bare their inner selves.... It's kinda hard to explain, ... it comes from within me."* (Jules)

*"My art is part of who I am and really looks into who I am and I try to reflect these different parts. My values as a piece of art, or who I treasure, and what's important to me, because it's all based around people or cultures, people that mean something to me, who have inspired me, to drive me, and that is what comes out in my artwork."* (Julie)

*"My art... it's a real expression of me. I love bright colours and choosing the colours for my weaving and all of that. I love those colours, the purples and the greens and putting up the wooden buttons on it and just even coming up with the title "Pulling at My Heart Strings" ... because that's part of me... that's me – all heart."* (Pip)



Ranui MacDonald, Tahupotiki, Acrylic on canvas.

*Tenei toi Māori, e honore mai tōku tūpuna Māori, Tahupōtiki, tipuna matua o Ngāi Tahu, tōku iwi o Ngāi Tahu, toko hapū kei roto te taone o Ōtepoti, te Waipounamu, Aotearoa, toku iwi matua.*

*This Māori artwork honours my main ancestor (Tahupōtiki) the founder of my main Māori tribe (Ngāi Tahu) of which my subtribe is Puketeraki is located in Dunedin, South Island of Aotearoa, which is the tribe I feel closest to.*

## 5. Community participation and wellbeing

Artists became connected to Ōtautahi Creative Spaces in a variety of ways, often facilitated through community agencies and resource people. They explained how they had been introduced to the programme through police officers and community support agencies, health workers, social workers, the local library, Red Cross, Totara House, their GPs, peer support worker, ComCare and the City Mission Group.

The artists could clearly articulate the benefits and outcomes of participating in the Creative Spaces programme, particularly in strengthening community relationships and breaking down barriers. It was clear from analysis that these various social agencies encouraged them to enrol and attend believing the programme would have beneficial impacts for them. The following quotes illustrate the different ways artists were introduced to the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme:

*“(The police) they helped me and directed me here... they were telling the whole neighbourhood of people that were getting the house, when they give the keys out... so I wasn’t thinking of art when I shifted here. It wasn’t until the policeman said and then I came. I had nothing to do so I wandered around, came and met the ladies at the office and they told me about the art and then I came on Monday... and I have been coming ever since.” (John)*

*“I visited my local library and saw you all sitting there and because I love arts and crafts I was naturally attracted to it and I started talking and finding out what you do and when you met and this other woman who was so enthusiastic about it and I thought ‘Wow. I could do this’. I hadn’t done craft for such a long time so I thought I would come along, so I was really excited, and I was given the brochure about it and I love it. It’s the highlight of my week. I really look forward to it.” (Pip)*

*“My support worker wanted me to get involved with the community so she took me along for a look around here at the hub and I decided I could go to the art class... and I have been coming for a year now and I love it.” (Pania)*

*“I was talking to the ladies who hand out the fruit and vege bags (at the Phillipstown Community Hub) and it came up in conversation and that I had done a degree at Ara and had just finished it and they were talking that there might be some volunteer work. So, through them I finally said, ‘Ok yip, I will do some volunteer work and so everything happened from there.’ (Maree)*

For several their mental health challenges had meant they were unable to work and had nothing to fill up their days. Ōtautahi Creative Spaces provided purpose and structure to their day. While it was a challenge to engage initially the artists described how they settled into Room 5 quickly;

*“Through Totara House, they told me about this art group.... My friend kept telling me and I really didn’t want to be doing nothing for another while... I wanted to have structure and to meet new people. Then I was biking to the bus exchange and I just thought I would come in, so I did.” (Richard)*

*“I spent last year being pretty unwell and I got referred to a community support worker and we were thinking about things I could do in the community and she suggested Room 5. It was pretty anxiety provoking but when I sort of came in and I settled down and stuff I just found it was really welcoming and just sort of felt like a good kind of environment.” (Max)*

While they may have been encouraged to attend by support workers or day programmes, the artists discussed how they came willingly after a very short time of attending Ōtautahi Creative Spaces.

*“It was my social worker, and she told me about this place and so I sort of came along, usually I didn’t venture out much because I was full-time caring for mum, but I came along. I was usually negative back then about most things, so I didn’t usually give things a try, but I did come along and I sort of enjoyed my time here. I don’t miss many days now. I come as much as possible and I’m much more involved....” (Sam)*

## 5.1 Strengthening community relationships/Breaking down barriers

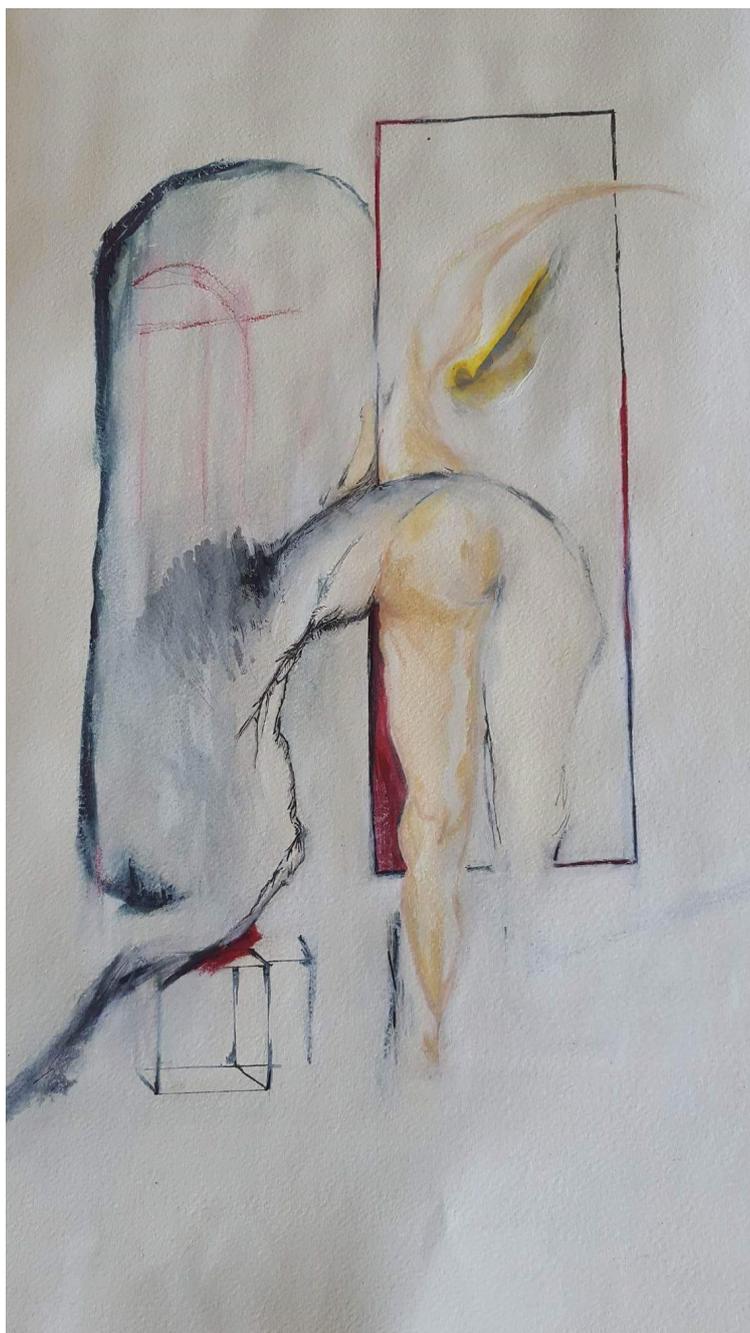
The majority of participants talked about the direct impact of Room 5 and how their participation had positively contributed to their wellbeing. There were also other positive aspects of the wider outreach programme that participant artists spoke about. Analysis of interview material revealed some perceived the programme had broken down traditional barriers and strengthened community relationships. This was particularly evident in the outreach programmes held in libraries. These programmes enabled staff and artists to work on their art alongside one another.

*"I think the library is really keen as a whole to get past that (authoritarian power) and that's why all the big desks have gone, they want those barriers gone and we know there are lots of people who never come and talk to us, some of them don't want to, but perhaps some of them want to and we're too authoritarian to approach. So, we work really hard, well some of us do, to break that down as much as we can and sitting down beside people doing something like this is a perfect way of doing it. It fits right in with what libraries are trying to do." (Jean, Librarian)*

The community art making activities, which police attended, were identified as particularly significant for breaking down traditional barriers and building better relationships. The Phillipstown hub, a centre of community activity where Room 5 is located, offered an opportunity for the artist, extended community and services to come together.

*"I think the programme has helped by showing the kids the police are taking part in community activities in a positive way, so they can understand that they (the police) are trying to do something... and the kids are more understanding of that aspect because they think (the police) they're serious all the time." (Sonya)*

*"I came to one of the weekends they had... where they had like the ICEcycles where they help fix up bikes and art was there as well. I came, and I saw a few people were here and it was really nice, it was like a family day kind of thing and they had over on one side they had like the pottery thing and even the police came along and made an appearance... and that was quite good because they were really nice, they had come and introduced themselves, the ones that were new and it does help make you feel even more safe." (Pania)*



Alex Stobbs, *I woke up this way*, mixed media on paper.

*'I woke up this way' is about the snapshots people see of symptoms of behaviour, and how they influence others interpretations of me in the moment. It demonstrates a physical reality others may observe, but not necessarily the depth of the internal experience of oneself.*

*It also highlights the elements out of one's control, and the impacts of which an individual can let it have on their identity. Art is a way to put my truth in an external and physical form. I experience a sense of freedom as a result.*

The physical location of Room 5 at the community hub meant participant artists had many different opportunities to engage with other community members:

*“I come to all the festivals that they have here, and it’s cool because how many places can you go to where a policeman actually cooks you dinner you know? And nicely I might add. And that’s what I like... it’s all community based.... One of the festivals we were allowed to put the policeman’s jacket on and the hats... and it’s good to see them encouraging the kids and even the adults... I try and come and support every activity, because without the hub we wouldn’t have Room 5... and everyone I make contact with I don’t just advertise Room 5 I advertise the hub as well.” (Terry)*

These community activities created an opportunity for the artists to connect creatively with children in the community in art making activities. Being able to create art and contribute positively was very significant, particularly for these artists;

*“When we had the festival here at the hub and Room 5 was involved... I did a huge mural, sort of pavement art with the pastels and I did the large eternity picture and in the end we had little children getting involved with the chalks and they were starting to add to it and my hands were getting skinned down to the bone... because I was trying to rub all the things in, but that was a success. Lots of people joined in and that was the idea – to get the community involved and a lot of children were sitting down drawing on the ground, all different ages, and my children were there as well. And I liked that.” (Sam)*

Children’s appreciation of the teaching and tutoring in collective art-making activities was emotional and immensely rewarding. Being able to contribute in a meaningful way in these community events and having one’s contribution valued was described by Terry:

*“With the big open day... I was doing harakeke teaching the kids and oh my god, it was so amazing, and this wee girl she did one of those DVD scratchings and she actually... gave it to me at the end of the day because I had taught her how to do it. She made me cry, and I still have that hanging up at home.... And that was the best thing... that she appreciated it and she was only like ten or something, she wasn’t very old but it made me feel quite welcomed... and with the classes one of the new guys that started last week actually liked my collage that I’m exhibiting and so I said ‘Well if you come back we can do one ‘... so we’re both going to work on it together.” (Terry)*

## 6. Post-disaster resilience and wellbeing

Ōtautahi Creative Spaces was originally funded as a post-earthquake support programme. It was apparent from the data that the programme had enabled the artists to take steps on a pathway to recovery from the trauma they experienced in the earthquake. Resilience has been described as the ability to bounce back from adversity and painful experiences and view problems and failure as part of a positive life-long learning experience (Dweck, 2017). Artists described how engaging in the programme had enabled them to feel better prepared and more resilient, particularly after the Christchurch earthquakes.

### 6.1 Being more resilient

Artists described how the earthquakes had impacted upon their wellbeing and they identified how attending Ōtautahi Creative Spaces had helped them employ techniques that supported resilience;

*“I can still have trouble with earthquakes... but the resilience to me is I guess getting through it faster, so getting past that knee-jerk reaction of absolute terror that the house is going to fall down or watching someone you love get hurt... so it's getting through it a little bit faster... so using breathing techniques remembering that you're safe... and yep just taking it one step at a time and not beating yourself up over how you feel... I'm a lot more confident with my drawing now than when the earthquakes happened because I wasn't drawing then, I was basically watching TV, movies, stuff like that... (Room 5) it's given me so many different opportunities that I didn't have.” (Maree)*

This artist described how the experience of making art in Room 5 had contributed to his overall wellbeing which had fed his resilience and ability to be able to get through challenging circumstances;

*“I think for a long time after the earthquakes I was just kind of holding on and just existing... I guess my resilience... kind of grew and the more that I could experience and still be standing up... I think now... resilience to me is having meaning and enjoyment and I think that's a whole new kind of being resilient and Room 5 has fed it. It's been a process that I've sort of personally been going through, and to have a bit of external meaning not just stuff I was dealing with internally....” (Max)*

### 6.2 Living a full life

It was clear that engagement in the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme had nurtured the artists' sense of wellbeing. For Mary, the ability to volunteer and be part of the programme had enabled her to live again and enjoy life, despite the challenges she faced:

*“I've just had my house rebuilt and there's been a lot of stuff around that. And then my job had been disestablished and all that sort of thing. I really needed something to keep my head above water and to help my stress levels. It's one of the reasons why I decided to volunteer and I've asked to come regularly because I think it's really helped, because it feeds and nurtures me... I actually got pretty depressed for quite a while because I couldn't see a future, couldn't see how it would be worthwhile... it's was just like plodding along, really not living, just existing. And for me doing these creative things takes me above survival and into living.” (Mary)*

The earthquakes had severely disrupted some artists' lives and many explained they had been badly affected. Being reconnected to art making and creative outlets was therapeutic, healing and restorative:

*“They [the earthquakes] disrupted our lives a lot and my partner was really badly affected by it and so that was an ongoing effect for us in a really detrimental way. And so that's probably when I stopped crafting. Yes, life just went downhill... we broke up and I couldn't enjoy myself and I didn't feel safe and having depression doesn't help. I feel like I'm coming back because I was always crafty, always making things, I enjoyed it so much and I had forgotten how much I had enjoyed it and how it fills your life with fun and interest and confidence and you feel proud of the things you've made... so that feeling had gone for quite a long time and now I'm sort of thinking, “Oh yeah, I remember this feeling, bringing back all those wonderful emotions – so it's been great... I don't know how long I would have gone on if I hadn't just taken that first step to come to the library. I remember thinking, ‘Oh my goodness and it's free and I can come along every Thursday. Fantastic... I'm there every Thursday. I plan my life around it.” (Pip)*

### 6.3 Managing anxiety

The impact of the earthquakes appeared to be particularly detrimental for artists who struggled with anxiety and depression. Being able to engage in the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme did not eliminate all their fears but it enabled them to feel more confident and to carry on:

*“I got to the stage where I couldn’t deal with going into the city (after the earthquakes). It just made me sick to the stomach... so I kind of had a lot of issues... and I’d get anxiety and stuff. Like I don’t like walking under anything that’s held up by bracing or scaffolding. I don’t like walking under – even though people say it’s safe... because of those reasons from the earthquake... but I am dealing with it. Some days I just have to deal with the anxiety... because it’s just knowing when... enough is enough...” (Sonya)*



Rebecca Yianakis, *Stability is cracking*, woodcut print on paper.

*This piece is about trying desperately to stay stable when you feel like your mental health is falling apart. The cracks represent your mental health breaking you apart; while the bold lines represent pieces of your life slotted together like a jigsaw puzzle – and your stability. I made the girl’s face appear peaceful, to show that even while in the dark, there is always hope that you can get through it and get better.*

## 7. Lessons learnt: Being part of a community of artists. Transforming identities and wellbeing

As Hardré (2015) argues, “Human motivation is complex, internal and interactive. It is also highly contextualised and place-based” (p. 24). People’s beliefs about themselves and their abilities are highly influenced by their social interactions with others within and across different social environments (Hardré, 2015). It was clear from analysis of interviews that participating in the creative art programme provided a strength based activity, which was identified as being therapeutic. The transformation from an identity framed by their mental health issues to an identity of a productive creative artist was significant, and positively contributed to wellbeing.

In the following section key lessons are presented which have contributed to the overall success of the programme, as identified by the participants themselves. The overarching finding was the process of becoming an artist in a highly creative, resourced and supportive community of practice lead to transformed identities and significant improvements in wellbeing for participants. As Cindy, one of the participants so clearly described:

*“It’s given me confidence and made me feel like I am part of a community of other artists.” (Cindy)*

Key interacting elements that contributed to this theme include:

1. A safe, practice-based place to belong
2. The quality of tutor/student interactions and relationships
3. Engaging in the creative process: Getting creative input and feedback
4. The importance of experimentation and making diverse artworks
5. Learning about other artists
6. Access to art making resources
7. Regular attendance over a long period of time
8. The importance of monitoring participant wellbeing

### 7.1 A safe, highly creative and resourced practice based place to belong

Overwhelmingly the artists talked about the importance of belonging to this special, practice based arts community and the impact this had on transforming and strengthening their identities and their general wellbeing. Often as participants talked they emphasised the uniqueness of the programme; belonging to a place that enabled them to practice art making and connect safely with others:

*“I’d like to emphasise the point of belonging. I look at the people here, and some of them, I couldn’t see belonging anywhere else. I think if this place wasn’t here... people would be in a worse place and I know I certainly would have been. I know my view of people would still be dark and cynical and I wouldn’t be able to trust. I can’t say where I’d be. I’d be extremely depressed somewhere... and I just think it would be a shame to underestimate what this place actually means to a lot of people.... Unless you belong somewhere you can’t work out your identity because you’re stuck in a dark place and there’s nothing to guide you. There’s no light shining in your life and you’re alone, and that’s not good....” (Sam)*

Interviewed artists often spoke of a common bond and the special atmosphere of Room 5 whereby they felt accepted for who they were, working alongside others who shared similar experiences;

*“Well it’s not just the art, it’s the friendships you make, we’re all here for a common bond and yeah with my depression... it brings me out of it... and like a lot of us have got mental challenges and that’s a bond too because you know if you’re feeling bad you just have to come and talk to somebody... and that’s the other thing I mean by common bond, you know we’re all pretty much in the same boat, (it might be) different scenarios but we’re one common goal – to be well... and for the art as well.” (Terry)*

*“Everyone else has had similar experiences... and everyone’s working through that as well... like the atmosphere... I think it helps when you’re in a room with people with shared experiences, who have like bonded.... It’s not the focus but it’s kind of in the background and art is the focus and the enjoyment of art.” (Peter)*

*“I hadn’t done craft for a long time. I’ve had some depression and I have missed it (craft-making) in my life and so I thought this was a great opportunity and everyone is so supportive and non-judgemental, because I can be very judgemental about my work and I thought, ‘well this is great because other people are doing it too.’ No pressure absolutely, and it was something I could achieve. It was so interesting what we were doing, while we’re doing the craft we’re talking and it was so relaxing, and I grew confident in coming along and doing more things and learning more things.” (Pip)*

Feeling safer and more secure with others and the process of experimenting with art making was closely linked. This artist describes that as they became more confident and secure in the group they were also encouraged to express themselves more creatively and share their work with others;

*“In the beginning (with my artwork) I restricted myself to rectangles because that was safe. It didn’t matter what people thought of it, I was just abstract but as I felt more secure in the group... with the people I started to open up more and share my faces. I trusted people more.” (Jules)*

It was clear from artists’ interviews that they felt safe and secure in the creative space. Staff worked closely with partner agency staff to ensure this happened. In an outreach programme supporting young people with compromised wellbeing, it was essential staff were able to closely monitor the quality of relationships and interactions, particularly if participants were feeling vulnerable:

*“So health worker is my title... I enjoy having the chance for the students to come in and have a bit of a chat with me here if things aren’t going so well... but also my role can be helping with a bit of screening with some of the referrals that come through to make sure they’re safe and okay, especially with the teachers working with the students who are quite vulnerable, so making sure the classroom is safe at all times... I’ll also have the chance to feedback to clinical teams as well if any of the students disclose anything that needs to be...” (Mike)*

## **7.2 The quality of tutor/participant interactions and relationships**

A key element that contributed to the impact of the programme, was clearly the quality of tutor/participant interactions and relationships. The tutor’s ability to encourage and inspire artists was often highlighted:

*“(My tutor) she’s the one who has actually taught me new techniques (with stencilling). I’d like to communicate but I don’t want to at the same time... but (my tutor) she’s very encouraging and I didn’t even know about the techniques and I hadn’t seen a piece of art like that so she’s very encouraging.... She puts you, she makes you feel like you’re on the right track and you’re doing something and at the same time I know that if I did have a problem that I can approach her. I feel like I’ve got a sense of belonging in the space, she’s very supportive of what I would like to do, she’s always asking me or getting involved and being excited about your pieces of art.” (Julie)*

Tutors were clearly responsive to individual participant needs, showing them alternative ways to make art. It was clear there was mutual respect and artists noted the specialness of the relationship:

*“(The tutors) are just so nice and so helpful and they just teach you different things.... They give you ideas and they’ll show you how to do things that you don’t know how to do... I had this thing with mirrors and photos and she (the tutor) very kindly took some photos of me and got me to do a self-portrait and that helped me a lot because... it wasn’t as scary looking at myself as I thought... and she was brilliant at doing that, she did it in a fun way in terms of taking the photos and it was just magic. I’ve never had people like this in my life before... they made you feel like you’re worth it. That’s what’s cool about this place.” (Pania)*

*“The tutors help a lot because they always give everybody a bit of time or it’s just the fact that they’re willing to acknowledge you, the fact that they say hello to you when you come in. And they know all of our names... I’ve been to other places and you don’t even get acknowledged.” (Cindy)*

The quality of tutor/participant relationships and interactions contributed to artists’ feelings that they were part of a wider community of art making practice:

*“She (my tutor) is great. Yep she’s good and so is (name). They help us, like they teach us how to do things... and there’s this other Pakehā lady that comes in and helps us too, she’s another artist and she sells her work as well.” (Alan)*

The artists explained it was the unique relationship they had with their tutors that motivated them to keep coming back. The art making expertise of tutors, coupled with their understanding of class members’ needs was also highlighted:

*“One of the more important things is my relationship with my tutors. The tutors here are just excellent... in terms of enabling... and it’s partly because of the tutors that I do keep coming. If they weren’t there I wouldn’t feel as though the group had any structure.” (Jules)*

*“The staff here are doing a good job... I just think understanding the people that are here, knowing they are all different and they come from different backgrounds and sometimes they behave in a certain way... and just getting them to focus on art takes their mind off (other things). I try to come here and leave what’s going on, the turmoil at home, at the door and come here and just concentrate on my art, but it’s not always easy.” (Sam)*

### ***7.3 Engaging in the creative process: Receiving creative input and feedback***

The quality of tutor relationships and interactions was discussed by the artists and the importance of creative input and feedback. The artists appreciated the time and effort the tutors put into giving them alternative ideas and feedback on their artwork:

*“I’ve had some input into what looks good and what doesn’t look good and how I could improve my paintings and I realised that abstract is harder than it looks. It’s quite challenging but I do like the challenge.” (Cindy)*

Talking with tutors and receiving feedback on their artwork, strengthened artists’ ability to show their work more openly and seek others input. This improved their confidence to take more risks and experiment with different approaches:

*“With one of my paintings I didn’t know whether to do open eye or closed eye and just talking with the tutors and stuff and getting their thoughts helped me make that decision. Because you had different views about reasons behind each one and it helped me get a clearer view of what I wanted to do.... People think about art differently and it’s interesting to kind of see how everyone’s mind kind of goes because art is so broad... I’ve become more open to showing people (my art-work). I was very secretive about things, no-one can see it... I’d only show people when it was finished... and it was because I (lacked) confidence... and now it’s good to see another person’s perspective of the process as well. Like they may have something that could make your painting better in a way...” (Peter)*

The quality of tutor feedback and interaction with class members was highlighted often and was described as very different to other art making programmes that artists had been engaged in:

*“I did art for two years at a high school but we were pretty much left to our own devices... and I didn’t get the same level of feedback I get here. I find the feedback important – from the professional.” (Jules)*

Contributing to group exhibitions also enabled the artists to receive feedback from the wider community:

*“I’ve put stuff into the exhibitions... there was an exhibition in New Brighton, there was a lady out there with a gallery and I sold two of that print and then there was a second one at the little hall on Stanmore Road and a big exhibition in there... it was awesome, and it looks even better when it’s got a little sticker on it because that means it’s sold.” (Alan)*

For many, the opportunity to visit art galleries and exhibit their work was very new and different, something that was difficult to envisage themselves doing in their previous lives:

*“I’ve enjoyed doing the exhibition, getting in on the group thing... getting feedback... I never dreamed of going to art galleries before... there’s always something different going on....” (John)*

*“(The exhibition) It just felt like it gave me a purpose and I really, really enjoyed making things for that.” (Maree)*

### ***7.4 The importance of experimentation and making diverse artworks***

A very important aspect of being part of Room 5 was the ability to engage in diverse art-making processes. Participants talked about engaging in different art making activities including carving, painting, print making, weaving, sculpture, photography, papier mache, spray-painting and graffiti art. The ability to try new art mediums, and be encouraged by expert tutors greatly contributed to artists’ confidence and enjoyment:

*“Well when I first came here I had no idea what I wanted to do other than art and then that goes a long way doesn’t it, covers a lot of fields. And then one of the lady tutors put me onto prints and I’ve been doing that printing as well as wood-cut printing with the printing machine and that... and I made a series of puppets out of papier-mache... so they’re all a bit different... so (my tutor) threw the idea at me of doing puppets so I thought ‘Oh yeah. That’s a good idea.’” (John)*

*“I’ve never done photography before so it’s quite intimidating. Now I’m thinking how am I going to do the frame, the photographs to make it look good. But she (the tutor) has given us handouts and she’s here every week to help us out....” (Cindy)*

It was clear that many felt challenged to try new mediums and approaches in their artworks. There was a sense of accomplishment and pride in trying something new and succeeding:

*“I now know how to use a printing press, how to make wood-cuts.” (Jules)*

The process of engaging in diverse art making activities and being encouraged to do so, meant these artists could experiment and try new methods out:

*“I’m getting to that point now where I can actually experiment a little bit. Whereas before I was afraid to do that, and I’m not so afraid now and I like trying new things....” (Pania)*

*“I’ve been experimenting with metal and I like to make things with metal, like metal sculptures and that... and making things with the junk pieces that I have.” (Richard)*

*“I’m really thinking about (artwork) and trying new things.... Like I thought I’d have a go at oils and (the tutor) showed me how it differs from acrylics and how you apply it differently... and I kind of got a sense of how it was different.” (Peter)*

This was a very different type of learning experience which enabled artists to develop more confidence and refine their skills, which enabled them to envisage themselves enrolling in other learning programmes:

*“I’m doing photography, I’m doing printing... and I love doing the research... and I’m looking at some of the old movies and seeing how they took their pictures... so I have learned new skills. I think that’s a fantastic thing... I didn’t know how to use a bloody camera... and for me after doing the photography I can see now they’ve got night classes at the high school, now I wouldn’t have thought about doing that before, but I know I can actually tap into that and do that because I have done this... my confidence is growing.” (Vera)*

### **7.5 Encouragement to make creative works: Access to art and art making resources**

Artists described how the tutors encouraged them to explore the materials and resources and to make creative works. This encouragement extended beyond access to tutors and others who supported them. It also meant having ready access to art materials and art making resources as well as extended times in the studio to complete artworks:

*“Well they’ve (Creative Spaces) helped me by supplying some of the art gear like the paints and the canvasses. I’ve bought a lot myself, but I did get some for the exhibition that we did.” (John)*

*“Just having access to the paint and materials... and the tutors....” (Cindy)*

*“They gave me extra time in the studio, so I could finish my artwork for the exhibition... I needed that.” (Peter)*

As indicated earlier, being an artist meant other aspects of participants’ lives were also transformed to support the new identity. As Terry points out below whilst he appreciated the ready access to materials in Room 5 he was also carefully budgeting his own income, in order to purchase paints for his art making:

*“I live on a budget, probably less than a budget and that’s a good thing. Coming here (Room 5) is a good thing because you can do it for free... since I started doing the art thing, I try and budget ten bucks a week and I buy paint.” (Terry)*

Given that the majority of artists were not working and were beneficiaries the access to materials and resources was particularly important. Without Ōtautahi Creative Spaces the artists would not have the resources to be able to produce art.

### **7.6 Learning about other artists**

Another special feature of the practice community was the encouragement of the tutors to research and learn about other artists and their artworks. Learning about other artists and their artistic expressions was inspiring and helped to overcome feelings of inadequacy:

*“I’ve been researching about other artists, German expressionists and woodcuts by German expressionists... I use the computer here... because I don’t have access to a computer at home... so that’s important.” (Jules)*

*“(The first day I came in) I don’t think I did any sketching that day because I sat there and I thought I can’t draw, that was my whole feeling... and it was (the tutor) said ‘Go and have a look at some of the books’, so I got a book on Rita Angus and I so enjoyed reading about her... I couldn’t put the book down... so just reading about the creative process and then someone saying ‘Of course you can’. And so that’s the birth of how I got to be involved in Room 5.” (Vera)*

### *7.7 Regular attendance (over a long period of time)*

Being an active member of Room 5 for an extended period of time (for over 12 months) was particularly transforming for those participants who had really struggled with socialising, anxiety or depression:

*“(Room 5) It’s really friendly and just welcoming really... I struggle with anhedonia which is basically I don’t get much pleasure or enjoyment out of things including socialising.... So, I find it really hard to sustain an interest in things.... But I have stuck with (Room 5) for a year now and it’s just been an experience where it’s such a supportive environment... one of the things I like about Room 5 is there’s no judgement there and they can tell if you’re quiet or whatever, they will still be friendly but they are not going to push themselves on you. So, people just understand... so I kind of pop out and be social for a bit and then I’ll just go back to what I do and it’s a really good environment for me to actually be able to socialise.” (Max)*

*“Room 5 saved my life... I am a different person... that’s what my neighbour said to me. He reckons before I started the art classes, he said ‘I am sorry to say this but you were dead and now you are alive’... that’s what he said a couple of weeks ago... and I realised that you know he was right because I was like depressed all the time, ... I’d be stuck on the stupid couch doing nothing... but now I have a way of getting out... and I would have missed out on everything I have gained in the past 2 – 3 years... I come every week as much as I can.” (Terry)*

Cindy explained it took time for her to learn to engage with others:

*“At first I was at a little table by myself and I was looking over at all these other people and they were all socialising... but I didn’t say anything you see but now I feel like I’m more of the group. And I don’t feel on the outer... People were friendly, it’s just that... I get a bit paranoid... maybe it’s social anxiety. I can think ‘Oh that person is not talking to me’, ... but here that seems to have got better.” (Cindy)*

A number of artists described how transformative Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme had been for them, compared to other arts based groups they had tried. The diverse arts based approach, coupled with the unique, supportive social atmosphere had enabled these participants to stick with it, something which had eluded them in other arts based programmes:

*“I had a support worker and we’d been through a couple of different art groups, but I’d always found a reason not to go back to them and finally we went to this one.... The atmosphere is a lot better, it was different to the ones I’d been to before... there were younger people too and the age group ranged... but it was also where everyone was doing their own project and it’s so diverse... like costume making, airbrushing I liked the room... the room was cool... And it was like bouncing ideas off everyone... and actually doing some work instead of procrastinating.” (Peter)*

*“I have tried other places, like I tried [name of programme] and things like that. And I found the staff there... quite discriminating. Some of the time they were quite mean and... they have an art class, but they were just like a doodle class, it didn’t have any focus and there were like clique groups... it doesn’t happen here, we treat each other with respect and dignity.” (Pania)*

## 8. Discussion

Results from this study clearly revealed the profound impact engagement the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme, and particularly Room 5, had on transforming and strengthening artists' identities and wellbeing. Put simply, it was the process of being deeply engaged in art-based practices that enabled these people to develop new mind-sets, learn new skills, and have pride in accomplishing something different and challenging. The safe, inclusive, highly resourced and supportive psycho-social environment of the programme was also emphasised as contributing to wellbeing. Artists felt accepted and welcomed, despite their personal challenges. They socialised with people who were both similar and different. Their art making was supervised by skilled and supportive practitioners who encouraged and challenged them to stretch their skills and knowledge; research and learn about other artists and exhibit their work in public exhibitions. The different elements of the programme enabled these people to develop new identities as artists and be valued community members. The programme provided a collective arts based, strengths approach to facilitating mental and physical wellbeing.

In the following section we revisit major findings which linked to six programme indicators. These were:

1. Wellbeing
2. Social connection
3. Strengthened families
4. Cultural connection
5. Community participation; and
6. Post-disaster resilience

Finally, we discuss key implications for further development of the programme.

### 8.1 Wellbeing

The development of wellbeing occurs when people engage in deeply satisfying, personal acts that often are seen to have value to others (Dweck, 2017). As Csikszentmihalyi argues,

*“The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times.... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (1990, p. 3).*

The concept of flow emerged from qualitative analysis as a major motivational state (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) as participants described the process of engaging in art making activities as ‘zoning out’, ‘relaxing’ or ‘taking my mind in a different direction’. This different mindset significantly contributed to participant perceptions of wellbeing. For those who suffered from depression or anxiety, rumination over personal problems or medical issues could emphasise feelings of worthlessness or failure. Being deeply engaged, learning about and persevering with artworks was clearly enjoyable for these people, which enabled a new sense of accomplishment and hope.

Another interrelated theme, which linked to artists' new motivational states, was the process of transforming identity; of becoming and being an artist within a larger community of arts based practice. This was empowering for these artists, as they now viewed themselves in new and positive ways. The power of the exhibitions was particularly mentioned as an authentic activity which connected them to other artists and fostered a new collective identity. This new identity as an artist encouraged feelings of self-worth, confidence and resilience; a marked change from previous disabled, impaired or less-worthy labels.

### 8.2 Social connection and wellbeing/Strengthened families through art making/Community participation and wellbeing

Results emphasised the strong relational context and supportive, creative climate of Room 5 and the clear links between strengthening social connection and wellbeing. Artists often described how they felt socially isolated before becoming involved in the Creative Arts programme. It was clear they valued the safe, inclusive and supportive ways the programme facilitated positive relationships and interactions with others, even though this was still challenging for some.

Artists often described how important belonging was to them; that they believed they were accepted for who they were within the Room 5 environment. The highly resourced and encouraging learning space was empowering for the artists who had experienced considerable difficulty in other social settings. They emphasised feelings of acceptance within the Room 5 art making community and an understanding of their personal mental health or physical issues. They also reiterated though that the shared purpose of the space was art making and creative, practice based activities. This encouraged participants to see themselves as practicing artists.

The quality of tutor/artist relationships and interactions was highlighted and significantly contributed to these new, artistic identities. The tutors appeared as ‘warm demanders’ with an ability to connect in safe, supportive and respectful ways, whilst still challenging class members to experiment and try new things. The encouragement to experiment creatively with different techniques and mediums was mentioned again and again by participants. The quality of tutor feedback and supervision, extended artist knowledge and skills also facilitated an increased confidence as artists improved their art making skills and knowledge.

Ōtautahi Creative Spaces was clearly highly resourced. This was evident as artists described their ability to experiment with photography, papier mache, print-making, painting and sculpture and other mediums under the supervision of experienced and knowledgeable tutors. The ability to exhibit artworks publicly and sell and/or give artworks away contributed to participant self-esteem and feelings of confidence. Learning about other artists through research and inquiry and engaging with other artists helped facilitate a sense of belonging and new identity, as an artist. Regular attendance and the ability to engage in the Creative Spaces programme over a sustained period of time, appeared as particularly therapeutic and rewarding.

The opportunity to learn about, and engage in, art making facilitated new conversations and strengthened connections with friends and family for many. Being asked to make artworks for family and friends and exhibiting artworks was notably empowering and greatly aided feelings of accomplishment and self-esteem. The ability to engage constructively with strangers would have been daunting to many before being engaged in the programme. Yet analysis indicated many artists now felt empowered to extend their social and art making skills through engaging in study, volunteer work, talking about their artworks to others and/or assisting others in art making within Room 5.

Other beneficial social experiences included being involved in community Ōtautahi Creative Spaces and Phillipstown hub events which drew others in, such as police, children and other community members. The chance to see and interact with police officers in these new ways was particularly highlighted and helped to break down barriers. At these events, artists were able to volunteer their time, share their new-found skills and assist others with art making. This aided feelings of self-worth through doing something important for others and contributed to their identities as artists and worthwhile citizens. Analysis indicated many participants were encouraged to join the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces programme by other community members, indicating the programme was highly regarded as enabling positive change.

### ***8.3 Cultural connection and wellbeing: Expressing identity***

The artists interviewed for this evaluation were diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, culture and gender. Yet analysis indicated the programme was able to provide culturally safe and responsive art making spaces, particularly for Māori artists. The programme enabled reconnection to te ao Māori, facilitated in group settings by experienced Māori tutors. This strength-based, cultural approach was deeply motivating for Māori artists, and greatly aided wellbeing and identity as Māori. The ability to engage in a culturally responsive and safe place extended to involvement in cultural activities, such as the sharing of kai (food) in group settings. The artworks and art making activities reconnected participants to their whakapapa (family blood ties), tīpuna (ancestors) maunga (mountains) and awa (river). This reconnection greatly aided wellbeing and a deep sense of belonging.

Non-Māori artists too, described how therapeutic it was for them to express themselves and their inner thoughts and feelings through their artworks. Some recounted how their artworks had changed over time, reflecting more positive outlooks about themselves and their place in the world.

### ***8.4 Post-disaster resilience and wellbeing***

Interview analysis also highlighted how artists perceived themselves as being more resilient and better prepared to deal with the challenges they faced in their personal lives. Being able to contribute meaningfully through the programme, through socialisation with others; the process of making artworks for others and/or volunteering with programme events enabled people to feel valued and that they were living a full life.

Experiencing the earthquakes in Christchurch had often had a detrimental impact on participants’ mental and physical health, yet results indicated that many perceived they were better prepared to deal with adversity and were learning more effective coping techniques. Experimenting with different art making techniques, learning new skills, receiving feedback from others and being stretched in new social settings all contributed to the artists’ resilience and confidence, which meant they were better able to cope with other challenging situations.

## 8.5 Opportunities for further development and analysis

Qualitative analysis has revealed many positive benefits for the artists. Being part of a community of art-based practice greatly contributed to their wellbeing. Therefore, continuation of the programme is highly recommended.

This evaluation has focused on programme recipients and their perceptions. It would be useful to gain further insight from tutors and friends and family members, as their perspectives could shed further insight into the enablers and inhibitors of change. Interviewed artists were clearly a diverse group and the programme may have had more positive benefits for some over others. Further investigation could uncover which aspects of the programme were more effective in strengthening wellbeing and what else could be done to enhance this for artists with more complex needs.

Tutors could also provide valuable information, useful for on-going development of the programme as they are intimately involved with participants in the art making activities. It would be useful to understand what tutors perceive as enablers or inhibitors of wellbeing.

As this evaluation was being conducted it was apparent that several of the artists were moving into further study, training and employment as a result of their experiences with Ōtautahi Creative Spaces. There is clearly an opportunity to investigate how art making in a community of practice can support transition to study, self-employment, further training or employment.

Finally, it is important to share the impact and success of the Creative Spaces programme with other social agencies which are working to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of New Zealanders. The unique, creative arts based community approach provides an important and effective method to strengthening wellbeing.

We conclude this report with the last word from Jules:

*"It's a wonderful thing what's being done now, you should come along and sit in for a session and just see how we operate. It's been good for me and I know it's been good for other people in the mental health field... and here's a painting."* (Jules)



*Melissa Redfern, Lost in the wood, I know I could always be good. Acrylic and collage on wooden table top.*

*Ed Sheeran's lyrics were going around in my head from his song Photograph and I was interested in his experience of loving being different from mine. In the music video to the song he shows family photos and home videos of him as a baby through to now. I decided to cover my abstract painting with photos of me as a child and two as an adult in my 20s and late 30s. I ripped out lyrics from an old song book from the 30s and 40s and placed them near the photos. The lyrics from the child (I was at a wedding where I was a flower girl) allude to my vulnerability at that time, and always wanting to be a good girl.*

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# Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Tēnā koe,

Ihi Research are working alongside Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust to research and evaluate the impact of the programme run through Ōtautahi Creative Spaces.

We would really like to talk with you about your experiences at Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust. The talk will take no longer than 30 minutes and will be at a place you choose. To ensure we represent your story faithfully, we will record ourselves using a digital recording device. Afterwards the interview will be transcribed and if requested, we can send back your transcript to confirm that it is accurate.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in this research. If you do choose to participate, you have the right to:

1. Refuse to answer any particular question/s;
2. Withdraw at any time and information you have contributed at any time up until the report is written;
3. Ask any questions about the study at any time during the participation;
4. Provide any information on the understanding that your name will not be used.

All information provided is confidential, any identifying information in your interview will not be used in the final report. The recordings will be listened to only by the evaluation team, any written transcriptions will be securely locked in a filing cabinet or a password protected file for the period of 1 year after the completion of the research and then destroyed. The non-identifying information you provide will be analysed and included in the final report. Upon completion and confirmation from Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust, a copy of the report will be provided to participants.

We appreciate your time and consideration in participating in this important work. Your participation will help Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust improve what they are doing, assist in providing evidence of the value of the programmes run by Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust to the funders and help gain funding for the future. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Nāku noa, nā

Catherine Savage	Wendy Dallas - Katoa
027 7779111	027 940 0829
catherine@ihi.co.nz	wendy@ihi.co.nz

# Participant Consent Form

Full name – Printed: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the Information Sheet and had the research explained to me.

I am aware that participation in this research is voluntary and I understand the information will be kept confidential. Any questions that I have asked have been answered and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. All information will be in a password protected file and stored for a period of 1 year and will then be destroyed.

When the report is completed and has been accepted by Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust, a summary of the findings will be sent to me if I would like.

Please tick the boxes if you agree;

- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.
- I give consent for my interview to be audio taped.
- I give consent for my comments to be included in the research.
- My identity will not be revealed in any part of the research.

Please sign and date this consent form.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide an address/e-mail for a copy of the report to be sent to you:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: A copy of the Interview Questions

### Interview Schedule

Key performance Indicator	Lead Question	Sub questions, probes
Introduction	<p>Can you tell me about how you came to Room 5/NCS?</p> <p>What do you get out of coming here?</p> <p>How were things for you when you joined?</p> <p>What art forms have you had the opportunity to try?</p>	<p>What attracted you to room 5/NCS?</p> <p>How long have you been coming?</p> <p>What do you like about it? What could we do better?</p> <p>How's Room 5/NCS different to other places you get creative?</p> <p>How does the approach fit your needs?</p>
Social Connection	<p>What's the social contact been like for you?</p> <p>Have you met new people?</p> <p>Do you see people from here outside of room 5/NCS?</p> <p>Have you made any new relationships from coming like with the tutors, or the other artists? How does this help with your art, with your wellbeing?</p>	<p>What sort of things have you enjoyed about the social side of the art space?</p> <p>I see that you have made a connection with --- can you tell me about that?</p> <p>Are you out and about more now that you are coming to the art group?</p>
Strengthened Families	<p>Has the art process helped you connect with your friends and family?</p> <p>Do you share your art, or is it personal? Who do you feel comfortable sharing your art with - can you talk about why that is?</p>	<p>(If you know they have family connection) - I have have seen you come in with your (family member) – or I met your (friend/ family member/partner) what do they think of what you are doing here at Room 5.</p>
Cultural Connection	<p>Does your art reflect who you are?</p> <p>In what ways can we see your personality or culture come through in your art?</p> <p>Do you see that in anyone elses art? In what ways?</p>	<p>(If you know they use motifs or cultural content) –“I remember your piece of art that you did that had strong cultural connections - can you talk about that”?</p> <p>If you know they identify as an artist – or their identity has changed over time ask – “How do you see yourself as an artist? Has coming to the art space changed your identity – who you believe you are? Can you tell me about that?”</p>
Wellbeing	<p>How does it make you feel to come to the art space? Can you talk about that – has that changed over time?</p> <p>Can you tell me about how your art has developed over time you have been coming?</p> <p>Does your art reflect the space that you were in at the time you were making it? Can you talk to me about how it has changed over time?</p>	<p>If you know that their wellbeing has improved in some way – ask directly –“ I remember that day you told us you stopped smoking (taking drugs, reduced your medication, became more independent, changed in appearance) – can you tell me about that?”</p> <p>How would you describe yourself when you first joined in, and how you are now?</p>

Key performance Indicator	Lead Question	Sub questions, probes
Community Participation	<p>Since you've joined Room 5/NCS, do you come to other community events - can you talk to me about that?</p> <p>NCS: How have you found coming to the neighbourhood creativity group?</p> <p>Is it easy for you to get to, would you have come into our art space at Phillipstown?</p> <p>How has coming here helped you build up the kind of skills that will help with getting work?</p>	<p>What sort of activities are you involved in – have any of them happened as a result of your work with the arts group?</p> <p>What sort of things are you interested in doing in the community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work</li> <li>- volunteering</li> <li>- study</li> <li>- joining artist group at Room 5</li> </ul>
Resilience following disasters	<p>*Optional</p> <p>How have the earthquakes affected you?</p> <p>Can you tell me about that and how you coped through that time?</p> <p>The funders that support us are really interested in 'resilience' - what do you think about resilience ? What does that mean to you?</p>	<p>What advice would you have for people who might have to go through something like the earthquakes ?</p> <p>How does creativity help you to be resilient?</p>
Other outcomes/impact	<p>Is there anything that I might have missed that you would like to talk about? It is really important that we tell the funders what coming to the art space has meant for you – is there anything that I haven't asked that you'd like them to know?</p>	





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