

Arts in Corrections: a report on project outcomes

- Creativity in Corrections forums
- The Looking Glass Prison Theatre Project

March 2016



“What I want for my future is to live a crime-free, drug-free life, to be there for family and my children and my children's children. I am an expressive person and very creative in many forms and so many levels, so I found the whole experience very uplifting and enjoyable. I'm keen to pursue more of these workshops or anything to do with the arts, given the chance.”

Participant in the Looking Glass Prison Theatre Project



Contents

1. Overview	4
2. Background	5
Funding	6
3. Creativity in Corrections	
Forums	7
Aims of the forum	7
Wellington	7
Christchurch	8
Auckland	8
Feedback from forums and workshops	9
4. The Looking Glass Prison	
Theatre Project	10
Overview	10
Aims	10
Arohata Prison and the CareNZ Drug Treatment Unit	10
Pre-prison artist training	11
Documentation	12
Food and transport	12
The workshop process	12
The performance:	
Come Listen to My Story of Wonderland	13
Evaluation	15
Challenges	19
Recommendations	20
5. Looking ahead	21
6. Appendix	22

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“There is a very complex mix of agendas and goals. Artists need to understand Corrections and Corrections need to value artists. The results can be very positive for both parties.”

1. Overview

In February and March 2016, Goethe-Institut New Zealand and Arts Access Aotearoa worked together to organise a series of Creativity in Corrections workshops and forums in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland, featuring German theatre practitioner Uta Plate.

The project had two strands:

- Creativity in Corrections forums, highlighting the role of theatre and creativity in prisons, strengthen community partnerships, and share and exchange knowledge among community art practitioners and Uta Plate
- The Looking Glass Prison Theatre Project, a seven-day creativity workshop, in the Drug Treatment Unit at Arohata Prison.

The aims and objectives of the project were to:

- develop successful collaborative partnerships between Arts Access Aotearoa, Goethe-Institut New Zealand, The University of Auckland, Department of Corrections, CareNZ, Wellington City Council, SkillWise and The White Room
- deliver three Creativity in Corrections forums in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch, each featuring a training workshop delivered by Uta Plate
- complete a prison theatre project, featuring various artforms (theatre, dance, music, visual arts, creative writing) in a prison in the Wellington region. The project will culminate in a presentation for Goethe-Institut New Zealand, Arts Access Aotearoa, Wellington City Council, Department of Corrections, Creative New Zealand and Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School.

The people in the Arts in Corrections network undertake arts activities in challenging, often isolated environments. The forums provided the opportunity to discuss and workshop the challenges and opportunities they have, as well as build a support network for each other. These events help to ensure the sustainability of these organisations, groups, individuals and projects.

Those who attended the Creativity in Corrections forums greatly appreciated the opportunity to work with Uta and share their knowledge with each other. The feedback was resoundingly positive and everyone was grateful for Goethe-Institut New Zealand’s generosity in supporting Uta to be here and work with us all.





Through the Looking Glass Prison Theatre Project, we provided a training opportunity for artists and encouraged a deeper understanding of how the arts can be used in prison. Despite the challenges, all of the artists involved in the project agreed they had learned a great deal, and that this was an important part of the community to be working in.

During the project we hoped to encourage women to explore and share their own creative identity, support their rehabilitation in the Drug Treatment Unit, and increase their sense of resilience and community connectedness.

In written and verbal feedback, the audience described the performance *Come Listen to My Story of Wonderland* as powerful, raw and moving. With appropriate tools and support, the performers developed their creative capacity and were confident in sharing it with the audience.

The project was a valuable collaboration between artists and prisoners, organisations and individuals, and strengthened a national network of artists, educators, academics and the wider community interested in Arts in Corrections.

Thank you to Arts Access Aotearoa’s supporters and funders. With the dedicated team of artists, committed staff, generous funders and the creative bravery of the 16 women involved in this project, we enabled arts practitioners and prisoners to develop work that is by and for the prison community. We also helped participants to have a voice, tell their stories, and actively engage with the arts.

2. Background

Goethe-Institut New Zealand, in co-operation with Wellington City Council and Toi Whakaari, offered Uta Plate a three-month residency to work in New Zealand from February to April 2015.

In April 2015, Uta facilitated a Move-Dance-Write performance workshop in the Drug Treatment Unit of Arohata Prison. Two Toi Whakaari students observed Uta in this workshop, which received positive feedback from inmates, staff and drama students. The success of this one-day workshop drove the planning for future opportunities for



the women in the Drug Treatment Unit, and for artists in the community to collaborate.

Goethe-Institut New Zealand invited Uta to return to New Zealand in 2016, and Arts Access Aotearoa organised the events and workshops.

Arohata Prison and its Drug Treatment Unit were chosen for the project for two reasons:

- the existing relationship from the 2015 workshop
- the clinical and Corrections staff, who are supportive and engaged with the women and the therapeutic community model.

The staff at Arohata firmly believe it is vital to give prisoners exposure to a variety of artforms, not only to extend them beyond their comfort zones but also to form links within the community to aid release, reintegration and recovery.

Funding

Goethe-Institut New Zealand invited Uta to visit New Zealand and supported her work on this project. Arts Access Aotearoa funded Jacqui Moyes as a project co-ordinator and facilitator.

- Wellington City Council funded the Wellington forum and the Looking Glass Project.
- SkillWise and The White Room hosted the Christchurch event and provided catering.
- The University of Auckland hosted the Auckland events and provided catering.
- The Southern Cross Bar and Restaurant provided subsidised catering for the Looking Glass Project.
- Alpha Art Studio provided a parking space during the Looking Glass Project.
- The Department of Corrections provided the stationery and staff support during the Looking Glass Project.

Eight artists, two filmmakers and an assistant volunteered to work on the project and gained professional development. Their generous donation of time and energy made the workshop a successful community project, demonstrating collaboration and creativity in a challenging environment.



"Thank you for the quality of today's activities. Everyone expressed so much appreciation on all levels of workshop, networking, and information."

3. Creativity in Corrections forums

Each event in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch included practical workshops with Uta Plate, discussions on current Arts in Corrections programmes and projects around the country, and opportunities for people in the three regional Arts in Corrections networks to connect.

These three regional networks include artists and writers, academics, Corrections staff and volunteers, Community Corrections staff, and people in the wider community interested in arts and social justice.

The forums and workshops were attended by more than 110 participants.

Aims of the forums

- Uta Plate, practitioners, academics and Corrections staff will share their skills and knowledge in a mutually beneficial learning environment.
- New Zealand arts practitioners will be inspired and supported to continue teaching creative expression in prisons and the community.
- Active engagement with the Arts in Corrections community across New Zealand, measured by attendance levels at the symposium events, completed evaluation forms and feedback from participants.

WELLINGTON

The Wellington forum was held at Toi Pōneke Arts Centre and attended by 36 participants. The day was opened with a karakia by Awhimai Reynolds (Arts Access Aotearoa trustee and Director of iWahine). Richard Bengel, Executive Director, Arts Access Aotearoa, and Bettina Senff, Director, Goethe-Institut New Zealand, also spoke.

The morning was spent workshopping with Uta, using theatre exercises for professional introductions, learning different techniques for engagement in theatre and movement, and using music and movement in group work.

In the afternoon, three short presentations were given on different creative projects at Arohata Prison.

- Anita Grafton (Clinical Manager, CareNZ) and Stephen Bailey (Acting Principal Corrections Officer) talked about the range of arts activities they use in Arohata Prison, and why the arts and community partnerships are integral to rehabilitation and recovery.



"These workshops are invaluable for those using theatre as a modality for social change, whether it be in prisons or whether it be in the openings and growth of connection in our communities. Thank you."

- Pip Adam and William Brandt presented on the creative writing programme they have been delivering in the remand unit, and how they hope to collaborate with other writers around the country who are working in prisons.
- Marianne Bevan, Department of Corrections, discussed the Arohata Book Club and its current project working with Pip Desmond, who wrote *Trust: A true story of Women and Gangs*. Pip Desmond was a member of Aroha Trust, a work co-operative set up by women, for women.

CHRISTCHURCH

The Christchurch forum was opened by Bev Lowen, who organised SkillWise and The White Room community creative space to host the event.

The forum was attended by 11 participants. Factors that may have contributed to fewer numbers than in Wellington and Auckland include:

- a significant earthquake in the early hours of the morning on the day of the event
- a Department of Corrections training day at Christchurch Men's Prison and staff unable to attend
- the anniversary of the Christchurch earthquake a week earlier. Events are typically hard to arrange during that time, according to Christchurch locals.

Although the group was small, it was a productive day and provided some very intensive workshopping and discussion.

AUCKLAND

The Auckland event was separated into two days. Both days were hosted by Molly Mullen and the Critical Research Unit of Applied Theatre at the University of Auckland's Education Campus in Epsom. There was the Creativity in Corrections forum, followed by a full day of practical workshopping.

The forum

The Auckland forum was attended by 30 participants. The morning was spent workshopping with Uta, focusing on introductions, group work using music and movement, and presenting devised performances.



"Thank you! So great to learn in such an applied way. Amazing facilitation and a great way to bring the community together."

In the afternoon, arts tutors working in the central and northern region prisons presented on current projects and programmes.

- Ann Byford (visual arts tutor) talked about her work at Waikeria Prison and Spring Hill Corrections Facility, focusing on the latest project in the Puna Tatari Special Treatment Unit.
- Stephen Bradshaw (Creative Arts Co-ordinator – Kairuruku Mahi Toi) and Anthony Cribb (Creative Arts Tutor) discussed the visual and performing arts practice at Kohuora Auckland South Corrections Facility.
- Beth Hill (art tutor) presented on her visual and performing arts work at Northland Region Corrections Facility, focusing on the Shakespeare Behind Bars project.
- Uta and Jacqui gave a short presentation on the Looking Glass Project at Arohata Prison.

Workshop

The workshop was attended by 37 participants. Most had attended the forum but there were also new participants focused on community theatre, not specific to Corrections. It was a highly productive and practical day of theatre making and discussion.

Feedback from forums and workshops

Forum and workshop participants were asked to provide feedback on what they would like to see at future Arts in Corrections events. Comments included:

- "One area that's holding us back is funding work beyond our volunteer commitment. I'm beginning to think more about the possibilities of sponsorship, finding a corporate sponsor? But don't really know where to start with that."
- "Host the next event in a prison so the context is clear."
- "Next time it would be good if there could be indigenous art practitioners that integrate culture and art into their work."
- "Hear from the perspective of prisoners who have experienced art projects and their feedback on that."



"I'd like to come out of this completely confident with myself, my shape, my size, my sound."

4. The Looking Glass Prison Theatre Project

Overview

The Looking Glass Project was a rare opportunity for a group of prisoners, clinical staff and Corrections staff to work on an intensive theatre project under the guidance of Uta Plate, Jacqui Moyes and CareNZ Clinical Manager Anita Grafton.

It was also an opportunity for nine Wellington arts practitioners to work and develop their practice in a prison environment. The artists were Jo Randerson (dramaturg); Sandra Schmidt (visual artist); Chantelle Brader and Batanai Mashingaidze (performing artists); Waylon Edwards (songwriter); and Dan James (musician).

In addition, two filmmakers – Rosie Howells and Alice Ralston – volunteered their time to film and photograph the project while Aimee Martin was a volunteer assistant.

Uta Plate directed the production, and Jacqui Moyes co-ordinated and facilitated the project.

Aims

- to provide a training and creative opportunity to artists, Corrections staff and prisoners in the Drug Treatment Unit at Arohata Prison
- to support the existing therapeutic initiatives of the CareNZ DTU team
- to encourage understanding of the impact of incarceration on people within prison and in the wider community
- to enable all workshop participants to be co-creators, using their own experiences and images, and value their creative potential
- to present a short piece of theatre to stakeholders on Sunday 21 February 2016.

Arohata Prison and the CareNZ Drug Treatment Unit

Arohata Prison is one of three women's prisons in New Zealand. It has the capacity to hold 88 women, minimum to high security, and has the only female Drug Treatment Unit in the country.

Anita Grafton co-ordinated the clinical part of the project, designing the framework for how the arts would support the clinical interventions and developing the evaluation. Anita also provided ongoing support for the women during the project, and was essential to the artists working in a safe way and following the first rule of "Do no harm".





Anita said she saw a dramatic increase in the women's self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth.

"Traditionally in addictions treatment we use talking therapies and so the women in the Drug Treatment Unit are used to talking about themselves. But theatre is more physical and we know that body work can spark past experiences on a much more fundamental level. That's what I saw happening throughout the workshop."

The 16 women in the DTU were encouraged to engage creatively over a period of seven days, and presented a 45-minute devised performance to a large audience of invited guests, other female prisoners, clinical and Corrections staff.

Pre-prison artist training

The artists all completed a full Ministry of Justice background check and applied to be a volunteer with the Department of Corrections. Once approved, they were sent background information about the project and working in an Arts in Corrections environment.

Over four days, the artists received a range of experiences and training opportunities:

1. The artists attended the Wellington Creativity in Corrections forum, meeting and workshoping with the wider Arts in Corrections network in the Lower North Region. This provided the opportunity to experience Uta's workshop style before going into the prison, and to understand the wider context of delivery in and around this work.
2. The second day was spent working with each other, experimenting with different workshop styles and discussing what each artist had to offer during the Looking Glass Project.
3. The third day:
 - the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network delivered a workshop for the artists to learn strategies for working with people who have experienced sexual violence or abuse, and how to deal with disclosure and ways to support and reassure people who have experienced sexual violence or abuse



"Doing this workshop helped me push myself. I feel a lot more confident to do things like this workshop."

- discussion of the artists' personal and professional expectations, fears and strategies
- design of a schedule for the first day of the workshop and how we planned to introduce ourselves to the women in Arohata Prison.

4. The fourth day was spent at the prison, undergoing health and safety training and a "getting got" induction, looking at how to keep safe from manipulation when working with the prison population.

Documentation

The project was documented through photographs, audio recording and filming. The women, artists and staff involved with the project were requested to sign consent forms for participation and documentation.

Food and transport

Transport was provided between the city and the prison. This was an important opportunity for the team to connect and discuss the day's events.

Food was provided to the artists. During the Arohata Prison phase, food was brought into the prison. This reduced time spent going through security each day and ensured the artists were well-fed. The artists were volunteering their time so their personal costs were reduced by providing food and transport.

The workshop process

The artists and women workshoped together for five days, five hours a day.

- Morning session 9am to 11:30am
- Lunch 11:30am to 1:15pm
- Afternoon session 1:15pm to 3:30pm
- Artist debrief 4pm to 6pm (ideally, but realistically this extended to 10pm).

The first two days focused on group work, movement and creative writing exercises.

The third day was spent as a dramaturgy day. The artists worked together offsite on content and planning for the performance. Feedback from the clinical staff was that the women needed a day to process, and future projects should include this "day off".



"It's like going swimming and not being able to get back. But with this workshop, I felt the fear and did it anyway. I think we can do pretty much anything and this show kind of proved that."

The next three days were spent developing the different creative pieces to form a 45-minute performance.

Uta led the workshop process but encouraged the artists to deliver workshops with smaller groups, and use their particular skills to engage the women. For example, Sandra (visual artist) worked with two women to create abstract paintings based loosely on the Looking Glass themes.

A performance was devised through a combination of exercises the women completed over the week. They were given writing tasks to do in the evenings and these formed the base of the script. The women wrote lyrics to music and improvised movement based on "flocking" exercises where they had worked intuitively with each other, moving as a "group animal". Dan James (sound and visual artist) and Waylon Edwards (musician) provided backing music and visual effects while the women were onstage.

Throughout the week, the prisoners talked about their reactions to the workshop. They talked about connecting with everyone in the circle; stepping out of their comfort zone; gaining confidence and a sense of achievement; and seeing creative possibilities both within and outside the prison.

The performance: Come Listen to My Story of Wonderland

After five days participating in a theatre workshop, the 16 prisoners performed a 45-minute devised performance, *Come Listen to My Story of Wonderland*. There was an audience of approximately 20 invited guests, 25 female prisoners from different units, and a mix of clinical and Corrections staff.

The women walked through the doors into the gym. Their heads were high, their movements strong. "Listen. I'm inviting you in. Listen. I'm inviting you in," they chanted as they formed a circle to embrace the audience.

There was mime, mask, movement, poetry, drama, music and song as the women shared their stories of addiction. A soundscape, composed by Dan James, encapsulated the 50 or more sounds the women hear in the prison and in their ideal environment. There were rattling keys, footsteps, giggling women, banging doors, children's voices, ocean waves, a V8 revving ...



"One of my lines I had written was 'Open your mind and your heart', and that's exactly what I ended up doing through the process of exploring and putting self-expressions into practice."

In one scene, a woman was trapped far out to sea unable to return to shore. "The more I floated, the more he sucked me in ... Not only did the ocean make me lose my way of life, I also lost myself and everyone I loved."

After the performance, there was a Q and A forum. The audience was able to ask questions, and discuss the process of the week and how they found the experience.

Written feedback from the audience was also encouraged, with large sheets of paper around the edges of the space for audience members to participate in the feedback process.

A prisoner wrote the following piece of creative writing, Swimming in a Glass Bowl. It was performed as a song and also as a monologue within the performance.

Swimming in a Glass Bowl

Once I wanted to be somebody's queen
I'd be one man's everything but
There I was stuck in time, crying, wishing all the while

From far away I could see him, swirling and twirling. I was told he was powerful and would take my life if he could so I would watch the tide come in and out.

My friends would all swim and I wanted to join them so I started dog paddling

Little bits at a time at first I thought, 'this is too cold' and I didn't like it. It was only up to my ankles, and I didn't want to go any further.

One day I thought fuck it and went right in the deep end and then I went under. Instantly I fell in love. I would justify it by only swimming on the weekends. Weeks turned to months. Months turned to years. And I just kept swimming and swimming oblivious to what was going on around me.

Eventually, I went out so deep, I was lost. At first I didn't mind. I loved the ocean and thought I was happy out there all by myself.

I spent so long out there, I forgot who really left me. I started missing my loved ones and try to go home. But I couldn't. I was stuck. I yelled out, but no one could hear. They just thought 'she's ok' 'she's just swimming, she will come back when she wants'.

But I couldn't even if I tried to swim to come back to shore. So I floated not caring where the sea was going to take me.

He had me. Caught in a rip. And made me think I needed him, when I didn't. The more I floated the more the more he sucked me in.



“Ngā mihi wahine mā. Arā ō koutou kaha me te wairua tapu. Kia kaha!”

On the surface it may look calm. Beautiful. But underneath a storm is brewing and strong current will catch you. Like me, if you don't be careful. I lost myself and I didn't know who I was. Not only did the ocean make me lose my way in life, I also lost myself and everyone I loved.

Then there she was.

Standing in the golden sand alone, crying and missing me. Telling me to come home. I knew it was a mistake going swimming in a glass bowl. It's time to go home.

I will leave this ocean; I will leave this king who ruled me. I am my own queen.

Evaluation

The project was evaluated using data collection such as focused group discussions, project records, writing and drawing exercises.

Pre and post-project evaluation sheets (qualitative and quantitative) were given to the women, staff and artists. The evaluation questions for the women were separated into clinical and arts-based feedback. Artists and staff were requested to fill out an evaluation sheet on their experience of the project.

Feedback from participants:

“I feel like I can be more open, be me and feel okay doing so, and it's opened my eyes and my mind to all the possibilities life has ahead. There's nothing stopping me from wanting to do something I've never done and being able to do it. I just did.”

“Well, the Arts Access workshop has been an amazing experience. I found myself growing more confident with each day and really looking deep inside and reflecting on who I am as a person and what I can bring. I didn't expect to have so much fun as I did.”

“Doing this workshop it really pushed me out of my comfort zone, but I really felt the fear and did it anyway, and as a result I came away at the end feeling proud of myself. So as far as my ability to engage in the DTU, I do feel more confident putting myself out there, whether that be with my own personal stuff or just taking risks by engaging in things I wouldn't normally do.”

“It made me realise that Corrections and clinicians really are here to help better ourselves. They're not here to just work. They are here to help us in our recovery. They care a lot. I trust them now.”

“I would like the chance to have more to do with the arts if possible, and to do more workshops and jump on any opportunities to do with any kind of arts that come my way in the near future. To expand my creative nature that I already own on many levels and shapes and forms and express. Creative minds are good.”

“I feel extremely proud of myself. I was so worried about going blank and forgetting my lines so to finish it without this happening gave me a huge sense of achievement.”



"Another part of the project that I think is crucial is giving the women total choice - the autonomy to step in or step out. Just simply being able to choose."

Feedback from artists:

"I chose this particular work because from what I've witnessed it strikes me that the prison experience for prisoners involves the putting on of various masks, so I'm interested in giving them a creative mask/identity for the sake of creativity rather than therapy."

"I was freaking out thinking the women in the prison would be disengaged with the project and it would be a constant struggle to keep them involved. How wrong I could be! I felt like the project was totally embraced and everyone got involved in different ways but also women commented on how they became a lot stronger as a community because of this project."

"As one woman said – and seeing it for myself – was when we first got there and she had her hair all over her face and then at the end of the next day seeing her get up onstage as a strong, confident woman, it actually shocked me. I saw her in a different light completely. It was cool to hear her also mention this change at the end of the project."

"It was just magical hearing the three women sing the song 'Listen to my story' for the first time to the group, and how it moved all of us. The showing itself, seeing the women step into themselves, their power, their confidence, their stories was so profoundly moving, and the standing ovation initiated by the ladies from the other unit, that was just priceless and so well-deserved."

"I am really so grateful for this opportunity. It brought together such a wonderful group of people and I really want to thank you all. Jacqui, Uta, Arts Access, all the ladies of DTU and Corrections. This project has been a surreal and incredible inspiration. I hope we can stay in touch and make something like this happen again."

"The ladies say it's a privilege working with us - I say it's a huge privilege working with them! I think it's safe to say that I've never ever seen a group of people step up and engage with creative processes so quickly, enthusiastically, perceptively and passionately in my entire life!."

Feedback from staff:

"As a Corrections officer, the arts really opened up my eyes to the benefits and contribution it has in terms of rehabilitation."

"I think I learnt about the theatre community and their passion and effort to encourage others to engage in this kind of work. I also learnt the hard work that goes on in making such events successful."

"I learnt that taking someone out of their comfort zone, and putting them under pressure (re the performance date) drew the very best out of everyone, and made the group of women strong, focused, and very supportive of each other."

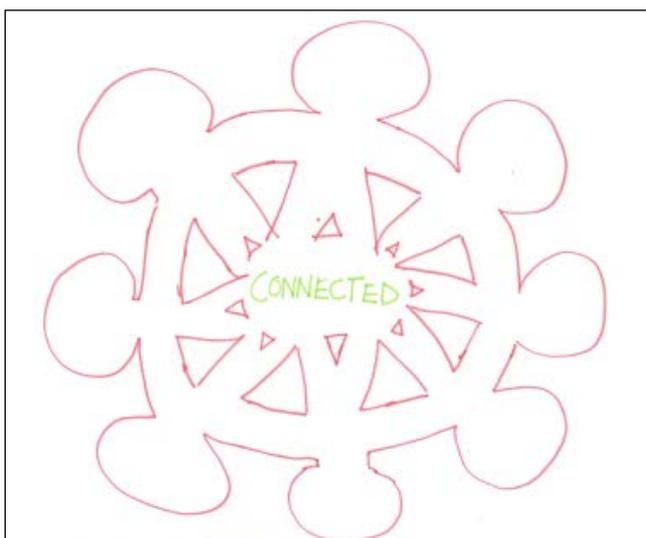
"During rehearsals I was worried how it would all come together, but "it'll be alright on the night" was so apt in this case; everyone involved in the project did outstandingly well – prisoners, artists, support staff, Corrections personnel etc. The final show was absolutely fantastic."



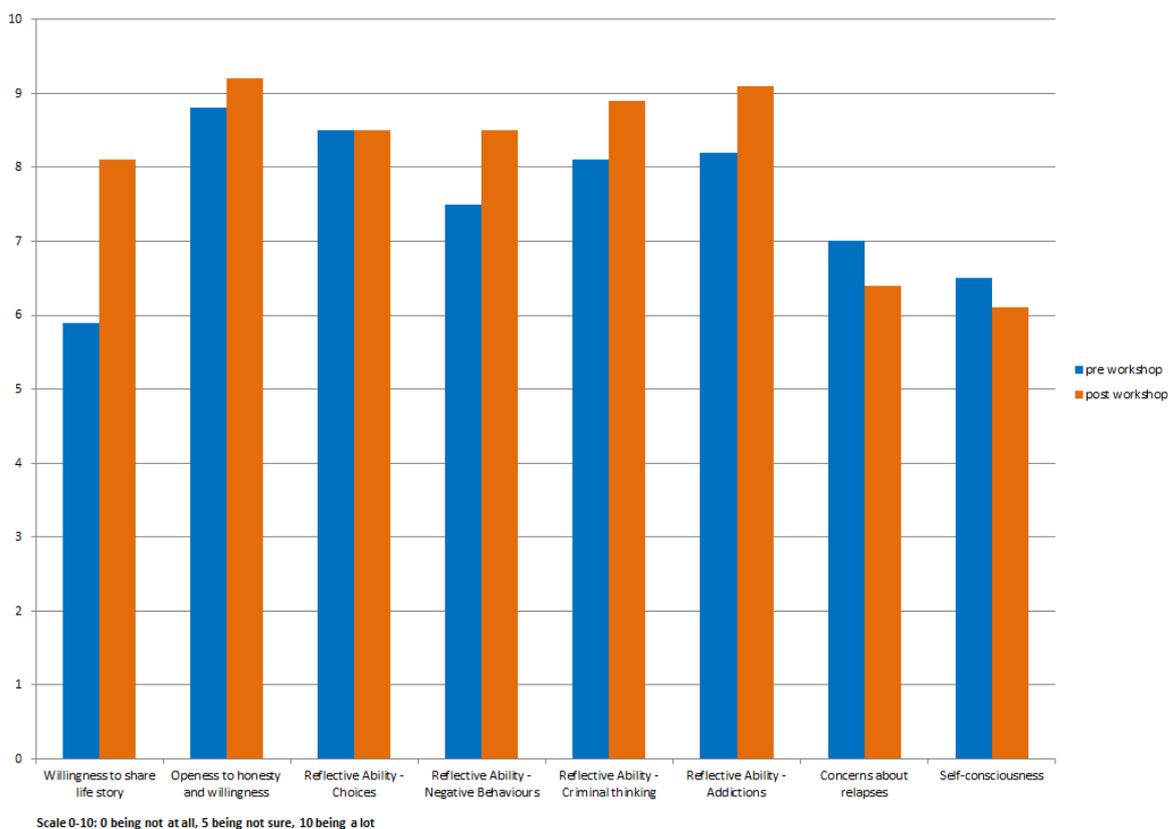
"To begin with I really thought that I had nothing to offer. Then as we got into things I started feeling very different. By the end of the project I felt that I participated and gelled well with all."

Visual evaluation

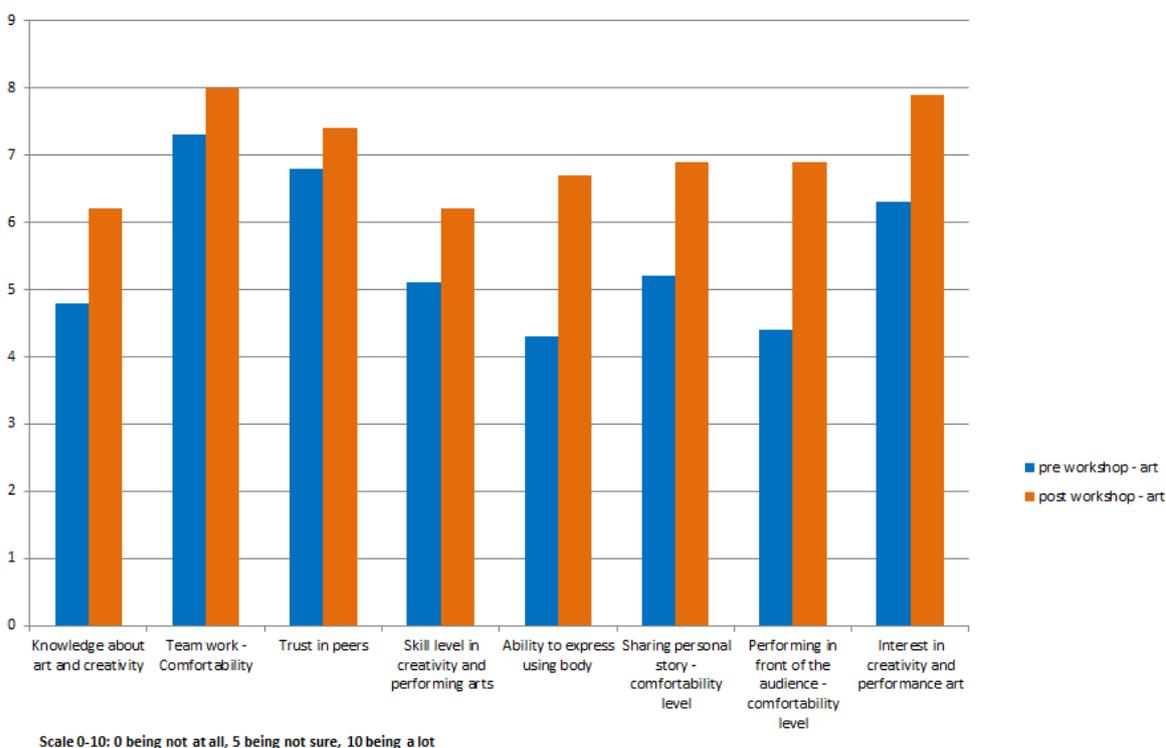
One week after the project ended, three practitioners visited the women and had a visual evaluation and debrief. The women were asked to draw an image that summed up their experience of the project, and add one word that expressed how they felt, one week later.



Pre and post workshop evaluation - clinical



Pre and post workshop evaluation - arts





"I definitely have an interest for theatre now and will search out creative workshops when I'm released."

Challenges

When projects are documented and evaluated in a meaningful way, they should provide opportunities to learn, and to develop the next project more effectively. The challenges are addressed here so we can learn from them.

Department of Corrections

The biggest challenge was the lack of communication between some staff members in the Department of Corrections. On the second day of the project, the facilitator was told that Saturday and Sunday would not be workshop days, and there was a request for the performance to be cancelled.

This was eventually resolved, and the compromise was that we would present our performance at 10am on the Sunday morning.

However, this meant the facilitator was taken out of one of the training days to deal with this situation; several guests were unable to attend given the last-minute change of time; and the women were not given sufficient time to prepare for the presentation of their show.

For artists working with Corrections, delays and challenges can be expected because that's the nature of working in the prison environment. However, timely and clear communication could have avoided this situation.

Participants

On the fourth day of the project, four women joined the group of 12 women who were immersed in the project. Their late arrival to the project, along with a challenging day-long transfer from Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility affected their ability to engage with the group. Many of the women in the larger group commented on the trauma of the transfer process. That the four women persevered and contributed to the show was a testament to their courage, and to the larger group's ability to welcome them into the working circle.

Artists

There was a tight timeframe of availability for all artists. This meant that some artists were unable to attend all of the training days. This also meant that there was not as much creative collaboration between the artists prior to going into the prison.

This project was designed to provide a training opportunity for artists so they could investigate the use of their creative practices in the prison context. Given the time restrictions of the prison and the demands of creating a 45-minute presentation, there wasn't as much creative freedom as anticipated.



"Well, the Arts Access workshop has been an amazing experience. I found myself growing more confident with each day and really looking deep inside and reflecting on who I am as a person and what I can bring. I didn't expect to have so much fun as I did."

This created a tension for the artists as they were there to be trained but also expected to lead the workshops at times.

"I really appreciated the sentiment that was expressed that there wasn't one 'leader' as such and that we were learning about everyone contributing to a whole in terms of leading, but sometimes it felt hard to step up to that because of lack of experience, and to think of what would be appropriate to facilitate in the space."

In future, it would be good to have a longer lead-in time so the artists have more opportunity to collaborate artistically with each other.

Volunteering

The original working schedule for the volunteer artists was extended far beyond what the artists could comfortably sustain. Most artists had other commitments such as part-time jobs and other arts projects or family obligations to navigate during the project.

"One thing that was a challenge was the unsaid expectations placed on us in terms of time commitment to the project, which was significantly different to what was on paper. Obviously theatre doesn't always work to an exact schedule but I felt that in a project of this sort and with the intensity it brings, and also being a newbie to it I was absorbing a lot of new information, experiences and feelings I needed time to process what happened."

Most artists felt the demands on their time were over and above what they had capacity for. The debriefing session at the end of the day was often focused on continued work rather than processing or unloading what had happened during the day.

"The debriefing time sometimes was not used as debriefing and more for planning the next day or scriptwriting, but I wonder if more of a structure around that, and really reflecting on the day together, or even personal 'journaling' time factored into that would help process what happened, and lend impetus to the next day."

In future, artist workload and expectations need to be clearly defined and agreed on in the planning stages of a project.

Recommendations

Given the intensity of the practical work in a prison environment, future prison projects aiming to provide professional development need to:

- support artists financially so they can fully commit to this kind of opportunity
- allow more time for the artists to work together creatively prior to the project



"This performance really showed me how very important it is to facilitate more opportunities for more and more work of this kind. It was invaluable! Thank you."

- discuss and communicate expectations clearly with artists: e.g. possible extension of working time
- focus on quality debriefing time to close the working day in a positive way
- make plans for follow-up opportunities for the prisoners to continue engaging in creative projects, if they wish to.

5. Looking ahead

One of the aims of the Looking Glass Project was to learn what impact it would have on the prisoners' rehabilitation and reintegration process. What would happen after Uta Plate and the local artists left the prison? And what happens when the women are released from prison and return to the community?

After the project, Jacqui Moyes visited the prison and worked with the women and staff from March to June 2016. This continuity was appreciated by the women and at the beginning of May, they asked Jacqui to support them in re-creating the show for the upcoming DTU graduation ceremony in June.

They had support from the Corrections and clinical teams, who organised them to rehearse each Friday and have access to equipment. They had three sessions with artists leading up to the graduation, with musical support from Waylon Edwards and Dan James, and direction guidance from Jo Randerson.

Using pieces from the original production, the women crafted a 25-minute performance called *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. They were motivated and self-directed, navigating group dynamics and working with creative decision-making.

As this report shows, this collaborative prison theatre project highlighted the role of the arts to motivate and inspire change; boost self-esteem; increase confidence; and enable participants to engage more fully with the clinical objectives.

An ongoing issue is the need for a positive community space where prisoners on release can go post release and practise the performing arts.

International research consistently reveals the positive effects of the arts in Corrections facilities. There is limited research on the benefits of the arts in a New Zealand context.



"Yes, it informs my future possible projects. It helps me make decisions about how and what kind of work to bring into a Corrections context."

However, Arts Access Aotearoa has written many stories, and documented and evaluated all of its Arts in Corrections projects. Ideally, this would be supported with funding to conduct research in New Zealand.

A key issue with the project was the lack of financial support for the artists. The demanding hours and intense environment left many of them feeling exhausted and over-committed. Artists must be funded if more projects like this are to be delivered. This is skilled work, requiring high skill levels in a chosen artform as well as self-awareness, and an ability to be fearless and support people who have experienced a lot of trauma. This is not a job to be done by volunteers. It's a job to be done by artistic professionals, supported by clinical staff and managed by Corrections staff with a positive outlook and belief in the possibility of change.

In summary, the Looking Glass Project raises several challenges for future projects:

- the need for continuity when a project is completed
- the importance of community art spaces and groups where prisoners on release can be creative
- the need for local participating artists to be paid.

6. Appendix

Uta Plate:

Uta Plate lives in Germany where she studied cultural education. In 1996, Uta founded the theatre-in-prison project in co-operation with the Ministry of Justice in a juvenile prison in Thuringia. Since then, she has been involved in many theatre projects and workshops involving youth in detention, prisoners and asylum-seekers.

Goethe-Institut New Zealand:

Goethe-Institut New Zealand is the cultural institute of Germany with a global reach. It promotes knowledge of the German language abroad and fosters international cultural co-operation. It conveys a comprehensive picture of Germany by providing information on Germany's cultural, social and political life.

Arts Access Aotearoa:

Arts Access Aotearoa is a national organisation that advocates for people in New Zealand who experience barriers to participation in the arts, as both creators and audience members. These include people with physical, sensory or intellectual impairments, and people with lived experience of mental ill-health. It is the lead organisation advocating for the arts to be used as a rehabilitation and reintegration tool for prisoners.

“It was just magical hearing the women sing the song ‘Come Listen to my story’ for the first time to the group, and how it moved all of us. The showing itself, seeing the women step into themselves, their power, their confidence, their stories were so profoundly moving, the standing ovation initiated by the ladies from the other unit, that was just priceless and so well-deserved.”

Artist from The Looking Glass Prison Theatre Project

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