

Arts Integrated

Most Significant Change Analysis

The Most Significant Change analysis is a qualitative technique that involves collecting stories from the people and stakeholders most closely involved in a service or programme. This technique was implemented to evaluate impacts of the Arts Integrated programme. Those most directly involved, such as the Arts Integrated participants themselves, alongside their families/whānau, discuss the impact of their involvement in this programme. This is a participatory approach; stories are gathered and analysed to determine how to identify and characterise significant changes as a result of programme involvement.

The following sections are divided into the four most prevalent themes, including 'Acquiring New Skills,' 'Self-Expression in a Safe Space,' 'Making New Friends,' and 'Increased Confidence.' These themes were selected based on their frequency of occurrence in the qualitative interviews collected from the participants and their families/whānau. Each domain contains a story chosen to represent the Most Significant Change for that theme.

**(All participants' names have been changed)*

Acquiring New Skills – Pauline's* Story

Pauline, 23, is a young woman who has been a participant in the Arts Integrated programme for two years, having first become aware of it via social media. Pauline reported that prior to joining the programme she and her mother both felt she had very little to do; "I was just bored at home, and I was wanting to make new friend." Art, and performance art in particular, was something new for Pauline, and she felt a combination of nerves and excitement arriving for her first workshop with the programme. However, she reported it was a very welcoming environment, with feelings of nervousness soon passing.

Pauline enjoys the wide variety of activities on offer at Arts Integrated, and has found a particular passion for drama and performing on stage. She stated, "I've encouraged myself to do new things out of my comfort zone.... At first I was scared of going on the stage, but I've overcome that...and I'm enjoying it." Pauline still does occasionally get 'stage fright' but her Arts Integrated practise sessions have taught her strategies for moving past this to perform at her best. A new area that Pauline has been exploring is writing and directing a play. Pauline has been working on this for quite some time, writing independently in her own time but seeking encouragement and feedback from her peers and tutors at Arts Integrated. Pauline is eager to include her Arts Integrated peers as a cast and share this at the next showcase.

In addition to her development of performance and writing skills, Pauline feels she has benefitted from participating in unexpected ways, impacting her life more broadly. She states she feels fitter, less anxious, and better equipped in terms of social skills. Pauline feels she will be able to apply both the practical skills and her increased confidence to her new volunteer job at a rest-home, where she will be assisting the activities coordinator. She is excited to bring inspiration from her time at the Arts Integrated workshops.

Self-Expression in a Safe Space – Oliver’s* Story

Oliver is the father of two young men who are participants in the Arts Integrated programme and have been for several years. Oliver feels that both of his sons benefit greatly from the programme, particularly in terms of developing confidence and having “a sense of purpose, definitely, with the boys having something to look forward to... having a task to focus on.”

A key aspect of the programme that Oliver revisited several times throughout his story was his appreciation for the tutors, specifically identifying them as role models of leadership. He stated, “everything they pass on to the boys they seem to do with a genuine love and affection to everybody.” Oliver feels that this teaching approach, alongside the safe, accepting environment, is reflected in the way the participants grow in their confidence and develop a passion for their craft. “It’s a shameless place, and everything is tolerated, you know, mistakes are made, laughs are had... it’s a really welcoming environment.”

Oliver’s thoughts were mirrored by another parent, Jennifer*, whose daughter has been a participant in the programme for two years. In response to being asked her perspective on the most important aspect of her daughter’s involvement in the programme, Jennifer stated, “being with other like-minded people in a safe environment. Being able to express whatever comes out and not feeling that she’s going to be judged”. Jennifer also agreed that the tutors played a critical role in facilitating such a safe environment, saying that they “give you time to express what you need to express, and encourage and include everybody.”

Making New Friends – Luke’s* Story

Luke, 21, is a young man who has been attending Arts Integrated workshops for three years. Prior to becoming involved in the programme, Luke helped around the house and pursued interests independently in his own time. Both Luke and his brother were introduced to the idea of the programme by their father, who found Arts Integrated online when searching for “something for people with challenges to be able to do something constructive or performance-oriented.”

Luke has always enjoyed music and re-enacting his favourite movie scenes - both of which are activities that Arts Integrated workshops not only nurtured but also developed. Luke discovered new skills in these areas such as different voices, different ways of moving, and new dance styles. However, Luke wished to emphasise that he has benefitted predominantly from making many great new friendships. He stated that “I’m hoping sometime when Arts finishes we can still keep in contact and arrange to meet up.” When asked if he feels if he has changed during his time with the programme, Luke strongly agreed, reporting he has learned new ways to express himself and is happier having so many friends.

Making new friends was a theme that emerged from almost all stories gathered. Pauline reported that during her time attending Arts Integrated workshops she has come out of her “lonely bubble” and into her “friendship bubble.” Her mother agreed with this, adding that there are now more people in her “friendship bubble,” which is a change compared to before she began participating in the programme. Another participant, James, also reported enjoying and valuing the great friendships that had developed from Arts Integrated. He described a particular

friendship, that when equipped with his new artistic and communication skills from the workshops, he had been able to successfully navigate as it developed into a romantic relationship.

Increased Confidence – James’s Story

James is a 23 year old man who has thoroughly enjoyed participating in the Arts Integrated programme for the last four years, upon discovering it online with his father. James’s life prior to joining Arts Integrated was similar to that of his brother’s, spending time independently pursuing his interests at home such as playing video games and uploading gaming-related videos to online media platforms, such as YouTube.

James developed a range of new skills, alongside which he found a marked increase in his confidence. As a result of his involvement, James became passionate about writing, discovering a particular strength in writing poems. Writing was not something James had explored prior to beginning the programme. He has since used this skill to express feelings he would otherwise have not had the confidence to express. “I had a crush on someone... and I couldn’t really express myself because I was very shy, so I had to devise a way to do it in song, and that’s how I express what I feel for this particular person.” Being able to express such a personal feeling musically with this new-found confidence has been wonderfully beneficial; from these new skills, a romantic relationship developed.

In addition to increased confidence in terms of interpersonal skills and self-expression, James has developed confidence in performing arts. A course highlight for James included the opportunity to perform on a stage, and while he does still report some nervousness, he feels that he is well prepared as they “have the best teachers in the whole of the Arts Integrated industry.”

Increased confidence was also reported by both parent interviewees, Jennifer and Oliver. Oliver specified that he has seen an increase in confidence in both sons in terms of their performance skills, while Jennifer noted that she had seen her daughter become less hesitant and anxious about approaching new people, public speaking, and working in larger groups.