



Caring for the future growing up today

Artist in Residence Project Child and Adolescent Health Service including Princess Margaret Hospital and Bentley Adolescent Unit

The Artist in Residence project was implemented to benefit patients of the Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAHS), including children and young people hospitalised at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) and the Bentley Adolescent Unit (BAU).

More than 200 children and young people, ranging from primary to secondary age, worked with Artist in Residence Sarah Toohey to experiment with a range of textile art forms and engage in a creative process.

As well as expanding their skills, participants were able connect with others, find a new way to express themselves and simply experience enjoyment.

The project culminated in an exhibition at Princess Margaret Hospital.



The Garden
- by participants in the 2012 CAHS
Artist in Residence Exhibition

Deciding

Some patients and their families spend long periods of time in hospital, away from the comforts of home. On occasion, they have experienced trauma and stress, and lack the normalcy of life outside the hospital. The project looked to the experience of hosting an artist in residence to offer a diversion from their situation and an opportunity to enhance wellness.

CAHS also took into consideration evidence-based studies that have demonstrated quantifiable positive effects of providing an arts-rich environment in a health care setting.

Preparing

The project was supported by the CAHS chief executive and executive team which ensured that diverse expertise was garnered from across the department. For example, the engineering branch manufactured the specialised displays for the exhibition and the public relations branch helped plan and publicise the exhibition.

Artsource, an arts advocacy agency, helped CAHS in selecting Sarah Toohey as the inaugural Artist in Residence.

The PMH Foundation supported the application of the project and sourced funding through Little Athletics to cover the costs of the resident artist and materials. As a funding partner, the PMH Foundation also provided support with publicity and event planning

The teachers at the Hospital School Services played a key role with enlisting the participation of primary and secondary age children.

Doing it



A young patient creates artwork using fabric as her mum looks on

During the residency, Sarah worked with patients to explore a fantasy land to where they might like to escape. This concept was the driver, with fabric and thread being the medium. How this was applied and what it would become was directed by the patients. All activities were flexible so they could be adapted to each participant's needs and preferences.

The methods and activities for the project were directed, to some extent, by the parameters placed around a child's health care setting.

There were material restrictions – for example, in the oncology ward only new, packaged materials could be used. Sharp materials such as scissors and needles were only used under guidance and kept in a lockable space, and patient groups could not always mix, so as to minimise cross-infection.

To maximise patient involvement, various opportunities were provided:

- Sarah held art workshops in public activity areas like the Megazone and Telethon Theatre where she worked with patients, visitors and family members. She also facilitated art workshops in Starlight Livewire for adolescents and the Starlight Room for primary aged children, which were televised to the whole hospital.
- Primary school patients were invited to Sarah's artist studio each Thursday morning on a rotating schedule to ensure all patients had a chance to visit the artist studio. The studio was open to teenagers each afternoon when the Livewire space was opened.
- Sarah also visited the individual wards to hold art workshops, as well as individual bedside visits for patients who were unable to attend group workshops.



Oncology patients at a workshop in the artist's studio

Participant comments:

"It was so nice to have light relief and just be together." – education assistant at PMH

"You're so busy making sure that the stitch is straight that you're not thinking about anything else." – mother

"It brought us together as a group. Everyone came into my room one day, about five patients, their parents and Sarah, and we worked together. I hadn't met those people before. It was an enjoyable experience." – girl aged 16

As the project progressed, patients visited Sarah in the artist studio as she collected the participants' artwork and began assembling them alongside her own artwork. Artworks were assembled into collective narratives, ensuring all the patients' contributions were included.

The project culminated in a launch and exhibition that allowed the wider hospital community to be a part of the project, while providing participants with a sense of self-affirmation.

Following up

Evaluation of the project showed that the following outcomes were achieved:

- New ideas were generated and new skills learnt.
- Patients spent time focused and engaged in positive activities.
- Family members drew enormous benefits from the project, welcoming the diversion.
- Siblings spending long periods in the hospital enjoyed focusing on creative projects.
- The artist's flexible approach enabled participation over a wide range of abilities, age groups and patient interests.
- The studio space gave patients the opportunity to physically and mentally remove themselves from a hospital environment, with some saying that it felt like they were going on an excursion.



Artist in Residence Sarah Toohey with participants in the Megazone Art and Craft Area