

# DUNDEE



# COMMUNITY CRAFT

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Project Overview	1
Methodology	2
Key Findings	3-5
Recommendations for improvement	6
Conclusion	7



# PROJECT OVERVIEW



## Background

Alongside Glasgow, Dundee has been shown to have the highest rates of drug death misuse over the last 5 years. The Drug Deaths Taskforce published 10 medication assisted treatment (MAT) standards in May 2021 to try to tackle this. They aimed “to improve access, choice and care for people affected by problematic substance use across Scotland”. MAT refers to “the use of medication, such as opioids, together with psychological and social support, in the treatment and care of individuals who experience problems with their drug use”.

## Dundee Community Craft

Dundee Community Craft is a vibrant organisation dedicated to empowering individuals within the community through the art of crafting. With a passion for creativity and a commitment to social impact, Dundee Community Craft provides a diverse range of opportunities including craft education, employment pathways, and volunteering initiatives. Through collaborative efforts with third-party and public-sector organisations, Dundee Community Craft creates engaging workshops that not only teach valuable crafting skills but also foster confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging.

## The Project

During our recent four-week project, we delved into understanding the effectiveness of Dundee Community Craft in fulfilling its aims and how it aligns with the MAT standards. We did this through active involvement within Dundee Community Craft, engaging with service users, and gathering insights firsthand. By immersing ourselves in the organisation's workshops, and interactions, we sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of how Dundee Community Craft operates and the impact it has on its participants. Through direct conversations and interactions with service users, we aimed to capture their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the services provided by Dundee Community Craft. Our project sought to evaluate the organisation's effectiveness in fostering community engagement, promoting skill development, and nurturing well-being through crafting activities, while also assessing its alignment with the MAT standards, specifically MAT Standard 6.

# METHODOLOGY



Over 4 weeks, we attended classes at The Bella Centre (women's community custody unit) and Just Bee (community cafe with a focus on recovery). By getting involved in the classes we were able to observe and understand for ourselves the importance of these classes. By conducting our own research into the evidence behind interventions like this, we were able to evaluate how this service helps to meet MAT Standards.

Dundee Community Craft specifically focuses on meeting MAT Standard 6, this relates to psychological interventions and states:

The system that provides MAT is psychologically informed (tier 1); routinely delivers evidence-based low intensity psychosocial interventions (tier 2); and supports individuals to grow social networks.

Throughout our evaluation we were able to speak to service users and gain an understanding of their experiences of attending the workshops. In the later weeks of the project we were able to ask more specific questions exploring wellbeing, confidence, social effects and challenges in order to further inform our results.



Just Bee, founded in 2016, is a Dundee-based charity combatting poverty. Operating six days a week, they support 120 adults weekly, addressing diverse issues like food poverty and mental health. Using arts as engagement tools, they provide non-judgmental support and activities for those struggling with addiction. They offer one-to-one support, community lunches, arts workshops, and fitness opportunities, alongside pathways for volunteer and short-term employment.



The Bella Centre, which opened in 2022, is a Community Custody Unit for low supervision women and young people. It was designed to offer trauma-informed, gender-specific support, emphasising the development of independent living skills and community integration. There is an aim to build positive support networks for the women in their care as they prepare to reintegrate into their communities.



# KEY FINDINGS



## Emotional Wellbeing

Crafting positively impacts emotional wellbeing by providing a creative outlet for expression, promoting mindfulness, fostering a sense of accomplishment, and facilitating social connections. Engaging in crafting activities can alleviate stress, boost self-esteem, and enhance overall mood, leading to improved emotional resilience and well-being.

When speaking with the service users, we found that the overwhelming majority spoke of the **“therapeutic”** benefits of attending these workshops. The attendees spoke of how they **“enjoyed”** the sessions. One described how it was in their **“diary every week”** and explained that the structure of attending week on week was a positive social contribution to his life. A weekly class provides routine and structure, something which is necessary to promote recovery. Research has found that individuals who are in recovery have up to 16 to 18 hours of new, unoccupied free time as they no longer require time spent for obtaining, using, and recovering from the effects of substances. A participant in one study stated “Having free time and kind of getting bored and when I’m bored, is when I start thinking about using. I try to fill my free time with whatever I have to keep busy.” This clearly shows the importance of having regular activities like the ones that Dundee Community Craft provides.

Participants also spoke of how the activities **“relaxed”** them. In the Bella Centre, one resident explained that the workshop kept **“their mind busy”**, it had helped their **“self-confidence”** and it had a positive effect on their wellbeing. Of all the people that we spoke to, 100% confirmed that they experienced better mental wellbeing by attending these classes. This is unsurprising when looking at the findings from the Arts on Prescription scheme that took place in South West England. Arts on Prescription interventions provided opportunities for participants to engage in community-based arts classes to learn and engage with artistic skills just like Dundee Community Craft does. The study looking at the effects of this scheme (Sumner et al.) observed participants to have significantly improved levels of anxiety, depression, and wellbeing after completion of the programme. The scheme ran in a similar way to Dundee’s, in blocks of 8 weeks focussing on an array of different arts like mosaics, ceramics, photography as well as creative writing and singing. These were all taught in once weekly sessions and the attendees were referred for reasons like isolation or bereavement as well as medical issues like diabetes or coronary care.

# KEY FINDINGS



## Social Cohesion

Crafting fosters social cohesion by bringing people together in shared creative activities. It provides a platform for communication, collaboration, and connection, transcending barriers of age, background, and experience. Through crafting, individuals build bonds, share stories, and create a sense of belonging within their communities, enhancing social relationships and confidence.

When speaking with the residents of the Bella Centre they explained that whilst they may not have been particularly interested in being creative initially, they would **“come for a chat”** and for something different to do. One resident explained: **“The other activities are solely recovery based. It is nice to have something that isn’t just recovery focussed so that everyone can join. Everyone has a totally different experience.”** She explained that other groups would speak of **“life recovery”** (as well as other addiction recoveries such as with alcohol or drugs) and this was not relatable for her. Having a creative outlet that was inclusive for everyone meant she had a workshop that she felt included in as well as the space to talk and she self-reported that this greatly improved her mental wellbeing.

In 2015, Dr Gail Kenning looked at the link between positive wellbeing and craft based textile activities in Sydney, Australia. She found “crafting is an empowering exercise of social agency, providing a sense of continuity and support during life transitions”. Dundee Community Craft clearly empowers individuals from all backgrounds to gather, talk and share experiences whilst participating in a creative and therapeutic activity.



*Social prescribing improves outcomes for people by giving more choice and control over their lives and an improved sense of belonging when people get involved in community groups. It is also effective at targeting the causes of health inequalities and is an important facet of community-centred practice.*

Social prescribing: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK



# KEY FINDINGS



## Skill Development & Wider Impact

Craft workshops facilitate skill development by providing hands-on learning experiences and opportunities for practice. Participants learn various techniques, problem-solving, and attention to detail, enhancing their dexterity and creativity. Through guided instruction and feedback, individuals develop proficiency in crafting, leading to increased confidence and competence in their abilities. This then transcends into their wider life by giving them confidence to face challenges and try new things.

When speaking to one woman at the Bella Centre, she spoke of how attending these workshops has **“increased [her] confidence and now [she] feel[s] like [she] can try new things.”** A different participant at Just Bee described how he learnt **“a bit more about what [he] can do.”** He explained that he was initially apprehensive about attending a jewellery making workshop but once he had settled in, he made his ring and has never taken it off since. He describes the pride he has in telling his peers that the ring on his finger was made by himself. The way in which attendees are able to see the outcome of their work and their improving skills gives a sense of accomplishment which in turn builds confidence. This can be seen when in the 3rd week of our project, an attendee came in and explained that they had enrolled in college for September. He explained that he would not have had the confidence to do so had it not been for the workshops he had attended over the last year.

These experiences display the profound effects that Dundee Community Craft have on building skills and confidence for the individual. Furthermore, classes like these can help reduce the burden on the NHS. The Arts on Prescription study discussed earlier, found that the project resulted in a 37% reduction in GP consultation rate and 27% reduction in hospital admissions. It is evident that these initiatives have the potential to make a huge positive impact on the individual and the NHS as a whole.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## FOR IMPROVEMENT

With increased funding, Dundee Community Craft could significantly enhance its services and impact on participants. Firstly, additional resources would enable the organisation to expedite the outcomes of crafting projects, providing a quicker sense of accomplishment for participants. This accelerated feedback loop is crucial for maintaining motivation and engagement. Moreover, increased funding would allow for a greater variety of crafting activities, catering to diverse interests and skill levels among participants. This variation is key to sustaining interest and enthusiasm over time. Participants have highlighted the importance of being inspired by new projects and techniques, as well as the opportunity for continued skill development.

Furthermore, with more funding, Dundee Community Craft could invest in additional materials, tools, and equipment, ensuring a richer and more fulfilling crafting experience for all involved. Additionally, the organisation could expand its reach and accessibility, potentially offering more sessions or reaching out to other communities within Dundee.

Ultimately, increased funding would not only enable Dundee Community Craft to meet the evolving needs and preferences of its participants but also further its mission of fostering community connection, personal growth, and well-being through the transformative power of crafting.





# CONCLUSION



In conclusion, the positive impact of Dundee Community Craft on emotional wellbeing, skill development, and social cohesion aligns seamlessly with MAT Standard 6, emphasising the importance of a psychologically informed system, delivering evidence-based interventions while supporting individuals in growing social networks.

Craft workshops, as experienced by participants, facilitate skill development through hands-on learning experiences and opportunities for practice. By learning various techniques, problem-solving, and increasing attention to detail, individuals enhance their dexterity and creativity, leading to increased confidence and competence. This newfound confidence often transcends into wider life experiences, empowering individuals to face challenges and try new things. Testimonies from participants at the Bella Centre and Just Bee highlight how attending workshops has increased their confidence and provided them with tangible skills they never knew they possessed. The pride and sense of accomplishment gained from seeing the outcome of their work contribute significantly to their growing confidence and self-belief. These experiences illustrate the profound effects that Dundee Community Craft has on building skills and confidence for individuals. Moreover, such initiatives have the potential to alleviate the burden on the NHS.

Ultimately, the success of Dundee Community Craft in fostering emotional wellbeing, skill development, and social cohesion underpins its pivotal role in promoting holistic health and community resilience. Increased funding for such initiatives not only enhances individual outcomes but also contributes to a healthier, more socially connected society, aligning with the overarching objectives of the MAT standards.

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