

ACHIEVING THE UEA MASTERS IN THE MEDICAL AND HEALTH HUMANITIES: THE JOURNEY SO FAR.

A Blog by Claire Thompson

March 2024

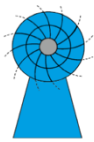
- PGT (Postgraduate Taught) Student – Medical Health & Humanities - University of East Anglia.
- Artist in Residence - Norfolk Initiative for Coastal and Rural Health Equalities ([NICHE Anchor Institute](https://www.nicheanchorinstitute.co.uk/)).
- Community Artist, Creative Health Changer, Eco-Artist
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I was delighted when, back in September 2023, I became the first NICHE (Norfolk Initiative for Coastal and rural Health Equalities) funded Artist in Residence on the new MA in Medical and Health Humanities¹ at the UEA (University of East Anglia). I applied for the funding award from NICHE and was accepted having been interviewed by the Course Director, Dr Harriet Cooper, and Prof Sally Hardy from NICHE.

Having spent the previous six years working as a Freelance Artist, my path led me into the field of Community Arts, culminating in 2023 with producing a Creative Health project that supported the wellbeing of fellow artists who live and work in Great Yarmouth. So much interest has been achieved over the last few years linking Creative engagement with health and wellbeing outcomes. Now in our area, we have multiple opportunities to explore and promote mind and health expanding process of living creative lives. If you look at the Norfolk

¹ <https://www.uea.ac.uk/course/postgraduate/ma-medical-and-health-humanities>



Collaborative for Arts, Health, and Heritage² website you can keep up to date on events and other project activities occurring in our local landscape which has been an initiative achieved between NICHE and other collaborating partners such as Restoration Trust, and Norwich University of Arts.

I thoroughly enjoyed producing the community project, and I realised that with the emergence of the Social Prescribing Model (Kings Fund, 2017/2020) and the emergence of Creative Health being more accepted and recognised, which has progressed rapidly following the all-party report³ *Culture, health, and Wellbeing*, (July 2017).

I saw there was an opportunity to take my project and creative ideas further and desire to become an advocate for radical change within the Community Arts sector. However, to understand how best to achieve that ambition, and to upgrade my knowledge, skills and understanding of the Creative Health sector, the new MA Medical and Health Humanities offered me the perfect solution.

The first semester has been all about settling in; both to my new academic surroundings coming twice a week to the UEA campus, but equally to academic life and the joys and challenges that presents. The initial modules have been both engaging and inspiring, learning about current developments within *Arts & Health*, how *Narrative influences Health and Healthcare*, and how the field of Medicine evolved and its intersection with other fields such as *Race, Gender, and Disability* studies. My second semester has seen me engage with new modules on *Policy Implementation and Evaluation*, and *Gender and Power*, alongside preparing for my dissertation, so it is all go!!

Throughout my studies I have been utilising my creative background to engage with my learning in new ways and to explore how this approach could benefit myself and others within academic study. My primary approach has been to undertake creative journaling⁴.

I do this each week where I intentionally put some time aside to sit down with my thoughts and creatively explore them within the pages of my journal. For example, the image of flowers included above is a page from my journal achieved just before I came back onto campus for my second semester. I was hopeful and excited to continue my learning.

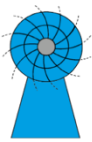
The learning I have undertaken so far on the MA has allowed me to progress my thinking about the myriad of crossovers between Arts and Health. From the active research being undertaken within the field, (Fancourt, 2017) to the ways in which the brain responds to creative activity and it's connection to health (Magsamen & Ross, 2023) have been both a revelation and an area of fascination which the course has allowed, and enabled me to explore more fully to inform my own practice and share that learning with others.

I would advise anyone currently interested in blending arts and health, firstly to undertake this MA, but if that is not feasible then to develop an understanding of narrative, with its implications for both personal practice and equally within society. To put it simply, the way we

² <https://norfolkartsandhealth.com>

³ <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>

⁴ <https://theplanneraddict.com/what-is-a-creative-journal/>



speak, the language we use, how we develop meaning and the ways in which this interacts with both our professional practice, our lived experience, and our personhood, has implications for our health and how we access and engage with the healthcare currently being delivered in society. The Lancet (linked in the further reading section below) is a journal that has been a wealth of credible information about Narrative and many other aspects that makes it a useful source of evidence-based information from where to begin your learning in this area.

I am excited about the possibilities for implementing my learning and developing radical frameworks for optimising workplace well-being, within the fields of Health and Healthcare and advocating and encouraging the cross-sector working needed to enable these frameworks to function effectively. I keep NICHE members updated and continue to think about where and how my learning can inform future initiatives and innovations in creative engagements for health.

For the first time I am offering a creative journaling workshop in the School of Health Sciences Creativity and Wellbeing week (May 21-27th, 2024), so get in touch if you would like to attend that workshop as a starting point on your own creative reflection practice.

References

Fancourt, D. (2017). *Arts in health: designing and researching interventions*. Oxford University Press.

Magsamen, S., & Ross, I. (2023). *Your brain on art: How the arts transform us*. Random House.

Further Reading

[Daisy Fancourt Profile | University College London \(ucl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/daisy-fancourt)

When art enlivens your sense: [Your Brain on Art](#)

The Lancet series on [Narrative medicine, narrative practice, and the creation of meaning - The Lancet](#)

Creative Lives (July 2017) available via <https://www.creative-lives.org/news/60-new-creative-projects-across-england-benefit-from-creative-lives-know-your-neighbourhood-grants>. Kings Fund, Social Prescribing report (2017 updated 2020) <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/social-prescribing>

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