



## Embedding Evaluation Creatively: Identity, Self-Portraits & Wellbeing

### A case study from Community Culture Club at the Museum of Norwich

Community Culture Club is co-delivered by: Susie Childerhouse (Artist Facilitator), Rosalind Hewett (Programme Lead), and Holly Sandiford (Creative Evaluator) on behalf of Norfolk Museums Service

Community Culture Club is a creative wellbeing programme for older adults (65+) inclusive of those living with a dementia, carers, people with long-term health conditions, and those who are lonely or socially isolated. Participants do not need to have a diagnosis of dementia to join the group, carers can either come alone or with the person they care for, and we do not ask for evidence of any of the criteria. Community Culture Club is based at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell part of Norfolk Museums Service (NMS). It is a fixed-term programme of ten sessions and runs once a year, from November to February. Each of the ten sessions is themed around an object or objects in the museum's collections.

Thanks to Kintsugi Project funding from NICHE<sup>1</sup>, staff working on Community Culture Club have been able to explore creative practice to embed evaluation within each of the sessions. Our programme aims and session plans are based on the five ways to wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> It has been hugely meaningful for us to work with artist and evaluator Holly Sandiford to devise evaluation tools that also play a part in contributing to improving participant wellbeing. The purpose of this blog post is to demonstrate what that looks like in one of our sessions. We want to share our practice with as many people as possible, and we hope you'll be encouraged to have a go at using some of our ideas.

The tenth and final session of the programme is provided in detail here (see box 1 below), where we explore self-portraiture, identity, and celebrate the whole journey we have been on as a group

#### Community Culture Club Session 10

##### 'Portraiture'

**Landing Place**, 30 minutes (sketching faces) -> **Object Exploration**, 30 minutes (discussing portraits from NMS collections) -> **Craft**, 30 minutes (making a polaroid self-portrait) -> **Creative Evaluation**, 15 minutes (creating a collage portrait) -> **Closing**, 15 minutes (exhibition)

**Box 1: Community Club Session 10. Portraiture an overview. Norwich Museums**

#### 1: Landing Place

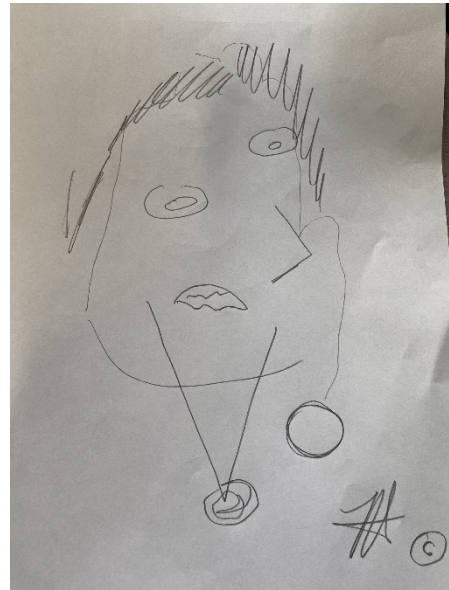
Our sessions always starting with a *landing place* activity. This is an introductory gentle craft or activity, that allows participants time and space to gradually arrive and settle into the museum and session space, aiming to shed and shake off any of the worries and stresses of the outside world. We always serve tea and coffee, and check in with participants as they arrive, facilitating conversation between the group. By the final week this requires little effort on our part, as the participants initiate

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uea.ac.uk/groups-and-centres/projects/niche/news/niche-kintsugi-and-mini-kintsugi-projects>

<sup>2</sup> [5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS](#)

conversations with each other, as they are getting more familiar with the surroundings and other group members.

In week ten, *landing place* introduces the session's theme of portraiture, whilst linking to the important aim of creating connections between participants. Each participant is given a piece of paper and a pencil and asked to pick someone else across the room. You then have one minute to draw their face. The twist is that you aren't allowed to look at your paper as you draw. This removes the mental barrier of trying to create an artwork that is perfect or realistic. The time pressure puts everyone on an equal footing, and the results lead to a whole lot of laughter, especially as you try and guess who is who. Running this activity a few times over means everyone gets at least one portrait drawn of them, which helps the sense of belonging within the group.



**Image 1: Rosalind, by F**

## 2: Object Exploration

What makes the heritage setting unique for running a group like this is the access to museum collections. Norfolk Museums Service has over three million objects in its collections, each one with a unique story to tell. In this portraiture and identity session we have pre-selected six images of people to explore with the group. As we look at the portraits, we discuss what the image tells us about the subject, we talk about the social history of each image, and we explore our emotional reactions to the images.

**Photograph 1: (L) Participants looking at a printed image of *Boy at Marbles (Henry Cotman)*<sup>3</sup> by John Sell Cotman (1808)**

**Photograph 2: (R) Susie talking to participants in front of the portrait of Sir John Pettus (1549/50-1614), Mayor of Norwich 1608 (1612)<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> [Collections object page - Museums Collections - Norfolk Museums Service](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Collections object page - Museums Collections - Norfolk Museums Service](#)

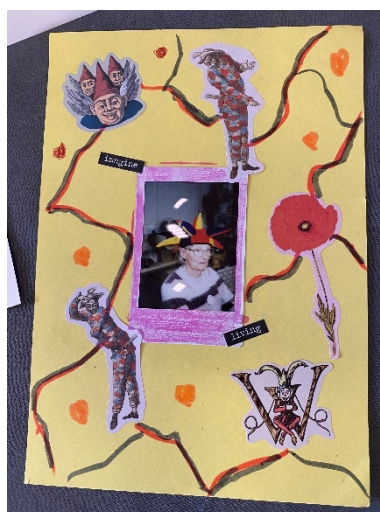
### 3. Craft

The craft activity for this session was originally devised by local artist Rose Feather<sup>5</sup> and is a joyful celebration of identity and creativity. Participants create their own self-portraits using a Polaroid camera and an explosion of art materials.

Rose says: *In self-portraits we can decide to hide or reveal as much as ourselves as we like. We can fill the picture with stories about our lives, or at the other extreme pose as a totally different person with a totally different life. We are the artist, so we get to choose.*

We set out hats and props for participants to help themselves to. When the participant is ready, we take a Polaroid picture of them in their chosen styling. This is when the creativity truly takes over. We lay out stickers, paints, pencils, collage materials, paper, glue sticks, and pens. Participants stick their Polaroid picture to a piece of coloured paper and set about embellishing it in a way that expresses themselves in that moment. The mood in the group during this activity is always so positive and supportive, despite the sadness that comes with it being the final session. The room is awash with creativity and the sound of people chatting. Below are three examples of the final self-portraits achieved in session 10, February 2025.

Images: Self-portraits created by C, S, and C in February 2025



### 4. Creative Evaluation

At the close of each session, our evaluator Holly leads a creative evaluation activity that connects to the session theme and asks a single evaluative question of the participants; **what does being part of this group mean to you?**

Holly is with the group for the entirety of every session, primarily to run the evaluation, but also chatting to participants, helping to make cups of tea and supporting with all the activities. By embedding herself in the project, Holly can document lived experiences as they unfold, rather than relying on retrospective feedback alone. We are so grateful to NICHE for funding this project evaluation, which has allowed us the opportunity to work with Holly and go on this journey of

<sup>5</sup> [Rose Feather](#)

discovery of creative evaluation that has informed all our practice, and evidenced the impact on session participants.

Across the programme a logic model (Savaya and Waysman, 2005) which guided the evaluation, identifying key research questions and required evidence. This reflective process evolved throughout to adapt to participants' needs and feedback. Participants were asked to explore the evaluation question through collage. Holly had pre-prepared faces cut out from magazines that people could choose from, and then the group were given time to assemble their collage in response to the question. Holly then went round the group and informally interviewed each participant about their collage. This was a relaxed way to get meaningful and honest responses from each participant.

**Two Images below: Evaluation collage created by participants in February 2025, and their words as they spoke to Holly about their images:**



*“No matter how I was feeling when I got up, say this morning, when I get here, all that goes away. It really becomes enjoyable, spending time with people. It helps my mental health now.”*

*“A lot of people have given in many ways. In some ways, it's very simple, but that doesn't mean it's not good. Homemade—I just like that and real life. And I don't know, that's been such a good thing.”*



The collage activity and the question **“what does being part of this group mean to you?”** work well within the portraiture theme as they centre on the person's experience. Throughout the project we are interested in monitoring social connections, emotional reactions and a sense of belonging. Participants responded well to using collage, incorporating imagery that symbolised their experiences in the group. The collages themselves were visually striking and could be used in a display or exhibition to showcase the project.

Recording the discussions was essential, as much of the depth came from verbal reflections rather than the collages alone. The quotes show how the evaluation method provided space for personal insight—one participant linked their artwork to dreams, while another described a sense of freedom in being able to create and express themselves. The method also allowed for spontaneous, emotional responses. Without the recorded discussion, these layers of meaning might have been lost. The whole activity takes no more than fifteen minutes and seamlessly fits into the flow of the session.

## 5. Closing

To close this session we host a mini exhibition of the self-portraits created earlier in the session. We display them alongside object labels that the participants made back in our first session together and stand together in the space to have a moment of reflection and celebration about the ten weeks we've had together.

**Two photographs below from Session 10 Closing exhibition. February 2025**



Looking ahead, the focus for us at Community Culture Club will be on making our evaluation even more inclusive and accessible, ensuring that everyone has different ways to share their thoughts. Giving participants more input into how evaluation is conducted will also be important. The small but powerful moments shared in feedback this year shows just how much the group means to people, and that's something we are excited to build on.

*We shall not cease from exploration*

*And the end of all our exploring*

*Will be to arrive where we started*

*And know the place for the first time.*

- **TS Eliot: Little Gidding Four Quartets 1943**

We hope that reading this blog post will inspire you to have a go at developing your own creative embedded evaluation tools to best serve your communities. We encourage you to have a go at it and see what happens. Do please get in touch if you need any further guidance or encouragement.

Rosalind Hewett: Programme Lead  
[rosalind.hewett2@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:rosalind.hewett2@norfolk.gov.uk)

Holly Sandiford: Creative Evaluator  
[hollysandiford1977@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hollysandiford1977@yahoo.co.uk)

## Useful Resources

- [Community Culture Club - Museum of Norwich - Norfolk Museums Service](#)
- [Evaluation Principles - Centre for Cultural Value](#)



- [Creative Evaluation — Jane Willis](#)
- [Art at Work. Using Art to promote wellbeing.](#)
- [5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS](#)
- [Tips for dementia-friendly documents | Alzheimer's Society](#)

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## REFERENCES

Eliot, T.S. (1943) "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets*. Gardners Books; Main edition, April 30, 2001.

Savaya, R., & Waysman, M. (2005). The logic model: A tool for incorporating theory in development and evaluation of programs. *Administration in Social Work*, 29(2), 85–103. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J147v29n02\\_06](https://doi.org/10.1300/J147v29n02_06)