



Freedom Arts

An evaluation of a pilot arts-justice program

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December 2022

Freedom has just been one hundred percent life changing for me. It really, really has worked for me. You just have to put in the time, put in the effort. I would be back using, definitely. I would be back living the life I was. Coming here, it gives me a reason to be here. I am learning to deal with more people, my anxiety level is not so high, it's slowly coming down. I feel like I'm a whole new person, a new leaf, started a new chapter in the book. I would recommend this program to anybody who wants to escape the same life that I had. (participant)

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Executive Summary

In 2020 the Tasmanian Community Fund (TCF) granted funding to Kickstart Arts for a three-year pilot arts-based therapeutic justice program in Southern Tasmania. The program aimed to break the cycle of re-offending for those struggling with substance use and subject to community corrections orders by addressing the underlying personal and social factors which promote offending. Freedom Arts began operations in June 2021 with the goal of providing for over 100 participants per annum and working with a minimum of 12 participants at any one time in a purpose-built art room in New Town. Anglicare Tasmania's Social Action and Research Centre was contracted to provide an independent evaluation of the pilot and establish a case for investment in a new service to provide ongoing Arts for Justice activities.

The evaluation found:

- The program was unable to reach the intended number of participants. Over its 16 months of operation, Freedom Arts received 41 referrals, 23 of whom engaged with the program. Low referral numbers were due to a dependence on Community Corrections for referrals, which consistently remained less than anticipated, and were also due to the complexity and long-term nature of working with and challenging the underlying causes of crime and recidivism. This led to the withdrawal of funding and cessation of the program in December 2022.
- The program achieved a high engagement and participation rate (56%) among a cohort of offenders often notoriously difficult to attract into therapeutic programs. For those who engaged it made a real difference, aiding recovery and social connection and generating positive changes in individuals which can be both qualitatively and quantitatively measured in the key dimensions driving re-offending and substance use. These include changes in self-confidence/self-efficacy, hope, impulsivity, motivation, resilience, trust and wellbeing, demonstrating a genuine potential to turn lives around.
- The program operated as a 'gateway' to others working with offenders, such as Community Corrections, community service organisations and the Courts, and complemented their work. It provided a space actively working to promote rehabilitation and reintegration and easing participants' engagement with other services.
- The program developed a good practice model for the arts-justice sector where key elements are individually tailored programs which fit the needs and interests of participants and challenge them to improve their skills, relationship-based service delivery through highly skilled arts practitioners, and minimally structured programming which can meet the attendance needs of participants' often volatile lives. The model also demonstrated the need for supported induction and engagement pathways, and the need to embed it in current service networks through collaborations and partnerships.
- A significant gap in both community-based and pre-release rehabilitative programs in Tasmania. The development of the Freedom Arts model and the learnings generated by the pilot establish a firm base for the development of new arts-justice programs in the state.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Freedom Arts began operations as an arts-based therapeutic justice program in late June 2021 in Southern Tasmania. Funded as a pilot for three years by the Tasmanian Community Fund (TCF) with auspicing and support provided by Kickstart Arts, the program aimed to break the cycle of reoffending for those struggling with substance use and subject to community corrections orders.

A body of research has shown that creativity and the arts in criminal justice settings can support improved wellbeing, awaken an interest in learning, lead to new skills and employment opportunities and help people build new positive identities (Arts Council England 2018; Cheliotis et al. 2014; Djurichkovic 2011; Hughes 2005). Through a non-mandatory process of personal growth, Freedom Arts aimed to provide pathways for offender rehabilitation by offering participants ways to address the underlying personal and social factors which promote offending and achieve 'freedom from within' at a crossroads in their lives.

Although across the world there are a number of arts-based programs working with offenders in prison, there are fewer examples working with offenders in the community and hence only a small number of best practice models. Freedom Arts was the first program of its kind to be established in Tasmania. This pilot was designed to produce evidence about the effectiveness of an arts-led approach to recovery and reintegration for offenders within Community Corrections. It aimed to provide clear recommendations about the potential value and best way to target further arts and justice programs. Its goal was to determine if there is a strong case for investment in establishing a new service to provide ongoing Arts for Justice activities to break the cycle of offending and addictive behavior.

This report describes the planning, implementation, operation and impact of the program until funding was withdrawn by the TCF half way through the pilot period. The program ceased to operate in December 2022.

1.2 Context

One of the primary objectives of the Tasmanian criminal justice system is to reduce the incidence of repeat offending (Department of Justice 2022). This is tracked using benchmarks from national data on return-to-corrections rates published annually. People are counted as having returned to corrections if, within two years of release or completion of a probation or community service order, they start a period of imprisonment or a new probation or community service order. The Corrections strategic plan, *Breaking the Cycle* (Department of Justice 2012), has an enhanced focus on the rehabilitation of offenders and putting clients at the centre of service delivery.

Community Corrections support offenders to meet their legal obligations and conditions of their order. These orders can include supervision, community service, home detention, parole, drug treatment orders and participation in intervention programs. They also include the Court Mandated Diversion Program (CMD) which is tailored specifically to offenders who commit crimes as a result of their use of illicit substances. The orders reflect the view that people can change and that prospects for change are enhanced by targeted programs, support and supervision.

Offenders are required to participate in highly supervised programs under the guidance of a probation or community corrections officer (CCO). This may include attending individual counselling, group counselling, frequent urinalysis, literacy support, family violence counselling and other relevant programs to support their rehabilitation, including weekly appointments with their CCO or case manager.

However, recidivism rates in Tasmania are poor with over fifty percent of prisoners (50.4%) released from prison back inside within two years (DoJ Annual Report 2021-22). This compares poorly with rates nationally which stand at 45.2%. The majority of parole orders finalised in Tasmania are revoked because of reoffending or breaching parole conditions (PBT Annual Report 2021-2022). Of 109 parole orders completed only 46% successfully expired, 26% were revoked because of new offending and 28% were revoked for non-compliance (e.g. using substances). Amongst those on community-based orders 17.9% return to prison or an order within two years of completion. This compares with a rate of 15.2% nationally.

These figures suggest a gap in current services which can effectively support offenders in their journey to rehabilitation and reintegration.

1.3 Evaluation

The Social Action and Research Centre at Anglicare Tasmania was contracted to undertake an independent evaluation of the program as it developed to ascertain:

- How far has participation in Freedom Arts had a positive impact on the factors which influence re-offending?
- What are the mechanisms which deliver this change?
- How can they be developed into a good practice model for organisations engaged in arts/justice initiatives?

The evaluation strategy was designed to measure how far the specific aims of the program had been achieved. These were to:

- reduce recidivism and divert people from the justice system
- reduce drug use and learn new skills to manage addictive behaviours
- improve emotional and mental health and wellbeing
- improve skills, confidence and resilience
- improve communications and relationships with family and community.

Typically, evaluative work to assess evidence about the impact of arts programs working with offenders has assessed retrospectively how far a project's original aims were met and whether the hoped for outputs and outcomes were achieved (Arts Council England 2018; Djurichkovic 2011). Few have been embedded from the start of service delivery or used validated outcome measures or pre- and post-intervention measurement of behaviour change. Based on an exploration of previous evaluations of community arts for justice initiatives across the world, this evaluation employed a mixed methodology to ensure a multi-lens approach. This incorporated both quantitative and

qualitative data collection and a strong participant voice including:

- baseline data collection about the characteristics of those referred into the pilot
- administrative data relevant to the individual journey of participants through the program
- pre and post intervention measurement of change using a standardised and validated measurement scale (IOMI¹)
- case studies illustrating positive (and negative) impacts gathered over the course of the pilot
- semi-structured interviews with pilot participants, project staff, contracted artists, community corrections staff, steering committee members and other stakeholders
- strategies for the longitudinal tracking and measurement of the sustainability of change.

The evaluation strategy was approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (SSHREC).

1.4 Developing Freedom Arts – a brief history

Freedom Arts was established in partnership with Community Corrections and Kickstart Arts to work with up to 320 people per annum with non-custodial convictions for drug offences in Southern Tasmania. Those with a history of violence or sexual offences were excluded. Initially conceived as CMD-specific, with all referrals coming through the CMD program, the referral pool was subsequently expanded to include people on a community corrections order and those released on parole from prison.

Located at Kickstart Arts Centre, St Johns Park, New Town, Freedom Arts joined a newly established cultural hub operating as a focal place where people could come together to explore creative ways to respond to the current challenges to society brought about by climate change, poverty and poor social and health indicators in Tasmania. While Community Corrections were responsible for referring clients into the program, Kickstart provided coordination, governance, financial management and employment of artists and other staff in a new, purpose-built art room.

As originally structured, the program proposed an individually tailored 10-week program with opportunities to participate in arts of their choice. The program operated three days a week from 9.30 AM to 2.30 PM during school terms and had a goal of working with a minimum of 12 participants at any one time. Participants committed to the program through the Participant Agreement outlining minimum standards of behavior. It involved:

¹ The Intermediate Outcome Measurement Instrument was commissioned by the UK Ministry of Justice in 2013 to provide an instrument to measure change, or intermediate outcomes, directly or indirectly associated with reductions in reoffending. It was designed to be used by community organisations delivering short-term arts interventions to adult offenders both in prison and in community settings.

- watching and discussing 10 Peace Education Program (PEP²) DVDs — 30-minute videos covering the themes of dignity, respect, choice, inner strength, self-awareness, clarity, understanding, hope and contentment
- a day in the art room working with contracted specialist artists to produce art, possibly responding to the themes of the PEP
- access to weekly yoga sessions
- a weekly wellbeing session run by a psychotherapist.

The Lead Artist/project manager (working 4 days a week) was responsible for project management, the daily operations of the program, teaching art, collaborating with referrers and recruiting and supervising wellbeing teachers and specialist guest teaching artists when required. Together with the Senior Creative Producer, the Lead Artist was accountable to the Freedom Arts Steering Committee and the Kickstart Arts Board of Management for delivering the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Community Corrections.

The first referrals to the program were preceded by eight months of implementation work. This entailed:

- **project management** such as setting up protocols and procedures including safety procedures around engagement, working procedures and policies, studio rules and expectations and usage of the art space. It included developing MOUs with partner agencies, referral processes and data sharing and support mechanisms for program staff
- **establishing the Steering Committee** and governance procedures with representation from key partner organisations and/or those with particular expertise in this area or whose clients were the intended participants of the program. This included Community Corrections, a retired Chief Magistrate, Equal Opportunities Australia, program staff and the Anglicare evaluator. Through quarterly meetings the Steering Committee oversaw the conduct of the Freedom Program and its evaluation and provided advice on key decisions
- **establishing a multi-functional participatory arts space** including gaining an occupancy permit, purchasing art materials and equipment, and creating a friendly, open and comfortable safe space that could cater for a variety of mediums and workshops with the ongoing flexibility to adapt to participant needs
- **developing partnerships** and effective working relationships with a large government department and with other service providers to promote awareness of and referrals into the program and engagement with it
- **program promotion** via presentations to Corrections teams, Risdon prison, other service providers, the courts and magistrates.

² PEP or Peace Education Program is a program designed to strengthen communities by training participants to build and sustain positive relationships. It provides learning experiences to reduce violence, enhance personal integrity and foster mutual respect.

These activities, the impact of COVID and waiting until the CMD program had enough clients to refer delayed the anticipated start of the program. When it did become operational late in June 2021 there was an understanding that the program would be subject to an adaptive management process and the model would develop and change over the course of the pilot period in response to operational experience and feedback from all stakeholders, including participants and service providers. This allowed Freedom Arts to build relationships and safety for participants, to learn from experience in managing participants and their journey through the program and to adjust the model and infrastructure accordingly.

A few months into the operation of the program there was a recognition that two significant changes were required – to the referral pool and to the structure of the program.

Firstly, the capping of numbers using the CMD and other community corrections programs in the South meant that even with one hundred percent engagement of those referred it would not be possible to reach the target numbers of over a hundred program participants per annum. This shortfall was exacerbated by difficulties in engaging a volatile and often chaotic cohort in an arts program where housing instability, mental health issues, sanctions and other changes to circumstances affected their ability to engage. In response, the target group was expanded to include drug offenders on probation, on parole and in-home detention. This expansion to the referral pool was recognised by the TCF and a variation to the Grant Deed made in March 2021.

In reviewing other referral sources there was also some discussion about whether Kickstart Arts and the Freedom Program could meet the requirements of a community service order (CSO). This requires a number of criteria to be met, including that the project site provides reparation to the community through the completion of community service hours. However, despite a community service site assessment, Freedom Arts with its focus on individual rather than community needs was not considered to be a valid pathway or able to meet the expectations of the court about giving back to the community. This meant that those with community service orders did not join the referral pool, although they did work on the grounds around St Johns Park as part of the CSO gardening detail.

Secondly, minimal engagement with the PEP and wellbeing sessions and no engagement with yoga led to the development of a less structured, more informal and open-ended program. Feedback from participants suggested that having somewhere to come to, activity to engage in and someone to talk to was enough. They were seeking somewhere to relax, be creative and distract from their often difficult circumstances rather than programs which would 'fix' them. The wellbeing program offered activities they were already exposed to and which they were obliged to attend as a condition of their order, for example counselling. There was also a view that the PEP offered little skill building for behavioural change. A less structured program better fitted with the engagement needs and attendance patterns of the cohort. As a result, the initial wellbeing activities ceased and the focus became 'doing art' in a safe and welcoming environment. Although the program continued to encourage regular attendance, this was left to the discretion of the participant as they fitted it around their other commitments.

A few months into operations, concerns were expressed about the lower engagement rate of women referred into the program (an engagement rate of 50% compared with 59% among the men). A women-only day was trialled in efforts to ensure they felt comfortable with the environment and the kind of activities available to them as well as meeting their childcare and

family commitments. However, the small number of women attending at this point meant it was not feasible to continue with women-only provision, although exploring how to better provide for women continued throughout the course of the pilot.

Alongside these changes, the Lead Artist/project manager, with support from the Steering Committee, engaged in numerous promotional activities to more fully embed the program in the service network, increase the number of referrals and support engagement. This entailed working with Community Corrections managers and teams, promoting the program through the prison-based reintegration service, talking to magistrates and forging partnerships with community service organisations working with this cohort, such as The Salvation Army's Beyond the Wire Program, Anglicare's Drug and Alcohol Support Program and Bethlehem House. The program began to build a stronger reputation in the justice and social service communities as it developed positive relationships with networked services.

A key influence on the development of Freedom Arts was COVID, which created what one respondent referred to as a stop/start scenario. At times COVID affected the willingness of those referred to engage and participate and, as the project manager said, "for those who have barriers to engagement and who might have been afraid to, COVID gave them a great excuse for not participating". COVID also slowed responses from partner agencies and other service providers by reducing opportunities for promotional activities due to restrictions and room capacity requirements. This meant that establishing Freedom Arts, encouraging engagement and building awareness and partnerships took longer than anticipated and slowed momentum around the program. However, an Open Day in August 2022 to showcase the work attracted an audience of over 40 people and a number of new referrals into the program. There was a generalised feeling that the program was slowly gaining more traction. In September Freedom Arts was given the Tony Hill Award by the Probation and Community Corrections Officers Association (PCCOA) for cutting edge initiatives in the field.

Despite efforts to better promote the program and attract more referrals, the TCF set a goal of increasing numbers by a minimum of 30 participants by September 2022. Freedom Arts was yet to reach its target number of 12 participants at any one time; nor had it been able to offer a wellbeing and wraparound program as originally planned, as this had been rejected by participants. It was clear by the end of September that Freedom Arts would be unable to meet these requirements. In addition, this coincided with a major restructuring of Kickstart Arts which impacted on its ability to effectively auspice the program and support the project manager. As one commentator remarked:

It was not just one factor but many, the perfect storm – governance, support, COVID, unrealistic targets, a series of unfortunate events. Some of the problems may have been surmountable if they hadn't all happened at the same time.

With the prospect of unstable management and an inability to reach TCF set goals, a decision was made to withdraw the funding for the pilot with the cessation of the program scheduled for December 2022.

2. Referrals, engagement and participation

Administrative data provides a clear picture of the basic characteristics of those referred, levels of engagement and patterns of attendance. Over a period of 16 months of operation (June 2021 – October 2022), Freedom Arts received 41 referrals from CCOs. The majority of these (88%) had a history of offending relating to drug use and ranged across a number of order types:

Table 1: Legal status, referrals and participants

Legal Status/Order Type	Referrals	Participants
Court Mandated Diversion	15	7
CCO Supervision	11	8
Parole	6	3
CCO – CS	4	3
Other, including Home Detention	5	2
Total	41	23

CCOs recorded a number of reasons for their clients' interest in being referred into Freedom. Although over a quarter (28%) were specifically seeking some kind of creative outlet, for others it was more about having somewhere to unwind, countering boredom and lack of occupation, wanting to learn new skills and meet new people, and wanting to maintain recovery from addiction.

Amongst referrals there were 12 women and 29 men ranging in age from 20-65 years with an average of 39 years. The women referred were slightly younger on average than men. Seven referrals identified as Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders (ATSI) and approaching one third (30%) were specifically identified as having literacy and/or numeracy issues by their referrer.

Once people had been referred there was a high engagement rate with the program – 56% of those referred then participated. This engagement rate increased over the life of the program, from 52% in March 2022. Although numbers were small, it appears that engagement rates differed between men and women, with women less likely to engage than men – a rate of 50% among women compared to 59% among men.

However, 18 of those referred either never attended or attended only once and never returned. Those who did not engage did not differ significantly in terms of their characteristics to those who did. They were likely to be slightly younger (average age of 39 compared to 42 amongst the engaged). Where known, the reasons for non-engagement were numerous. They included being incarcerated, physical injury and mobility issues, ending of the order, securing work, parenting and other commitments and responsibilities. However, they also included mental health issues and

anxiety and nervousness about attending. As some participants identified, attending on site had been a significant barrier for them to cross and required support from other services to fully engage.

For those that did engage, patterns of attendance varied. Although initially Freedom offered a 10-week program held on consecutive weeks, adapting the model to better fit the cohort meant devising individually tailored programs often spread over a number of months. Some attended once or twice and ‘dipped their toes into the water’ but did not become regular attenders until some months later when their lives had stabilised or other commitments had been dealt with. Others attended regularly from the beginning for a period of 3 or 4 months and then returned for infrequent visits at a later date. Table 2 demonstrates how the number of participants and attendances grew steadily over the evaluation period with increasing numbers of regular attenders.

Table 2: Attendance – July 2021 to November 2022

Month	Number of participants	Number of attendances
July 2021	6	19
August	6	21
September	7	15
October	3	7
November	6	16
December	5	11
<i>Program suspended until January 25th due to COVID</i>		
January 2022	3	4
February	4	14
March	5	19
April	7	28
May	8	39
June	8	44
July	8	48
August	7	44
September	6	33

<i>Withdrawal of funding and cessation of program announced</i>		
October	3	23
November	2	22

Those attending regularly were doing so over periods of four or more months and in two cases over a period of 10 months. But attendance was often disrupted by circumstances like a return to prison, health and medication issues and family crisis. A number of regular attenders were struggling with health issues, court processes, personal commitments and family crises which affected their attendance levels. This meant that the move to a less structured, more informal program better fitted with participants' needs and circumstances.

3. The views of participants

Central to the evaluation was ensuring a strong participant voice. The experiences of program participants were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the evaluator. They were asked about their initial expectations of the program, activities they were involved in, any challenges they had encountered and the impact of participating on how they thought about themselves and their lives. When they reported changes in themselves over their period of participation they were asked what they felt accounted for those changes and what would have happened if they had not experienced Freedom Arts. Changes were also measured quantitatively using a pre- and post-intervention assessment process.

3.1 Referral and engagement

There were a number of pathways into Freedom Arts. Some had been referred directly by their CCO. Others had been introduced to the program by other service providers and then sought a CCO referral. While a percentage were directly seeking some kind of creative outlet, others had no background in art or had not practiced any art activities since their school days. They were instead seeking occupation and social connection:

My probation officer mentioned it to me because he could see I was struggling mentally from being stuck indoors and not really seeing anyone and not communicating. I was losing the ability to communicate because you're isolated. He said there's this program would you be interested and I'll put you up for it. I said I'm up for anything that gets me out of the house and gets me to socialise and communicate. I wasn't really interested in the art. Not really, I've never been a painter. But when I got out here I just started to colour in some drawings at first because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Caroline and the other teachers would give me ideas and ask me about my interests. My interests are mainly my motorcycle so I've put a lot of work into doing signs and banners for my garage which are motorcycle related.

Converting referrals into attendance was a challenge. Once referred, it was clear from participants' experiences that engagement was not straightforward and a number described feeling apprehensive, shy and nervous. There can be deep-seated confidence issues and it could take several weeks to build up the courage to attend after an initial interest in being referred. One participant with a background in wood carving, who was pro-actively seeking an outlet, described how difficult he had found it to actually make contact with the program:

After reading the leaflet I expected a lot more people than what are here and that made me very anxious. I've been locked up for a couple of years. When I asked for a referral my parole officer didn't know anything about it. I met her [the Lead Artist] that day at the house and had a chat and there was another chap in the house who was coming out here. I got up the next morning and thought no, I had to find my way out there and I decided not to go out. But he said oh you're ready to go, I'm going to Freedom Arts, go on come with me. So, I came out with him and then after that I couldn't wait to get out here. I came because of a chance meeting with her, that's how I got here. For me it was just three lucky things, finding the flyer, meeting her and then coming out with him. Apart from those three things I probably wouldn't have been here.

Some CCOs and other service providers had escorted their clients to the site initially to introduce them and support the first visit. It was clear that, while for some this had worked well, for others it had stalled their engagement. Supporting engagement was a delicate balance and it was clear that a one-size engagement model did not fit everyone as they all had different interests, ideas and motivations for engagement:

The ones which seem to stay are the ones which come by themselves. If you come out with a parole officer it feels like it's an extended parole interview. There was a young fellow that came and his parole officer came with him and used to sit at the table with him. She was shielding him from us so you couldn't go and make him feel at ease because she was there so he lost the interaction. He came three times and then didn't come again. You couldn't go over and make him feel at ease. She should have brought him here and gone away and come back to pick him up. She was watching him do every pencil stroke.

However, despite some initial apprehension, for most the welcoming atmosphere had quickly reassured them. As two participants said:

I was a bit nervous to start with because I'm a sort of hermit person. I stay at home and don't socialise. But since I've been coming here it's opened up a whole new world for me, it's been amazing. It gave you a sense of welcome and warmth, a feeling that you could be in a place where you were comfortable. I had low expectations but was quickly and pleasantly surprised.

I wasn't really nervous. I was intrigued and interested about what happened out here and laughter. I come out here and I actually smile and I laugh and that's something I haven't done for quite some time since I offended. It's a great environment to be in. We are all friends. It's very relaxed.

3.2 The impact of participation

Freedom Arts aims to address the underlying personal and social factors which promote offending and achieve 'freedom from within'. Participants were asked to describe the impact on their lives of participating in the program and whether they had noticed any changes in themselves. These changes are known to be directly or indirectly associated with reductions in re-offending and turning lives around.

a) Learning new skills

Participants described involvement in numerous activities – leatherwork, woodwork, sculpture, drawing and painting, excursions to galleries and submitting work for exhibitions. They commented on learning 'different skills and aspects of art':

Art, I thought would be just like painting but there have been multiple different things I've done, a good variety. It did scare me to start with. I'd never picked a paint brush up in my life. Caroline is an amazing teacher. I had never done things like this before and I wanted to give it a go. I'd never done painting like shading work and drawing but Caroline got me into it, mixing paints and helping me blend paints. We painted the [signal] box blue. That was really fun that was. We got to do flowers on one side, a plant growing out of the cracked soil and put Freedom on it. People stop in the street and say woah. They drive past and then come back to have a look and jump out and say what a good job you're doing. When we grew up graffiti was a bad thing but now it's street art.

Basically, I started painting myself at home and when I showed it to my parole officer she said maybe you would like to do this and I said okay. When I came here Caroline said have you ever tried acrylics and I hadn't. Basically, I've been doing acrylics ever since. Also, woodwork to mainly make frames for my paintings. I made the bench seat in the courtyard. It was my idea. Last week I made a belt and I had never worked with leather before.

I've never done this before. This is the first belt I've ever made. I dyed this one. I done the plait too. That's intense to do. It's pretty cool and I put buckles on.

They had welcomed the challenges posed by Caroline as their skills developed:

I like being pushed a bit. There have been quite a few times when I've thought I've finished a painting and Caroline has come back and said no you could just do a little bit more here, there, and they've turned out so much better. Caroline will give me challenges to overcome. She will do something, the outline and then she makes me do the colouring, shading. So, she sets challenges. I have been watching drawing with charcoal. I prefer to watch three or four times before doing it. Caroline has a good variety of things that we do.

I've done some painting, woodworking, made jigsaws. Just for me coming up with ideas of what I want to do because I'm not really that creative, that is where Caroline and the teachers come in. They give me ideas and hints and say that's a good idea so we'll go with that. I like to take my time and do things properly.

It was not just artistic and creative skills that participants had been able to develop. They also commented on learning and practicing social skills, including the ability to be with and work with and mentor others:

This guy here whose making belts, he is always go, go, go. I have been helping him do his belt. He is on the edge all the time. Being with Caroline sort of calmed me to not get aggressive with him and take the time with him. The other day he was putting his stake holes in and it's got to be 10mils. I said just calm down, relax, just go with the flow mate. There is no need to be getting stressed out over something so little. Then Caroline said you're doing a great job. She gave me ways of not getting angry with him so that was another help as well.

I've picked up a couple of techniques. Caroline is good with some tricks and do's and don'ts. Your border and your sky and horizon and getting that right. If you paint landscape you want landscape as the focus point, the clouds, the beach. And talking to people too. I just walk away from it if they're giving me the shits. Learning to walk away from it, put the paint brush down and go off for five or ten minutes and then come back. So, patience.

b) Self confidence

All participants who fed back noted improvements in their self-confidence. As one said, "my self-confidence has definitely improved, all with the ability to express myself". For one man, the realisation that he was able to paint or work with leather had been a big boost. Others said:

It's mainly my depression. I have bad depression. It opened up expression because there's a lot of stuff I talked to Caroline about. It's more like it gave me self-confidence. It really, really did, just to approach people and stuff like that. Caroline doesn't judge, she just listens and she helps you talk. Just being here my self-confidence and to approach people and talk to people, it went from here to here.

It's welcoming and engaging. The artists didn't put pressure on me. They let you run with whatever you're doing and encourage you. I have been to a couple of art galleries down Salamanca recently. I wouldn't have dreamt about doing anything like that before, six months ago.

I've always been a confident person but when I was stuck at home for the first four months it just made me feel a little bit worthless. Not so much worthless, how to describe it? I just felt lonely and lost at home with nothing to do. So, this place has given me the opportunity to get out and use my mind. It's brought me back out. Before I was confident, outgoing, had a lot to say. But then I became withdrawn and this place has helped me a lot.

c) Relationships with other people

Although some said this had not been an issue for them, others commented that it had improved their relationships with others "because my self-confidence has grown and you can communicate a lot better". As another said, it had been important to have "supportive peers and enjoy being able to build relationships with people of a similar background":

It's even helped back home. I now know the importance of showing my daughters how much they are valued so they can have good self-esteem.

It definitely brought me out of my shell a bit more after two years in prison. You become withdrawn. You have to in that environment and after two years you don't know how to deal with money, your meals, your laundry. It's just all bloke conversations so it's a slow brain washing process in there. Just getting accepted out here was the big thing, it has been good mentally.

The first week or so I was settling in and just getting to know everybody and then gradually I came out of my shell. I had become a bit of a recluse. It has done wonders for me. I would have gone insane being at home and only getting out once a week for an hour to go shopping.

It gives me something to talk about, what I've done for the day. I will get on the phone to my friends, sister, nephew and say have a look at this and I send them through a picture. They will say that's really good, that's excellent. When you get positive news like that it makes you feel really good. When someone gives you credit for what you've done. And you get a lot of credit from Caroline and the teachers here for the things you do. It's all uplifting.

d) Ability to cope with recovery from addiction

Some participants described how isolated and alone they felt dealing with addiction issues. Freedom Arts' ability to provide occupation, distraction and a new and different peer group had been highly valued by participants:

It gives me a distraction to lengthen my episodes of drinking. If I wasn't here I would be drinking.

I had already recovered but it has helped maintain my sobriety.

I was an addict. Cold turkey is the end of that story. I don't want to go back to that lifestyle. Being here, because a lot of them are in the same boat as me, that has been amazing too. It gives me a reason to be somewhere, to feel wanted because I have no family or friends. Being here really helps and you can talk about all different things.

At Bridge they mentioned it as something to take your mind off things when they come into your

head about getting on drugs. It's a coping technique, it's distraction. Freedom has provided distraction on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. You have to focus hard and concentrate whatever is going on out there. So the distraction out here is good.

e) Dealing with stress

Providing occupation and a safe and welcoming environment had improved anxiety levels and resilience. Knowing there was a support network that understood had been a key benefit:

Being here, painting and working with Caroline has made my stress level go from there to there. I know it's a place that don't judge you. It removes you from the life outside that I did know and puts you in a whole other world which is what I need at the moment. Some days I get bad anxiety and bad stress and I just get on the phone or talk to Caroline about it. No medication, no nothing. The anxiety is slowly coming down. I can slowly interact with more people and stuff like that. I am a lot more confident.

It reduced my stress. Before this all I could do is be at home depressed. I had nothing to do but think about what's happening back home. But coming here gave me something else to think about.

For years I've suffered with anxiety and depression, that's through personal things in my life. So a lot of my stress is outside and there's no stress here at all. So to get out of the house and watching the four walls and the TV screen, you come out here and see smiling faces and people are happy to see me and I'm happy to see them. We are all in the same boat and we are helping each other out.

f) The way you think about yourself

Increasing feelings of self-worth, confidence and communicating better with others had changed the way participants thought about themselves and fostered new, more positive identities:

I think more of myself and feel more confident in the things I do and reacting with different types of people. People look at you different when you say you're doing art. It's given them something to think about.

I feel like I'm a whole new person, a new leaf, turned a new leaf, started a new chapter in the book.

The work I've done out here I'm actually proud of because I've never thought I'd be able to do it. Some of the chiseling I've done and routing with the power tools. I never thought I'd be able to chisel out a block of wood and make it into something but with the help of Marcus and Nick. So something that when my friends come around I can say, look I made this, I made this, because I'm proud of it. And without the help of Caroline and the other teachers here it just wouldn't have happened.

g) Being part of the community

Overcoming isolation and engaging with new people had been important:

A community of peers of similar experience, being accepted. It's good to be connected.

It has just given me a bit more confidence and my parents seeing me doing something, that helps

as well. They come to the open days to see what we've been doing. If I didn't have that I wouldn't have anything to take them and show them. It's good for your self esteem I suppose. My father he's 90 next month and drugs is a foreign language to him so he could never understand. Because of my addictions in the past they tried to understand but they really have no concept of it. So just having somewhere like this to bring them. It has helped me reconnect with them for sure.

I have been made to feel welcome and part of a group. It's just enabled me to come back out of my shell.

h) Plans for the future

Participants talked about how Freedom had opened up new pathways for them. They described contemplating doing a community service qualification, or improved job prospects, working on their literacy skills, learning computers, doing more art and gaining the motivation to lead a better quality of life:

I want to be a better person in my life. I've done some wrong things. I've done some bad things and I want to give back or try to give back to community more or less what I've done wrong. I think it's the only right thing to do.

I don't feel confident enough to go back into the workforce yet and that's where this program comes really, really handy.

I am trying to turn it into making a living out of art and they have all helped in that direction. I have put in for a couple of grants with Caroline. You can get involved in art opportunities in Hobart and see it as the too hard basket but with Caroline it's been good. That helps your self-esteem because she thinks you are capable of doing it. Just her taking the time to do that, it definitely affects you.

They all expressed an interest in keeping in contact with Freedom Arts and/or in continuing to develop the skills they had learnt on the program, including the possibility of working with other arts-based organisations. Two expressed some interest in peer work which had been generated by their experiences and one person said "I will be here as long as they are here. I will even come after my order".

I would continue to come out for sure. Even if it was just to come out for an hour or two and chat with people and maybe talk to other offenders about how they are travelling because I've been there and done it now and know what to expect and the highs and the lows. I am just sorry to see it might come to an end. It might start up in another form.

When asked what accounted for these changes in themselves, participants were keen to identify the safe and welcoming environment at the program, relationships with staff and the ability of staff to work with them and improve their skills:

It starts with Caroline's welcoming nature and her confidence-building ability. It's because of the environment which exists at Freedom.

This is hard to answer. There was never any pressure and most of the people who come here are of the same vein. So it's been a lot easier to get to know people here than on the outside. You are accepting and they accept you. Caroline runs a pretty tight ship here. If someone comes in under

the weather she will tell them to come back when you're sober. She won't just tolerate it which makes you feel safer too.

It's everything. They make you get involved. It's good all round.

I think it's just focusing on something. I have ADHD so concentrating is fucking hard for me, conversation with someone is hard. I find it difficult to watch a TV show. I don't know how to relax and watch a movie. But I can focus on my art although I can't watch a TV show. It's something to do, get your creative mind thinking, painting landscape.

What Caroline does is fantastic. She has the right personality for the job, she is very open and forward. She is a bright smiley face to come into, never a dull moment. There is always a joke or a laugh with her. The atmosphere is good.

They were also asked what might have happened if they had not got involved with Freedom. Participants described negative outcomes and possible reoffending and said that without Freedom many people would find themselves back in the justice system:

I would of felt lost not having a workshop and something to do. I would of more than likely be back in jail by now.

I would have been a wreck, gone insane, just being at home stuck indoors. It just gives me freedom, that little bit of freedom to get in my car and drive out here like a normal person. You don't feel normal when you're in detention. It just opens my mind up to man you've got to behave yourself. I am ashamed of what I did, my charge, and it certainly makes me think twice about my actions. I don't want to be in this position again. I could have been over in the big house so I consider myself quite lucky. So I am making the most of everything. The opportunity was put to me to come out here and I jumped at it.

I would be back using definitely. I would be back living the life I was. Coming here in myself it gives me a reason to be here. I would recommend this program to anybody who wants to escape the same life I had, to get involved in programs like this. It's been life changing. It really, really has worked for me. I need this not to go and use again and fall back into the rut I was in before.

I would have fucked up probation. I'm on bail at the moment. I would have tried to stick with the conditions but without having something to do every week I would have got into trouble.

If I hadn't been coming here just for the social side, take the art out of it, just the social side, I may have ended up back I prison because if I only had other ex-prisoners to talk to, the people I was associating with before I went. I have a job three days a week (I wish it was five days a week), otherwise I wouldn't have anything to do. If I didn't have here to come to there's not much else. I don't know what I'd be doing. The chances of reoffending, well I would be spending more time with people I shouldn't be spending more time with

3.3 Co-designing the program

Participants were asked what changes they would like to see to the way in which Freedom Arts operated. There were comments that it was hard to get to and that it was 'a bit out of the way' but overall participants were happy with the model offered. They were pleased with its informal structure and low numbers which meant it was easier to engage. Suggestions were made about other activities which could be offered like cooking:

Cooking. Not everyone can do it. I can but I can't paint. Having more activities available so you're not doing the same thing all the time. It's a pity we can't do cooking. It would be nice if there was a cooking class, that would be awesome. Plating up food I make it into a piece of art.

But most were happy with the program as it stood and expressed concerns about getting more people involved and its closure. The move to a more informal structure had been important, including the ability to attend over a longer period of time. There was a clear message that addressing the underlying causes of re-offending was not necessarily something which could be achieved during a 10-week program:

It's great, keep going. It's certainly providing opportunities for people, they just need to get more people involved. It saves a lot of money for the government. But with the amount of funding available I don't think it's possible. But from my own personal experience you will never do it in 10 weeks [turn people around].

I can't see any changes. It's just having the space to do your thing. You can go into the corner and do your own thing and everyone is respectful. It's a shame it's finishing. I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't here. I finish my parole in February so if it finishes in December I only have to get through a month on parole. Whereas if that had been a month ago it would have been a different story.

It's terrible it's going because it really did make a difference. Some really engaged. It's been very rewarding for those who have come away feeling better about themselves and the fact that some of them came back after they finished their order and stayed for a while. There is no real support for rehabilitation.

Why close this down, when it's such a good program. It's a shame. Everyone will tell you the same story. It's great for people like me. I consider myself very lucky. If I had gone in it would have been a completely different world for me. I would have lost my unit, my pets, what would have happened to all my possessions, my tools, my TV, video games, all my cooking utensils. Everything you have in life would have just gone. I don't know how people cope with that. I consider myself very lucky, thank the judge. If I had gone over there I reckon I would have come out a worse person. Whereas given the opportunity to come here and being spared prison made me think a whole lot different about the way I act. I find it hard to put into words sometimes.

One participant talked about the enormous gap in rehabilitation opportunities in Tasmania and the need to connect with Freedom Arts or similar programs pre-release:

The prison system is archaic. They have a reintegration crowd that work in the prison, six of them with over 1,000 prisoners. They sit with you and try and help you with your application for parole. It was never, ever mentioned there's a place like this. You look forward to getting out and then it's a real anti-climax. I'd been without cigarettes for nearly two years and the first thing I did was buy a packet of cigarettes, because I didn't want to smoke again but it was just such an anti-climax getting out. If I had known about this it would have been something to look forward to and something actually happening when I got out. Actually reintegrating, you do a couple of courses which are only designed around an ideal world. So just awareness of this place because you get out with nothing, nothing to look forward to apart from seeing your family.

3.4 Measuring change

The evaluation entailed pre- and post-intervention measurement of change using a standardised and validated measurement scale. The Intermediate Outcome Measurement Instrument (IOMI) was commissioned by the UK Ministry of Justice in 2013 to provide an instrument to measure change or intermediate outcomes directly or indirectly associated with reductions in reoffending. It was designed to be used by community organisations delivering short-term arts interventions to adult offenders both in prison and in community settings.

IOMI tracks change against baseline data in seven domains. These are self-efficacy/agency, hope, impulsivity, motivation to change, resilience, interpersonal trust and wellbeing, as measured by answers to 21 questions. IOMI also incorporates a validated measure of practical problems with eight questions about whether the subject is experiencing difficulties with housing, drugs, drink, relationships, gambling, money, employment and health. This allows scores from key domains to be put into the broader context of other challenges in peoples' lives.

Those who engaged with Freedom completed a pre-intervention assessment in their first weeks with the program. The assessment was then repeated on exit from the program. It was intended that the assessment would also be administered nine months after exit to ascertain the sustainability of any change. However, data available from the pre- and post-intervention assessment is limited and the cessation of the program has meant that it is not possible to measure the sustainability of any change in the longer term. In addition, the move from a structured to more informal program meant difficulties in identifying exits so that the assessment could be administered.

Data was available for seven participants (or one-third of the participant population) who completed both a pre- and post-intervention assessment over a period which varied from three to eight months. Although two of these participants demonstrated no change, five demonstrated positive changes in their scores for some or most of the dimensions.

Table 3: Pre- and post-intervention scores, percentage change

Participant	Percentage change in scores in seven dimensions						
	Self-efficacy %	Hope %	Impulsivity %	Motivation %	Resilience %	Trust %	Wellbeing %
1	0	+ 22	+ 85	+ 85	+ 75	- 13	- 17
2	0	0	- 33	0	0	0	0
3	+ 11	+ 65	- 55	0	+ 20	+ 5	+ 23
4	+ 52	+ 66	0	+16	+ 66	+ 25	+ 23
5	0	0	+ 10	- 16	0	+ 5	0

6	0	- 8	0	0	0	0	0
7	- 12	0	0	+ 8	+ 14	+ 9	0

For example, participant 1 attended nine times over a four-month period. She had been looking for a creative outlet and somewhere to help her unwind. Despite a difficult housing situation, problems with transport and family crises, she had increased her score in four dimensions – hope, impulsivity, motivation and resilience.

Participant 4 attended four times in late 2021 and then started to attend regularly in February through to May. Overall, he attended 44 times over a seven-month period and increased his score in five dimensions. He described how attending Freedom “has just been one hundred percent life changing for me. I feel like a whole new person”. In May he returned to prison for matters prior to his involvement with the program. He reported that his time with the program helped him cope with prison and that he now had renewed hope for his future life without drugs and using his newly acquired art skills.

The IOMI scale was well received by those who completed it and demonstrated an ability to measure change in key domains resulting from a short-term arts intervention. However, the cessation of the program has meant the scale cannot be used to measure sustainability of behaviour change in the longer term and a reduction in recidivism.

4. Partnering with Community Corrections

Freedom Arts was established as a partnership between Kickstart Arts and Community Corrections. Community Corrections officers (CCOs) identified clients on orders relating to drug offences, assessed their suitability for the program and interest in it and completed a one-page referral form. For those on the CMD program progression to stage 2 on their order, or stabilisation, was a prerequisite for referral.

Between July 2021 and August 2022 twenty CCOS referred into the program, some up to four times. They were asked to complete a Survey Monkey questionnaire at six-monthly intervals about the referral process and any feedback they had from clients attending Freedom Arts. Half (10) responded. They commented on a total of 29 referrals made to the program. Of these 15 had gone on to engage. Four CCOs described how they had been directly involved in facilitating that engagement by attending for an initial visit with their client.

In addition, and after the withdrawal of funding had been announced, the evaluator attended a Glenorchy office team meeting and a team meeting of CMD case managers for direct feedback about referral experiences and the impact of engagement that they had witnessed amongst their clients.

4.1 Referral and engagement

Although the referral process itself was in theory straightforward, aligning the assessment, risks, circumstances and needs of the client to referral and engagement with Freedom Arts could be complex and burdensome. The primary role of the CCO is about managing the order and the conditions around the order through case management. It is not a therapeutic intervention but rather aims to link offenders with appropriate support services. The CCO's role is to build rapport, identify risks and provide support to manage the risks effectively so people do not reoffend. By the time links have been made with a GP, counsellor, a drug and alcohol or anger management program, linking and liaising with other voluntary support programs like Freedom Arts can fall to the bottom of the list. Timing is key in order to align the right offender at the right point in time in their journey on the order with some capacity and space to engage with a voluntary program. As one CCO said:

We were quite selective. We wanted to try and chose people to refer that would have the best chance of engagement. We had to be careful about selecting people who met the criteria around drug history, no association issues, who could get transport there, those sorts of things. And conflicts with other appointments they have, drug testing twice a week, counselling, court. All the clients have needs and requirements so one form which takes time can fall off the side of your desk and then the time to support the client to engage and remind them.

I would generally refer people who were interested in art. I did have one guy I referred who had no interest but he had nothing to do on those days. He loved it and was part of the Artists with Conviction [exhibition].

Once assessed as suitable and willing to be referred, CCOs commented on difficulties in supporting that referral so that people engaged with the program. An analysis of administrative data estimates an engagement rate of 56% amongst those referred into the program. As one CCO commented "you

try and get someone through the door and then there's a high drop-out rate". They commented on high levels of anxiety and a lack of confidence among clients which operated as barriers to attending initially and to engagement. As well as struggling with other commitments or changes in circumstances like homelessness or a return to custody, taking a first step to actually get there, however high their interest and motivation, was a real challenge for many clients. Reflecting the views of participants, CCOs identified significant psychological barriers to engaging with the program and a case for 'warm referrals' and a supported induction period:

It takes a lot from this end to actually refer people to Freedom Arts and then to make certain that they keep on attending. I found it useful, not just to refer, but actually follow them up on a week-to-week basis to check whether they attended or not. The two people I referred didn't go. One person I spoke to was really keen but didn't show up. A lot of our clients, if they know oh yes, I'm going to do that but if they then don't turn up and if there's no follow up they don't turn up.

The nature of our clients, they are quite erratic and with the drug court we have quite a lot struggling with substance abuse. So just getting them to appointments regularly is a real issue. They tend to attend on one occasion and then the next week they miss the appointment or they'll forget about it or feel nervous or whatever it may be. I think that made it difficult. They are fairly erratic clients and often they may be resistant or apprehensive to try something different.

I had a few saying they'd go to Kickstart tomorrow and then tomorrow would come and they'd get to the bus and find a way not to go because probably it was just a little bit too much. So something to soften that first step.

As well as a reluctance and anxiety about trying new experiences, transport was also identified as a barrier to engagement. Although St Johns Park is on a number of bus routes it can be difficult to access, especially for those with limited incomes. A number of CCOs suggested access to taxi vouchers or bus tickets to facilitate attendance. There was a suggestion that the location – associated with child safety, youth justice and drug and alcohol treatment services – had negative connotations for a number of people which may have affected their willingness to attend.

4.2 Impact of attendance

CCOs were asked what kind of impact they had witnessed on their clients of attending Freedom Arts. Some CCOs said they had not had enough contact to comment on this, others felt that although the hurdle was getting there, "for the right participants it is a fantastic program". They described how a number had gained significantly from the experience in terms of self-esteem and confidence, pro-social modelling, providing a creative outlet, offering meaning and purpose, mitigating anxiety and providing a sense of accomplishment. One CCO described it as "an amazing and inspiring program":

The program was a large contributor towards the client's positive mental health during the order. It gave him a sense of purpose and ultimately pride in being able to complete artwork.

My client says he enjoys it and looks forward to going each week. He has advised me it gives him a boost of confidence as he feels appreciated by others as well as the staff in the project. He tells me he feels cared for and very comfortable talking with her [Caroline]. It is assisting in growing self-confidence.

I was really impressed with those who were engaging. They were engaging on a very frequent

basis and the art work they were producing was really impressive. A lot of the people hadn't had any history of being creative. I was just blown away by some of the work they were doing. For the people in there, there were a lot of benefits. They were tapping into a whole new side of their personality that they didn't recognise that they had.

The lack of complex and time-consuming intake requirements meant clients could engage quickly, whilst the voluntary and informal nature of the program and its distance from the criminal justice system made it feel like something they wanted to do rather than something they were directed to do. As CCOs pointed out, this distinguished Freedom Arts from other programs and aided participation rates:

The program worked. There were so many benefits from it. Caroline was always very approachable. Her personality was very good at engaging people. It was a great program because it was that nice step away from the justice system. So having it not located in the building here was a great benefit. It didn't feel like a regular justice appointment. It felt like you were there for your own interest and to do something outside your mandated appointments. That was a really good part of the program. The range of things that were offered was fantastic, from painting to working on pallet building, furniture.

One significant impact of clients' attendance was the way in which it influenced the work of Corrections and their own service delivery. As a couple of CCOs stated, traditional counselling was not suitable for many of their clients so engaging with arts and group activities which were fun was considered more effective and appropriate. It helped participants to have a sense of purpose which then transferred to other areas of their lives. This meant they were more motivated to make positive change and to actively work towards rehabilitation and reintegration. It also aided CCOs to work with their clients in a different way, by seeing them from a more holistic perspective and developing more positive relationships with them. As one CCO commented, it helped to prepare them for group therapy environments and potentially other therapeutic rehabilitation programs:

It gives you something to talk about which is positive. Oh, you did that. And it builds up that confidence. I think it just made it easier and they are probably more likely to open up if they feel relaxed and doing something which makes them feel good and which they are good at. They feel more confident and getting positive praise from a job well done. If anything, it made the communication a bit easier.

We did some sessions out there and it was good to see a different side of them, much more relaxed and we didn't talk about justice stuff, we just talked about fun things and had a good afternoon. They are much more talkative. Doing their art and creating something as part of conversation and talking about something which was probably really significant. It was good to have a bit more of an informal conversation on the way in the car.

There was some discussion about whether making the program mandatory would be a benefit. However, there was a general consensus that its voluntary nature was a key contributor to its effectiveness:

The mandated appointments within the Department are one thing but for something like this which is artistic and creative that needs to be something they do because they enjoy it, they feel comfortable being there and it's a place of safety. A lot of our guys have stressful lives and for them that period in the week where they would go and do pallet furniture, that's their part of the week where they can unwind and relax. I don't think it should be mandated.

5. The views of contracted teaching artists

This evaluation was concerned not just with the impact on participants of engaging with the program, but also the mechanisms which deliver these impacts and the insights that gives into good practice in arts-justice programs and how it might be improved.

The evaluator spoke with two artists contracted to work with participants. The focus was about what good practice looks like for both artists and for the programs which employ them to work with vulnerable groups. They were asked about their own background and experiences of working with vulnerable groups, their goals and expectations in undertaking work with the program, induction, training, professional development and support received or required and any changes or improvements they would like to see.

Both artists had similar motivations for engaging in this kind of work and had become involved via word of mouth or having previously worked with Kickstart Arts:

It's really good to share the experience of what I do, very rewarding. You develop your practice and your work and you want to share it and put it out there for people to see and people who are inspired by it. People need to develop a relationship with that part of themselves. When I am in a making space I have real sense of satisfaction in myself and I love it. It's a therapeutic thing.

I recognise that the arts and imaginative realm are vital for each person to feel they are acknowledged. Acknowledging our internal realm and treating it with value is the starting point in healing from whatever hiccups we've had in our lives. While people are on the outside of society in offending roles and situations they could make a new start by valuing the imagination, valuing the internal world and bringing it out so people can see it, whether it's the dark side or more accepted part of people. Helping people just get the story out from their imagination and put a visual representation to it.

Artists were asked about the challenges they faced in working with this cohort and they described a learning curve resulting in changes to their professional practice. Firstly, they described the need to build a relationship with participants to be able to work with them effectively:

I didn't know what to expect, so when I first came in they were definitely checking me out for a long time. It took a while to trust me or open up to me or hear my ideas.

Secondly, they described a need to change the pace:

I came in thinking we would hit the ground running, we'll get on with some stuff. I realised I had to back off from that because I couldn't push them at the start. I have to really see where they're at each day and go with that and not have huge expectations for the outcomes for a day. There is a lot of talking and listening and supporting in that way. That has been a change for me. The pace for me was hard coming from a professional background of having something done. But you have a consistent amount of time rather than a lesson block so you have a whole day which is why you can be a bit gentler and slower. I did spend two or three sessions doing it at their pace and getting to know who they were and what their stories were enough to be able to help them transfer those stories into some form of physical visual art.

It's really made me approach it differently. If I push it too hard there is a collapse in confidence with participants. You really have to work with them at their pace and as they open up and

develop confidence. We are bringing in new ideas that is quite demanding for some participants. So we changed tack a bit and just let it flow. My approach is always what do you like and what can you do with that. At the beginning I had to really pace it, let them come to me.

Working with small numbers, as opposed to a class of students, had both negative and positive implications. On the one hand it limited the diversity of ideas in the room. On the other hand, being able to work more intensively with individuals paid off in terms of relationship building and producing an output more quickly:

We have been trying to get more participants through. I think more participants would have lifted the expectations in the room and what was happening. Art does feed off itself and we bounce ideas around. A lot of art and design is about problem solving. I want to do this; how do I do that and then everyone sits around and says well you could do it like this or like that.

It meant we could have higher quality time with each individual and in that sense it was a bonus for the offenders involved that they would get a lot more time with me. So working with five or six people where some wouldn't take on any wood carving, I would be spending time with three people and we developed their projects quite quickly. I didn't feel I had to be creating a finished work so we could all have something to show for it. We could just be sitting discussing all the various realms of what they were going through. It was much more about the process of getting to know your individual self. So if they wanted to put a mark on paper or carve into a piece of wood that was an absolute bonus.

Whatever the changes required to professional practice, the artists described substantial rewards in terms of the personal satisfaction they experienced as they witnessed positive changes in individual participants:

People coming into the art space were just relieved, to be amongst creative people compared to where they were living and restricted in what they could do. One said it's the only time he gets to smile at Freedom. It makes the program so valuable even with only a small number of people. When he first came here he could hardly speak, he was really, really shy and had lost a lot of the social skills to be in a place like this. But now he loves being here and waltzes in really happy. When I see him make something and hang it on the wall and say I really like that, that's really important. He has a lot of pride in that.

As an individual artist I found it very rewarding. It reinforced my own choices in being a community creative artist. To connect with people as humans who have made some poor decisions but who also have had a lot of hardship put upon them by society. I felt that I am reinforced in what I do as being a valuable contribution to our world and to Hobart and the individuals. This is important and a worthwhile place for me to be in the world. I like to feel I'm contributing. Art can feel a bit of a selfish pursuit at times. You can see how beneficial it is for people who get a lot from it. What I get from it is feeling like I'm offering something and sharing my skill set with people who need it and can benefit from it.

As the artists suggested, any training or induction required was about having a better understanding of the participant group and their particular needs and how this might impact on their usual practice, including the pacing of the work. This would need to be incorporated into any good practice model for organisations working in this area.

6. The views of community service organisations

The evaluation strategy required an annual survey of other organisations whose clients were referred into Freedom Arts via Community Corrections. Key informants from three organisations gave feedback on eleven of their clients who had been introduced to Freedom. Seven of these went on to attend regularly.

They commented on an easy and relaxed induction and engagement process where the key element was building a relationship with Freedom Arts staff. While some workers had initially attended with their client, they described how participants experienced immediate benefits from the program and from Caroline to the extent that they were then able to engage on their own without further support.

Questioned about any challenges with engagement and participation, one informant identified that “transport is the biggest barrier for potential referrals”. Like other commentators, they also identified the mental health of their clients, social anxiety and order suspensions or sanctions as barriers to engagement.

The impact of attending the program on their clients was described as “overwhelmingly positive”. As one said: “it works because the person is allowed to express themselves rather than being compliant or restricted on parole or a drug order”:

He thoroughly enjoys having meaningful activity in a weekly routine. He has relayed that he feels calmest on Freedom days as he was able to focus and think on nothing but what he is painting or working on. He feels as if this has been the most beneficial therapeutic support to date.

He has maintained abstinence with confidence. The location of Freedom was triggering to begin with and he crossed paths with past friends. But discovering the pros to using community-based support gave him strength and courage to work through uncomfortable triggers and cravings so much so that new associations became of greater value than past experiences. His self-confidence and worth increased through finding strengths in particular areas of art as well as an eagerness to learn and develop new skills quickly. He is proud to show his individual work and involvement in public based creations.

Respondents described how they had witnessed friendships being made, personal development and a growth in confidence, improved mental health and wellbeing and breaking down the effects of stigma and institutionalisation. They watched as individuals began to foresee future pathways away from the justice system as well as possible peer mentoring roles where they could feed back into the program by mentoring newer participants. Staff were identified as being key and acting as catalysts by providing a comfortable, non-judgmental and safe environment where people felt understood and were given opportunities for achievement:

It is the most successful community support because clients voluntarily engage. Caroline provides a safe place for them to feel themselves. Knowing someone has an understanding of court matters without this being the primary focus allows them to rebuild self-care, love and worth.

The participation of their clients was also having a positive impact on their own service delivery. They described being confident in knowing their services were complementary and that their client would benefit from the support and a demonstration of the importance of creative outlets, whether they were interested in arts or not. It had led one organisation to consider the value of offering

more creative outlets in their own services:

We have seen a huge benefit from Freedom pushing us towards wanting to provide people with a similar therapeutic style. It is very beneficial to people that engage. Having seen the impact we would like to offer more creative outlets on site for all residents, not just those on orders.

[Freedom] shares similar goals to ourselves, supporting clients to find new identities, maturation and social bonds. We share primary goals which are complementary – building motivational support to reduce the likelihood of reoffending via networking, relationship building.

When asked what changes they would like to see to the program they had few comments on the model itself. However, they did comment on Freedom's demonstrated ability to work with some of the most traumatised individuals who had long histories with the justice system and with substance use.

7. Conclusions and learnings

7.1 In summary

In 18 months of operation, Freedom Arts has demonstrated an ability to offer a legitimate referral option for those in the justice system. Building a solid foundation, establishing a referral process and developing relationships with Community Corrections, other community organisations, magistrates and with participants has led to an arts-based therapeutic justice program which can show success in beginning to address the underlying drivers of reoffending and recidivism. The program has been able to 'turn lives around' amongst those who have fully engaged. Even if only small numbers of lives are affected this is a major achievement and enormously beneficial in breaking the cycle of reoffending.

Freedom Arts has been successful in:

- achieving a high engagement and participation rate (56%) among a cohort of offenders who are often notoriously difficult to attract into therapeutic programs
- generating positive changes in participants which can be both qualitatively and quantitatively measured over time in the key dimensions driving reoffending and substance use. These include changes in self-confidence/self-efficacy, hope, impulsivity, motivation, resilience, trust and wellbeing, demonstrating a genuine potential to turn lives around. For those who engaged it made a real difference, aiding recovery, social connection and creating something meaningful.
- complementing the service delivery of other organisations – Community Corrections, community service organisations, the courts – by providing a space actively promoting reintegration and rehabilitation and giving other services a more holistic perspective and greater understanding of their clients. Freedom Arts might be described as a 'gateway' service, providing the confidence and support to ease participants' engagement with other services.

The key elements of the developing model which have been instrumental in being able to achieve these successes are:

- individually tailored programs to fit the needs and interests of participants and which challenge them to improve their skills
- an adaptive management process which can deal with the volatile circumstances of peoples' daily lives and the resultant fluctuating attendance levels over a period of weeks and months
- relationship-based service delivery and the creation of a non-mandatory, safe, non-judgmental and welcoming environment where participants feel supported, understood and which can foster interactions and pathways beyond the justice system to 'break the cycle'.

The inability of Freedom Arts to attract the number of participants anticipated in the original Deed has not been due to the capacity of the model to work with growing numbers. Rather it is due to dependence on Community Corrections for referrals, which consistently remained less than

anticipated, and is also due to the complexity and long-term nature of working with and challenging the underlying causes of crime and recidivism. This means that despite the withdrawal of funding and cessation of the program, there are a series of valuable lessons to be learnt from implementing and operating Freedom Arts which can inform any future iteration of arts-justice programs in Tasmania.

7.2 Learnings

What can the experience of establishing and operating Freedom Arts teach us about the future for therapeutic arts-justice programs in Tasmania? And what is required for good practice in this area?

- **Comprehensive planning processes.** Freedom Arts was a multi-agency program reliant for its success on partnerships with a key referring agency and with other community support organisations. It takes time and investment to knit together a number of different agencies. To foster this requires a realistic lead-in time, investment in building and developing appropriate partnerships, a true assessment of need and demand, supported pathways for referral and engagement and embedding the program in the network of services working in the rehabilitative and reintegration space so that no opportunities for collaboration are missed.
- **Flexible funding** for pilot programs able to carry risk and be adaptive to changing circumstances and a participant-focused adaptive management model to give programs the greatest chance of success.
- **Embedding evaluative processes** which employ both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to assess impact and outcomes and respond to change in an ongoing manner, so pilot programs can ‘learn as you go’.
- **Governance.** A proactive steering committee/auspicing organisation representing multi-agency partnerships to support program staff, undertake administrative work and engage in ongoing promotional work to expand engagement with and understanding of the program.

Instrumental in being able to achieve a successful arts-justice program model are:

- **referral and assessment processes which take a holistic approach** to an individual’s needs and potential benefit rather than highly formal assessment and restrictive criteria
- **individually tailored programs** to fit the needs and interests of participants which challenge them to improve their skills across a number of domains
- **a versatile arts space** which can be adapted to a range of different activities and foster individual programs
- **supported induction and engagement pathways** in recognition of the numerous psychological and practical barriers to engagement for this cohort
- **relationship-based service delivery** to create a safe, non-mandatory, non-judgmental and welcoming environment where participants feel supported and understood. This requires highly skilled arts practitioners with the ability to build rapport with people from marginalised groups and adapt their professional practice accordingly

- **quality not quantity** and a focus on the kinds of changes individuals can experience working in small groups with a trauma-informed approach rather than the volume of participants who are processed through any program
- **less structured, more informal programming** focusing on social and emotional connection, learning new skills, doing something meaningful and being treated like a person not an offender. Given the complexity and long-term nature of challenging the underlying causes of crime and recidivism, programs should be open-ended and be able to manage fluctuating attendance
- **working with women** and thinking constructively about how to offer a service fully accessible to women. This might lead to women-only activities and workshops
- **working with volunteers.** There is a valuable role for volunteers in arts-justice programs to assist with creating a welcoming space, helping with practical tasks, mentoring and role modelling. This might include the progression of some participants to roles as volunteer peer mentors and as champions of arts-justice programs.

A key learning from Freedom Arts is the way in which it highlighted the significant gap in both community-based and pre-release rehabilitative programs to tackle high recidivism rates in Tasmania. Although Community Corrections offers assistance, it is more about support to meet the conditions of an order rather than therapeutic or rehabilitative programs to assist offenders to lead better lives. Programs which can provide a feeling of achievement, a sense of belonging and acceptance and a pathway to a better life are almost non-existent in Tasmania. All other organisations consulted as part of this evaluation commented on the way in which Freedom Arts was able to contribute to and complement their own reintegration work by making it more effective, building bridges and giving people the confidence and self-esteem to go further in learning and engagement with other programs.

7.3 Future developments

Evidence from the evaluation and an analysis of the learnings which have emerged from the pilot suggest that this model of working has proved effective in beginning to turn around the lives of those who fully engage with it. As other research has demonstrated, of particular note is that the less formal, more flexible approach which can attend to participants' specific needs and wishes and the non-judgmental attitudes of staff are instrumental in promoting personal reform.

The pilot has established a firm base for the development of and investment in new programs which integrate the learnings in order to tackle the cycle of reoffending. At the same time, the report has also identified a large gap in therapeutic rehabilitation and reintegration programs in the state which can operate as complementary to existing services. As one commentator said:

It is a fantastic start for a new Freedom. Hopefully a fire has been lit and can be blown back into life in whatever shape.

This evaluation recommends building on Freedom Arts' achievements to establish a new program(s) with a firmer and potentially broader referral base, fully embedded in the service network with established community partnerships and offering a strong connection with the prison and pre-release initiatives.

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