

Press Release

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Southbank Centre launches new series of *Art by Post* activity packs to boost mental health as 75% of participants say it improved their wellbeing



Image credits (L-R): Anna Selby © Katie Musgrave; Love Ssega © Ben Millar Cole; *A Wind-Up performance* by artist Brian Keeley, photograph by Bibo Keeley, 2020

The Southbank Centre's popular **Art by Post** scheme, in partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing, which delivered free activity booklets to those most isolated during COVID-19, returns with six new creativity booklets providing free poetry and art activities to support anyone with long-term physical and mental health needs. Participants can refer themselves, be referred by a friend, family member or a professional such as a Social Prescribing Link Worker, or organisations can sign up to receive the booklets in bulk. For more information on how to sign up click [HERE](#).

Art by Post reached almost 4,500 people aged 18-103 across the UK in care homes, hospitals, charities, arts organisations, specialist dementia services, prison facilities and housing initiatives, giving them an outlet for artistic expression. According to feedback from previous participants, 90% agreed *Art by Post* had given them something to look forward to, 86% felt inspired to be more creative, 75% agreed that it had improved their wellbeing, while 73% said it had helped them to feel more positive.

The new *Art by Post: Poems For Our Planet* booklets, designed by artists and activists, guide people through activities using poetry, creativity and nature to inspire and support wellbeing. People are encouraged to think about how they can care for the health of our planet. Some of the poetry created by participants will be included in an installation as part of the Southbank Centre's wider summer season of work centering on the climate emergency with a focus on empathy and activism.

Artists who are participating in creating this series of activity booklets include activist artist **Doug Francisco**, multidisciplinary artists **Bibo & Brian Keeley**, author **Shazea Quraishi**, musician and performing artist **Love Ssega**, poet and naturalist **Anna Selby**, artist **Jess Thom**, and visual artist and writer **Amanda Thompson**.

The booklets have been supported by Paul Pulford, Founder and Head Gardener of Grounded Ecotherapy, and his team Kevin Fitzgerald and Michael Richardson. Grounded Ecotherapy is a volunteer-led horticultural therapy project for people in recovery from substance abuse, mental health conditions and homelessness.

Partners involved in supporting *Art by Post: Poems For Our Planet* are multi-arts centre **The Barn** in Banchory, Aberdeenshire, events venue **Platform** in Glasgow, activity and engagement charity the **National Activity Providers Association (NAPA)**, which supports a national network of 3,000 care homes, **Nightingale Hammerson** care homes in London and national charity **The Reading Agency**.

Alexandra Brierley, Director of Creative Learning at the Southbank Centre, said: *"When we first launched Art by Post, we had more referrals than we expected and we received incredible feedback from those that took part in this wellbeing initiative. We're delighted that we're able to launch a new series of activity booklets with the support of the National Academy for Social Prescribing. Art by Post gives a platform and voice to those often isolated and builds on the Southbank Centre's wider mission to harness the power of arts to improve mental health and wellbeing."*

Sunita Pandya, Interim CEO at The National Academy for Social Prescribing, said: *"After the success of the first Art by Post project, we are delighted to be partnering with the Southbank Centre again and funding the project to present Art by Post: Poems for Our Planet. At NASP we've witnessed the life changing effect social prescribing - connecting people to non-medical support to address problems like isolation or stress - can have on people's mental and physical health."*

However, we are also keenly aware that some green social prescribing or arts for wellbeing projects aren't accessible to those who cannot leave the house. These booklets - which are being offered to link workers for distribution - make social prescribing activities available to all. We can't wait to see the work they inspire."

Gay Palmer, Social Prescribing Link Worker, added: *"Nature is known to improve a person's physical and mental wellbeing, and everyone should have the opportunity to benefit from this. As a link worker I support many individuals who are unable to leave their home or access nature due to many reasons. Thankfully this booklet will allow them to interact with nature in a meaningful way which will allow for a connection with themselves and a wider community."*

Anna Selby, poet and naturalist, commented: *"Being part of something that reaches out to so many people, meets them where they are and supports them to connect and engage with*

the natural world through their imaginations; is like us learning from the birds who were the first gardeners and took seeds to new places, spreading flowers, fruits and shoots.”

Simone Stewart, Head of Creative Programmes at The Barn, added: “Over the last few years, *Art by Post* has become a rich network of interconnections where our communities have come together, listened and learnt from one another. We are looking forward to *The Poems for Our Planet* series of booklets and workshops as this will help us to explore not only our relationship to one another, but also our relationship to nature. This programme will contribute to creating the conditions of shared understanding and creative joy, helping us to build care and resilience.”

#ENDS#

For further press information, please contact:

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Images: Available to download [here](#)

For more information on how to sign up to *Art by Post: Poems for Our Planet* click [HERE](#).

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Testimonials from the first *Art by Post*:

“Art by Post has given something that I never really knew I had, a poetic side to me, I am now on my 30th poem, it has shown me that I have a constructive side to me. It makes me think, that gives my poor old brain something to do, exercise is good for you they say, so exercising the brain must be good for your brain.

I think mostly it gives me an overall sense of achievement to be able to do something that other people like and enjoy reading, so mostly what Art by Post has given me is a part of myself I didn't know was there, and I like that part and it has given me some friends that sadly I haven't met yet, but hopefully I will someday.”

Alan, Art by Post participant

“Art by Post [...] made me think outside the box, I found it very stimulating. It was things that I would never have dreamed of doing, illustrating music for example, and imagining you're a tree - it really inspired me. It's been lovely, I really look forward to what's coming next time.”

Barbara, Art by Post participant

“Art by Post has made an astonishing difference to my life during the pandemic. Proud isn't a word I use often, but I bloody am of this, if I'm honest.”

“Almost like getting a present in the post.”

“Art is a way to make someone who is unwell feel connected – it promotes healing and conversation.”

“Art by Post was fantastic – quite a brilliant idea! I discovered what I could do and of course what I couldn’t! I so enjoyed the drawing and writing, even wrote a tiny poem, never have done that before and I am attempting to write more poems.”

Social Prescribing Link Worker

A Social Prescribing Link Worker connects people with local community activities and services that can help improve their health and wellbeing.

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK’s largest arts centre occupying a prominent riverside location that sits in the midst of London’s most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. We exist to present great cultural experiences that bring people together and we achieve this by providing the space for artists to create and present their best work and by creating a place where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work. We want to take people out of the everyday, every day. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. It is also home to six Resident Orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra). www.southbankcentre.co.uk/

About the National Academy for Social Prescribing

We are an organisation dedicated to the advancement of social prescribing through promotion, collaboration and innovation. We work to create partnerships, across the arts, health, sports, leisure, and the natural environment, alongside other aspects of our lives, to promote health and wellbeing at a national and local level. We will champion social prescribing and the work of local communities in connecting people for wellbeing.

Our objectives are to

- Make some noise – raising the profile of social prescribing
- Find resources – develop innovative funding partnerships
- Build relationships – broker and build relationships across all sectors
- Improve the evidence – shape and share the evidence base
- Spread what works – promote learning on social prescribing



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