

CONNECT  
THE DOTS



# CONNECT THE DOTS CHARITABLE TRUST

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CASE STUDY REPORT BY GEVA DOWNEY  
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With support from the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, through the Te Tahua Whakahaumarū Creative Arts Recovery and Employment (CARE) Fund, Connect the Dots has been able to successfully enhance access to, and participation in, our art-making and art discussion programmes for adults living with intellectual disabilities.

Support to broaden the demographics of our participants during the Covid Pandemic (which reduced our access to older participants and people living with dementia) enabled Connect the Dots to work alongside residents of LIFE Homes.

LIFE Homes (The Life Centre Trust Auckland) has five residential homes in the Warkworth area and Rodney district, providing 24/7 care for adults with an intellectual disability.

This Case Study report shares the joy and growth that LIFE Homes resident Tessa has experienced. As with every human interaction, the positive impact of this project has also been felt by Connect the Dots Tutor, Geva Downey, who has brought her exceptional skills in art facilitation, and her warm and respectful manner, to residents like Tessa, for their first opportunity for professionally-facilitated creative arts workshops in their home.



Sessions began in May and were delivered every second week on a Monday morning.

Tessa's work is prolific and she approached sessions with enthusiasm and curiosity. As sessions progressed she became more curious about her flatmate's way of working. Her language with her peers began to mimic the questions often posed by the facilitator during session, "What do you notice?", "what makes you say that"? ... and offering encouragement "YES! I can see that. You used your mum's favourite colour. She will love that!"

This led to richer conversation about the art works used during visual analysis and the original works made by the group. The positive encouragement fed the wellbeing of the whole group



*Tessa talking with Natalie about painter, Star Gossage. They are talking about the mood of the colours used and if that makes them feel safe or excited...or both!*



**Tessa is confident and enjoys sharing her thoughts and interests with others, but visual art sessions allowed for a more nuanced way to share what her experience of the world is like, sometimes specific to her Māori culture.**

**When discussing her painting of her awa, Tessa remarked, 'I made this because it means a lot to our powerful river (her awa)... There are stones that you can throw in the water'.**



**During sessions we share discoveries made through experimentation and emphasise the value in her work. Tessa's house in Orewa is home to six women, staffed by a small rotating roster of careers. Experimentation involves risk taking. Doing this in a safe, familiar environment can support positive associations in the home and with one another.**

**When asked what her favourite session was, she replied with "I loved them all because I got to try something new every time". Then after a minute she added, "I really loved making paints from plants".**



**Her paint experiments link to the action of throwing stones in her area and watching the splash.**

**Sometimes her works would relate to an experience in wider urban world:**

**'...and you have got a texture.. texture all different tiles and colours.. but this (points to an area on the art work) is like WOOP! It gives you the coverage, everything is covered in the hospital.'**

**Her creative practice has helped Tessa to communicate her physical experience of visiting the hospital and make further meaning from the world around her. The shapes, lines, textures and dimensions of that hospital environment were important parts of the experience and her unique way of processing the world.**

It is important to Tessa to be able to share other interests and precious objects that give her a sense of safety and being cared for.

Often after sessions, she would pop away to her room and bring back a favourite Teddy to tell me how important it was to her. One morning, after giving her Teddy kisses she said 'I love art and I also really love my teddy'.



Positive feelings about her art making was being connected to other areas of her life that gave her satisfaction.

Participation and agency is valued in the homes and by the clients, helping with the set up and clean up is an act of caring for their space and one another - maanakitanga.



**This project supporting the work of LIFE Homes residents would not have been possible without the support of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage CARE Fund. We are first and foremost a creative ageing trust, with both a reputation for providing meaningful arts opportunities for older people and people living with dementia, and significantly funding that is tied to serving this demographic.**

**Without the understanding and flexibility of this grant, we would not have been able to dedicate our educators and resources to support Tessa and her flatmates so readily, nor provided meaningful and rewarding opportunities for our educators, which contributes to their ongoing development and professionalism.**

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