

Welcome!

We hope that this information sheet will answer any questions you may have throughout your time with Creative Alternatives. Please remember that the team are here to support you, so if you do have any other questions or concerns please feel free to contact us. You can also find lots of information at our website – www.creativealternatives.org.uk.

Who are Creative Alternatives?

The Creative Alternatives programme is a joint initiative between Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council's Leisure Services Department (Arts Development) and the **Invest To Save** programme. The scheme began in November 2006 as a result of a pilot study which led to us being awarded 3 years of funding. Creative Alternatives works in close partnership with Sefton PCT, Sefton's Health Improvement Support Service, the Active Sefton programme and Active Reading, a reading project by Sefton Libraries.

Who can get involved?

Residents of Sefton who are over 18 years of age and who are experiencing mild to moderate stress, depression and/or anxiety. You do not necessarily need a diagnosis of these conditions from your GP; it may be that you know yourself that you often feel down or anxious, or that your life is particularly stressful at the moment due to things such as family problems, loneliness, or money worries.

How can creative activity help me?

There are many benefits which creative activity can offer and what you get out of it really depends on your own goals. For some it is about a distraction from the stresses of their every day life. For others it is a chance to express themselves and learn about their emotions. Others again simply enjoy coming out to meet new people, to gain some confidence and to feel a sense of achievement in a creative project.

Here is what some of the people on our programme have already said:

"I am really having a great time at the sessions and feel much more happy in myself after each one, also it gives me optimism for the future which is good 'cos it was looking a tad bleak beforehand."

"I like doing art because it helps me express something which is beyond words. Because it relieves me. I don't have words for everything I feel but I can express my feelings through drawing or mask making. I always feel better afterwards."

"I just want you to know how special and important these arts workshops are to me. They are a lifeline. They are the only moments in a week when I feel free to share and communicate. They draw my emotions, and make me feel vulnerable but somehow safe too. They give me a confidence to try to express some of my fears and deepest feelings, and there are always people there who are willing to listen and encourage."

Do I have to be good at art?

No! Creative Alternatives is all about getting involved and having fun. It is the process that is important rather than the end product. And most people are more creative than they realise - you may uncover some hidden talents!

How do I get involved?

A professional may recommend that you get involved with us. You can request that they refer you to us by completing a form which is available at our website or directly from our Referral Officer. (By professional we mean, for example, a GP, psychologist, counsellor, social worker, community nurse, occupational therapist, or someone working within the community and voluntary sector)

You can also self-refer by phoning, writing, emailing or completing the form on our website. If you come to us via self-referral you will be asked for details of a professional we can write to for a reference.

What happens once I have been referred?

Before taking part in Creative Alternatives you will be invited to meet the programme's Referral Officer. This informal meeting will take place somewhere in the community where you can easily get to and where you feel comfortable. During this first meeting (which lasts approximately one hour) an assessment will be made of your suitability for the programme and you will have the opportunity to find out if we are right for you. You will be asked to complete a couple of simple questionnaires and asked about how you feel your depression/anxiety/stress affects your daily life and also how you hope that Creative Alternatives will help. Practical issues, such as when you can attend workshops and what your creative interests are, will also be explored.

If the programme currently on offer suits your needs you will be invited to begin attending the workshops and you will be expected to attend sessions on a regular basis. The Arts Project Officer will keep you up to date with the Creative Alternatives programme, which includes a variety of workshops and monthly outings, such as visits to museums and galleries.

Where and when will the creative workshops take place?

Where possible this will be based on the times and locations which are most convenient to you. This will be discussed in the first meeting you have with the Referral Officer. All the workshops and meetings take place in community buildings, such as arts centres, libraries, NHS centres or community centres.

What will happen at the workshops?

Each workshop will be run by an experienced artist and a support artist. We envision that the groups will be relatively small in number with no more than ten participants per workshop. We hope that this will give you an opportunity to meet new people and become acquainted. Each workshop will be different; depending on the focus of the group, it may include crafts, drawing, painting, watercolours, creative writing, pottery, photography, drama, dance or music.

You will have access to a weekly intro workshop which will familiarise you with a variety of art-forms. This intro workshop runs throughout the year, we only stop for occasional breaks (usually around the holiday periods). The intro workshop is a great way to get to know Creative Alternatives. It offers lots of fun activities and what we do depends very much on what you are interested in! We currently operate two intro workshops, one of which is held in the south and the other in the north of the borough.

Throughout the year, we also run up to eight specialist workshops. These workshops focus on a particular art-form, say creative writing, and they are a little more concerned with the final outcome. Your enjoyment is still at the top of our list ... but these workshops give us the opportunity to work towards an exhibition, a publication or a performance! No worries if this doesn't happen though. Specialist workshops also run on a weekly basis and they last for ten weeks at a time.

What are the theatre and gallery visits?

We will regularly organise group visits to local galleries or theatre productions. There may also be occasions when you can access discounted theatre tickets due to your involvement with Creative Alternatives.

What are the reviews?

At regular intervals you will be asked to complete the simple questionnaires done in your first meeting with the Referral Officer. We do this to ensure that you are comfortable with the programme and that you are finding it beneficial. This process will enable us to make any necessary changes to the programme and give you the opportunity to tell us of any problems you may have. This will usually be done via post, however, if you feel that you would rather do this in a one-to-one meeting with the Referral Officer, this can be arranged. We ask for your full co-operation in this process as it affects the future funding of the project.

Since my involvement with Creative Alternatives my depression/anxiety has improved should I reduce my medication?

We would strongly advise you to speak to your doctor before altering any medication.

Through the art work I have learned things which I am uncomfortable with. What should I do?

The creative process can be very powerful. Feelings which have been buried deep inside may come to the surface. If this happens and you feel you would like some extra support you can speak in confidence to someone on the Creative Alternatives team and we will try to help you access local counselling services. Alternatively, you can speak to your GP.

What will happen to the information you have about me?

The Referral Officer will discuss this with you at your first meeting and ask you to read through and sign the 'Consent Form'. Any information about you will be kept within the Creative Alternatives team and not be passed on to outside parties without your consent. The results of any questionnaires you complete with us will not show your name or any other personal details. These will always be kept separate; and we will identify you in our records through a code. In the initial meeting we will ask, if you consent to the use of personal information for the research we are carrying out, and you will be given the opportunity to consider this once more at your final meeting when you exit the programme. You can change your mind at any point please speak to the Referral Officer.

Does it cost anything?

All the workshops and materials are free of charge. The only thing you will have to pay for is your travel.

Do you provide child care?

We do not provide child care, but we do know of places which do. Please discuss this with us.

What if I can not attend a session or decide to leave?

The programme offered is designed to improve your emotional wellbeing and regular attendance is strongly recommended. However we do understand that this is not always possible. If you are unable to make a session please let us know in advance.

If you decide it is time for you to leave the programme please contact us to arrange your exit meeting.

What happens when my scheduled programme ends?

Once your scheduled programme ends, you will meet again with the Referral Officer for your exit meeting. She will support you in continuing your creative activities through public arts workshops, theatre, library and gallery programmes, as well as college courses in Sefton, if you feel that this is right for you.

After you have left the programme we may contact you on occasion to ask you to complete the questionnaire again which you did in your reviews so that we can see what the longer term affects of the programme have been for you.

Please remember that we are here to help and that you may contact us for support, motivation or advice.