



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Anxiety UK

Anxiety UK

Art for Anxiety Relief Course Evaluation Report

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UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

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Key:

(AM) = Anonymous Member

(AA) = Anonymous Artist

1. Overview

Dr Faye Sayer and Amy Luck from the University of Birmingham, in partnership with **Anxiety UK**, undertook a study into the impacts of **Anxiety UK's Art for Anxiety Relief** online creative courses, funded by the Katharine and Harold Fisher Anxiety Research Fund. Between January 2022 and March 2023 online member and course attendee quantitative and qualitative surveys, based on public healthcare and psychologically accredited measures, were undertaken with **70 Art for Anxiety Relief** course attendees and **82 Anxiety UK** members.

The evaluation provided robust, rigorous, and significant evidence to support **Anxiety UK's** work and their wider strategic vision and values, including providing high quality, accessible, innovative and personalised services based on the experiences of those who have experience of anxiety, stress and anxiety-based depression. The research provided evidence to enable **Anxiety UK** to understand how and why attending **Art for Anxiety Relief (AfAR)** courses had changed attendee's mental wellbeing and anxiety levels.

1.1. Key Findings

Anxiety for Arts Relief courses reduce anxiety and improve wellbeing:

- **Measurably and significantly** reduced attendees' anxiety and improved mental wellbeing
- **Reduced anxiety** from 'moderate' to 'mild'
- Supported the New Economics Foundation (NEF) Five Ways to Wellbeing:ⁱ
 - Enabled attendees to **Connect, Take Notice, and Keep Learning**.
- Positively impacted the National Accounts Framework Wellbeing Indicators:ⁱⁱ
- Measurably improved **Personal Wellbeing**
 - **Emotional Wellbeing:** increased positive feelings and reduced negative feelings
 - **Positive Functioning:** improved engagement and feeling competent
 - **Resilience and Self-Esteem:** attendees felt more optimistic, resilient and increased self-esteem
- Measurably improved **Social Wellbeing:**
 - Facilitated the development of **Supportive Relationships**

"It impacted on my anxiety because it made me feel that I had done something proactive, that I was competent and then it led to me having new hobbies which mean I meet more people and spend less time worrying or feeling useless" (AfAR Attendee)

1.2. Executive Summary

Anxiety UK, established in 1970, is the UK's leading anxiety disorders charity, run by and for, those with lived experience of anxiety including, but not limited to, agoraphobia, social phobia, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), specific phobias, health anxiety and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

The organisation has a strong service delivery arm and provides a range of support services including 1:1 psychological therapy: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, counselling, and clinical hypnotherapy, alongside text, helpline support and other information and advice services focused on anxiety.

We firmly believe that those affected by anxiety should have a choice regarding treatment options because a 'one-size fits all' approach is not always suitable, as many require care that is tailored to their specific needs. Furthermore, whilst there are now a range of psychological therapies available through **Anxiety UK** and indeed the National Health Service (NHS) for those needing support, we have very much felt that the potential of art-based approaches in the management of anxiety, has to date, yet to be fully exploited.

Following the proliferation of online support services developed in response to increased levels of anxiety arising ostensibly from the COVID-19 pandemic, **Anxiety UK**, like many organisations, saw the opportunity to further diversify its service delivery offer so as to reach as many people as possible needing support. As a direct result of feedback derived from the organisation's annual membership survey, national participation group, and an artist, originally commissioned to produce a painting to commemorate the charity's 50th anniversary in 2020, the concept of the **Art for Anxiety Relief (AfAR)** course was therefore created.

A few weeks later, following development of the course outline and promotion via the charity's social media networks, internal Customer Relationship Management System and via the charity's quarterly magazine, 'Anxious Times', the first **AfAR** course was launched in June 2021, running for an hour a week over 6 weeks on a Saturday morning, facilitated by a contemporary artist. Feedback received from participants attending the first **AfAR** course was overwhelmingly positive, and demand began to grow fast for additional courses in a relatively short space of time, resulting in further courses facilitated by the original facilitator being put on. Coincidentally, as word spread of the **AfAR** course, several artists with different genres including those specialising in watercolour, mandala, illustration, and crochet, independently approached **Anxiety UK** and were subsequently taken on as **AfAR** facilitators, running the next series of **AfAR** courses which had at that point, become part of the charity's mainstream service offer.

Whilst feedback continued to suggest that course participants were deriving immense benefit from attending **AfAR** courses, we wanted to be able to explore in a scientific manner, the effectiveness and acceptability of the **AfAR** approach, and therefore commissioned colleagues from the University of Birmingham to undertake this research on the charity's behalf via the charity's Katharine and Harold Fisher Anxiety Research Fund.

The results of this comprehensive study show very clearly that participants (and facilitators) derive many benefits from their involvement with the course, which not only includes a significant reduction in anxiety levels from moderate to mild, thereby proving the approach's effectiveness in the treatment of anxiety, but importantly, measurably improved personal and social wellbeing. Furthermore, the qualitative feedback received from participants provides evidence of the acceptability and value of the approach. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the **AfAR** courses play a vital role in the management of anxiety.

Armed with these findings, **Anxiety UK** will seek to expand its creative wellbeing offer, and in doing so, will take further vital steps towards meeting its legacy statement of 'making the despair caused by anxiety, a thing of the past'.

Dr Nicky Lidbetter

CEO

Anxiety UK

2. Art for Anxiety Relief Course Overview

Art for Anxiety Relief is a six-week, hourly online course for people aged 18+ delivered via Zoom. Designed to focus on the benefits of art in the management of anxiety, **Art for Anxiety Relief** is open to both **Anxiety UK** members and non-members and is advertised via **Anxiety UK's** website and social media channels.

Art for Anxiety Relief courses are facilitated by artists with different styles/genres of art/creative activities:

Contemporary – Degard is a British contemporary visionary painter who offers people an ability to broaden their perceptions, know themselves more deeply and to lose fears around art making in a highly supportive environment.

Mandala – Amy Diener is a Bangkok-based artist from New York with lived experience of OCD, who specialises in vibrant dot paintings. Amy uses art as a coping mechanism to relieve anxiety and through the course, teaches techniques that she has found helpful in the management of anxiety.

Illustration – Ruby is an illustrator who uses her creative medium to communicate her experience of anxiety to those around her. She guides course participants through understanding illustration techniques such as movement, scale and watercolour to apply to drawings that capture a specific emotion or memory.

Crochet – Facilitated by Leigh, this beginners crochet course is perfect for anyone looking to get started with the creative art of crochet. As well as learning a fun, new craft, participants also learn how to explore a different way to relax, be mindful, and maintain good mental health – all in a creative way.

3. Data Collection Methods

Quantitative mental wellbeing (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale – WEMWBS) and anxiety (Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment – GAD-7) measures were used in this study to investigate and measure the impact of attending **AfAR** online courses. Surveys were completed at the start and end of the course. This pre/post methodology provided data on change to attendee’s wellbeing and anxiety levels after the course.

Online member surveys, including qualitative methods comprising open-ended questions and free comment space, were also sent to **Anxiety UK** members in January 2023 to attempt to capture data from previous course attendees as well as ascertain barriers to attendance and ideas and recommendations for future courses and strategy.

Feedback from artists delivering **AfAR** courses was gathered via online focus groups and surveys which asked artists to share their perception of attendees’ experiences after the first and last session of each course.

Key indicators for improved wellbeing were based on NEF’s five evidence-based actions for wellbeing, which include: to connect; be active; take notice; keep learning and give (Figure 1)ⁱⁱⁱ and the National Accounts of Wellbeing personal and social indicator framework (Figure 2).^{iv}



Figure 1: Five Ways to Wellbeing^v

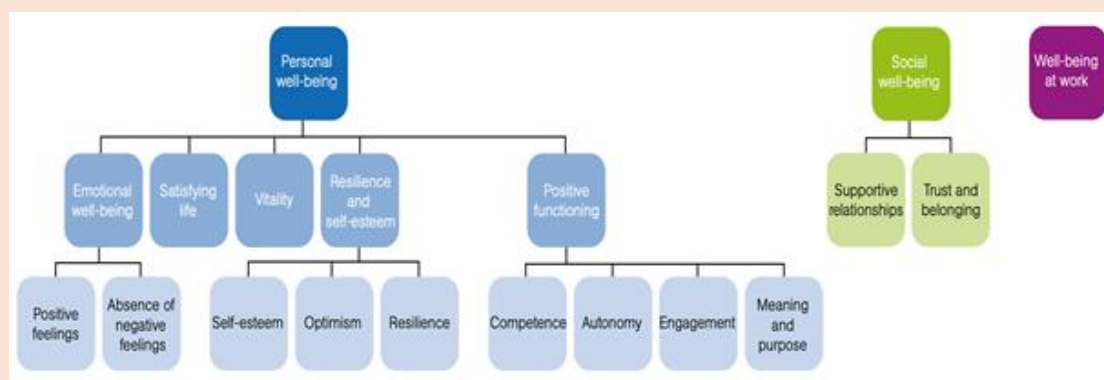


Figure 2: National Accounts of Wellbeing Framework indicator structure^{vi}

3.1. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)^{vii}

The WEMWBS is a self-administered questionnaire which was developed in part to enable the evaluation of programmes which aim to improve mental wellbeing. Respondents are asked to rate the frequency of 14 measures over the last two weeks using a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 (1= none of the time, 2= rarely, 3= some of the time, 4= often, 5= all of the time). Scores for each measure are summed to provide a total score.

3.2. Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7)^{viii}

The GAD-7 is a self-administered questionnaire which seeks to measure and classify participant's anxiety levels and anxiety symptom severity. Respondents are asked to rate the frequency of 7 measures over the last two weeks on a Likert scale ranging from 0-3 (0 = not at all, 1 = several days, 2 = more than half the days, 3 = nearly every day). Scores for each measure are summed to provide a total score, which determines severity of anxiety levels and symptoms:

Total Score	Anxiety Severity
1-4	Minimal symptoms
5-9	Mild symptoms
10-14	Moderate symptoms
15-21	Severe symptoms

4. Analysis Methods

AfAR course attendee's before and after surveys/scores were matched and if one score was missing (e.g., an attendee had not completed both the before and after survey) then the attendee was excluded from the data set, as without this change to wellbeing after visiting could not be assessed. As such the number of attendees who completed GAD-7 was reduced to 29 and the number of attendees who completed WEMWBS was reduced to 41.

Quantitative analysis was conducted on GAD-7 and WEMWBS total scores and WEMWBS individual measure results. Percentage differences between mean results from before and after visits were compared to enable an understanding of overarching data patterns. Statistical hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the significance of changes to individual's wellbeing and anxiety levels after attending the course, and the probability that any change was not a result of chance and showed a true reflection of the target population. The Paired-Sample Sign Test or Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test (related sample tests) were applied, where the null hypothesis assumed that the median of differences between [measure (e.g., 'I've been feeling useful) pre-test] and [measure post-test] equalled 0. Results were deemed to be statistically significant when the p-value returned by the test was below 0.05 (5%). Results were determined to be highly significant below 0.01 (1%). The two-tailed test was conducted to test for change to wellbeing, rather than improvement or reduction. The direction of change was determined by the greater number of positive or negative differences observed in matched pairs. If there were more positive matched pairs than negative, for example, the direction of change was determined to be positive.

Standard deviation from the mean was calculated to ascertain variability. Standard deviation demonstrated how far away on average each answer was from the mean average; the smaller the standard deviation, the more results were clustered around the mean and the less variability in the data. Standard deviation differences between the 'before' data and the 'after' data were calculated to assess whether variability had increased or decreased after attending an **AfAR** course. Lower variability between results was deemed to illustrate patterns of behaviour.

Qualitative data from online member and artist surveys and artist focus groups was thematically analysed, with the support of NVIVO software. Key themes identified were linked to the 5 Ways to Wellbeing and National Accounts Framework Wellbeing Indicators. Results of quantitative and qualitative analysis were triangulated.

5. Art for Anxiety Relief Courses

Anxiety UK staff and artists delivering **AfAR** courses were invited to attend an online focus group at the start of the study to enable researchers to understand the context surrounding this study and more about the audience, goals, and outcomes of the courses.

5.1. Audience

Focus group respondents suggested that those who attend and could benefit from courses included individuals who:

- are already interested in art
- have dropped artistic goals/dreams
- already understood the anxiety relief benefit of creativity
- are restarting hobbies/interests
- everyone!
- are struggling with low self-esteem
- are looking to upskill, or gain more practical skills
- are lonely

Respondents suggested that a potential issues/risks in working with such audiences included people feeling sensitive about what they produce (everyone wants to hear that their work is great) but this is a risk of art production and addressed in courses.

5.2. Goals

Artists and staff goals discussed in the focus group included:

- Creating a community feeling, encouraging team-work and togetherness.
Enabling the anonymous nature of courses to help people to open up and share.
- Creating a social space, allowing attendees to bounce ideas off each other
- Demonstrate how easy it is to get into art
- Facilitate attendees learning new skills to use during and after courses
- Ensuring participants feel that art is a self-care time, time to reflect/relax/enjoy.
Not necessarily the time to be the best artist!

Focus group respondents suggested that attendee goals included:

- Having a specific, booked time for self-care which enables attendees to hold themselves accountable to giving themselves that time
- Improving confidence
- Re-connecting with their creative side
- Allowing themselves to be free, creative, take things with them long-term
- Become transfixed in escapism
- Self-practise without a tutor

- Creating mental space where they can rest, create distraction/mindfulness/flow state

Common barriers to course attendees meeting these goals included group dynamics, worries about commitment, life circumstances and time.

5.3. Outcomes

Staff and artists suggested that **AfAR** courses could achieve the following outcomes:

- Attendees feel thrilled/excited to do more
- Some people book onto more courses
- Instant boost to self-confidence/ anxiety-relief
- Make friends and build a community
- Other options/outlets to help anxiety, not just medical care/drugs
- Stepping-stone to other outlets once know creativity can help
- Opening eyes to the impact of creativity

Focus group attendees suggested that success as a result of attending **AfAR** courses could include:

- Feeling joy from the experience
- Attending was worthwhile
- Reduction in anxiety
- Art production

6. Study Results

6.1. Course Attendee Survey Analysis

6.1.1. GAD-7 (Figures 3 & 4)

- **42.26%** decrease in attendee's mean average total scores
- Mean average attendee scores reduced from **10.34** (moderate anxiety) to **5.97** (mild anxiety)
- Statistically **highly significant** ($p = .002$) reduction in anxiety levels.
- Standard deviation reduced by **22.68%**.

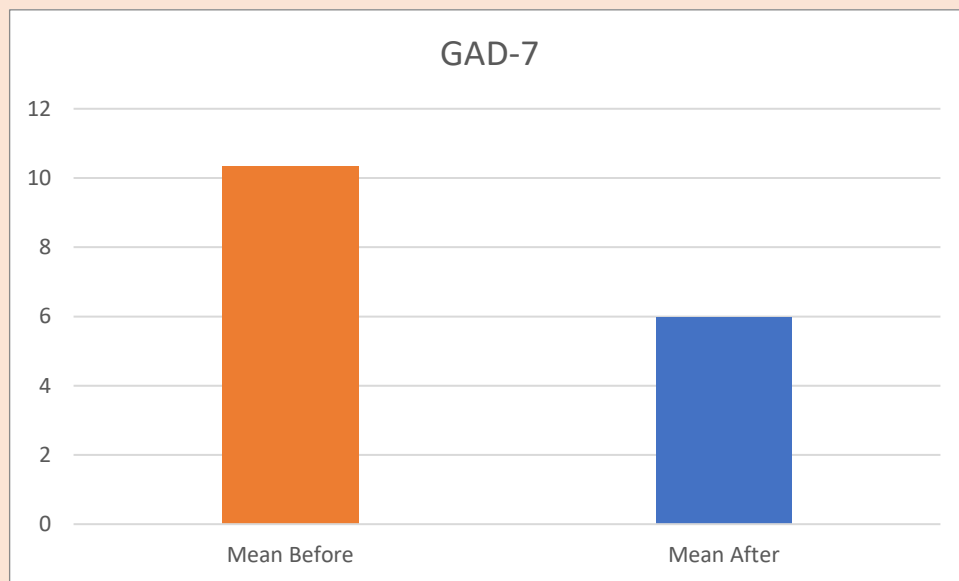


Figure 3: GAD-7 Total Mean Scores Before and After Course Attendance

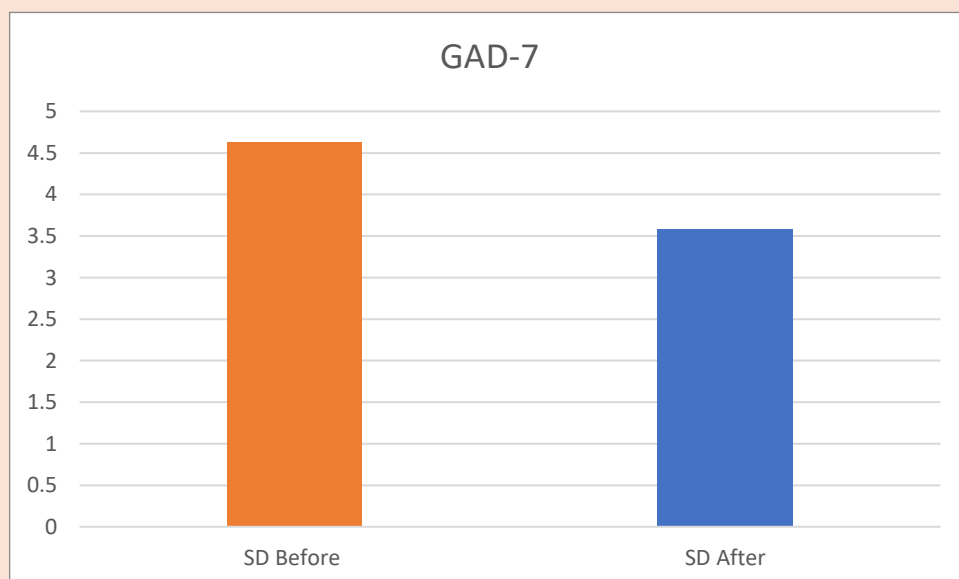


Figure 4: GAD-7 Standard Deviation Before and After Course Attendance

6.1.2. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Figures 5 & 6)

- Attendee mean average total scores increased from **41.5** to **47.8** (+**15.18%**)
- Attendee mean scores for all WEMWBS measures increased (from **6.25%** to **25%**).
- All measures underwent statistically significant increase after attendance
- Statistically **highly significant** increase in: I feel optimistic about the future, useful, relaxed, cheerful, interested in other people, energy to spare, dealing with problems well, good about myself, close to other people, confident, able to make up my own mind, interested in new things.
- Statistically **significant** increase to I feel I can think clearly, and I feel loved.
- SD reduced for all measures except thinking clearly which did not change and confident and optimistic about the future, which increased.

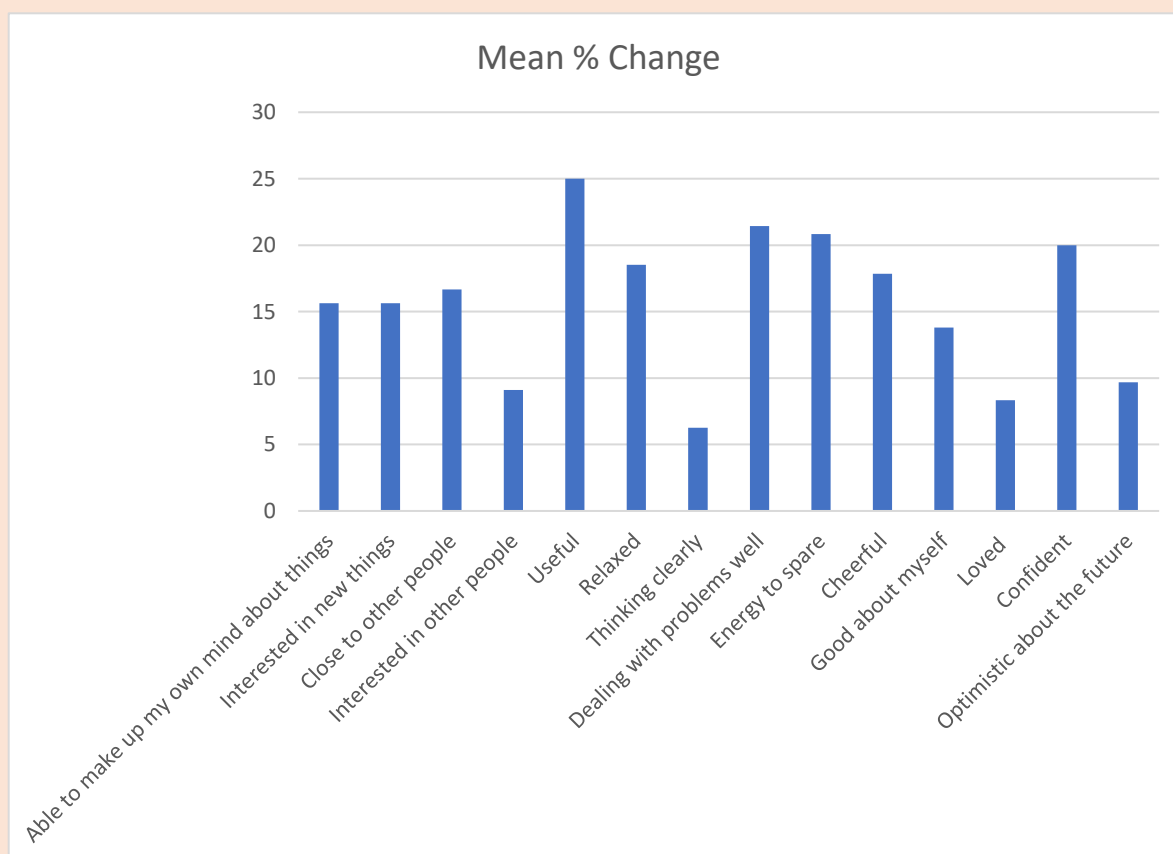


Figure 5: WEMWBS mean results percentage change

Measure I feel...	P Value	Significance Level	Mean Score Percentage Change	Standard Deviation Percentage Change
Able to make up my own mind about things	0.001	Highly significant	15.63	-26.60
Interested in new things	0.006	Highly significant	15.63	-23.23
Close to other people	0.002	Highly significant	16.67	-19.59
Interested in other people	0.008	Highly significant	9.09	-16.30
Useful	0.000	Highly significant	25.00	-13.51
Relaxed	0.000	Highly significant	18.52	-10.67
Thinking clearly	0.016	Significant	6.25	0.00
Dealing with problems well	0.000	Highly significant	21.43	-9.09
Energy to spare	0.000	Highly significant	20.83	-5.62
Cheerful	0.000	Highly significant	17.86	-6.76
Good about myself	0.001	Highly significant	13.79	-2.22
Loved	0.018	Significant	8.33	-16.19
Confident	0.000	Highly significant	20.00	2.56
Optimistic about the future	0.002	Highly significant	9.68	24.62
Total WEMWBS Score	0.000	Highly significant	15.18	-9.12

Figure 6: WEMWBS results after attending the course, including Mean Score Percentage Change, Standard Deviation Percentage Change, P Values and Significance levels

6.2. Artist Survey Analysis

Post-activity online event records were completed by 4 artists after the first and last course session for 6 courses. These surveys provided artist perceptions of **AfAR** attendee experience and indicated that courses met the artist/staff and attendee goals and outcomes discussed in focus groups conducted at the start of the study (see section 4).

6.2.1. Attendee experience

Artist event records demonstrated that compared to the first course session, by the end of the last course session, attendees appeared less anxious and more confident and engaged with the group and the session more (Figure 7).

% sessions in which artists responded that attendees “quite a bit” or “extremely”:		
Attendees...	First Course Session	Last Course Session
Appeared less anxious	66.67%	100%
Enjoyed the session	100%	100%
Engaged with the group	50%	100%
Actively engaged with the session	83.33%	100%
Understood the session	100%	100%
Learnt new skills and knowledge	100%	100%
Appeared happy	100%	100%
Shared idea and stories with each other	66.67%	66.67%
Demonstrated positive responses to the activity/event	100%	100%
Appeared confident	50%	83.33%

Figure 7: Table denoting percentage of first and last session in which artists responded “quite a bit” or “extremely”.

Qualitative feedback from artists suggested that **AfAR** courses improved attendee’s anxiety levels *“at the end of the session, we discussed our anxiety levels and maybe*

had transformed to feeling less anxious” (AA), and “I could see their anxiety levels lowered” (AA).

Analysis of qualitative data provided by artists indicated that attending **AfAR** courses improved attendees’ wellbeing based on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, including to **Keep Learning, Connect** and **Take Notice**. Thematic analysis of commentary indicated that connect was the most impacted measure, followed by keep learning, and take notice. Artists commented **AfAR** supported attendees to:

- **Keep Learning** *“everyone was focussed on learning a new skill” (AA) “I found that each week... everyone progressed” (AA) and “A few seemed keen at the idea of a next stage of course now they had the initial skills and techniques” (AA)*
- **Take Notice** *“they felt more grounded and mindful” (AA), with attendees sharing personal stories about “how the painting process has shaped their experience” (AA).*
- **Connect** *“There was a lot of friendly and engaging chat which has grown over the weeks” (AA) and “Personal stories have been shared throughout the course” (AA).*

The courses improved attendees’ personal and social wellbeing, specifically related to NEF wellbeing indicators.^{ix} Artists commented **AfAR** courses had improved attendees’ personal wellbeing, in the components of:

- **Emotional wellbeing**, positive emotions increased, and negative emotions reduced as attendees *“appeared more at ease” (AA), felt “peace and calmness” (AA) and “joy and relaxation” (AA), “people seemed happy when they left” (AA), “there were a lot of smiley people at the end!” (AA), and “everyone appeared in a good mood, happy to engage and chat” (AA).*
- **Positive functioning** as participants felt more engaged *“quick to get involved and share” (AA), “getting into the rhythm and play of painting” (AA) and “each week, there was full engagement” (AA), competent “people were...acknowledging their successes” (AA) and meaning and purpose “one of them had been struggling to get through her days, leave the house even. But that the course had given her life again and she was now doing something new every day and enjoying art again” (AA).*
- **Resilience, optimism, and self-esteem** were improved, attendees *“grew in confidence” (AA), were “happy to show and discuss their work and progress confidently and proudly” (AA) and inspired to continue creative endeavours “people shared what they were going to do for the future and that inspired the others to be involved” (AA), “One participant told me that I had inspired her so much she had now signed up for another art course that she hadn't been brave enough to do before” (AA), “most (if not all) of the group had already found*

another crochet project that they wanted to start - one even started hers today in the session! I find this to be a marker that they enjoy the craft and plan to continue, and with this continuation, all the subconscious mindful benefits of crochet will hopefully become habit and routine” (AA).

Artists commented that attendees’ social wellbeing was improved in the components of:

- **Supportive relationships** with artists commenting *“the group gelled nicely”* and *“the participants turned into a group and somehow we all relied on each other to attend and participate which was lovely - there was a coherence to the group that felt important”* (AA).
- **Trust and belonging**, where sharing of personal stories, shared interests and experiences created a *“sense of community”* (AA).

Artists noted some negative impacts to attendees, including feeling *“subdued”* (AA) that the course had come to an end, artists indicated they were *“sorry to see the end with the lovely people who had attended”* (AA) and *“A few [attendees] seemed keen at the idea of a next stage of course now they had the initial skills and techniques”* (AA). Multiple artists mentioned *“it was a shame to not have the ongoing connection of the group”* (AA) and *“it is a shame that this shared coherence then dissipates after the class is finished. I did not dare to share email addresses or ask people to do that in the class. I was not sure of the 'rules' around this”* (AA).

Other challenges to delivering courses included group dynamics *“Interaction was coming from 3 main people. It was difficult to get others to speak and get involved”* (AA), reassuring attendees *“that nothing is perfect, and to remember this process is about enjoyment and distraction”* (AA), and difficulties of delivering online *“doing this whole process remotely - the interaction is much harder than face to face”* (AA), *“it has always been challenging to do this on zoom and balance the multiple functions of screens with zoom. I am never completely convinced of the rapport online but it is convenient of course”* (AA).

6.2.2. Artist experience

“Meeting new people, sharing my knowledge with them” (Artist)

The evaluation indicated that facilitating **AfAR** courses positively impacted artists’ **personal wellbeing**. Commentary suggested artists’ **emotional wellbeing** improved, as they experienced a reduction in negative emotions and increase positive emotions *“I have been having my own personal struggles so undertaking the course has been a mix. The build up before the session today was overwhelming, but the actual session was fun, enjoyable, playful. And has left me with a much happier mood. Exactly what I needed, and what I hope the course brings others”* (AA) and **resilience and self-esteem** improved *“I feel proud of how far everyone has come”* (AA). Courses also supported **social wellbeing**, specifically supportive relationships *“I really enjoyed running this course and chatting and crocheting with the participants”* (AA).

6.3. Member Survey Analysis

In January 2023, **Anxiety UK** members were invited, via email, to complete an online survey. The survey aimed to provide data to understand current perceptions of **AfAR** courses amongst **Anxiety UK's** members and previous course attendees.

82 Anxiety UK members completed the online survey

- **46.30%** respondents were not aware of **AfAR** courses (Figure 8)
- **82.90%** respondents were interested in attending **AfAR** courses in the future (Figure 9)

The members survey indicated **AfAR** courses could benefit from increased advertising amongst **Anxiety UK** members and demonstrated there was a clear desire and audience for the courses amongst **Anxiety UK** members.

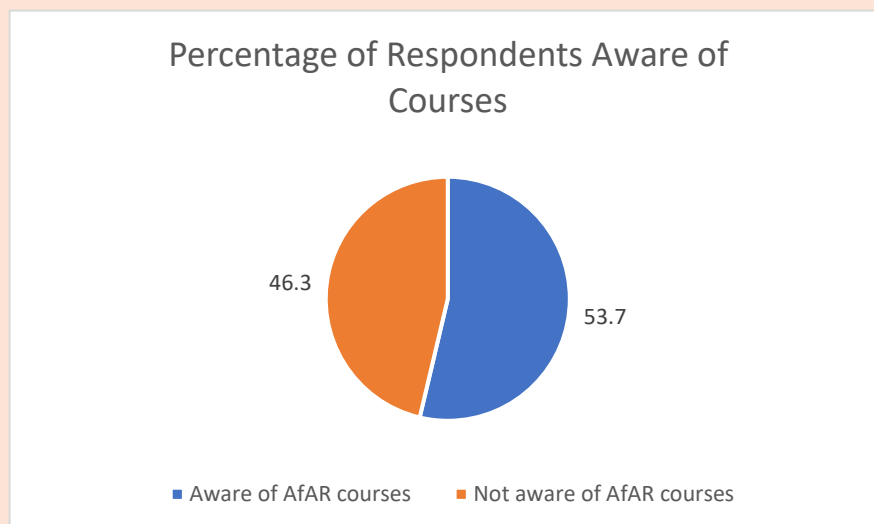


Figure 8: Percentage of member survey respondents' awareness of AfAR courses

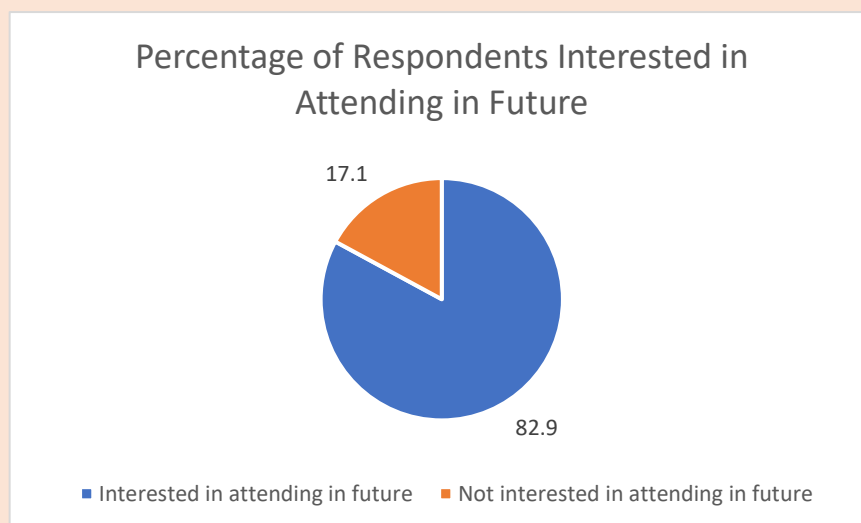


Figure 9: Percentage of member survey respondents interested in attending AfAR courses in the future

6.3.1. AfAR attendee experience

“I really loved both courses” (AfAR Attendee).

8 members indicated they had previously attended an **AfAR** course and 1 that they had attended multiple courses. Several members did not state which course they attended, but where information was provided this demonstrated that the course genre varied, including crochet, illustration, and mandala.

6 respondents who had attended an **AfAR** course reported a positive experience including *“I did enjoy the course”* (AM) and *“I really enjoyed this course as it was easy to join due to being on zoom and as I was back at university it helped me once a week to focus on my mental health!”* (AM).

1 respondent had a mixed experience *“I felt that it was judgemental from others and was nervous of interactions. Though I enjoyed the time to myself and the technique”* (AM), and 1 respondent reported a somewhat negative experience of the course *“I didn't particularly enjoy the course. We mostly sat and painted almost as if alone. I didn't produce anything nice either, perhaps the teaching wasn't clear enough or I didn't pay enough attention”* (AM).

Members indicate that attending the AfAR courses reduced their anxiety, specifically linked to being creative *“being creative did help my anxiety levels”* (AM) and providing a distraction *“it helped me to see how getting engrossed in art can be a great distraction from my anxiety”* (AM), *“It impacted on my anxiety because it made me feel that I had done something proactive, that I was competent and then it led to me having new hobbies which mean I meet more people and spend less time worrying or feeling useless”* (AM) and *“I found the process of the mandala painting to be very calming and would quickly get absorbed into it and feel my anxiety levels decrease”* (AM).

3 members stated that attending **AfAR** courses resulted in a sustained impact after the course had ended *“I have since taken up crochet as a hobby and I find I feel calmer when I am doing it as it gives me something to do with my hands other than being on my phone and on social media which I find has been detrimental to my health. I often spend evenings when my kids are in bed doing some crochet or before I go to sleep and again it helps me fall asleep more easily”* (AM), *“I learnt new skills in the two areas named and it has inspired me to continue these activities as hobbies and join local in-person classes”* (AM), *“Trying now to keep it a regular habit and practice weekly”* (AM).

Analysis of qualitative data indicated that attending **AfAR** courses improved members' wellbeing based on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, including to **Keep Learning**, **Connect** and **Take Notice**. Thematic analysis of commentary indicated that Take Notice was the most

impacted measure, impacting 7 respondents, followed by keep learning (n=4), and connect (n=2). Members commented **AfAR** supported them to:

- **Keep Learning** *“Great course, it was an opportunity to learn a new art technique that I hadn't tried before, in a calm environment, it was most enjoyable and very relaxing too”* (AM)
- **Take Notice** *“I loved the course and thought Amy had a great way of introducing concepts and encouraging us to have a go”* (AM).
- **Connect** *“I would like to attend another course as I enjoyed the social aspect”* (AM)

The courses improved members' personal and social wellbeing, specifically related to NEF wellbeing indicators.^x Members commented **AfAR** courses had improved their personal wellbeing, in the components of:

- **Emotional wellbeing**, increasing improved positive feelings *“I feel calmer”* (AM), *“very relaxing”* (AM), *“very calming”* (AM).
- **Positive functioning** as members felt more engaged *“it helped me once a week to focus on my mental health”* (AM) and *“It helped me to see how getting engrossed in art can be a great distraction”* (AM), *“would quickly get absorbed”* (AM) and competent *“It made me feel... that I was competent... and spend less time worrying or feeling useless”* (AM), *“I felt really daft at first as I couldn't do it but I realised the usefulness of some of the strategies I had learned on another Anxiety UK course as I could see aiming for perfection wasn't going to work here and it was a case of lots of practice. This was good for me”* (AM).
- **Resilience, optimism, and self-esteem** were improved, with members commenting *“whenever people have tried to evaluate my performance in some way (for some reason people like to do this) I have stood up to them enough to say that is nonsense as I am still learning so I don't need them to say my project is brilliant or rubbish. I'm not asking them to evaluate my performance in any way as I am doing this activity as I enjoy it and for myself, which again is very unusual for me as a busy working mum of two young children”* (AM), *“it has inspired me to continue these activities as hobbies and join local in-person classes”* (AM).

Members commented that social wellbeing was improved in the component of:

- **Supportive relationships** with members commenting *“I enjoyed the social aspect”* (AM) and *“Before doing this I hadn't spoken to anyone outside of my family/friends about my anxiety so was comforting to talk to others who understood and were very supportive!”* (AM). **AfAR** supported the building of new relationships *“it led to me having new hobbies which mean I meet more people”* (AM).

6.3.2. Barriers to attendance

Anxiety UK members were asked what, if any, barriers prevented them from attending **Anxiety UK** courses. Several respondents felt there were no barriers to attending courses (n=11). The most frequent barriers to attending **AfAR** course were:

- **Cost** of the course itself and the materials required to take part (n=12) *"I cannot afford to attend"* (AM) and *"Although I do think it was fairly priced, the additional costs of paints etc made it more than expected. I loved it and appreciate having all the kit to continue myself now but would struggle to pay for another different art course"* (AM).
- **Day/time** of the courses (n=12) with members commenting that *"Many of the courses aren't suitable for full time workers due to the hours they are at... I'm starting an in person mixed media for beginners course next week at a local college, had this been offered in the evenings I'd of taken it up with Anxiety UK"* (AM), *"I work shift patterns"* (AM), *"the times as I work long hours"* (AM) and *"clashes with work and commuting"* (AM).
- **Lack of time** due to other commitments such as childcare or work (n=12), with member commenting barriers included *"working 5 days a week"* (AM), *"having the time amongst work life"* (AM) and *"time restrictions due to work commitments and child care"* (AM).

Other barriers included:

- Courses being online (n=3) members worried about *"Online connectivity"* (AM) and *"I struggle to self-motivate with online courses. I prefer in person as this gives me accountability and it helps me to feel more connected to others"* (AM).
- Doubt about their art skills (n=3) *"I'm worried I won't be very good"* (AM) *"I can't draw"* (AM) and *"I'm no good at art"* (AM).
- Anxiety (n=3) Members indicated that *"I have serious social anxiety. I find group activities very stressful. Anything that involves been judged too is hard for me too"* (AM) and *"I have avoidant personality disorder. it's a form of social anxiety. courses, anything vaguely reminiscent of school, causes me particular stress"* (AM).
- Inability to commit to the course (n=2) comments included *"Procrastination"* (AM) and *"I'm not sure if I am committed to do it"* (AM).
- Being unaware of the courses (n=2) *"Now I know about them I shall apply"* (AM), disability (n=2) *"Autoimmune disease that contributes towards sudden fatigue"* (AM).
- Lack of suitable environment to attend (n=1) this included *"finding a suitable location, environment, room, table. Setting up materials to take part in the course... my living situation would exclude me"* (AM).

- Insufficient course descriptions (n=1) *“I sometimes feel like the descriptions aren't sufficient or they don't give a clear picture of what the course will be like”* (AM) and availability (n=1) and *“there did not seem to be a course available for me to join”* (AM).

6.3.3. Suggestions for topics for future courses

Anxiety UK members were asked what online creative, arts or craft-based courses they would like **Anxiety UK** to offer in the future, whilst a number of respondents stated they were unsure (n=9), 69 people provided suggestions (Figure 10).

Suggestion	No. times suggested
Sewing (knitting, crochet, cross stitch, quilting)	17
Drawing/doodling/illustration/still life/colouring	14
Painting	12
Creative writing/poetry	11
Collage/papier-mâché/origami/paper mask making/card making	6
Weaving	2
Fimo	1
Clay	1
Candle making	1
Music	1
Digital art	1
Woodwork/ sculpture	1
Filmmaking	1

Figure 10: Table showing course content suggestions

7. Research Summary

The majority of **AfAR** attendees had a positive experience, with a number experiencing sustained change after attendance. Multiple members attending **AfAR** experience **reduced anxiety** and improved mental wellbeing supporting them to **take notice, keep learning, and connect**. **AfAR** courses impacted **personal wellbeing** in the facets of emotional wellbeing, positive functioning, self-esteem, and resilience. Social wellbeing was also improved, in the indicator of supportive relationships.

'This was good for me' (AfAR Attendee)

Quantitative results indicated that **AfAR** courses supported attendees to reduce anxiety and improve mental wellbeing. **AfAR** supported attendees to **Connect** and **Take Notice**. Results indicated that people attending **AfAR** courses felt a measurable improvement and change in anxiety levels and wellbeing as a direct result of their experiences, specifically:

- **Reduce Anxiety Levels:** Reduced GAD-7 scores.
- **Improved Mental Wellbeing:** Improvement to WEMWBS scores.
- **Improved Social Wellbeing:**
 - **Supportive relationships**, attendees felt closer and more interested in other people and loved.
- **Improved Personal Wellbeing:**
 - **Positive functioning**, attendees felt more **engaged** (interested in new things), **competent** (thinking clearly), **autonomous** (able to make up my own mind about things) and **meaning and purpose** (useful) after their engagement.
 - **Emotional wellbeing**, attendees experienced an increase of **positive feelings** including cheerful and relaxed.
 - **Resilience and self-esteem**, attendees felt increased **resilience** (dealing with problems well), **optimism** (optimistic about the future, inspired) and **self-esteem** (good about myself) after attending **AfAR**.
 - **Vitality**, attendees felt they had more energy to spare after the course.

Qualitative results indicated that **AfAR** courses supported attendees to **Take Notice, Connect, and Keep Learning**. Results indicated that attending **AfAR** courses reduced anxiety and improved wellbeing, specifically in the following components:

- **Reduced anxiety:** providing creative outlets to enable attendees to improve their anxiety levels
- **Social Wellbeing:**
 - **Supportive relationships**, providing a space to develop supportive relationships with those with similar lived experiences and explore new hobbies.

- **Trust and belonging**, creating a sense of community.
- **Personal wellbeing:**
 - **Positive functioning**, in **engagement**, with attendees able to focus on their mental health and feel their days had **meaning and purpose** again and feel **competent** in taking up new hobbies after attending the course
 - **Emotional wellbeing**, improved **positive feelings**.
 - **Resilience and self-esteem**, engendering feelings of pride (**self-esteem**), **resilience** and inspiring **optimism** and future endeavours.

8. Lessons Learnt and Future Strategies

- **Advertising and Marketing**
 - Many respondents were unaware of **AfAR** courses, this indicated that more or different types of advertising and marketing is required to ensure to raise members awareness.
- **Support Attendees To Give**
 - Courses that are linked to wider community social, health and environmental initiatives, such as knitting for hospitals, artwork for care homes, quality for care leavers or birdboxes for community spaces.
- **Reduce Barriers**
 - The most frequent barriers to undertaking an **AfAR** course were cost, timings, and other commitments. To assist with increasing attendance, in future **Anxiety UK** could consider:
 - Courses are run at varying days/times
 - Make it clear that art skills are not required
 - Attendees can attend as many/few of the sessions as they wish to combat worries about commitment.
 - Consider if there could be sliding scale payment based on income, or a number of places that are for free each course.
 - Include materials in course costs and post these to attendees to avoid individuals having to buy full sets of materials.
 - Provide handouts or brief videos for attendees to refer back to
- **Support and Train Artists**
 - Increase the variety and number of artists that work on **AfAR** courses, offer them training and mentoring to provide more variety of courses and to benefit the mental health and anxiety of more artists.
- **Signpost**
 - Consider including a final debrief/signposting session to future courses or other online or in person creative mental health and anxiety courses.
- **Sustainability**
 - Consider follow-on courses or introducing mechanisms to enable attendees to keep in touch and continue sharing their artwork, such as online forums/groups, or enabling attendees to share contact information/social media pages with each other, to ensure sustained connections and benefit.

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