

## Executive Summary – Women of Yardley Unite Evaluation

### Arts in the Yard

Arts in the Yard (AITY) is a resident-led community group established by the Yardley Arts Forum over five years ago. It is a grassroots arts and community organisation, set up to foster community development and community cohesion.

### Women of Yardley Unite

Arts in the Yard (AITY) secured £49,000 of Prevention and Communities funding from Birmingham City Council to develop Women of Yardley Unite (WOYU) in November 2019, in order to deliver a programme of arts-based activities for women within Yardley. WOYU works to promote healthier lifestyles, increase social participation and make carers feel more supported. They work particularly with women over 50, and those with physical disabilities or mental health difficulties.

WOYU work mainly with female artists to create workshops that are reflective of the cultural diversity of the community and individual needs of participants. Artists curate a workshop or pack for participants, in order for them to be able to make a craft piece or art work for them to keep or share. The activities that are delivered help the women to realise their potential by increasing their confidence, helping them to build new skills and develop support networks. The project aims to create significant health benefits for participants through increasing feelings of mental wellbeing, enabling them to live healthier lives. It also increases social opportunities for the participants, reducing isolation, and creating confidence for participation in other activities in the area.

### Service Delivery

WOYU began offering art and craft sessions to local residents in November 2019. The sessions ran between 10am and 2pm, with a break in between which allowed participants time for a cup of tea, a break for lunch and a chance to chat. The WOYU team acted quickly following the lockdown and whilst there was an immediate suspension of face-to-face activity, the team worked hard to develop new ways of working which would allow continued participation. Throughout the pandemic, sessions have been delivered online, with WOYU working alongside artists to create packs of materials to distribute to participants in advance of each session.

### Key findings

Participants seemed to be very invested in and engaged with WOYU. Participants feel well supported whilst taking part in the activities. Members also provided support to each other, particularly if they were aware someone was experiencing a difficult time.

It was clear from the interviews that WOYU is highly valued by the participants. They like that it's hyper local to them, that the pack is a high-quality artistic experience, delivered by a regular delivery person, who's also a woman and has a connection to Yardley and a wealth of knowledge of what's going on in Yardley. They like being in contact with AITY, and the other things they offer.

Staff are aware that for WOYU to be able to evidence their success, they have to demonstrate how they meet the 'prevention first' outcomes of BCC (the funders). In line with this, it was clearly demonstrated from the interviews that participants taking part in WOYU activities had achieved healthier lifestyles, both physically and mentally.

The group not only provides a focus and something to look forward to, but the activities themselves were also seen as having a therapeutic effect. An increase in mental wellbeing was shown in many ways, the key themes being reciprocity, increasing confidence and reducing isolation and increasing social connection. The reciprocity within the group appears to be an important feature, both enabling a safe space in which relationships can be built as well as supporting the women to complete activities successfully, helping to build a sense of wellbeing. Being part of WOYU has increased confidence for all of the women interviewed. New friendships and relationships have been formed within the community.

### Community Development

All of the participants mentioned diversity as being a welcome characteristic of the group, in terms of ethnicity, age and interests. WOYU staff commented that the women were respectful of each other's cultures, with lots of cross faith appreciation. Participants all enjoyed learning new things – *"I just want to learn – never too old to learn."*

Local partners refer directly into the service. WOYU has created opportunities for women in Yardley, who are now emerging as community leaders, by undertaking other work in the community. Several women now work for WOYU in either paid or voluntary roles and others have set up their own arts groups in their local areas.

### Perceived barriers

In terms of the content of the activities, the main barriers were around lack of interest in a particular activity. Sometimes the barriers for participants relate to their confidence and sense of self-worth. Staff felt that for the women whose first language isn't English, they hadn't completely got this covered, as the instructions were in English. Staff also felt that it was difficult to measure the impact of the programme and that AITY's structures and processes that are in place are still developing so don't allow for this currently.

### Recommendations

Recommendations made to WOYU include:

- Enhancing recruitment processes – outlining more explicitly who the group is for and the kinds of activities on offer, and exploring potential barriers to participation
- Development of the offer - working with participants and using their ideas and suggestions to co-design post-covid delivery
- Personal development for participants – looking at developmental opportunities
- Creating a platform - giving participants the opportunity to show their art to their community
- Funding – looking at alternative ways to continue to fund the programme
- Measuring impact – using tools to measure impact, in order to ensure WOYU's sustainability
- Expansion of the AITY offer – looking at other cohorts in the community and applying learning from WOYU to facilitate activity