OUR CRAFT PLACE CIC | COMMUNITY STORIES

Lucy's Story

Finding friendship, confidence and a place to belong

IN LUCY'S OWN WORDS

I am a 40-year-old female former Social Worker. After being diagnosed with complex mental and physical health conditions, I was forced to give up work. I have been attending the community craft sessions at Our Crafty Place, run by Kate and Viv.

> *"Since attending the sessions I have felt a sense of connection and belonging."*
>
> *- Lucy Butler*

My mental health issues mean I experience hyper-vigilance, becoming especially anxious in new situations. The Our Crafty Place website assured me that I would be made welcome and encouraged me to attend. The building is accessible, which is important due to my limited mobility.

Due to limitations with my physical health, I am currently unable to drive. It is therefore vital for me to have local activities to attend. Our Crafty Place is in an excellent location which can be accessed by bus, this has enabled me to attend sessions independently.

What Kate and Viv have created is a truly special environment which is warm, friendly and calm. The sessions feel comforting, like a being in a safe ‘bubble’, which has helped with my autism and anxiety. They offer a space to be creative but also to relax with a coffee and have a chat.

Being diagnosed with disabilities has felt disempowering, with decisions often being made for, or about, me. Attending the sessions has enabled me to find freedom through creativity. The creative process put you in control in a safe way, and gives you a sense of accomplishment.

Due to chronic fatigue and my ‘social battery’ being easily drained, prior to attending I didn’t think I would manage to stay for the entirety of the sessions. However I have found that I become so lost myself in the crafts, it is often a shock to me that the session is nearly over!

I have found my personal situation very isolating. Before discovering Our Crafty Place, I had started to feel lonely. Since attending the sessions I have felt a sense of connection and belonging. I have swapped numbers with other attendees, and been invited to attend both chronic pain and chair based exercise groups.

Attending health appointments, managing medication and navigating the benefits system has been very stressful. At home, mobility aids, equipment and supplies remind me that I am ill. When I attend sessions I can leave all this at the door, prioritise myself and focus on relaxation and enjoyment.

At the community craft sessions, I have had the opportunity to try many different art and crafting activities. As I am now in receipt of benefits, without these sessions I would not have been able to afford the materials, or have had access to the same level of guidance to facilitate this.

Kate and Viv are very perceptive and offer tools to break down barriers to participation. For example, when my physical health led to me shaking, I was offered stress balls to utilise which reduced the shaking in my hands in order for me to continue my painting.

I have noticed improvements in my chronic pain since attending the sessions. The relaxing atmosphere and immersive activities have reduced the amount of tension I hold in my body. This has also helped with the quality of my sleep, which is extremely beneficial.

Since my mental health diagnoses I have undertaken many forms of one-to-one therapy. I have found them too confronting and overwhelming, with a focus on negative themes. I have found the sessions at Our Crafty Place have been of much more therapeutic benefit. With the addition of tools like the ‘worry eater’ (a soft toy whereby you can write down your worries and post them in to his belly!) and the reading of a story while we are crafting.

When my mental health is poor, I often engage in negative self-talk. Kate and Viv lead with confidence, patience and flexibility. Their enthusiasm, nurturing and positivity seems to be ‘catching’ and since attending the sessions I am learning to be kinder to myself. I am looking forward to attending more sessions in the future.

