

Hollybank Trust

Creating meaningful work opportunities

Hollybank Trust provides education and care for children, young people and adults with complex disabilities and medical needs. We are a Specialist SEN provision for physical and sensory needs and this drives our vision for empowering our students to become active communicators and creative learners despite their profound needs.

Over the past few years we have been working to create meaningful and realistic work opportunities for young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This case study follows the story of Fiona, who has become a paid artist in her own right through our social enterprise project. We hope that this simple yet hugely successful approach to creating real jobs for learners with very complex needs is something which other organisations might consider in order to increase the opportunities for this group of learners.

Empowering our learners

Fiona has profound and complex physical and learning disabilities. She is a non verbal communicator, has very limited motor control and relies on support for all her day to day needs.

In previous years the children, young people and adults at Hollybank have used 'Soundbeam' to create and manipulate sounds and to compose individual and group pieces, with adult support. They have also used 'G-force', with the aid of a microphone to paint with sound.

With the support of Stewart Geddes, Enrichment Programme Manager, Fiona has worked in an iMUSE environment which combines musical and visual effects created by her movements and sounds. This has been further personalized by using low frequency sound to reduce pain, stress and anxiety thereby freeing Fiona to think, communicate and learn independently.

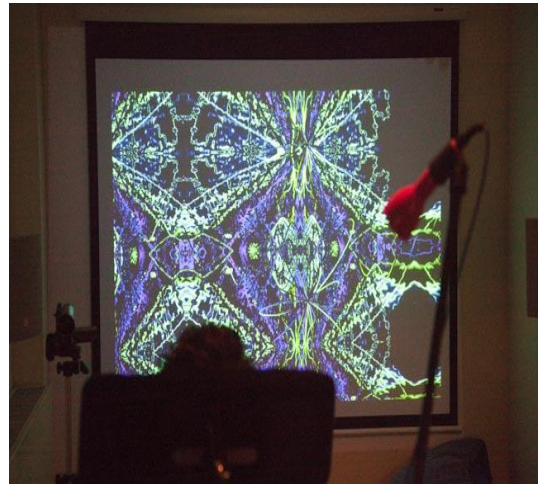


iMUSE sessions are an interactive music, sound, visual and vibration stimulation experience tailored to the individual needs of the person. Vibroacoustic therapy is a technique in which a combination of two different sounds is played to the person through a Sound box whilst sitting in their wheelchair or out on a positioning bag. This will include low frequency sine tones that stimulate and relax the body.

Fiona's individual sessions have enabled her to progress from being a passive to an active and ultimately a creative learner. iMUSE celebrates Fiona's movements and sounds and gives her ownership of her work, which is a great achievement as her experiences are often very limited due to the complexity of her disability.

Creating meaningful opportunities

During these sessions Fiona creates her own truly unique sound pictures which can then be printed off as a lasting record of her very own work. Fiona's greatest success is that some of her images, created using iMUSE, are now being sold for respectable prices to local companies to display on the walls of their offices and meeting rooms. This has resulted in raising Fiona's self esteem and has provided her with a real and meaningful work opportunity.



Fiona's Views on this Project

Fiona is very happy to have been given the opportunity to express herself, to take control of her environment and to have had her work displayed in a number of offices – for a substantial fee! Her self esteem and confidence have improved tremendously, as has her motivation to communicate and initiate interactions with both people she knows well and people she may never have met before. Fiona's mother is also extremely pleased with these achievements; she is amazed that her daughter has a job, something which she never thought possible.

Developing a Social Enterprise

We are now looking to expand the work that Stewart and Fiona have begun into a social enterprise project. Fiona is about to move into our Post 19 Enrichment Programme and plans are being put into place to expand upon the sale of her work. We have recently invested in a printer which will enable us to print onto a range of products such as t-shirts, mugs and pens and are now exploring the possibility of opening an inclusive café / gallery / outlet space to promote and sell the work that Fiona and her peers have created whilst at the same time providing a place for people with complex needs, their families, friends and other members of the community to meet and enjoy a coffee and a cake.

For further details contact Ailsa Moore, Deputy Head Teacher or Stewart Geddes, Enrichment Programme Manager at Hollybank Trust.