

Focus on **OAKLEAF**

Summer 2019

The light at the end of the tunnel

Using art to say the things that are hard to say

Life, colour, vitality, community

How Sussex Oakleaf turned an empty shop into a mental health focussed art exhibition



Mental health accessible

Introducing the new mental health guidelines to help you access vital services

Working for a cause, not for applause

Volunteering for the right reasons and finding shared values and new opportunities



Your guide to **good mental health** in Sussex

A warm welcome...



▲ With Elza at the staff & volunteer conference

I'm pleased that we have been able to devote so much of this issue to The Big Mental Health Pop Up and the amazing art works that were displayed there during Mental Health Awareness Week in May. The project has been a huge success and it has been fantastic to see so many people talking about mental health and the incredible work of our services.

This year sees Sussex Oakleaf celebrating 25 years since our inception and we began the celebrations with our annual staff and volunteer conference. I was delighted to present a long service award to one of our hardest working and most dedicated members of staff, Elza Thayre. Elza, who recently retired, was with Sussex Oakleaf right from day one and before that worked in St Francis Hospital for many years. Her friends and colleagues have nothing but kind words to say about Elza and she has been a real asset to the organisation. Thank you for 25 years Elza!

The celebrations don't stop here though and we are hard at work planning more events for later in the year so please watch this space to see how you can get involved.

As always, we hope you enjoy reading this issue and I am looking forward to meeting many of you soon.

Philippa Thompson
Chief Executive



Happy Birthday

by Dominic Goodeve
Marketing & Communications Officer

Sussex Oakleaf is this year celebrating 25 years of providing mental health support. However, our roots stretch back further into the history of St Francis and Graylingwell Hospitals.

Opened as the Sussex County Asylum in July 1859, St Francis Hospital at its peak housed more than 1,000 patients. So many in fact that a second hospital, Graylingwell, was opened in 1897 in Chichester.

It was from these two hospitals that Sussex Oakleaf received its first residents in 1994, first from St Francis Hospital and later from Graylingwell. Sussex Oakleaf was set up by its original trustees in order to provide homes in the community for patients who were in many cases institutionalised following a lifetime

of hospital care.

For many patients and their families, Sussex Oakleaf was a dream come true. Residents were offered their own rooms in shared houses within the local communities and were supported to live their lives more independently with more choice and control over where and how they chose to live. Many of the staff who worked in the hospitals transferred over to Sussex Oakleaf and continued to provide support to the residents.

“One of the patients wept with relief and joy when she saw the new house.”

- Former Sussex Oakleaf Director, Wendy Green (1995)

The Stories from the archives of former patients and Sussex Oakleaf residents are moving and inspirational at the same time. Former newspaper seller, Brian Tebbutt, was at St Francis Hospital for 25 years before moving into one of Sussex Oakleaf's properties at the age of 66.

Brian, who at one time lived on the streets, now had access to a garden where he could tend his own plot of vegetable and herbs. He said in 1995:

“I don't much like the old place. It's much nicer here. I've got no parents now, I've lost touch with my sister. This is my home.”

Violet Tidy spent 30 years in St Francis Hospital following a nervous breakdown caused by over work as a senior cook.

From spending her days on a ward with little privacy, she now had her own bedroom adorned in fresh pink, with a carpet which two members

of Sussex Oakleaf staff had brought back from Turkey for her.

From her window, Violet could see across the long lawns to the towers of St Francis Hospital. She said in an interview at the time:

“They cared for me well there. But that was a hospital and this is a house and a home. I have got a lovely room and a lovely home.”

The world of mental health care has moved on a long way since the mid 90s with people feeling far more able to talk about their mental health and services shifting their focus to recovery and supporting people to fulfil their potential. Sussex Oakleaf still provides residential care but also supports people through a range of community-based services alongside specialist youth, employment and personality disorder services.

We are focussing on fundraising at Sussex Oakleaf this year as we continue our anniversary celebrations. We have already received a number of generous donations and we're delighted that lots of friends Sussex Oakleaf family are planning fundraising events for later in the year.

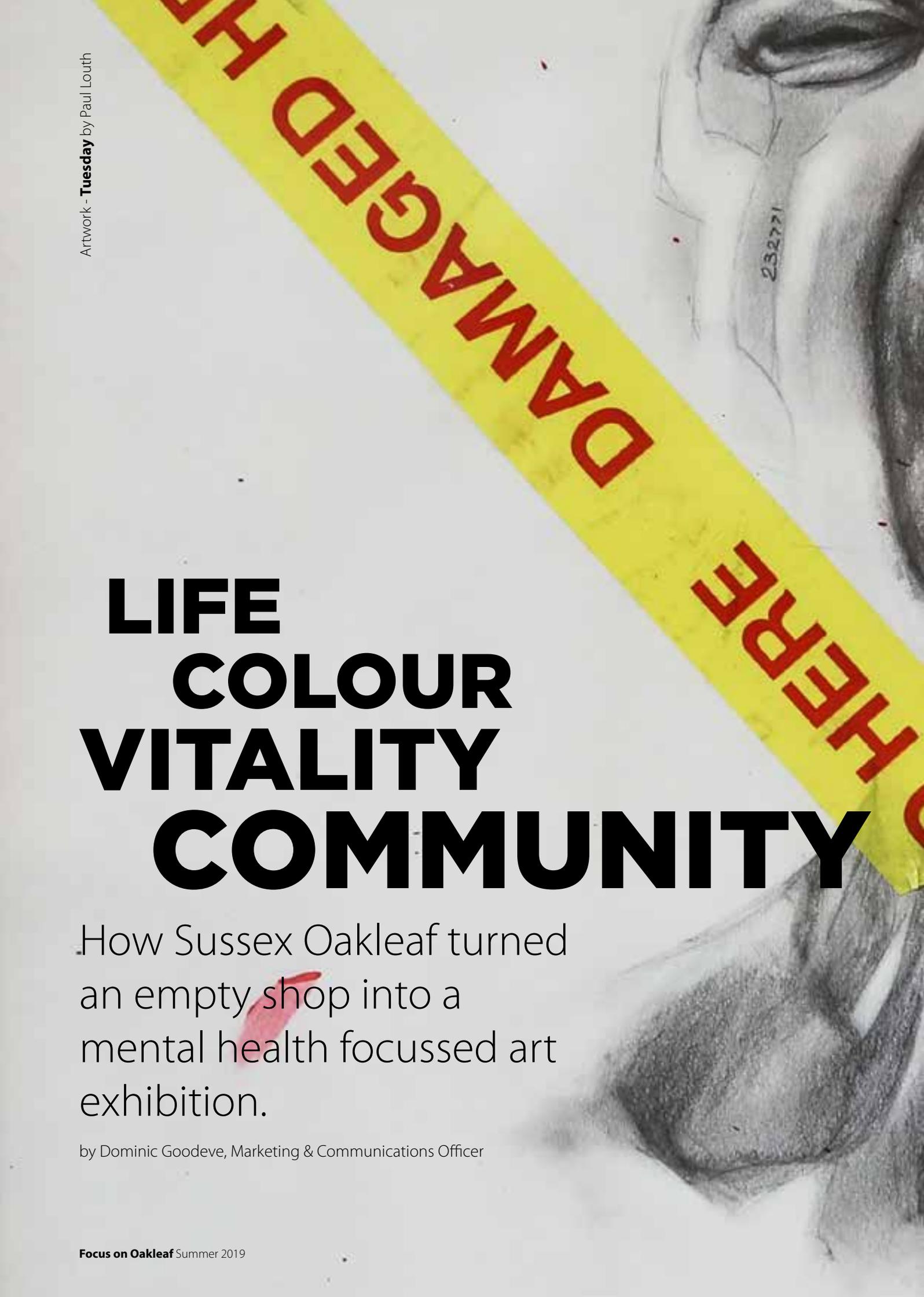
We would love more people to get involved though. Why not get sponsored to do something you love, make friends, challenge yourself and raise money at the same time? We are happy to help you with your fundraising plans so please get in touch and let us know your ideas.

Support us

Sussex Oakleaf's vision is for a world where people with mental illness and mental health issues are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential and to live their lives as independently as possible.

If you would like to help support the vision then please visit:
www.sussexoakleaf.org.uk/support-us





LIFE COLOUR VITALITY COMMUNITY

How Sussex Oakleaf turned an empty shop into a mental health focussed art exhibition.

by Dominic Goodeve, Marketing & Communications Officer



“ I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way - things I had no words for.”

Iconic artist Georgia O'Keeffe's statement will ring true for many of the artists who took part in The Big Mental Health Pop Up earlier this Summer.

Sometimes it can be hard to express our thoughts and feelings. For those of us who struggle with our mental health it can be a real problem which holds us back. We need to get our feelings out but sometimes we are just not able to. For some people, finding personal expression through art can be transformational.

At its heart, The Big Mental Health Pop Up was all about being able to say the things you have no words for. Enabling people to express themselves in

a whole range of different ways, an giving people a platform where they could challenge their own and other people's perceptions of what they are capable of.

From 13-19 May, Sussex Oakleaf turned an empty shop in the centre of Burgess Hill into a bustling hub of mental health activity and an exciting and inspirational art gallery.

More than 700 visitors came through the doors to experience the pop-up event and many of them found a space where they could open up about their own experiences >>>



of mental health. The public space played host to the full range of human emotion during the week and left a lasting impression on those who visited.

It wasn't just art though. Workshops were held during the week on a range of mental health related subjects. Participants had the opportunity to learn but to also meet other people going through similar difficulties and share their experiences in a safe environment.

One of the artists involved in the event said:

"It's been an incredible opportunity to produce some art around mental health and to speak to an array of people regarding the topic and even speak live on the radio.

As someone who suffers with mental illness daily, it was nice to have an outlet to express my views on the issues. It additionally made me realise that I'd love to use my story and my work, and my journey, to advocate for mental health."

The feedback from people who visited The Big Mental Health Pop Up has been fantastic. It has been so rewarding to create something so tactile and visual right in the heart of a community which we have been supporting for the last 25 years. Many of those who visited wanted to know when the event will be happening again and, while there are no firm plans yet, conversations

are starting about how we can make The Big Mental Health Pop Up an annual event and where and how we might shape future pop-ups.

For now though, all that's left is to say thank you to all of the amazing artists who took part and to everyone who came

and visited, took part in a workshop or took the opportunity to open up about their mental health. A

special thank you also goes to everyone who donated to the project or volunteered to help deliver the event.

We look forward to crossing all of your paths again in the future but for now, if you are struggling to say things that you can't say in any other way then remember that you always have access to colour and shapes.

Sussex Oakleaf provides a range of creative outlets for clients to engage with their mental health. To find out how our services may benefit you please visit our website

www.sussexoakleaf.org.uk

1. **Wonder under the sea**
Jayne Crow
2. **Fractured 1**
Kore Sage
3. **Unruffled**
Jo-Ann Silk
4. **Rhapsody in Blue**
Kevin Keemar
5. **I am you**
Reef Morley
6. **Begin**
Kore Sage



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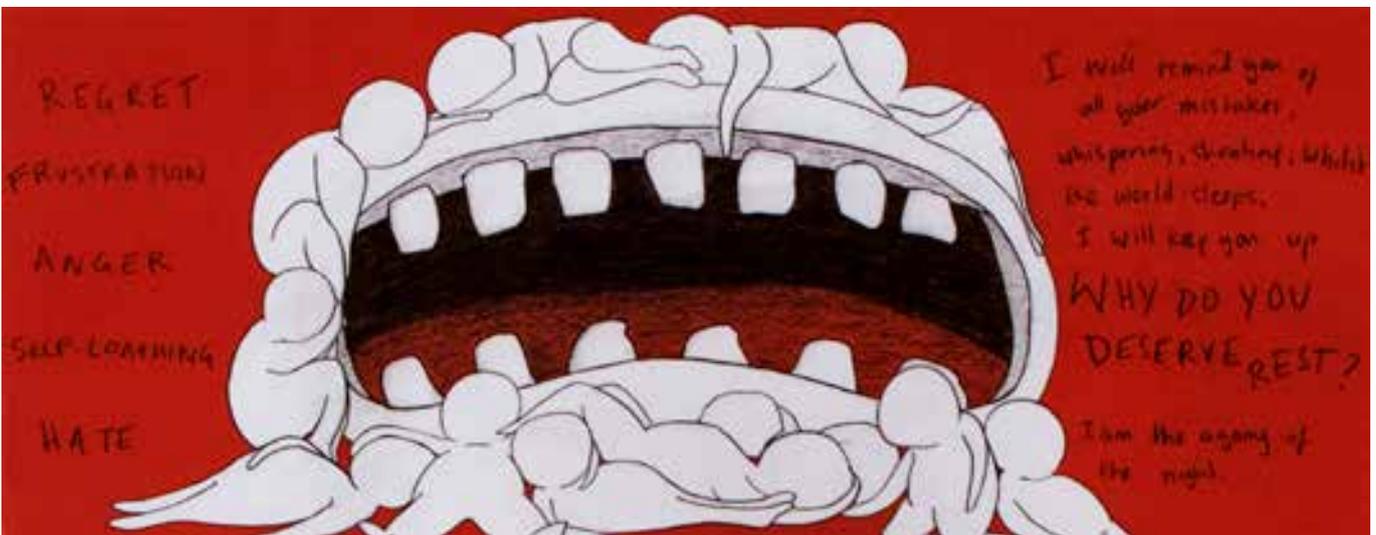
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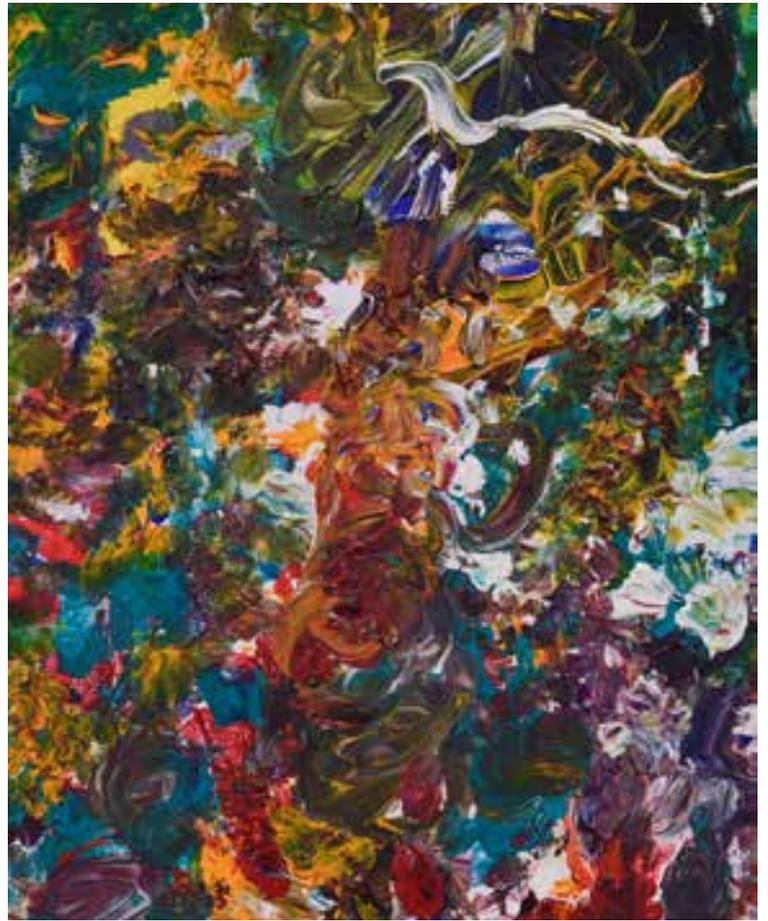


5.

7.



8.



9.



10.

7.

Convergence

Anita Aleksandrova

8.

Untitled

Anonymous

9.

Dancing in the rain

Amy-Syrad-Hardy

10.

Night Owl with Flower Moon

Melanie Hodge

11.

I am You

Reef Morley

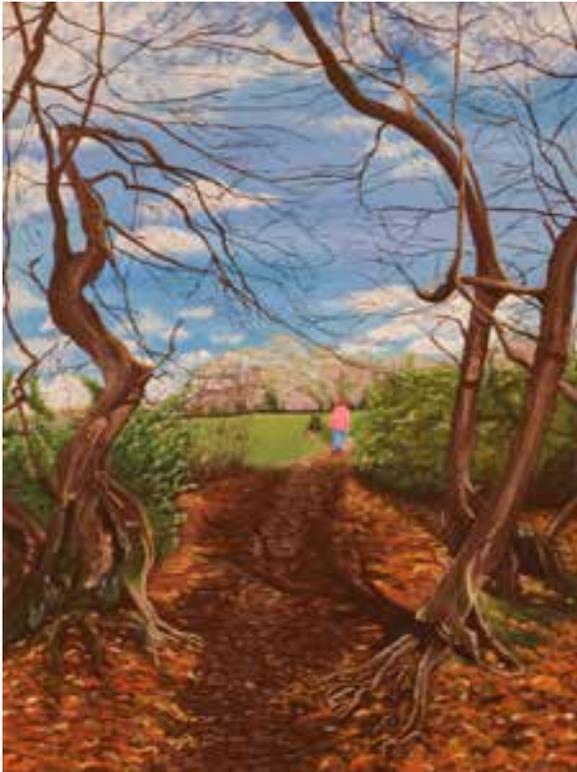


11.

11.



13.



14.



12.



15.



11.

Surviving Bright

Adam Llewellyn-Smith

12.

Ruby

Paul Louth

13.

Bedelands Dog Walker

Jayne Crow

14.

Cerebral Vortex (My Pebble)

Laura Bedford-Turner

15.

Musquet

Angie Blythe

16.

Consumed

Grey Whiley



16.

WORKING FOR A CAUSE, NOT FOR APPLAUSE

by Anita Aleksandrova
Sussex Oakleaf Volunteer

I first heard about The Big Mental Health Pop Up while attending a recruitment fair in Brighton. I hadn't heard of Sussex Oakleaf before, but they had the busiest and brightest looking stand at the fair, so I waited for my turn to find out what they were about.

I am studying photography

at Portsmouth University but have taken a year out to concentrate on my own artistic projects. University can be challenging for people's mental health and I have witnessed many of my friends suffer while experiencing my own difficulties as well. I have always found creativity to have a positive influence on my own mental health and

it has always provided me with a positive outlet for my emotions.

After learning more about Sussex Oakleaf and The Big Mental Health Pop Up, I eagerly signed up as a volunteer. I have ambitions to become a curator in the future and Sussex Oakleaf was giving me the opportunity to

become involved in the set up and running of an exhibition. It was very exciting!

When I first visited The Big Mental Health Pop Up shop it was just a big open space. We worked late into the evening preparing the space, deciding where all the artwork should go and hanging it. The quality of the work was incredible, and I kept changing my mind about which piece was my favourite.

I got to spend a few days helping to run the exhibition as well. This mainly involved welcoming visitors and showing them round. I got to meet some of the people that Sussex Oakleaf supports, and it was so heart warming to hear their stories. I sat in on a workshop which was focussed on body image and mental health. I had never been to something like that before and it was all fascinating.

One thing that surprised me was just how many cups of tea we got through and I have since learnt how integral a good cup of tea is to a successful event! In all honesty, it was humbling to see how much impact it had to simply offer someone a cup of tea and lend them an ear while they shared their experiences. I will always remember just how important it is to listen.

My experience of volunteering with Sussex Oakleaf has been amazing. I signed up as a way to improve my CV but ended up learning so much and meeting so many amazing people. I was even invited to the annual conference and was given a box of chocolates as a thank you!

Volunteering is such an amazing thing. Just because you aren't being paid doesn't mean you aren't benefiting from it. Sussex Oakleaf is a real family and I feel so lucky to have had the chance to be a part of it.

“SUSSEX OAKLEAF
IS A REAL FAMILY
AND I FEEL SO LUCKY
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▲ From left to right - Laura Bedford Turner (artist), Reef Morley (artist), Anita Aleksandrova (artist & volunteer), Councillor Roger Cartwright, Burgess Hill Mayor, Natasha Bull (Avtrade volunteer), Sarah Woods (Avtrade volunteer)



Money & Mental Health: The Facts

One in four British adults with a mental health are struggling with a problem debt.

People with severe mental illness are two and a half times as likely to experience money or debt problems.

People in debt are twice as likely to develop major depression than those not in financial difficulty.

People in problem debt are twice as likely to think about suicide as those not in financial difficulty.

The ongoing stress and anxiety caused by financial difficulties can also make treatment for mental health problems less effective, with some studies suggesting recovery rates to be half of those with depression but no financial difficulties.

Taken from Money and Mental Health: The Facts - Money and Mental Health Policy Institute



Mental Health Accessible

New guidance has been launched to help people with mental health difficulties access essential services.

Money worries have long been associated with poor mental health - both as a cause and an effect of mental illness.

Three quarters of people have experienced at least one sign of anxiety while dealing with essential service providers, like their bank or energy company. Many of us reading this article will know just what this feels like.

But now, new standards for essential services have been developed. Called Mental Health Accessible, the standards will be used to test firms on how accessible their services are for people with mental health problems, and then make recommendations on how to improve them.

They will test firms on:

- How well they train and prepare their staff to support customers with mental health problems

- Whether they offer a wide range of communication channels, so that people can get in touch whichever way suits them best
- What tools and support they offer to help people stay on top of things when they're unwell.

Lloyds Bank has become the first business to sign up to the scheme and will be the first to be assessed against these standards. They have committed to using this insight to improve their services for people with mental health difficulties.

Sussex Oakleaf has long provided support to individuals who are struggling with their finances. We know only too well how mental health can impact on money and visa versa so we welcome the new scheme to help move things forward for people and look forward to seeing the impact that the Mental Health Accessible service standards have.

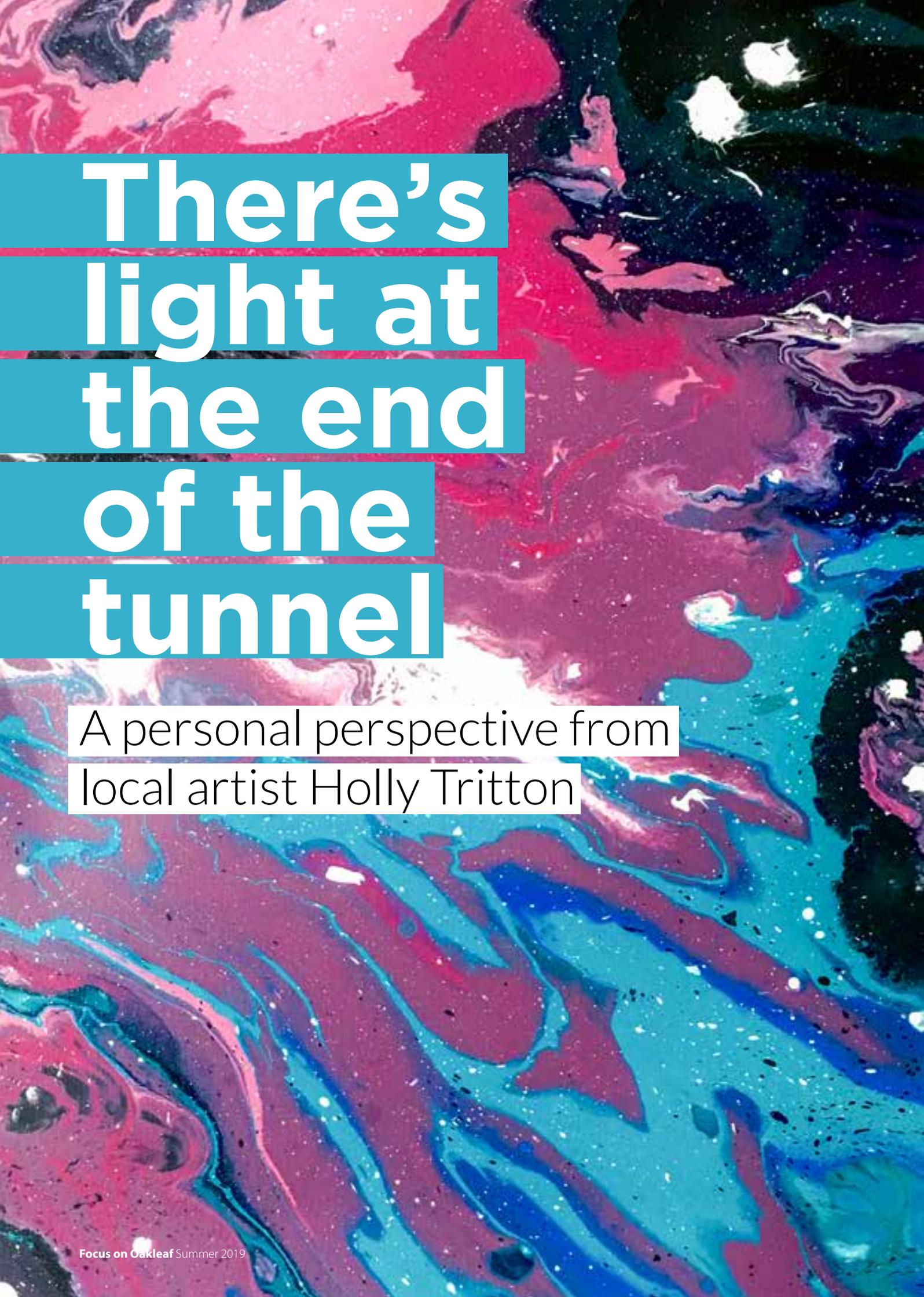
Find out more

Mental Health Accessible has been developed by the Money & Mental Health Policy Institute, a charity set up by Martin Lewis OBE.

They aim to explore the relationship between money and mental health and support changes which will see an improvement in the lives of people affected by mental illness.

You can find out more by visiting: www.moneyandmentalhealth.org





There's light at the end of the tunnel

A personal perspective from
local artist Holly Tritton

I began painting when I spent seven weeks in a psychiatric hospital. Painting was a form of therapy, and it was a break from having to verbalise my suffering and my trauma.

Mental illness is everywhere. It is estimated that one in six people in the past week experienced a common mental health problem but that doesn't even account for all the friends and families of those who have been in times of crisis.

For mental illness and mental health, creativity can play an incredibly crucial role in recovery. No diagnosis can be defined by a single sentence or a list of symptoms found on Google. Behind the diagnosis there lies a story, a past and a journey. Art allows for this story to be told in a way that is personal to the individual.

The Big Mental Health Pop Up was an amazing opportunity for artists of all backgrounds to tell their stories, whether that was through abstract art, watercolour or any medium. The exhibition brought together people who have all had some connection to mental illness, whether that was their own personal struggles, or they had connections in other ways.

For me, the exhibition provided an opportunity to come out of hiding and allowed me to finally share my mental health story. To this day, I find talking about my mental health hard. Unfortunately, there is still a stigma around mental health. For an individual to find the courage and strength to stand up and talk about their own battles is incredibly brave. It puts you in a place of vulnerability in which you could be faced with judgement.

However, art is a form of words, but visualised. And for me, The Big Mental Health Pop Up was my chance to stand up and express my struggles with mental health and share my story through painting.

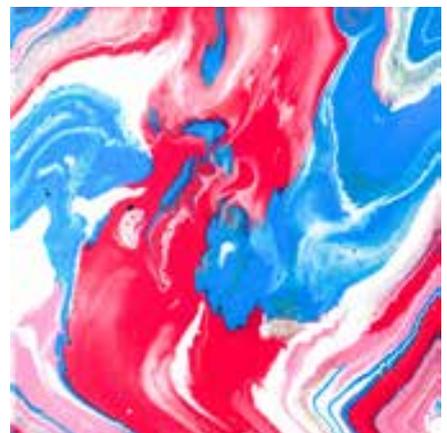
For someone to look at your art and understand how you feel or used to feel, even if it is just for a second, it shines hope that you're not alone in how you're feeling. Mental illness is so commonly defined by a definition and symptoms, but people often fail to draw attention to the root cause of mental illness, whether that is trauma, isolation or childhood struggles, people forget to talk about the hidden and most dark topics. I believe that every person has a completely different story, so being able to relate to somebody's past and present feelings isn't easy. However, by producing an image which is relatable, people can begin to understand your pain, your suffering and your challenges.

The exhibition brought people together from all different life experiences, it allowed people to share their stories to the world, it allowed artists to gain confidence behind their work and mainly it provided a voice for mental health.

My story can never completely be put onto a canvas using some acrylic paint, and my pain can never be fully expressed using a paint brush, but through visualising some of my symptoms and thoughts, I feel I can provide hope for someone out there who is where I was at my darkest time.

Art is my voice, it's my way to share my views and opinions and most important to not stay hidden anymore. I use art to accept my journey, to accept my mental health diagnosis and to be proud of who I am and to not feel so alone in a world that can sometimes feel incredibly dark.

Your story is your story, and I believe everyone should have the power to share theirs. I choose to share mine because I hope that I can provide insight to others that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, even when you feel like you can't see one.



Sussex Oakleaf provides a range of support services to people with mental health needs, those with a personality disorder and individuals at risk of homelessness.

We empower people and promote independence by providing recovery focussed community wellbeing services, residential care, peer mentoring, housing support and volunteering opportunities.

Get in touch



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