

Ciara Harrison
Waterford Healing Arts
Artist in Residence
Report 2017



Wild Thing (you make my heart sing) on display in the foyer of University Hospital Waterford. Photo credit: Keith Currams

Introduction to Waterford Healing Arts Trust

The Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) supports the development of the arts and health sector in Ireland through professional development for artists working in healthcare settings. WHAT has been running an Artist in Residence programme since 1994 as a means of engaging hospital users in contemporary arts practice and offering opportunities to emerging artists for professional development within a healthcare context.

The focus of the residency is the artist's engagement with patients in University Hospital Waterford (UHW) in participatory and/or collaborative arts experiences. The artist is given a studio space for a six-month period with access to a digital darkroom, arts and health library, dance floor in the multi-use studio space, internet and administrative support as requested. Mentoring support is provided by WHAT staff. This residency is funded by the Arts Council. Ciara Harrison was the Artist in Residence in 2017.

The Residency

Introduction

This report aims to guide the reader through the experience of an artist working in the healthcare setting of UHW. I will do this by outlining my initial residency proposal and the development of this proposal throughout the six-month period from May to November 2017.

I will begin by explaining my initial proposal, which was in the form of a creative invitation. I invited patients to engage with me in conversation or story telling. The title of this project was ‘Tell me a story, spin me a yarn...’. This project involved working one on one with patients by the bedside and was instigated by the WHAT Artist-on-Call service.

The second project called ‘Wild Thing (you make my heart sing)’ was run as part of the Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing 2017. It was a participatory arts project that engaged many hospital staff, community groups and a local school over a three-month period. The project was a celebration of community, conversation and gifting. I will firstly offer my experience of organising a project in the hospital setting. I will then explore the concept of the project as an intervention in the hospital setting.

To conclude, I will provide an evaluation of my experience as Artist in Residence in UHW.

Creative Invitation

My initial invitation to patients was to invite them to share with me a story of theirs, be it from the past or present or a dream for the future. The title of the project was called ‘Tell me a story, spin me a yarn...’.

The hospital setting, as is necessary, is a clinical and sterile place. Beauty, a spark, a fragile moment is brought by the people or the community that enter the space.

This is created by human interaction, conversation and kindness. I wanted to be a listening ear, offering time for a patient, staff member or visitor to share their moment, acknowledging and grounding their presence in the hospital setting.

The intention was that our conversation would be documented in some form, as I would ask the storyteller to make as we converse, and I would do the same. The hope was that something tangible would remain from our conversation, be it a painting, a mark, a drawing, knitting, crochet, embroidery etc. that would mark and be a spark of our meeting.

My aims for the residency was to give of my time to patients, visitors and staff of the hospital to share a story or moment of theirs with me; it was to offer a form of escape for a hospital user where they can go back to the past or dream to the future, briefly leaving their present situation. I hoped to find beauty in a simple moment of conversation and document and create something tangible out of this moment. With permission of the storyteller the 'something tangible' that remains could become evidence of our meeting and shared with others, either in the studio or hospital setting.

I hoped to create an inviting and open studio space where the hospital community can visit, relax in and become a part of.

Tell me a story, spin me a yarn...

WHAT provides a service called 'Artist-on-Call' and this was a helpful link for me to integrate in to the hospital setting. In the first week of the residency all UHW staff were emailed details of my creative proposal along with contact details for WHAT. The email was an invitation for staff to make contact with me if they had a patient who would benefit from an artist's visit. A number of Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists availed of the service. In particular, I visited the Orthopaedics 1 and 2 wards on several occasions.

On the second week of my residency, I met with a long-stay patient in isolation in Orthopaedics 1. This patient had an interest in the arts, particularly in painting, drawing, poetry and music. He used to sketch regularly and had a keen interest in



Embroidering a patient's drawing in Orthopaedics 1.

Van Gogh and his life. We listened to and discussed Don McLean's song Vincent (or "Starry Starry Night"). I printed a series of Van Gogh prints that hung in the patient's room. He said this instigated conversation between staff members and himself about the work. During this time he had sketched a drawing of a phoenix and I had transferred this on to calico. Van Gogh applied the technique of impasto to his paintings. This involves laying the paint thickly on a surface where the brushstrokes are left visible. In the hope of referencing Van Gogh's style in the patient's drawing I

used the technique of needle painting. The patient chose the colour palette. This was a new embroidery style for me therefore the excitement of seeing the work progress was mutual as I gained a new skill and the patient saw his drawing in a new medium. The patient was discharged before the work was finished and I have continued the work during the residency. I brought it with me when working with a patient in the Department of Psychiatry and she has begun to needle paint a drawing of her own. I found these unexpected links a very exciting aspect to the residency.

At the beginning of July I began to visit Medical 5 on a regular basis. The Nurse Manager informed me that, unusually, there were not many long stay patients at the time. For whatever reason, it tended to be women that I mostly visited in this ward. I don't think this was intentional on the part of either the ward staff or myself. Initially I was apprehensive, not wanting to intrude on the patients' space or put pressure on them to engage with me. The most appropriate approach for me was to ask the patients if they would like me to sit with them and talk. I usually received a positive response to this question.



Working with a patient in Medical 5. Photo credit: Irish National Lottery

I had many engaging and emotive conversations with patients. I did very little speaking. Instead I would ask open-ended questions to encourage our conversation. These conversations were often stories from the patients' past. One patient spoke to me about the loss of her husband. She used to knit all of his jumpers and this led us on to discussing handmade clothing and the quality and longevity of these objects, as opposed to the shop bought of today. As she had been an avid knitter in the past I suggested to her that we knit together on my next visit. She was welcoming of this suggestion. When I next visited she did not want to knit so instead we spoke and I knitted. As I was a novice knitter she inadvertently became the teacher and became involved in the making process in a different way than expected. She taught me her well-honed skill and encouraged me to continue practicing. I brought the knitting back a number of times and we worked on it together as we conversed.

Well Festival of Art and Wellbeing (9th – 15th October 2017)

The Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing is an annual event organised by the Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT), Garter Lane Arts Centre and Waterford City and Council Libraries. Now in it's 5th year, the festival coincides with World Mental Health Day and World Hospice Day, celebrating the personal and societal benefits of the arts.

Wild Thing (you make my heart sing)

In late June Claire Meaney (WHAT Acting Arts Director), Maeve Butler (WHAT Acting Arts Assistant Director) and I discussed a potential project I could develop as part of the Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing 2017. We discussed the idea of involving the staff of UHW in an art project where fabric flowers would be made and displayed in the hospital foyer and also gifted to the patients of UHW. Natural flowers are actively discouraged from hospitals for reasons of infection control. Making and gifting fabric flowers could be a welcome alternative. It was suggested that the flowers be delivered to patients via the catering department on the morning meal trays similarly to how WHAT deliver the annual Menu of Poems in April time.



Delivery of a flower to patient during Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing 2017 in UHW. Photo credit: Keith Currams

Logistically, it was necessary for us to initially seek the approval of the Infection Protection and Control department (IP&C) in order to move forward on the project. In early July our proposal was discussed at the IP&C team meeting where it was concluded that hospital management should be informed of the project. If hospital management gave approval IP&C recommended that prior to the making of the flowers that all participants would complete appropriate hand hygiene. All other

information provided to IP&C by WHAT was deemed satisfactory. In early August approval was sought and granted from hospital management.

The catering department suggested the flowers be delivered to patients with their 11am tea on the morning of 13th October. The department covers 14 in-patient wards including the Paediatric ward. In addition, catering is also provided to Dialysis patients in the Dialysis Unit. There are typically 30 patients in each ward and 60 patients in the Dialysis Unit.

Upon receiving the go-ahead for the project from management it was necessary to publicise it within the hospital community. It was to be a participatory art project, ‘a form of art that directly engages the audience in the creative process so that they become participants in the event... the artist is seen as a collaborator and a co-producer of the situation (with the audience), and these situations can often have an unclear beginning or end.’¹

We aimed to produce 1000 flowers (480 flowers for patients, remainder for the foyer installation) therefore many hands were needed to achieve this feat. A newsletter was sent out to all staff of the hospital on 17th August detailing the project, the projected outcome and workshop dates for flower making. Initially the uptake for staff workshops was slow. It was word of mouth that proved to be the most successful method of invitation. Throughout September and October many hospital departments visited the studio to take part in 30-45 minute workshops with tea, coffee and biscuits provided. Essential creativity fuel!



Examples of workshops for Wild Thing (you make my heart sing) for Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing 2017.

¹ www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/participatory-art

During this period the project expanded to Waterford community groups, charities, interested individuals and a secondary school that were keen to be involved in the workshops. This greatly increased the production of the flowers as well as opening the project out to the wider community.

An Intervention

Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.

Confucius 450BC

The Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing focuses on the positive contribution the arts can make to one's mental and emotional health. I wanted to organise a project that was driven by process and community, and conveyed the joy that comes from a project's journey. Gifting, sharing and equality were also central themes of the project. Each person's contribution to the work, be it the donation of materials, the making of a flower, the delivery of a flower were core to its realisation.

To run the workshops it was firstly important to create a safe, welcoming and open space for participants. Secondly, the making process needed to be attainable, taking in to consideration the varying abilities and time constraints of participants. It was important that the participants felt a sense of achievement on completion of their flower. Although instruction was provided to assemble the flower, participants were asked to choose their own fabric combinations. This gave each flower its own identity.

An important aspect of the flower making workshops was the conversations that occurred among the participants. Some workshop attendees were colleagues and friends, and others were unfamiliar; some were experienced sewers and others were novices. Conversation was often instigated by the materiality of the flower making – fabric, wool, thread – and the process – folding, sewing, pom-pom making. It revived both positive and negative memories for some participants of school sewing lessons. Others had little experience of sewing. The varied knowledge of participants allowed for skill and story sharing during the workshops.

On completion of a flower, participants were given the option to write 'Care Instructions' on a manila tag. This would be tied to the flower stem. Using the analogy of a flowers care instructions, similar to those that come with shop bought flowers, I asked the participants to write suggestions they would give to someone to better nurture and care for themselves.



Fabric flowers with the makers 'Care Instructions' on tags. Photo credit: Keith Currams

Instructions such as *'Believe you can and you're half way there'*, *'The mind is everything. What you think you become'*, and *'Start each day with a grateful heart'* were offered.

When all the flowers came together in preparation for their distribution and exhibition there was a sense that each one was laden with stories. They had become an artifact of their process, the narrative wrapped up in the memory.

480 flowers were delivered to the UHW Catering Department at 9.30am on 13th October. The catering staff became our collaborators and the distributors of the flowers. Their contribution to the project allowed for this intervention in the hospital routine. There was a shift in the habitual activity of the 11am tea and coffee break where each patient was gifted with a fabric flower.



The deliver of a flower to a patient in UHW as part of Wild Thing (you make my heart sing).
Photo credit: Keith Currams

The remainder of the flowers, approximately 400, was on exhibition in the hospital foyer from early morning to late afternoon on 13th October. The flowers were arranged in bouquets in glass jars and displayed around the foyer area. WHAT staff and myself were on hand throughout the day to offer context and answer questions to visitors, staff and patients about the project. There was much interest in the concept and transitory nature of the work. It was very enjoyable to observe staff members excitement at seeing their contribution to the project on display. Claire Tully, Director of Nursing at UHW describes the project as follows,

The display of the beautifully crafted flowers in the foyer of the hospital was a beautiful heart-warming sight. I observed so many staff and visitors admire the flowers in the foyer. Indeed one of the makers of the flowers had stopped while I was there and was proudly explaining how they were made.

Two staff Nurses also stopped and admired the flowers and they were offered a flower each to take away, they were both overcome with this thoughtfulness and could not believe this kindness shown to them, one of the staff nurses picked the colours her daughter would like.

Many visitors were seen with the flowers throughout the hospital and I know the patients on the ward really appreciated this lovely thought.

The flowers were beautiful to look at and the colours were amazing, the skill and craft was of an exceptionally high quality.



A selection of Wild Thing (you make my heart sing) on display in the UHW foyer on 13th October 2017.
Photo credit: Keith Currams.

As one of the project's central themes was gifting, the WHAT team and I decided to invite visitors to the hospital foyer to choose a flower of their liking to take home. This sporadic gesture added a further layer to the project. Visitors shared stories with us of whom they were visiting or whom they were going to pass their flower on to. One patient whom I spoke to told of how a fellow patient in his ward had received a bad diagnosis that day and to comfort his daughter this patient had given her his flower. This was a very poignant moment for me and we were able to gift this patient with another flower.



A bouquet of Wild Thing (you make my heart sing) flowers on display in the UHW foyer on 13th October 2017.
Photo credit: Keith Currans.

Wild Thing Timeline

14 th August	Call out for fabric, wool and glass jars
17 th August	Newsletter sent out to UHW staff
28 th August	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
5 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
6 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (UHW staff canteen)
7 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (Newtown School, Waterford)
8 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
11 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
12 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (Medical 4 Ward)
13 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
14 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (WHAT Open Studio)
18 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (Well Festival Launch, Garter Lane)
	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
19 th September	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
2 nd October	Wild Thing Workshop (studio)
3 rd October	Wild Thing Workshop (Outpatients 4)
	Wild Thing Workshop (Brothers of Charity, Tramore)
4 th October	Wild Thing Workshop (Shine Discovery)
9 th October	Wild Thing Workshop (WHAT Conservatory)
13 th October	Delivery of 480 flowers to UHW patients through Catering Department.
	Installation of flowers in UHW foyer.

Evaluation

Throughout the residency I had many opportunities to work one on one with long-term stay patients initiated through the Artist-on-Call programme. This allowed me the opportunity to build meaningful and trusting relationships with patients. My proposal had centred on conversation and story telling. This organically evolved over time as the examples have illustrated in this report.

Linking with Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists early in the residency was beneficial for patient introductions. Occasionally, there was an assumption that I was an art therapist and I would explain that I was not qualified in this area. In the second week of my residency I was introduced to a patient who was struggling with his diagnosis. We began by talking about his work and his passion for underwater diving. His diagnosis had resulted in a change of work circumstances and he could no longer partake in his hobby due to a physical disability. I often reflected that this did not appear to be a helpful approach, as he would become emotionally distressed. In this circumstance I did not feel equipped to work with this patient and I would have been better saying so after our first meeting.

Initially I put pressure on myself to meet my proposal outcomes. I was concerned that I was not creating enough tangible work with the patients yet I was reluctant to do this simply for the sake of it. I would always offer the option of working with art materials but it was very important that it was the patients' choice to opt in or out of this. I did not want to put pressure on a patient to engage in an activity that was not meeting their needs.

The opportunity to be part of the Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing provided a chance to manage a large-scale project that invited all aspects of the hospital community to participate in. I initially proposed that the UHW staff would make the flowers for the project and an email was sent to all staff with workshop dates. The uptake on the workshops was slow and it was difficult to entice involvement. I altered my wording in a second email to staff and marketed the workshops as an opportunity for team building. This proved to be a successful approach. Opening

the workshops out to the wider community was also a great opportunity to work with community groups and different age groups.

The Wild Thing (you make my heart sing) project encouraged me to reflect and reevaluate on my own practice. This project was driven by interaction, participation, dialogue, cooperation, collaboration and intervention. Its success was reliant on each of these elements. It was also necessary to have a tangible element to the project. The fabric flowers were accessible and uniform. The making process was not time-consuming although participants were encouraged to work at their own pace and were welcome to contribute more than one flower. The ability of the project to create intangible moments: the conversation, the laughter, the skill sharing and the story telling were the essence of the project. I see a curiosity and leaning with my practice towards arts participation and accessibility, complimented by making. I now want to explore this further and challenge how it can be integrated with my textile work.

Throughout the residency I continued with my own textile work in the WHAT Studio. This proved difficult and inconsistent as I felt this time should be spent in the hospital with patients. It would be helpful to be provided with funding for a seventh month, which can be spent in the studio reflecting on the residency in whatever method appropriate to the artist.

If I were to begin the residency again (and benefitting from hindsight) I would be more patient with the pace and progress of the work. There was an inner conflict where I wanted to be instantly absorbed in the project but in order for the work to be meaningful it required time. This can seem as though little progress is being made. It is helpful to treat your proposal as a living document that will alter and develop throughout the residency. I kept reflective journals for patients that I was continuously visiting so as to have documentation of our development. This was a cathartic and grounding exercise for me.

To conclude, the Waterford Healing Arts Trust is both familiar and knowledgeable of the hospital. Do not hesitate to ask advice or seek assistance as it is likely your

needs have arisen during previous residencies. It can be reassuring to hear that others have met similar challenges in the past.