

Breathe Arts Health Research
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Breathe Arts Health Research awarded Maudsley Charity funding to deliver pioneering Creative Mental Health Programme for Children in Care

Following a 6-month development phase in collaboration with the Symbol team at **Lewisham Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)** earlier this year, leading arts and health social enterprise **Breathe Arts Health Research (Breathe)** have been successful in their joint bid to deliver a 3-year, co-designed creative mental health programme accompanied by ground breaking research for young people in care - who are among the most vulnerable and underserved young people in the UK.

A collaborative, creative development phase

The development phase, funded by a grant from **Maudsley Charity's Building Brighter Futures programme**, brought together young people in care, and those who care for them, in a series of creative sessions designed to put young people's voices at the centre of their care. The programme worked with children and young people, aged 11–18, utilising multiple art-forms from songwriting and poetry, through to magic and visual arts.

Foster carers also played a key role, attending dedicated workshops to discuss their own mental health needs and how best to support their children. Specialist CAMHS clinicians took part in creative sessions alongside young people, strengthening relationships and challenging hierarchical structures that can act as barriers to trust.

"This programme shows that when you trust young people with power and creativity, they not only show up—they lead," said **Yvonne Farquharson, Founder and Managing Director of Breathe Arts Health Research.**

Why this work matters

Children and young people in care are among the most vulnerable groups in society, with nearly 50% meeting the criteria for a mental health disorder, compared to around 10% in children not in care.

Barriers to accessing mental health services include stigma, mistrust, and unwelcoming environments, with 44% of those who do access support experiencing early termination for a variety of factors. There is an urgent need to create inclusive, non-shaming, and supportive spaces that foster resilience and support mental health for both young people in care and their carers.

Yvonne Farquharson, Founder and Managing Director of Breathe Arts Health Research, explains:

"Creative approaches can build bridges between young people and their healthcare teams, helping them to engage and connect in more meaningful ways both with their own mental health and in traditional care pathways. By fostering trust, emotional expression, and a sense of agency, we're seeing what can happen when children in care are invited to help shape their own mental health support."

Our ambition

Our ambition is to make a long-lasting impact on mental health support services for children and young people in care, across South London and beyond. Working in partnership with academics from University of Cambridge, an accompanying research study will measure mental health and engagement outcomes and inform Breathe's development of a scalable, evidence-based model, which can be replicated in other CAMHS teams across the UK.

"We aim to harness the arts to transform mental health support for children in local authority care. This funding will help us improve engagement, nurture wellbeing and build trusting relationships to improve outcomes." - **Dr Rani Samuel, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust**

ENDS

Additional Quote if required:

"At Breathe Arts Health Research, we specialise in combining science and creativity to transform healthcare services for those who need it most. Thanks to the support of Maudsley Charity, we will be spending the next three years working creatively with and for young people in care - putting their voice, their opinions and their needs right at the heart of new service design."

Working in close partnership with, and learning from the years of experience of the wonderful Symbol team in Lewisham CAMHS and Lewisham Social Care team, we will together find new creative and artistic ways to support the mental health of young people in care and improve their engagement in existing services."

Innovation, collaboration and evidence are central to our approach. We are delighted to be partnering with academics from the University of Cambridge to embed robust evaluation and research into the heart of this project. Our commitment to evaluation and data collection will ensure the investment and support from Maudsley Charity, leaves a legacy, enabling us to support the mental health of more young people beyond the life of this funding."

Yvonne Farquharson, Founder & Managing Director, Breathe Arts Health Research

Notes to editors

0. **Primary contact:** Breathe Arts Health Research, Georgia Heighway (Communications Manager) georgia@breatheahr.org or 020 3290 2013.
1. **About Breathe Arts Health Research**
Breathe Arts Health Research is a pioneering social enterprise that combines the transformative power of the arts with robust scientific evidence to improve health and wellbeing. With programmes spanning physical and mental health, Breathe partners with the NHS, universities, and communities to deliver life-enhancing interventions that inspire hope and lasting change. www.breatheahr.org
2. **About Lewisham CAMHS**
Lewisham Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), part of South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, provides specialist assessment, treatment and support for children and young people up to the age of 18 with moderate to severe emotional, behavioural, and mental health difficulties. Working closely with families, schools, social care and community partners, Lewisham CAMHS delivers a wide range of evidence-based interventions designed to improve mental health outcomes and build resilience.
3. **About Maudsley Charity**

Maudsley Charity is a grant-making charity that advances and accelerates positive change in mental health care in south London. The charity funds and supports key clinical, academic and community partners so that everyone who experiences mental illness, without exception, can access the care that's right for them.

While our roots are embedded firmly in our local community in south London, we aim to also seed positive change in mental health care elsewhere in the UK, by sharing and amplifying the knowledge and evidence that is generated through the work that we fund.

<https://maudsleycharity.org/>

4. **About Building Brighter Futures**

Maudsley Charity has committed £10 million over the next 5 years to its Building Brighter Future programme. Building Brighter Futures funds work to improve the mental health of children and young people aged 10-19 years old who are living in the most challenging circumstances and who face complex difficulties.

<https://maudsleycharity.org/our-grants/building-brighter-futures/>

5. Interviews can be arranged with clinicians, carers, artists and Breathe staff.