

Tonic Arts projects make an impact at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital

The Royal Edinburgh Hospital (REH) is a specialist hospital for the provision of psychiatric care and treatment supporting approx. 620,000 patients per year.

Patients using the hospital are frequently admitted for long periods, can experience significant health inequality, comorbidity, and often experience readmission following discharge. In recognition of the challenges faced by patients cared for at the REH and the staff that support them, NHS Lothian Charity has invested in a dedicated part-time Arts and Green Health Facilitator, Becky Brazil, to provide a programme of works on the site to tackle these issues.

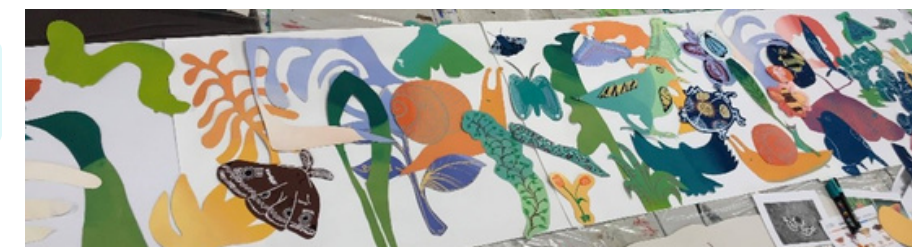
To ensure Tonic Arts and Green Health projects fit the needs of those using the REH site and to encourage a sense of ownership, Becky uses a participatory approach, she engages and consults with staff and patients at every stage of the projects, supporting them to feel listened to and valued.

The EU Culture for Health Report 'Culture's contribution to health and wellbeing – A report on the evidence and policy recommendations for Europe' (2022) highlights the value of accessibility and a person-centred approach to arts-based activity which can result in a range of health and wellbeing benefits. This approach is reflected across NHS Lothian Charity: Tonic Arts programme which seeks to put beneficiaries at the heart of its work. The Tonic Arts Team tailors its participatory activities to each project, as detailed in the three Tonic Arts projects in this Impact Report.

The link between arts and mental health

There is a growing body of research that evidences the benefits of arts engagement in relation to mental health. Activities such as making and listening to music, dancing, art and visiting cultural sites are all associated with stress management and prevention, including lower levels of biological stress in daily life and lower daily anxiety. Arts engagement can also help to reduce the risk of developing mental illness such as depression in adolescence and in older age. Participating in arts activities can build self-esteem, self-acceptance, confidence and self-worth, which all help to protect against mental illness. [What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being, a Scoping Review.](#) Fancourt D, Finn S. 2019.

The Royal Edinburgh Hospital has an Environment & Experience Group (E&E Group), composed of approx. 20 staff and patients who volunteer as they have a special interest in the hospital environment. The group's remit is to identify areas for enhancement, agree on new projects, and approve designs. Becky consults with this group during all stages of projects delivered at the REH.



Patient and staff creative workshop designs for Mural projects at the REH

I love looking at the artwork in the hospital. After a stressful shift, it really brightens my day after."

–Staff Member

Glazed Corridor

Consultation and creation

This busy link corridor is a covered, glass walkway that provides staff, patients, and visitors with access to other areas of the hospital from the Mackinnon Building. Prior to the works, Becky consulted staff and patients passing through the corridor over several days. The feedback was that the corridor appeared drab and run-down, largely due to the frequent need for glass cleaning and maintenance, they wanted vibrant colours with botanical or organic shapes. For health and safety reasons, the artwork needed to allow good visibility, the installation of vinyl artwork was selected as an ideal solution as it allows natural light to continue flowing through the space. It's also relatively cost-effective compared to etched or stained glass, and offers long lasting durability with minimal risk of fading or wear. Fire regulations were also adhered to with frequent consultation with the REH Fire Officer.

Artist, Sharon Quigley, had created similar vinyl works at the Western General Hospital. As they were well received, she was commissioned for the REH project. Taking the feedback from the consultations into account, Sharon presented her initial designs to the REH E&E Group. The group requested the designs be more colourful, playful/joyful, and feature more botanical shapes. Sharon developed further designs in consultation with the group, and the final design was circulated to all REH staff via a site wide e-bulletin for feedback before receiving final sign off from the E&E Group. Volunteers from Amey, as part of a corporate volunteering day, kindly cleaned the glass in preparation for the installation.



The corridor, before

The end design is based on the theme of "healing plants", featuring depictions of growth, germination, and garden topiary. These vibrant and uplifting shapes create a visual connection to nature, softening the clinical environment and providing a calming point of focus for patients and staff.



The corridor, after

Impact – Improved hospital environment

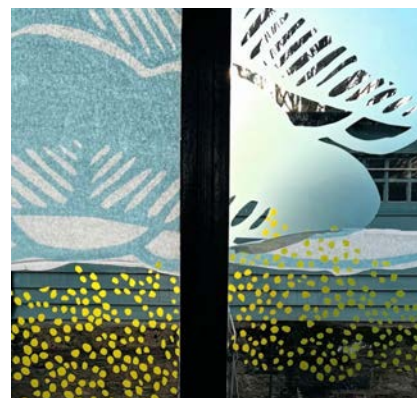
Staff, patients and visitors were asked to what extent they thought think the artworks improved the hospital environment out of 5.
(1=No improvement at all
5=Extremely improves it)
On AVERAGE they rated:

4

-  **This corridor was always a dreary, sad environment. It felt derelict. Now much brighter and now feels like a great space when walking past."**
– Staff member
-  **Definitely improves the hospital, the corridor now feels warmer, much better than before."**
– Staff member
-  **Brightens the space. It's colourful and draws your attention away from the drab corridor to look at artwork."**
– Patient

Impact – Improved mood of people moving through the corridor

-  **Cheers the place up – makes me more happy to be here."**
– Patient
-  **Shot of pleasure when you walk past something beautiful like this."**
– Family member
-  **Helps improve my mood when passing on the way to my job in the hospital."**
– Staff member
-  **Makes me feel calmer as I work here."**
– Staff member



Flower design in the corridor

REH: Our Story – The Mackinnon House Dining Room

Consultation and creation

The idea for the project was developed from two smaller Tonic Arts and Green Health projects installed by Becky. These initial projects used historical material curated by the Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA), which is held at Edinburgh University. The projects generated an enthusiastic interest from the hospital community, many interested in the site's history. Responding to this demand, Becky consulted with staff and patients across the hospital to plan an expansion of the project. The consensus feedback was clear: the community wanted to see more of the archive material displayed in an accessible and open space.

The Mackinnon House Dining Room, a busy canteen used by staff, patients, and visitors had been identified by the REH E&E Group as requiring enhancement. Becky presented the idea for the REH: Our Story archive exhibition, which the group immediately approved. Becky conducted further research into the archive material and commissioned graphic designer, Becky Milling, to help with the overall exhibition design. Throughout every stage, the project involved frequent discussions and updates with various stakeholders, including the E&E Group, patients, staff (particularly long-term patients and canteen staff), the REH Fire Officer, and Infection Control. This collaborative process shaped the final design, which now celebrates the site's 200 years of therapeutic history in a welcoming, colourful, and inclusive way.

Impact – Improved connection and feeling of belonging

100%

of staff, patients and hospital visitors agreed the inclusion of historic photographs and items made them feel part of a greater NHS history and encouraged a sense of belonging



Great use of the wall space. Love the photos of old REH. I try to contrast and compare with how it is now."

- Staff member



How times have changed, a nod to the past. Huge improvement to space – its great."

- Staff member



Makes me feel happier, I like the historic photos – nice to look back at how it was."

- Staff member

Impact – Improved hospital environment (more welcoming)

90%

of staff, patients and hospital visitors agreed the artworks improved the canteen environment



Makes you feel like you are in a high street coffee shop. Nice place to sit on my break and relax with colleagues."

- Patient



Better than it was – I do spend a bit more time in there now as it's pleasant and feels chilled."

- Staff member



Great little cafe – feels definitely more welcoming and bright and cheerful."

- Staff member



Smaller project at REH Tonic Art Gallery



The artworks in the dining room



The artworks in the dining room

Mural Projects

Consultation and creation

Two outdoor spaces had been identified for enhancement by the REH E&E Group; the Jordanburn entrance to Mackinnon House and a shipping container beside Artlink’s location at the site. Both were viewed as dull, uninviting and unwelcoming spaces so Becky identified and commissioned artist, Natasha Russell, to produce large murals for the spaces. To gather ideas and encourage engagement, Becky and Natasha ran eight creative workshops at Artlink’s studio and in some of the wards with approx. 50 staff and patients attending. The participants created shapes using cards and experimented with colours, giving participants a chance to get creative and design their own artworks. Using the ideas generated from the workshops, Natasha presented designs which were circulated to staff and patients with the most favoured selected. Installation began with the Artlink container mural, where patients and staff from the workshops helped with the painting. Work then moved to the Jordanburn entrance. Due to that mural’s height, Natasha completed it herself.

Staff and patients at the workshops asked that the design for Jordanburn entrance mural connected to the Whitebeam trees situated around the courtyard and would introduce calming blues and greens to imitate trees and foliage wrapping the entrance, creating a light filled and a welcoming feeling and to provide softness and colour to the building in winter months. Feedback captured after the mural was painted shows how it has improved the hospital environment and supported wellbeing.



The Jordanburn entrance, before



Workshop creations

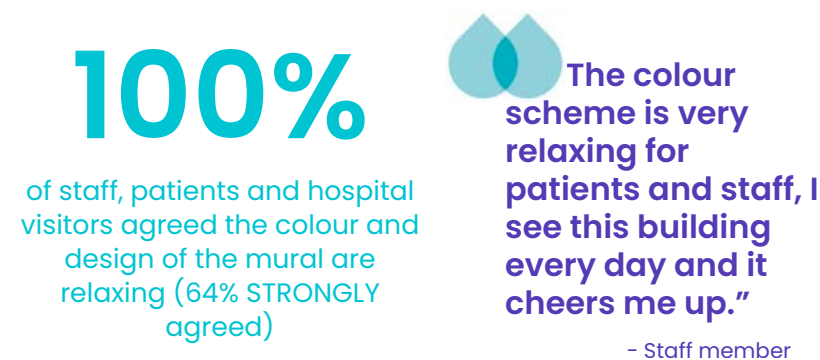


The Jordanburn entrance, after

Impact of the Jordanburn entrance – improved hospital environment



Impact of the Jordanburn entrance – improved patient and staff wellbeing



In consultation with the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Community NHS Lothian Charity’s Tonic Arts Team will continue to develop Tonic Arts and Green Health projects on site. More information about the programme can be found at [NHS Lothian Charity: Tonic Arts website](https://www.nhs.uk/lothian-charity/tonic-arts/). Thank you to the Impact Support Volunteers for supporting with data collection.

Report compiled by Rebecca Caulfield, Evaluation Manager, NHS Lothian Charity