

INSIGHTS FROM

THE CURIOSITY SHOP

23 JULY 2026

CENTRE FOR HEALTH & HERITAGE,
GLENFIELD HOSPITAL, LEICESTER

#1

A SENSE OF
BELONGING.

CAPTURING
CONVERSATIONS IN
MULTI-
SENSOR
WAYS

PEOPLE NEED
STORIES
!!!





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Creative practice is becoming increasingly recognised within patient care, community health and social prescribing contexts. However, healthcare systems are now asking new questions about staff wellbeing, workforce retention, burnout, compassion fatigue and organisational culture.

Curiosity Shop #1 created a space for creative practitioners, working with creative writing and storytelling practices, and arts for health leaders to collectively explore what happens when the participant is a healthcare professional rather than a patient. Many creative methods already exist and the challenge is not necessarily inventing new practices, but understanding how existing approaches might translate into staff-facing contexts.



Curiosity Shops are part of Empathy, Difficulty, Difference: Creative Curiosity in Practice. This AHRC-funded project asks how literature - creative writing, shared close-reading, reflection - might help us address difficulties, difference and crisis. By convening an interdisciplinary and wide-ranging dialogue, it seeks to learn from lived experience and successful examples of creative practice from individuals and community arts organisations. Its central question is to investigate how literary and creative practices might support empathic communication and self-care in highly pressured healthcare environments; its aim is to take this learning back into the community, the ward and the practice of the healthcare professional.

CREATIVE PRACTICE

Participants shared their practices which were broad and flexible, including storytelling, poetry, textiles, ceramics, glass and illustration. These methods are valued not simply because they produce creative outputs, but because they can help people to pause and take a breath, to express themselves, connect with others and explore emotions, heritage, identity and lived experience.

In shifting focus of creative engagement from patients to healthcare practitioners, the creative practitioner does not necessarily need to invent entirely new creative methods. Instead, existing approaches could be carefully adapted to reflect the pressures, professional identities and working cultures of healthcare settings. The quality of facilitation, framing and participant experience is suggested to be more important than the particular art form used.



#CREATIVECURIOSITYINPRACTICE

Creativity

Creativity is expressive.
It is making, thinking, sharing,
pushing boundaries.
It is development -
restoration of the human.

Creativity is a place to escape to.
It is searching for imagination.
Creativity is openness, fluidity.
It is being free. It is space. It is
momentum.

Creativity means having fun,
being playful, childlike and
curious.
It is about experimenting.

Creativity is sometimes hard to
access.
It means doing whatever you want to
do.
Nothing is wrong.

Creativity is a means to celebrate
and communicate.
It is true voice.
It is happiness.

Creativity is everything!
It's the source of everything.
It feeds into everything.



We asked our
participants,
'what does
creativity mean to
you?'

JUST
DO^{ING}
IT
'S WONDERFUL

CREATIVE PRACTICE INSIGHTS

Adapt rather than reinvent.

Many existing patient-facing creative writing and storytelling approaches could be used with healthcare professionals, but they should be adapted to reflect professional pressures, identities and workplace cultures.

Prioritise process over product.

The value should come from reflection, exploration and conversation rather than creating a polished artistic output.

Make activities accessible and low risk.

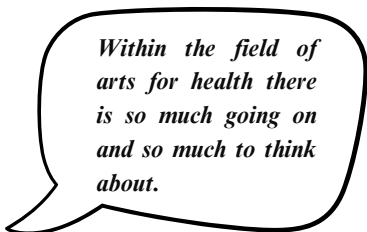
Activities should require no previous creative experience, begin with simple prompts and allow participants to build confidence gradually.

Offer different ways to participate.

Use a mixture of writing, storytelling, visual and tactile methods, with options for private reflection, paired discussion or group sharing.

Protect the integrity of creative practice.

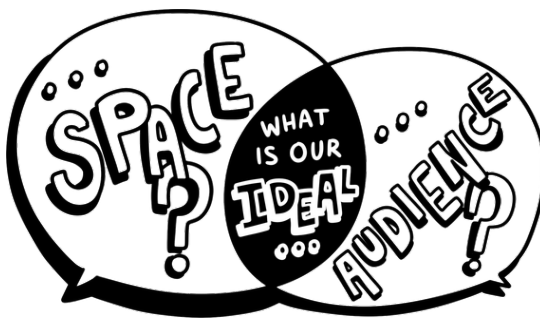
Adaptation should not turn creativity into another formal training exercise, performance measure or tool used only to improve productivity and resilience.



SPACE

Participants describe an effective creative space as light, comfortable, flexible, welcoming and noticeably different from a clinical, corporate or classroom environment. They value natural light, access to nature, movable furniture, comfortable seating and the ability to move between group activity, individual reflection, conversation and making.

However, space was understood as more than the physical room. It also included the emotional, organisational and cultural conditions that allow people to participate. Healthcare practitioners need permission to step away from their usual responsibilities, confidence that the time is protected and reassurance that creative participation is legitimate. A successful workshop depends more fundamentally on how the space is facilitated and whether participants feel safe, comfortable and free to experiment.





We asked our participants, 'describe your ideal creative engagement space?'

A Quiet Corner

Table on wheels, space to move around, great seating, choice for people with different comfort needs, whiteboards, different working spaces, event spaces, exhibition spaces, display cabinets. A cafe.

Big windows, stained glass windows, high ceilings, glass walls, real wood. Lots of sunlight. Being able to see the outside, being able to go outside, views to nature, trees, a beautiful lake. No hard edges,



A messy artist's studio, flowers, colours, yellow. More handwriting than screens. Music and dance, pool tables and dart boards. A library, sports centre and swimming pool nearby.



Time away from noise, carpets to muffle the echoes, a quiet corner for the introverted. A space to feel inspired, reflective, creative, hopeful. A space to feel free.

2021 / 12 / 24
Light - lots of
sunlight - possibility
to be outside? Natural
elements, flowers, colour
yellows. A table that
round, no hard edges
place to write prompt
maybe to handwrite not
than on screens.

It also a quiet corner, for the
one who may be a ~~bit~~ introverted and
in a large room challenging

SPACE INSIGHTS

Create a clear break from the working environment.

The workshop should feel different from a clinical space, meeting room or conventional staff training session.

Provide a flexible and welcoming setting.

Movable furniture, informal seating and separate areas for making, conversation and reflection can support different activities and needs.

Recognise that space is also organisational.

A creative environment depends not only on the room, but also on protected time, freedom from interruptions and permission to step away from usual responsibilities.



*Words can be
empowering when
you have access to
them.*

HEALTHCARE AUDIENCES

Participants recognised healthcare professionals as a distinct audience working with significant pressures, including high workloads, limited time, emotional demands, professional responsibility and organisational cultures that may treat creativity as non-essential or ‘fluffy’.

Healthcare professionals may already use creative activities intuitively in their lives outside work, but may struggle to see them as legitimate within professional settings. Engagement is therefore likely to depend on credible framing, protected time, organisational permissions and a clear connection to healthcare practice. Creative participation should be presented as an opportunity for reflection, connection, perspective-taking and exploration, rather than another intervention intended to make staff more resilient to difficult working conditions.

CONNECTION

#CREATIVECURIOSITYINPRACTICE

Healthcare

Healthcare is doctors and nurses.
It is illness and it is treatment.
It is surgery and hospitals.
It is structure.

Healthcare is a place of trauma.
Of fear. Frustration.
Healthcare is about waiting.

Healthcare is about getting better.
It is about improvement

Healthcare is prevention
looking after yourself
inside and out.
Healthcare is about staying well,
about keeping
our physical machine going
for as long as possible.

Healthcare is a point of support -
it is getting help from professionals
when needed,
it is healing and recovery.
It is so necessary,
yet I hope I need it as little as
possible.

Healthcare is caring
about people
their physical and mental health
their bodies, minds and souls.



We asked our
participants,
'what does
healthcare mean
to you?'

INSIGHTS

Acknowledge the realities of healthcare work.

The workshop should recognise workload, time pressures, emotional demands and competing responsibilities without blaming individuals for structural problems.

Establish relevance and credibility.

Clearly explain how creative practice can support reflection, communication, relationships and wellbeing, supported by a concise and accessible evidence base.

Avoid deficit-based framing.

Healthcare professionals should not be presented only as burnt out or in need of fixing and creativity should not be positioned simply as resilience intervention.

Secure genuine organisational permission.

Attendance should be supported by leaders and managers through protected time, rather than expecting practitioners to participate during breaks or outside working hours.

Design for a diverse workforce.

Activities should be adaptable across professions, settings, career stages and different levels of comfort with creativity.



*So many things to do,
practical to strategic, but
positive to see things
growing.*

BARRIERS TO CREATIVITY FOR HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONERS

To be creative you need to be relaxed.

There is a fear of needing it to be right.

Healthcare practitioners are harder, mentally, to get to a place of creativity.

Creativity is considered 'fluffy'.

Creativity is not seen as an essential component of the job.

Creativity is something you do when you have the luxury of time.

It's difficult for healthcare practitioners to give time to self-care when they usually the carers.





RESOURCE PRIORITIES

Findings from Curiosity Shop #1 indicate that the foundations of a successful creative workshop for healthcare practitioners are not primarily expensive materials or specialist facilities. Participants prioritised permission, conversation, time and champions and advocates as the most essential conditions.



OVERARCHING PRIORITIES

Permission.

Healthcare professionals need to know that creative participation is legitimate, supported and an appropriate use of their working time.

Conversation.

Creative activities should create opportunities for dialogue, reflection and shared understanding rather than focusing mainly on the artefact produced.

Time.

Participants need enough time to transition from a busy working mindset, become immersed and reflect without feeling rushed.

Champions and advocates.

Healthcare and creative-sector champions can build credibility, support engagement and help sustain the work beyond a single workshop.

Ethical and flexible participation.

Participants should have control over what they create, how they contribute and whether they share personal experiences.



Other points identified by participants to pick up in future Curiosity Shops: more sharing of evidence of the positive impact the arts has on health and having some science to support the medical brain and help with understanding; explore the disconnect between people viewing arts as a hobby and tapping into its benefits in a professional capacity; the role of AI - is there one?

OVERALL DIRECTION

Later in 2026 we will be holding Curiosity Shop #2, a space for creative inquiry for healthcare professionals. Rather than a conventional staff wellbeing intervention or artistic skills session, we will create the conditions for healthcare staff to slow down, experiment, reflect and connect through a series of accessible creative methods.

Beyond reaffirming the value of creative approaches for reflection and wellbeing for healthcare professionals, at the heart of this second Curiosity Shop will be a consideration of how creative practice can respond realistically to the time pressures, professional identities, organisational structures and ethics that shape healthcare work.



LOTS
OF
NATURE



CONNECTION

CREATIVE
CONFIDENCE



PERMISSION
TO
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