



FIBRE

VERD DE GRIS ARTS

 **VERD DE GRIS ARTS, HEBDEN BRIDGE, CALDERDALE**

 **VERD DE GRIS FIBRE PROJECT**

WHAT IS THE FIBRE PROJECT ABOUT?

Verd de Gris Arts FIBRE project in Calderdale, West Yorkshire, is supported by a current National lottery Communities Fund three-year grant. The project utilises **creative arts to bring socially disconnected women/girls together on a cross-cultural and inter-generational basis to significantly enhance their engagement, connectedness, progression (e.g. towards Further Education, volunteering, employment) and wellbeing. In turn, their ability to contribute to collective voice/influence work to benefit the wider population of disconnected women/girls.** Verd de Gris work is underpinned, shaped and driven by the user-led, vibrant and inspirational **One Voice Collective**, currently comprising **25 Calderdale women from diverse cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and ages with direct lived experience of social disconnection and struggle**, who have completed variations of the transformative groupwork courses. This is offered through a **suite of transformative courses** explicitly designed for/with women who are **socially disconnected** and often **living with trauma**, combining **groupwork and one-to-one support**, pioneered and piloted through the FIBRE project.

This work is supported with a **progression pathway** whereby women completing courses have a range of supported, mentored opportunities to become **peer volunteers, mentors and co-workers**, utilising their own experience to **supportively empower other women** in similar circumstances – in turn are then able to become involved in wider collective voice/influence, advocacy, research and strategic work (e.g. co-designing and co-producing podcasts/talks and public performances and participating in high-profile cultural/wellbeing initiatives and university research projects).

*The word FIBRE has many different meanings and connotations:
a natural or synthetic filament that may be spun in to yarn, or used in fibre optics;
it is the narrow elongated thick-walled cell used to create our muscle fibre.
It has also come to represent notions of a moral adhesive, binding and uniting our social
groups in times of crisis.*

HOW DO YOU DEMONSTRATE IMPACT AND SUCCESS?

The courses at Verd de Gris constantly evolve and adapt **to meet local women's needs**. These are examples of some of the courses that have been developed through the life of the FIBRE project:

BEHIND THE MASK: A proven methodology that supports women with low confidence or living with various issues impacting their quality of life and emotional resilience. These well-being sessions are for women from across local communities - they are inclusive and accessible.

BEGIN 2 CHANGE: This project builds on the Behind the Mask model and explores progression into further education, paid employment, and volunteering opportunities. It combines group and dedicated one-to-one (121) support, working closely with key agencies and stakeholders, including the DWP, local colleges, and employment agencies.

LOST WITHOUT A MAP: a creative project for women who may be feeling disconnected or 'stuck' in their lives. This course addresses a real, identified need for emotional support and connection among local women, using the therapeutic benefits of creative expression to help women find their way back to a more fulfilling and connected life.

SOUL SPACE: a project designed for a younger cohort of women who are feeling anxious or stressed – younger women who want to find a deeper connection to themselves and to other women. Re-connect, Empower, Re-wild, Breathe.

What sets Verd de Gris work apart is its **commitment to sustained engagement beyond the initial courses**. Behind The Mask and Begin 2 Change serve as stepping stones to further involvement with the One Voice Collective. **This collective provides women who have gained greater self-confidence with ongoing opportunities to participate in creative and social activities**. These activities, co- designed with One Voice members, culminate in public performances, conferences, and advocacy work, amplifying the voices of these women and creating a lasting impact on their communities. This methodology not only **empowers women individually but also fosters a sense of community and collective action**, ensuring that the benefits of their programmes extend far beyond the duration of the courses themselves.

Measuring impact and success is often self-evident in the ways in which projects are framed and designed. Utilising a range of comprehensive methods and tools such as **'Soft Skills Assessment'** (score chart ascertaining confidence / communication skills / home life at the beginning and end of the sessional work), enables Verd de Gris to measure and ascertain benefits and impact. Verd de Gris understands that participants may feel disinclined to complete survey and monitoring forms for various reasons. However, **Verd de Gris emphasise the value and importance of tracking progress –not only to help individuals see how far they've come but also to give them space to share feedback on the project**. To ease this reluctance, Verd De Gris integrate **creative evaluation methods** such as journaling, recorded interviews, and creative writing, making the process more engaging and accessible.

WHAT KEY LEARNINGS HAVE EMERGED FROM THE PROJECT AND HOW ARE THESE INFORMING YOUR PRACTICE?

The most important aspect of this work is **listening and understanding** - then to move the initiative forward with the women and girls themselves as **co-engineers of change**.

HOW IS THE INITIATIVE ENSURING LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY?

Verd de Gris continues to **explore avenues for longer term funding** of this work as National Lottery funding, that supports this project comes to an end this summer.

WHAT ASPECTS OF HEALTH DOES THE PROJECT ADDRESS?

The FIBRE project addresses **mental health, social isolation, health prevention, health inequalities, physical health and Intercultural connection / fostering cross-community relationships**.

WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE PROJECT?

The beneficiaries of Verd de Gris existing and planned expansion/enhancement work – at both individual and wider collective voice/influence levels – **are socially disconnected women and girls in Calderdale from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and ages, mainly living in communities experiencing significantly greater deprivation and socioeconomic challenges than England generally, in Halifax and nearby towns (inc. HX1, HX2, HD6, OL14)**.

“We, together with the women we support and co-design project work with, are fearful that this work will not continue into the future”

TESTIMONIALS

“Let me tell you a story. I’ve done such a good job of blocking it out, that I can’t remember the date, but I’ll say about 7 years ago my life changed overnight, by other people’s cruel doings and untruths. The negative impacts another person’s actions had were utterly devastating for me, with long-term effects and consequences. When life hits you, sometimes it comes in waves that kick you sideways. I don’t recognise who she was now. I look in the mirror and I see me - Me who I am NOW. Me who I was meant to be, be allowed, allowed to become. Life events change us, how could they not? Through adversity comes strength they say, and me and these amazing women, strong, beautiful women weaved into my One Voice family, have unseen scar tissue from our deep buried pasts. Unspoken and unheard, shamed and belittled”

“One Voice is a magical cycle breaker for many of us. And never underestimate a cycle breaker”

“This ends with me. One Voice has given ‘Us’, given me wings of freedom. I finally fled, from the miseries of my life, I started to shout “Look! I’m flying up high. Look, I can touch the clouds and sky. Look, I feel free, I feel light, no more carrying the heavy load of past upon my weak and fragile wings.”

“Expansion of self. My world has become richer, more nourishing since becoming a part of One Voice. Its a safe womb-space, nourishing and creative, birthing more confident, connected, stronger women. I have had opportunities to connect with women from different backgrounds, socially and culturally, ages and histories. This diversity has given me more confidence to be more empathetic and caring towards others. The world needs more of this energy. I feel that One Voice is so much more”

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