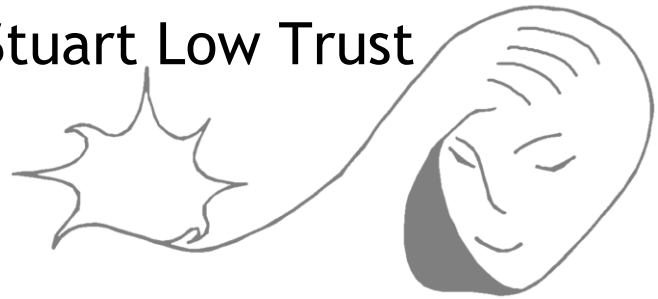




The Stuart Low Trust



bringing people together for better health and wellbeing

Annual Impact and Learning Report 2023-24 August 2024

Introduction

During the past 2 years has The Stuart Low Trust ('SLT') has exceeded our objectives, helping more people than the previous year and completing several organisational development projects. **We have supported an almost 50% increase in beneficiary demand.**

The Stuart Low Trust is celebrating its 20th anniversary of being formally established during this year. In May 2024, our Board launched our new Strategic Plan 2024-28, which sets out new ambitions to reach people most at risk through social isolation and offer new support to overcome social inequalities.

***"SLT is a wonderful lifeline" and
"SLT is a great organisation for developing community."***
Recent participant feedback

Guided group visit to the nature and culture at Kew Gardens summer 2024



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Reflections on impact of multi-year funding

There is a major risk in the small charity sector that organisations operate hand-to-mouth in a desperate struggle to survive and can't invest in the capacity building developments which could enable the organisation to thrive. The stability created by your multi-year funding has enabled several very significant internal capacity building developments so that SLT is more resilient in our post-pandemic environment and high inflation environment:

- **Monitoring & Evaluation** - Through our grant funding from Woodroffe Benton Foundation, we implemented a new Lamplight cloud-based database system for improved participant and volunteer record-keeping. This was integrated with our newly improved monitoring and evaluation framework to be better able to capture and report our activity outputs, outcomes and impact. **This Annual Impact Report provides a comprehensive example of our increased quality of reporting.**
- **Human Resources** - We have managed the transition to a new Programmes Manager and have created a new post Marketing & Communications Officer to increase our reach. We have reviewed and are implementing wide-ranging changes to improve how we employ our important sessional staff, who support our frontline service, including updated contracts and role descriptions.
- **Volunteers** - We have developed a new induction process for new volunteers, equipping volunteers with a better understanding of SLT's mission and values and upskilling them with an improved understanding of mental health support skills and Safeguarding Adults.
- **Finance** - We redesigned our budgeting and accounting systems for improved accuracy, efficiency and reporting. We introduced a new budget framework, new bookkeeping tools and transitioned to Xero accounting software.
- **Fundraising** - We introduced a new fundraising strategy aligned to the new post-pandemic and cost-of-living challenging economic environment.
- **Planning** - We created a new annual plan framework 2023-24 covering for example: Partnerships, Equality & Diversity, workforce development, fundraising with specific timetabled actions, following consultation with the staff team and our participants.

Our progress towards our service annual goals and objectives

Participant outcomes achieved

During this past year, we have introduced our new outcomes monitoring and evaluation framework through consultation with SLT participants and researching best practice nationally. Participants have self-reported the following outcomes through over 350 surveys completed at 16 different types of groups activities across our programmes:

Reducing social isolation

- 89% self-reported "I feel more part of a community."
- 85% self-reported "I have more opportunities to meet new people."
- 86% self-reported "I have experienced positive connections with other participants."

Greater sense of wellbeing

- 85% self-reported "I feel uplifted mood (less depressed)"
- 71% self-reported "I feel more able to cope with daily life."
- 90% self-reported "By offering a free service, SLT enables me to enjoy activities I couldn't otherwise afford."

Feeling more confident and motivated

- 82% self-reported “I feel more motivated to go out and enjoy nature/ galleries in my daily life.”
- 74% self-reported “I feel more confident to attend new events or activities (other than SLT).”
- 87% self-reported “I feel more comfortable and confident participating in a social group.”

Participant demographics

- 68% female and 32% male
- 2% aged 17-24, 56% aged 25-60, 42% aged 60+
- 10% Asian, 11 Black, 8% Mixed heritage, 69% White, 2% Other ethnic background

Our service activity achievements

During the past year, The Stuart Low Trust delivered a total of 198 activity sessions across our three Programmes Arts, Nature and Wellbeing attended by 1690 participants experiencing mental health issues. We ran:

- 86 Arts activity sessions attended by 663 participants;
- 24 Nature programme activity sessions attended 181 participants
- 88 Wellbeing programme activity sessions attended by 846 participants

Designed into every session is time for participants to connect and talk (eg while having a tea break), where they share their own tips for coping when they are feeling low, experiencing anxiety and looking after their wellbeing.

Sunday Philosophy Forum - Activity: 15 Philosophy Forum in person sessions this year at the new venue the Old Diorama Arts Centre, attended by 124 participants. The Forum is led by a team of volunteer facilitators under the expert guidance of philosophy graduates.

Art Workshops - Activity: 26 of art workshops this year, attended by 210 participants. SLT runs fortnightly art activity workshops in partnership with and on the site of Estorick Gallery of Italian Art.

Art outings - Activity: 6 sessions, attended by 56 participants. Visits included private tours around Charterhouse, the Neo-gothic mansion Two Temple Place, the British Museum and the Wellcome Collection.

Choir - Activity: 25 Choir sessions this year, attended by 140 participants. The Choir is run at the new venue of the St Luke’s Community Centre and **recorded the new SLT Christmas single ‘Guiding Star’** at the Universal Recording Studios in December 2023.

Nature visits/outings - Activity: 23 sessions, attended by 181 participants, comprising 17 visits to nature sites such as Sunnyside Gardens, Freightliners City Farm, Gillespie Park and Ecology Centre and Regents Park for activities through the seasons and 6 outings further afield in London.

Friday Evening Events - Activity: 27 Friday evening events attended by 532 participants. Events included music performances (eg Metropolitan Brass Band) drama and poetry performances, comedy nights, ‘Social Nights’ and health presentations.

Wellbeing Workshops - Activity: 61 online and face-to-face Wellbeing Workshops this year attended by 314 participants. SLT’s Wellbeing Workshops enable participants by providing a toolkit of coping techniques to use at home including gentle exercise activity, chi kung, mindfulness and dance.

NEW Poetry/Creative Writing - Activity: 6-8 week courses led by a professional writer with lived experience of mental health issues in partnership with Islington Mind. 14 sessions this year, attended by 107 participants.

NEW Monday Meet-ups Social Group - Activity: Launched in January 2024, 12 sessions held attended by 72 participants. Outings have been run for example to Alexandra Palace, St Martins in the Field Church.

Quotations from service users who attended our Arts and Nature Programme 2023-24:

Arts activities

"I enjoyed this activity because I was stimulated and engaged and feel more positive"
Art workshop January 2024

"I believe that I have gained a lot from attending this magical poetry & creative writing course and Bill Dury as our teacher is awesome and so very creative." Creative writing March 2024
"Fantastic trips, visits really help my mental health! Thank you!" Art visit March 2024

"Wonderful group dynamic. Great fun in a positive way too. One of the best social activities I have participated in. Great comfortable venue also." - Choir March 2024

Nature activities

"Meeting other people has enabled me to lift my depression. Learning new things and meeting other people enlightening and lifting of spirits." - Nature visit March 2024

"I love SLT trips / walks / visits. These great visits have a positive effect on my mental health. Better than drugs or counselling. " - Nature visit March 2024

Wellbeing activities

"I enjoy mindfulness. I find it very helpful in managing my mental health, nice welcoming and supportive group." Mindfulness workshop October 2023

"It was good for me and the other participants. The benefits are twofold: one for physical fitness and balance. The second for a positive mental boost." Chi Kung workshop November 2023

"Recovering from severe anxiety episodes, I cannot begin to tell you how much confidence & happiness I have gained from SLT" - Monday Meet-up January 2024

"Not only is it educational, accepting of others as they are. I live alone and wouldn't necessarily on my own go to some of the places in London.... a hot drink brings people together."
Monday Meet-up January 2024

Community-building Friday events April-June 2024

- "I feel uplifted and in a better mood. ... Only positive. These are a lifesaver."
- "When I arrived I felt tense and tired. Now, my mood improved and I feel revived... It was the first time I went to an SLT activity, and I love it."
- "Today's event helped me to relieve my stress. I thoroughly enjoy this... I feel much better, less stressed, calmer and happier."
- "I pushed myself to come but now I feel released from my negative thoughts..."
- "This is my first time and I think SLT is doing a great job. Feeling more close to people."

Volunteers

Over 20 volunteers are the lifeblood of a small community based charity, such as The Stuart Low Trust, running a variety group activities and events. They provide over 1,000 hours of volunteering time per annum. Volunteers support our programme delivery in several ways:

- A team of 5 volunteers assist at our fortnightly Friday events, as these are a social event for 20+ participants involving reception, food preparation, 1:1 support, set up and clear up roles.
- Volunteers are assistance at our Saturday workshops, nature outings, art workshops and Choir.
- Volunteer assist in the office to input feedback evaluation forms.

Service Innovations through partnerships

New Creative Writing/Poetry course in partnership with Islington Mind

We piloted a highly successful new partnership new 6-week course with Islington Mind in the summer 2023, facilitated by a Writer and Poet with lived experience of mental health issues, which was supported by Islington Mind staff and held at their Despard Road Community Centre. Our participants have reported very positive outcomes and so we are continuing these courses three times per year.

New peer-led social outings group - Monday Meet-ups

In response to participant feedback requesting more opportunities to connect socially and extensive consultation during 2023, we launched the new peer-led social outings group called 'Monday Meet-ups' in January 2024. Two experienced mental health workers act as mentors with a group of up to 12 participants per session to empower them to lead activity sessions, once per month in an Islington café and once per month on an outing to a place of special interest in London. Participants are encouraged to lead a variety of sessions drawing on their interests, such as poetry reading, or act as the local guide on outings to a places that they know well.

Charterhouse Art Masterclass

During the autumn 2023, we ran series of Art Masterclass workshops with Charterhouse which were held each week in a different location within the historic site and gardens dating back to the 14th century to be an inspiration for the painting sessions. Our participants have also had the opportunity to exhibit their work in the public cloisters of the Charterhouse.

Choir performance of Guiding Star

During 2023, SLT has been working on a Christmas single called 'Guiding Star', written by two staff who happen to have singer-songwriting careers before joining our team. The song aims to raise awareness of SLT and mental health through lyrics which express how we can find a way through our dark times to a more hopeful place. Our Choir participated at a recording session for the single at a professional studio one of our corporate partners, Universal Studios near Kings Cross. Aply led by our Choir teacher, the group recorded the backing vocals which now feature in the Guiding Star'. We plan to increase reach and impact 2024 through production of a music video to be filmed at the Estorick Gallery of Italian Art, where we run our art workshop activities, in which the Choir will feature.

Theatre performance

In March 2024, we were delighted to reach our highest attendance since pandemic of 40 people at our Friday evening event with very positive feedback. Dangerosity Actors and Writers Company, based in Soho performed an original new play called THREE on the theme closely aligned to SLT's purpose - *"a tragicomic piece of theatre about what it means to be human; highlighting themes of self-love, compassion, and loneliness. This intimate two person show explores the trials and tribulations of one woman's life experiences both in and outside of her mind, and places the ordinariness of her everyday life under a microscope, laced with heartbreak and humour."*

Challenges during this year

We have experienced challenges to achieve our annual core income target in the past year owing to the poor national economic position impacting community and corporate donations. In addition, to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on our beneficiaries, the current high inflation economy has increased costs of venue hire, sessional facilitator fees, staff salaries and food at activities which is a major challenge, as we run around 200 activities per year.

We experienced an unexpected and sudden period of sickness for 5 months of one of key staff, who is responsible for managing our activity programmes. We employed additional staff capacity to cover for this absence and averted any significant impact for our participants attending our activities. However, as we are such a small charity, our staffing costs increased significantly during this period and some organisational development plans were delayed.

Key learning points from our participants

Through surveys and engagement events during the past year, we learnt from our participants' feedback:

- 50% expressed an interest in learning more digital skills, eg how to use WhatsApp or other mobile apps, how search the internet or access online shopping.
- 50% expressed an interest in receiving information about free or low-cost activities available in London outside SLT.
- 40% of participants exercise once per week or less and the most popular type of exercise is nature walks (72%) followed by Chi Kung, Yoga and Pilates (36-38%).
- 18% would like online activities to continue, which they can participate in at home.

We are responding to these expressed interests through our new Strategic Plan 2024-28.

Board of Trustees development

We recruited a new Chair in March 2023, Eliat Aram, who is eminently qualified being the long-standing Chief Executive of the prestigious Tavistock Institute and a local resident.

We have recruited two new Participant Trustees, to increase representation of mental health lived experience on the Board. One of these new Trustees has been a public governor of the Camden & Islington NHS Foundation Trust and so brings prior governance experience.

We have recruited two new Board members with finance and company governance expertise via the Big Alliance's BoardMatch programme 2023, which connects Islington charity to professionals working in companies in the City of London. We have also appointed the Board member of corporate partner, the director of the TV Production Company Kudos.

Our work that we particularly proud of - Case study

New Creative Writing project

Bill was referred to SLT by a local Social Prescribing Service. He was a professional Writer and Poet, but owing to his mental health issues, was currently unable to work and looking for volunteer experience to build his confidence. Through a new partnership with Islington Mind, we arranged for Bill to run a new 6-week Creative Writing/Poetry course on a volunteer basis in collaboration with Islington Mind at their Despard Road Community Centre. Owing to the success of the pilot, Bill facilitated a second course from January 2024 and is now being paid to run a regular 8-week course. Here is a summary of the benefits Bill has experienced.

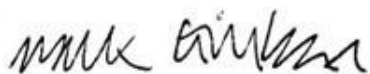
“I’ve thoroughly enjoyed the process and working with the participants. I am very keen to continue with the project. Everyone is engaged and likes the exercises given. Everyone feels inspired to continue writing post course. I aim to support their enthusiasm so that they can continue to explore their emotional health through writing - to help them understand what they need and improve their mental health and wellbeing. The Mind staff have been great, a great support - with good communication skills. I feel very grateful for this opportunity. We have created a safe place to share. I try to see things from two sides and now wants to help participants find this in themselves. At times my mental health can be challenging, but I am always comfortable sharing appropriately my past from a positive perspective.”

New Strategic Plan 2024-28

Our new Strategic Plan 2024-28 has been developed through a process of six months’ intensive engagement with our participants and staff with three strategic planning Board sessions. The Strategic Plan was approved by our Board in May 2024 and aims to increase SLT’s model of inclusion in new ways:

- A new tailored programme to engage **young adults** aged 18-35, co-designed with young adults and community partners.
- A new tailored programme to engage **refugees and asylum seekers**, co-designed with specialist community organisations.
- To increase access to our activity programmes for **under-served groups** (men, people who are Autistic and LGBT+) through co-designed changes to our core activity programmes.
- To **up-skill our participants** to progress independently beyond SLT through new information resources about affordable activities in Greater London and new digital skills training. In recently surveying, 50% of participants did not use digital tools and expressed an interest in learning skills to use email, WhatsApp, mobile travel apps, safe online search and shopping.

We are excited to progress these new developments in the year ahead to be better able to support our current community needs.



Mark Gillham
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Our team of staff and volunteers at the Jean Stokes Community Centre 2024



Our new Monday Meet-ups peer-led social group 2024



Our Art workshops, held in the gallery space of the Estorick Gallery

