

# Art Encounters Pilot Project Spring 2024: Evaluation

A collaboration between Studio KIND. and The Burton at Bideford

## Overview

The pilot project sought to support young people with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) from a local school.

Studio KIND. and The Burton at Bideford collaborated in hosting two workshops in the learning and engagement space at The Burton. Our intention was to investigate the question:

**How can art institutions engage young people who are not in school, in order to build their confidence and wellbeing?**

The emphasis of the workshops was on creativity for wellbeing, learning new skills and confidence building, whilst providing a link between home and school, with gentle re-socialising.

If our evaluation confirms a positive impact on the young people we worked with, we would like to extend the project to make more regular opportunities for these students and their parents and in the long term, explore the possibility that workshops held initially at the gallery, could then be taken into the school environment, easing the pupils back into schools gently.

## Team members



Carole Evans, Interim Director and Learning & Engagement Manager



Liz Wilde, Learning and Engagement Assistant



The Burton at Bideford is a gallery and museum of international note, in a unique setting of a historic port on the north coast of Devon.



Studio KIND. is an artist-led contemporary art gallery and project space located at the Corn Store in Barnstaple's historic Pannier Market.



Sharon Gale, Director of Community Engagement

Laura Porter, Director of Founding Director and Curator



# Pilot Project Summary

The Art Encounters initiative delivered by Engage in partnership with Take A Part, sought to support creative practitioners with training focussed on understanding action research tactics and methods when working with children and young people.

Studio KIND. and The Burton at Bideford collaborated and hosted two workshops for emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) students from a local school.

The evaluation sought to find out if creativity for wellbeing sessions based in an art gallery setting, was a positive way to engage EBSA students and be a gentle step forward to re-integrate back into school.

The findings confirmed from the evidence that the sessions were successful in engaging the participants, with all producing an artwork to take home. Any anxieties about the workshops at the start of the session were gone by the end, with students leaving happy and relaxed. It was noted that for a more meaningful, long term legacy, sessions should be held over many weeks for progress to happen.

## **Costs**

This activity was funded by Engage with a £1000 bursary.

### **The bursary funded:**

- Two workshops, each two hours in duration
- Four hours in total were spent prepping the activity
- Two days spent on collating evidence and writing up this evaluation

### **Overseeing the delivery of the sessions were:**

- Two artist educators, one from each gallery
- One SEN attendance mentor from the school

## **Participants**

- Three ESBA students aged (12-14)
- Two parent carers
- All students were recognised as SEN
- We were made aware that participating parents may have low level mental health
- Photography of participants' faces were not permitted

## **Access Needs**

Students living with acute anxiety and low level mental health were less likely to leave their home to attend a workshop. It was suggested by the SEN lead that showing a photo of the artist educators and a photo of the learning and engagement space would help towards alleviating any worries.

SEN lead wrote a list of 'Top Tips' for best practice, which the artist educators followed:

- No eye contact
- Create a low pressure environment
- No direct questioning
- Take photos/video of the venue, staff and project in advance to share with students to set parameters and expectations
- Relax, be yourself and talk to the adults in the room and let the students melt into the background and observe; let them come to you
- They don't like people in their proximity, so give them lots of personal space.
- Personalise and find out what interests them
- They like to feel they've accomplished something, so give a small task that you are 'struggling with' and give them lots of praise for completing it



The Burton At Bideford



Sharon and Liz ran the pilot project in the learning and engagement room

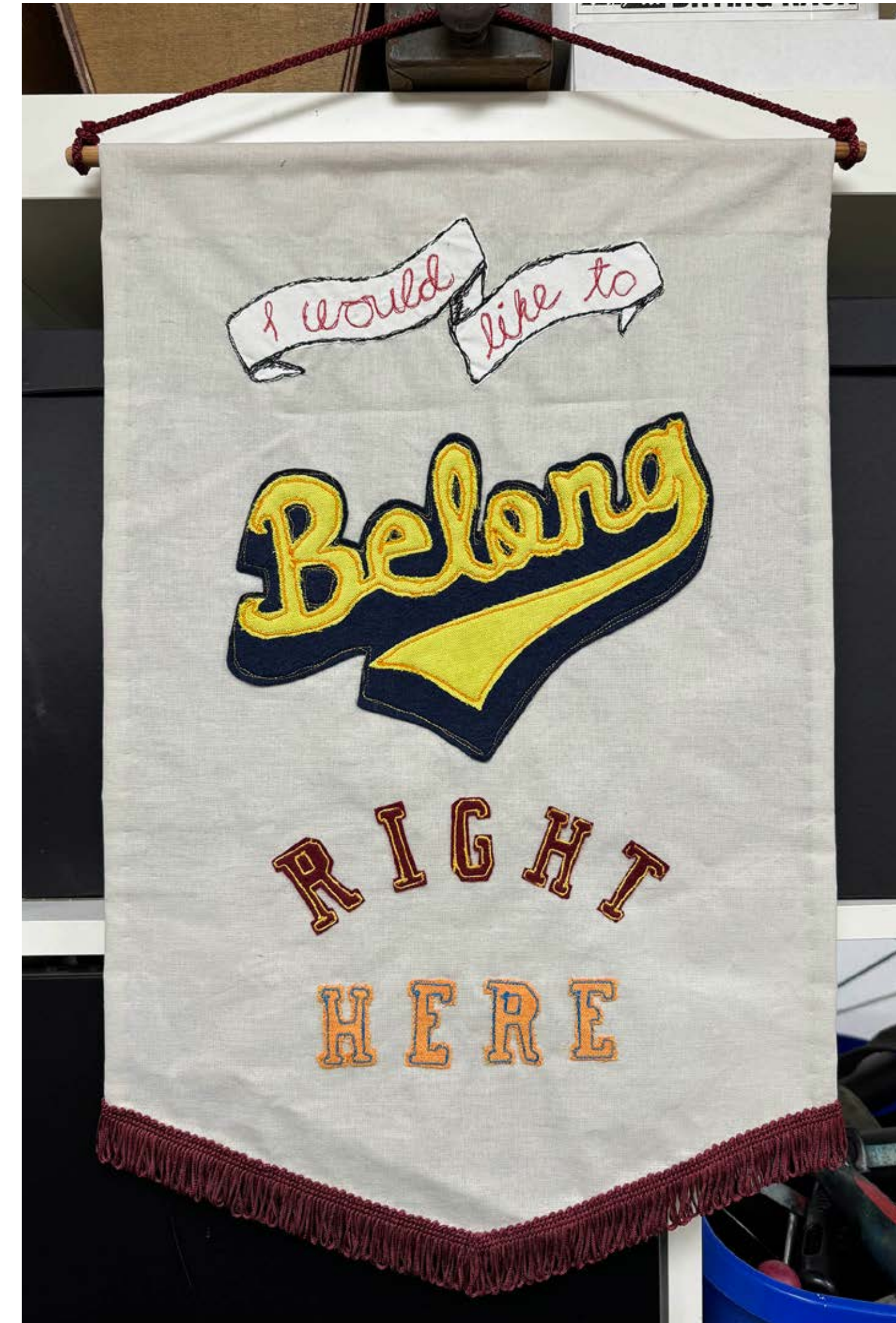
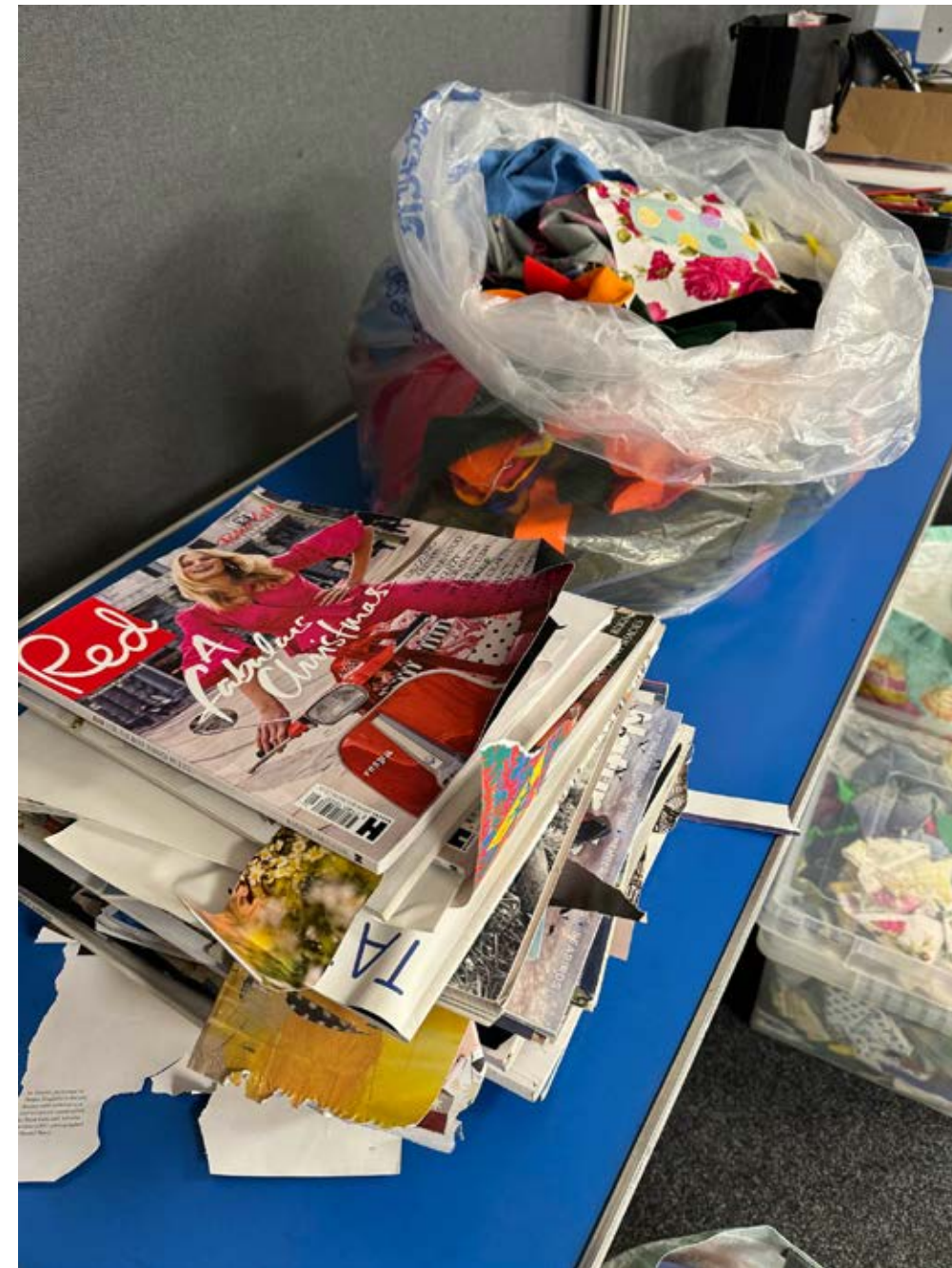


The learning and engagement room at The Burton

## The art activity

Positive pennants, inspired by a 2013 artwork by Quiet British Accent.

Creating a sporting pennant around the theme of positivity or personal interests using collage, drawing, stamping and mixed media. Opportunity to use bondaweb, a sewing machine and hand sewing and use a variety of design books to research ideas.



Pennant artwork created by artist duo, Quiet British Accent, 2013

Work in progress

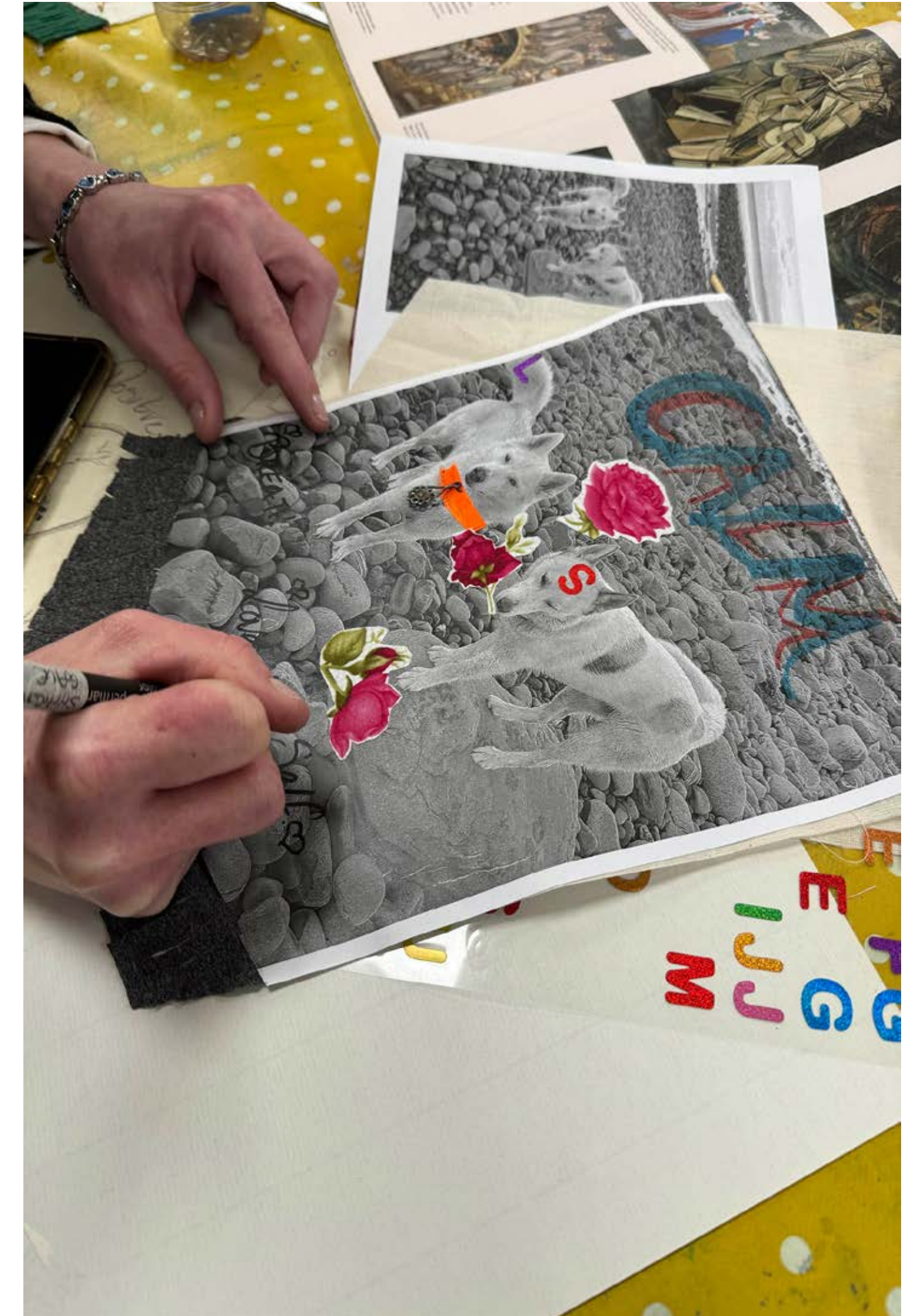
'Wolfie' by child B



'I'm Proud' by child C

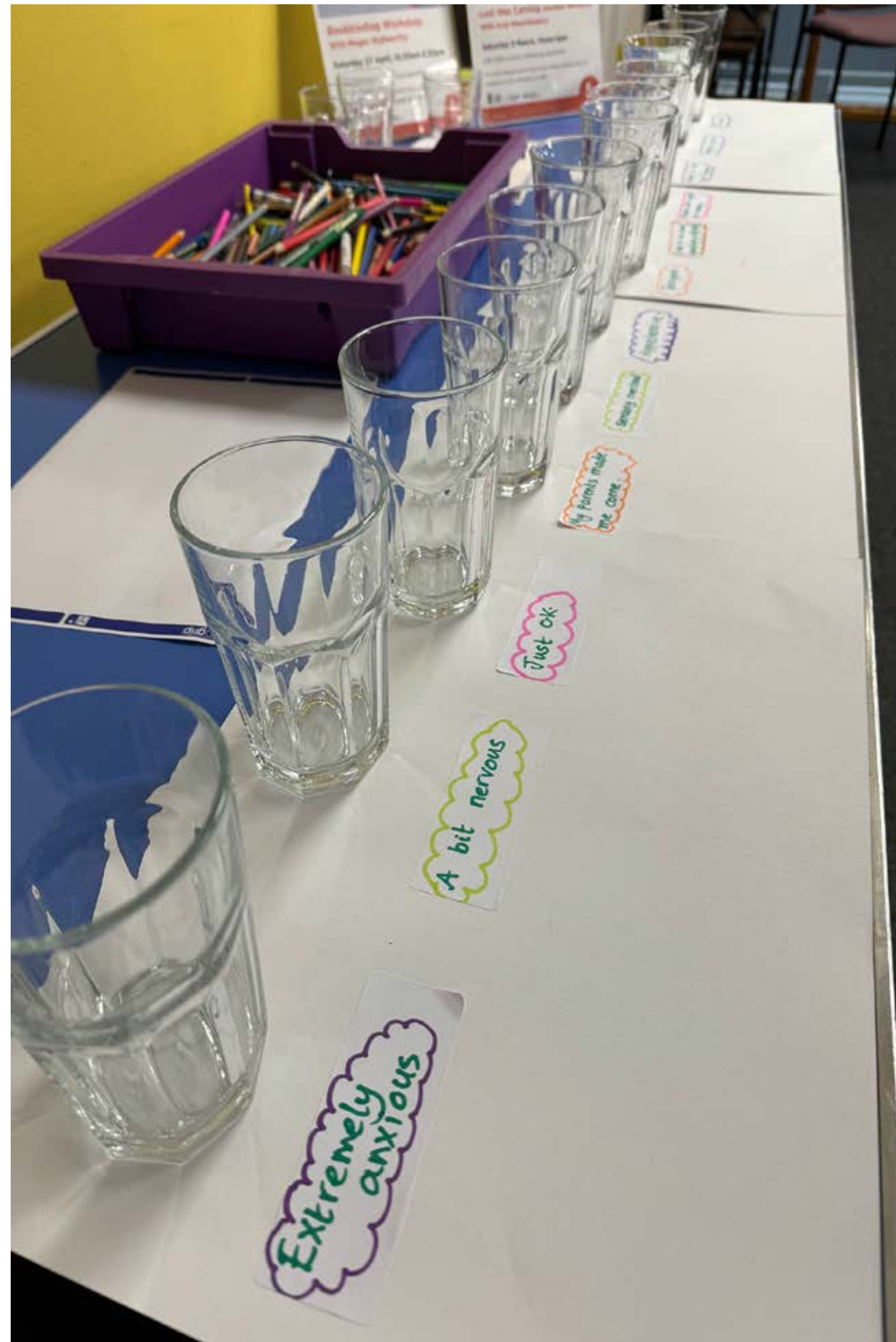


'Calm' by child A

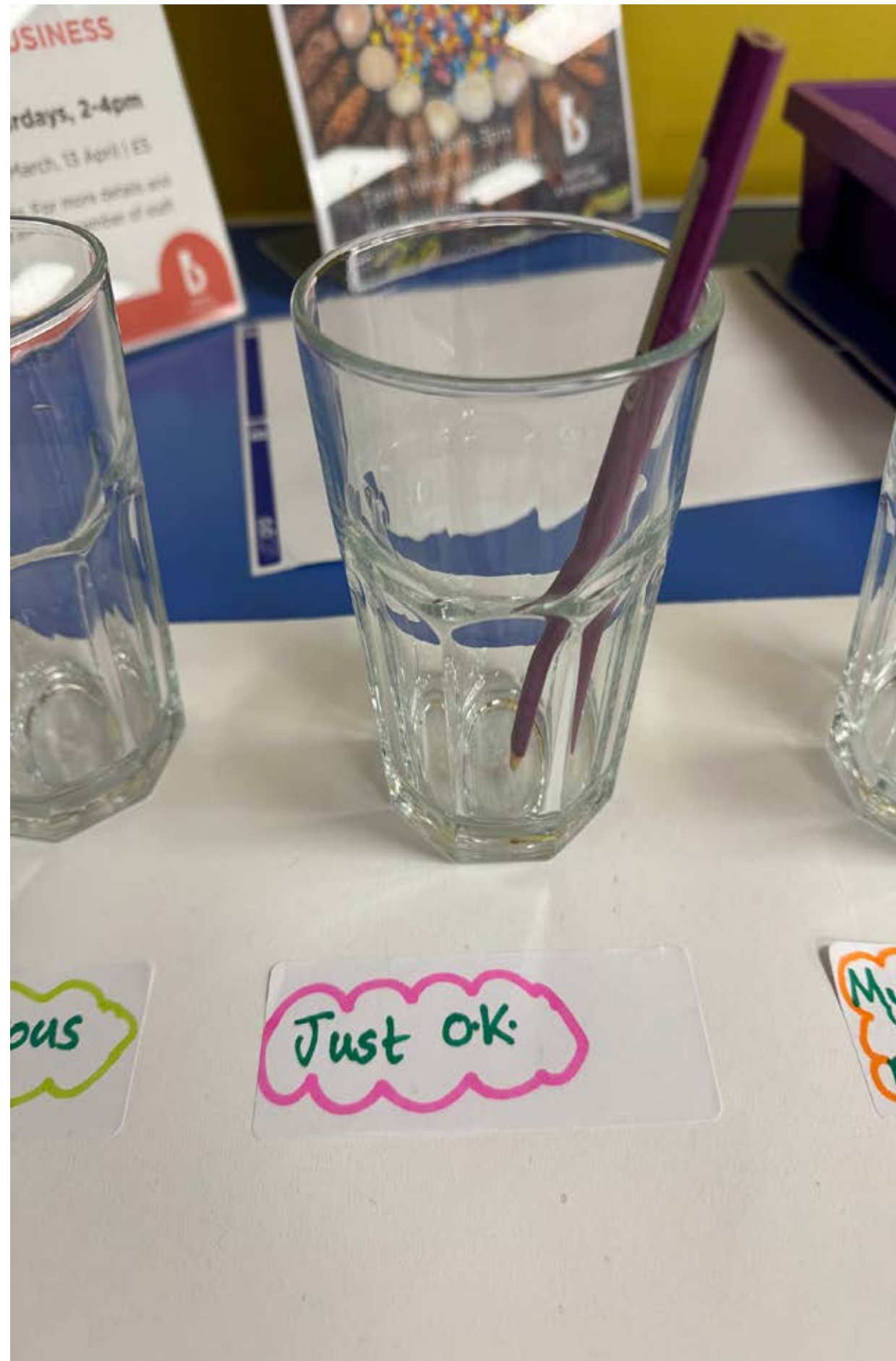


**Evaluation method:** How am I feeling prompts

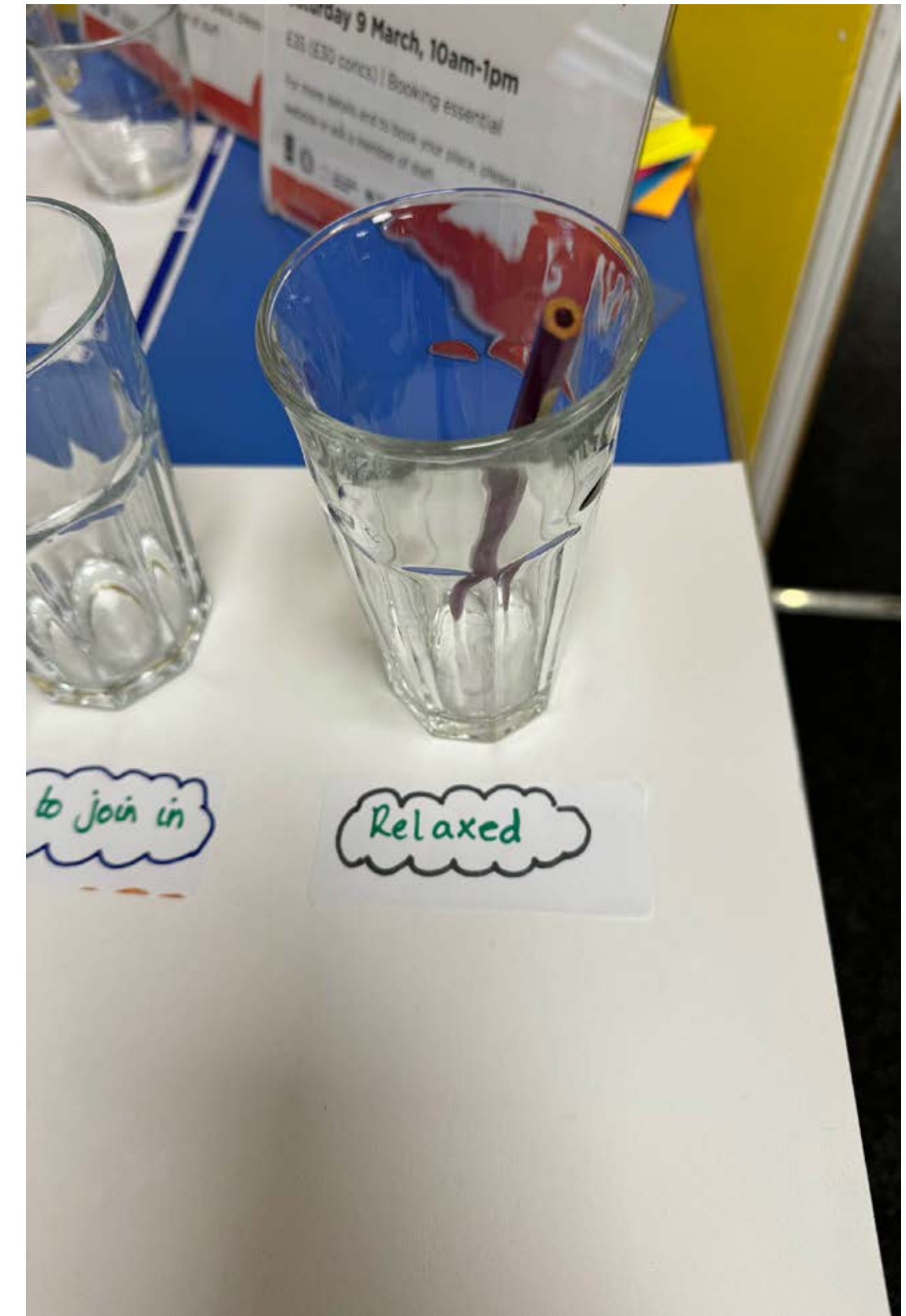
Glasses with prompts/pencils



**Student A** the start: Just OK



**Student A** the end: Relaxed

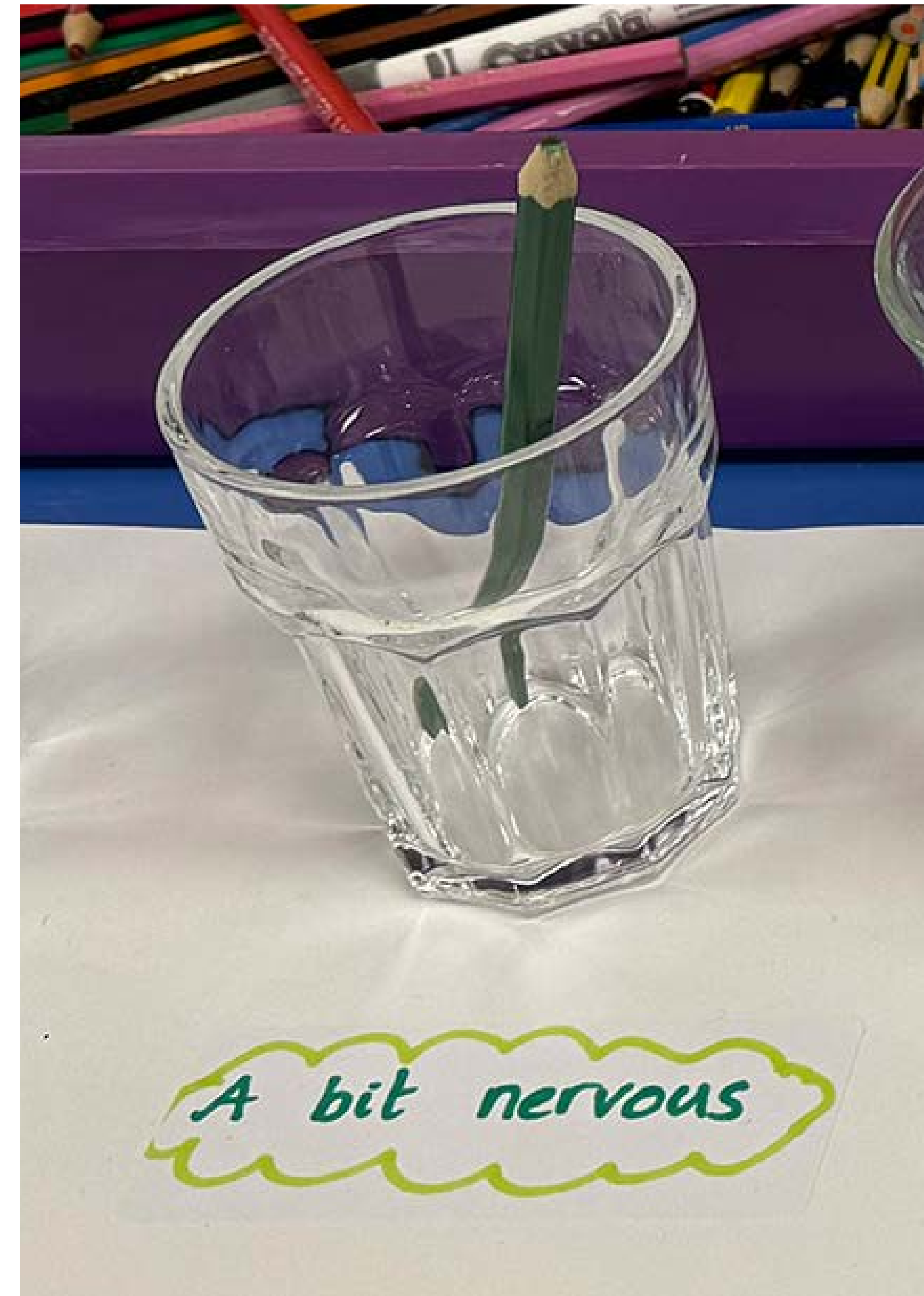


Participants were invited to put pencils into glasses which matched how they were feeling at the beginning of the session, as well as at the end.

We found that this was quite a simple evaluation activity, which all the participants were happy to engage with.

The two parents who stayed also joined in, both responding positively that they were pleased to be doing something new, happy to see new faces, and relaxed.

|         | Beginning of session                 | End of session                            |
|---------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Child A | Just OK                              | Relaxed                                   |
| Child B | My parents made me come<br>Intrigued | Relaxed                                   |
| Child C | A bit nervous<br>Happy to join in    | Relaxed<br>Pleased with myself for coming |



## Observations during the sessions

Child A and his mum attended the first session. Although he chose not to speak at first, he was willing to place a pencil in the glass and found himself a place at the table, where he put his head in his hands and didn't communicate or appear to engage in the first instance.

His mum was quite chatty and evidently enjoys creative art herself, so she seemed pleased to gather the materials and make a start on the banner. Child A stayed with his mum and she communicated with him by giving him choices about what he wanted to put on his banner, whilst she cut things out etc.

Once the mum had asked for a print out of their two dogs, child A began to get involved and take an interest. Mainly he snipped bits of paper but selected colours for his mum to use. He also spoke a little, telling us the dogs' names and what breed they are. As he became more involved, he made more choices about the banner, and seemed pleased with it. Mum was very appreciative and said how great it was to be able to come along. As the session drew to a close, child A put a pencil in the 'Relaxed' pot.

After the session, the staff member gave us the heart breaking back-story of this young boy and his mum, which moved us to tears. If they were able to step away from their anxieties for just a small fragment of time, then it was a privilege to witness that.

Child B attended the second session with his mum and child C's mum had to leave, so she stayed on her own.

Child B took a while to settle, but again, his mum took the lead and they worked together making choices about what to include and what he wanted the theme to be. He wanted to include his cat, and was very clear on what he wanted and didn't want. There were a couple of moments when he was a bit 'testy' with his mum, and swore, but he seemed to have a good relationship with her and she kept bringing him back on task. At the end of the session he moved his pencil to 'relaxed'. His mum was saying how great it was to have this opportunity and that she knew of other people who would definitely benefit. In particular, she told us how she watches a neighbour battle with her child on a daily basis, to try to get her to school.

After they left, the staff member told us that until just a couple of weeks before, child B had not left the house in over a year.

Child C lives with ASD and ADHD and struggles to attend school because of sensory overload. She tends to attend school for a few days, then becomes totally overwhelmed by the barrage on her senses.

She was very motivated and seemed to enjoy working 1:1 with the adults in the room in turn, again, choosing her dog to base her banner on. The calmness of a small group in a quiet environment was relaxing for her and she was pleased with herself for joining in, and was really proud of her artwork.

There are an increasing number of students living with ASD and ADHD, who find the physical environment of school totally overwhelming.

### **Feedback from child C and child B**

On the second session, we asked the parent of child C who stayed and child B, to respond to a small hand written questionnaire at the end.

#### **Child C with help from parent**

##### **What did you really enjoy?**

Answer: The art project itself, nice environment & fabulous equipment

##### **Write down something you learned**

A: Bondaweb and different art styles

##### **What didn't you like or find helpful?**

A: None

##### **What one change would you make to the workshop?**

A: No changes

##### **What will you remember about the session?**

A: What I made was fun, I enjoyed it.

The parent added "It has been lovely getting out and doing something different."

#### **Child C with help from SEN Attendance Mentor**

##### **What did you really enjoy?**

Answer: Making the thing!

##### **Write down something you learned**

A: I learnt that Wolfie could look mega cute with hairy eyebrows

##### **What didn't you like or find helpful?**

A: Nothing!

##### **What one change would you make to the workshop?**

A: It's been really good - nothing

##### **What will you remember about the session?**

A: Making the pennant

### **Feedback from SEN attendance mentor from the school**

'I found the sessions incredibly useful. We had two attend, child A and child C that are repeat school refusers. They were able to engage in the project set in their own time in a relaxed environment. It was great that the setting was away from the pressure related to the school and that the 'instruction' was informal and fluid meeting the individuals' needs.

For me, as Attendance Mentor at Bideford College I would completely back any extension of funding for this type of activity for our students, particularly those with a combination of SEN, Anxiety based non-attendance. The pupils that completed the course all said they really enjoyed it which is massive for them to participate in any kind of structured activity and enjoy it!

I would have preferred to see a 4-6 week course of this activity and see the students evolve over the time given and perhaps engage in more independent work away from the parent or guardian - I think this would be a perfect stepping stone for re introducing the school question and building relationships with the mentors and their students'.

### Feedback from parent A via email

It was brilliant the art workshop that A and myself went to that the school had arranged,

A's really been struggling to cope with life and attending school, A took part in a mini art project and had some awesome ideas then he made a beautiful pice of art,

A was extremely anxious when we go to the Burton art gallery, but he did it, the two lady's where kind an had a gental calm approach, I would encourage any one to give it a go it helped A's confidence and he stayed calm throught it too, he enjoyed as he told his brother what he had done.

Thank you, good luck with future course, grate experience.

Many thanks, L.

### Feedback from parent B via email

The art group at the Burton was a wonderful experience. My Daughter was really struggling to get to school and out of the house. She wasn't confident doing Art at all and struggles with anything new. She was reluctant to try it out. The tutors were understanding, helpful and kind and created a really safe, comfortable space. Because of this my Daughter was able to fully participate in the session. It was such a positive experience, it really boosted her self expression and confidence. Many weeks later she continues to talk about the session and loves to show people the art that she created.

K.



Child A's artwork hanging up at home

## Challenges

- **The best laid plans are not infallible!** We were tested by circumstances beyond our control. One of the teachers we were working with from a school in Braunton, had a horse riding accident and was on extended sick leave with no staff replacement available, the school had to withdraw.
- Studio KIND. had to move premises, this generated a massive amount of work and took a great deal of time.
- Communication very difficult for teachers because of their workload.
- The demographic extremely hard to reach because of the nature of their condition.

## Learning Points

- The attendance mentor has an in depth knowledge of these families, and helped to raise our awareness of some of the HUGE personal circumstances faced by some of them. We were moved to tears by some of the back stories of the individuals/families who took part.
- Attendance mentor gave us top tips on working with anxious participants.
- We learnt about a range of different types of evaluation.
- Through chatting as we worked on our banners, we learned that parents seemed very relieved to be listened to and to have a tangible opportunity to engage in something positive outside of their home, as well as enjoying the art activity itself.
- All of the participants were motivated to talk about their pets and were more relaxed when they could share pictures and anecdotes about them. Knowing this, means that animals and pets could be a safe starting point for future projects.
- Recognition that all sessions must be supported by a staff member from the school.
- Greater understanding of some of the challenges faced by this demographic.

## Key Outcomes

- Studio KIND. and The Burton at Bideford decided to work together on one project rather than working in two separate schools. This has been an added bonus. Working closely with each other has provided invaluable opportunities for shared inspiration and collaboration in the future.
- We have begun a working relationship with an attendance mentor from the school, so communication with the school has opened up. This should make reaching families easier.
- Confirmation that this is a group who really need help.
- Greater awareness of ways to engage with students with ESBA, and enhanced teaching skills.
- Evaluation was adapted to suit the participants.
- Evaluation demonstrated that everyone felt more relaxed and uplifted as a result of taking part in the workshop.
- An understanding that the sessions were as valuable to the parents as they were to the students.
- Identified potential benefits of a support network for parents.

## Key Impact

- All participants had not taken part in a workshop like this before.
- All participants felt better at the end of the workshop.
- All participants learned something, be it how to use bondaweb, exposure to different art styles, using materials in an interesting way to portray interests and self-identity.

## Conclusion

### How can art institutions engage young people who are not in school, in order to build their confidence and wellbeing?

Our evaluation does confirm that art institutions can engage with EBSA students, with a positive outcome, facilitating creative based workshops in a safe environment. Ideally the project needs to be longer with more workshops so students can work towards engaging in more independent work away from their parent or guardian. The aim of the workshops would be to bridge the gap between home and school, encourage curiosity and a love of learning, with the hope of raising self worth and self confidence.

As stated by the SEN attendance mentor, “This would be a perfect stepping stone for re-introducing the school question and building relationships with the mentors and their students”.

## Next Steps

- Find funding to facilitate a longer term programme of workshops.
- Continue building relations with Bideford College, developing a programme of workshops for EBSA students.
- Reach out to other schools and their SEN Mentors, through the schools’ SEN teams we can foster relations with parents and carers, perhaps facilitate creative sessions for parents/carers of EBSA students.



## Absences From Schools In The UK – The Key Statistics For 2023.

The number of UK children being recorded as absent from school has risen considerably post-pandemic, according to the latest government figures. Even more concerning is the estimated 250,000 children who are not even registered with a school in 2023.

School absence is caused by a wide range of social and economic issues and is known to lead to:-

- Poorer outcomes for the children affected
- Poor attendance could lead to worse health, reduced employability and an increased likelihood of the child turning to crime.

**It is, therefore, a vital task of local authorities across the UK to slow and reverse the decline in school attendance.**

Persistent school absences in the South West was 23.8% in 2021/2022

## What are the Key Causes of Absenteeism in Schools?

- Poverty
- The Covid-19 Pandemic - led to a greater rate of school absence through sickness
- Families adopting a more relaxed attitude towards their children’s attendance
- Special Educational Needs
- Parental and Family Factors - Negative attitudes. Young carers
- Peer Pressure - Truancy
- School Factors - Threat of bullying or a feeling of self-isolation

Source from <https://www.systemc.com>