

## ARTS FUNDING FOR BEDMINSTER FAMILY PRACTICE

Article by Dr Gillian Rice for Pulse medical magazine, March 2006

When my GP partners and I decided to build a new surgery we thought hard about the kind of atmosphere we wanted to create in the premises. Having worked for many years in a converted Victorian house with a wealth of period features, we were anxious not to move to a soulless, clinical environment that might feel alien to staff and patients, many of whom loved the domestic feel of the original surgery building.

My interest in using the arts in a healthcare environment started in 2000 when I obtained funding from the Poetry Society to have a poet-in-residence at the surgery for six months. Soon after, two art therapists worked with us for a 12 month period. Having introduced the arts into the culture of the practice, we could see how artists might be able to help us shape the kind of environment we wanted when the opportunity arose to design and build new premises.

I knew we would need help if we wanted to secure funding for art work in the surgery so I approached Lesley Greene, an experienced art consultant. Lesley helped me devise an arts strategy for the practice and submit an application for £30,000 funding to Arts Council England (ACE). This was a time consuming business, even with Lesley writing the bulk of the application, and after putting a great deal of work into research for the bid we were bitterly disappointed when ACE turned us down. We were told that one reason our bid failed was that many applications from large hospitals were for similar amounts and given the scale of our building project ACE felt our funding bid was too high. As a result, we submitted a revised application with a request for £12,500 funding and second time around our bid was successful.

I knew this award on its own would not go far, so using information provided by ACE on other bodies that fund arts projects, I contacted numerous organisations to try to secure additional funding. Awards for All, a Lottery grants programme aimed at local communities, provided £5,000 towards the artwork in our two children's play areas. The Greater Bristol Foundation (now known as the Quartet Community Foundation) makes grants to voluntary organisations and community groups in the greater Bristol area and they provided an extra £3,000. £2,000 was used for artwork in the play areas, and £1,000 to run poetry workshops for patients, giving them an opportunity to write text that could be incorporated into the final art commissions.

Arts & Business, an organisation that helps business people support the arts, awarded us £1,000 through their Strike a Match scheme (aimed specifically at first time business sponsors of the arts). They also suggested I seek sponsorship for our art projects from various local and national businesses. I spent many hours phoning and writing to companies but the only sponsorship we attracted was from the accountancy firm KPMG which offered £1,500 towards the cost of our project to produce a huge wall mural depicting the history of the practice.

Finding my way round various funding systems was a nightmare as each one has their own procedures to be followed and a specific application form to be completed. Awards for All would not accept an application directly from the surgery so the PCT (primary care trust) had to apply on our behalf, although I completed all the necessary paperwork. Some grants, such as those managed by the Quartet Community Foundation, are only available to small charities, community groups or local voluntary organisations but luckily we had set up a patient participation group in 2003 which met the eligibility requirements.

The patient participation group offered to fundraise for the art projects and to date has contributed about £1,000. As the artwork was designed to improve the surgery environment for patients, and the group was heavily involved in one of the art projects, I nominated the group for the Royal College of General Practitioners' patient participation award in 2004. We were joint winners and our £1,250 share of the prize money has helped to pay for the wall mural.

Altogether we secured more than £25,000 of funding for the art commissions. We knew we would need considerably more if we wanted the arts to significantly influence the new surgery environment so the property owning partners agreed to contribute another £20,000.

The old surgery had pretty gardens that would be missing in the more urban setting of our new premises, so we were keen for the art works in the new surgery to be loosely based on the theme of Nature. Bristol artists Annie Lovejoy and Mac Dunlop developed this theme and created some wonderful features for the new building: beautiful glazing in the entrance doors to the surgery, a lighting sculpture that changes colour in response to outside air temperature and an enormous aquarium containing poetic text (as well as fish!) to name just a few. Eleanor Glover, another Bristol artist, worked with children from a local primary school to produce colourful wooden reliefs that decorate the children's play areas.

The art work has helped to create an unusual and uplifting environment for patients and staff and the response from both groups has been overwhelmingly positive. Raising funds for the art commissions and being closely involved in project management consumed hundreds of hours of my time over a three year period but the enjoyment I get from working in such a beautiful environment, and the pleasure it gives to others, has made it well worth the effort.

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