

## **Article for Beer-Harris Memorial Trust September 2022**

Oakleaf Enterprise is Guildford's mental health charity. We support local adults suffering any mental illness, providing work-related training, counselling and a wide-ranging programme of wellbeing activities. Having grown out of the occupational therapy department of a Victorian mental health asylum, Brookwood Hospital back in the 1990's, in 2022 we are marking 25 years as a registered charity.

Back in 2015 we devised a pilot art therapy class for Oakleaf clients, as part of our wellbeing activity programme and that summer we were delighted to be able to launch this project on receiving generous support from the Trustees of Beer-Harris Memorial Trust (or the Dominic Beer Memorial Trust as it was known at that time).

Trustee Susanna Beer became our main link with the Trust and it was a real pleasure to be able to welcome her to visit Oakleaf in February 2016. Susanna's artistic knowledge, commitment to the Trust and empathy with Oakleaf clients all shone through, ensuring that this visit was an enjoyable and fruitful experience for all concerned.

Since that initial visit, Susanna has visited Oakleaf and the art project in particular, on a further two occasions. She met with Oakleaf's CEO and showed great interest in and understanding of our clients, forming a connection with Andrew our outstanding art tutor and speaking with clients individually during their sessions.

During and post pandemic, we have been challenged by lockdown and restrictions, but have continued to offer art as a key element of our client activities. We adapted our sessions, initially to be remote via zoom and subsequently to take place in venues with space to allow socially distancing. Art continues to be one of Oakleaf's most popular therapeutic activities and is always oversubscribed. We are hugely grateful that the Trustees have continued to support this activity, throughout all the changes and challenges of recent years.

Susanna, although unable to visit during the last 3 years, has nonetheless continued to show a keen interest in all aspects of 'Art at Oakleaf' and it has been a pleasure to be able to keep her updated with developments by phone. As she retires from the Board of Trustees, we will miss her visits and enthusiastic insights but hope to keep her apprised with our work.

Sadly our tutor of the last seven years, Andrew, has suffered significant ill-health over the summer and is unlikely to return to us, but we are grateful to have found a new tutor and believe that the project is in a strong position to continue from strength to strength. Although currently taking place at an external venue, we hope that 'Art at Oakleaf' will return to our small art room in the near future.

We undertake a Client Survey every six months, enabling clients to feedback their views on any of our wide-ranging activities.

**The following comments relate to 'Art at Oakleaf':**

*"[This project] has given me purpose and new skills, been a great support when I've been really low, helping me to meet other people who understood what it is like, made me laugh and chat."*

*"The last three years have been very difficult for me. Having this regular activity to look forward to every week, even during lockdown, has helped me to have a focus and purpose. I have never considered myself to be an artist, but the art I have created has given me a real sense of achievement".*