

Words for Wellbeing Workshops

Frequently Asked Questions

Are the workshops only open to people living with HIV?

Yes, the workshops are facilitated to enable those living with HIV to explore the subject of living with HIV.

Are the workshops designed only for gay men living with HIV?

Absolutely not. The workshops are facilitated by a gay man but will include work from a range of authors of differing gender, sexuality and ethnic background. We are very keen to have similar diversity in our group of participants, for the benefit of everyone.

How many workshops are there and how long are they?

There is a series of six weekly workshops, each lasting three hours.

What times will they take place?

The pilot workshops will take place either 2-5 pm or 6-9 pm on Wednesdays. Availability on the Expression of Interest Form will be used to plan future workshops and may run both afternoon and evening in future.

Do I have to attend all of the workshops?

Attendance at the first workshop is required and we expect a commitment to attend the other five workshops, especially the final 'sharing and evaluation' workshop.

Is there a fee for the workshops?

This pilot workshop has been funded by donors and no costs to participants are involved. Refreshments are included. Participants with the means are of course welcome to donate to Lunch Positive to support future workshops if they wish.

What if I have difficulty reading and/or out loud?

All work shared will be read out loud and available in print on an individual's handout. Participants reading work out loud to the group is voluntary.

Are the workshops confidential?

Yes. Part of the first session will involve participants committing to confidentiality within all 1:1 and group interactions and sharing. You will be encouraged, but not obliged, to share some of your work, albeit some exercises will explicitly not be shared.

What is the structure of the workshops and are there any breaks?

The workshops will be a mixture of reading works of a given theme, quietly and out loud, various writing exercises, and sharing of work and/or experience on a 1:1 and group basis. There will be a 10-15-minute break part way through the workshop, and refreshments.

Whose work will we read?

The final choices of texts are being selected but will likely include writers and poets such as Danez Smith, Derek Jarman, Oscar Moore, Tory Dent, Juno Dawson, Jericho Brown, Mary Bowman, Bakita Kasadha, Tim Dlugos. We will also share work written by allies who are not HIV+ (e.g. John McCullough, Robert Hamberger, Paul Burston, Joelle Taylor, Neil Bartlett, Dale Booton, Sue Burge, Jeffrey Sugarman). The facilitator will also share their own poetry including biographic work on actors Dursley McLinden & Jonathan Blake, and Derek Jarman.

What subjects will it cover?

The aim of the workshops is to explore living with HIV and the experiences of living within the global epidemic. Whilst you will not be 'thrown in at the deep end' we will examine events that many people experience such as acquiring the virus, diagnosis, stigma, medication, grief & loss. You do not need to have experienced all of these personally.

What if I find some of the content emotionally difficult?

Reading, writing and listening is a proven way of processing emotions and a key part of the programmes aims. However, individuals will need to take responsibility for how deeply they examine certain emotions based on their ability to deal with what the workshops may uncover. Participants are free to not share experiences or feelings (or leave the room) if a particular subject is too difficult for them. A Lunch Positive support worker will be present at all times to support participants and in the event of any emotional issues.

Are these workshops therapy?

Whilst we hope the workshops are therapeutic, they are not group or 1:1 therapy. The facilitator (nor the support worker) is not a certified counsellor or psychotherapist, but has received training in health & wellbeing workshops. To reiterate, individuals need to take responsibility for joining the workshops and how deeply they examine certain emotions. If you have concerns over your mental wellbeing you are encouraged to discuss with your GP, psychotherapist or other medical professional before and/or during the workshop period.

Is there any emotional support provided by Lunch Positive?

A Lunch Positive support worker will be present at all times to support participants in the event of having emotional or other issues triggered by the workshop during (and for up to 30 minutes after) each session. However, participants should ensure that they seek and/or

continue emotional support from professionals in this area. A list of support organisations is attached.

Where can I get support if the workshops trigger emotional difficulties?

To reiterate, a Lunch Positive support worker will be present at all times to support participants having emotional difficulties triggered by the workshop. Participants will be encouraged to not leave the building without first talking to the facilitator and/or the support worker. Participants should contact their GP, therapist or other services if they need psychological support. A list of support organisations is attached.

What evidence is there that workshops like these are helpful to health and wellbeing?

— Therapeutic Benefits of the Arts

There is compelling evidence accepted by organisations such as WHO and the NHS, of the benefits of Arts on health & wellbeing¹ — with specific research on dealing with chronic & mental illnesses, trauma, addiction and bereavement.²

Whilst there is no specific HIV research, "the arts hold promise in tackling difficult conditions for which no complete solutions are available... how the arts can provide a holistic lens to view conditions that are often treated primarily as physical."³

Research on the impacts of reading & writing workshops shows quantitative & qualitative improvements in mental wellbeing and 'Quality of Life'.⁴

— Healing Power of Poetry

Poetry as a healing tool can have a concrete impact in all areas of medicine. Several scientific studies and reviews have demonstrated that poetry has a beneficial impact on patients in terms of managing pain, coping with stressors, and improving personal well-being. Moreover, listening, writing, and reading poetry improves a patient's ability to deal with chronic illness⁵.

Three aspects of poetry—reading, writing, and sharing— reduce loneliness and decrease mortality. To paraphrase poet Paul Celan, a poem is like a handshake: it creates bonds between people. Poetry, and the creative introspection it fosters, can help individuals feel more connected to themselves, to those around them, and to the external world as a whole. Even when practiced in isolation, as many individuals experience during the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics, poetry can increase self and interpersonal awareness, encourage the ownership of voicing your own ideas and emotions, and increase one's ability to reflect upon significant memories or current-day situations. This can directly address both actual and perceived social isolation and can be a powerful step in helping individuals combat loneliness⁶.

Will the benefits of the workshop be assessed and evaluated?

Yes. We are working with Brighton University's Centre for Arts & Wellbeing to establish an independent evaluation of the pilot workshop. Participants are requested to take part in the

evaluation of the pilot programme in order to report to donors and support possible future development of the programme. This will include an online/hard copy short questionnaire and group facilitated discussion.

Will there be more workshops in future?

Lunch Positive are planning to seek funding for future workshops, which will be informed by the evaluation. We hope future workshops will take place in the Autumn 2023. This will include timings and length of programme and whether to create separate poetry and memoir workshops.

Have Lunch Positive run workshops like this before?

Lunch Positive's 'predecessor', *Open Door*, ran writing workshops in 2002-3, resulting in an anthology of poetry and prose, *The T-Cell Chronicles* (Xpress Yourself Group, Omnigen, 2003).

Will there be support afterwards to help me develop my writing?

Lunch Positive is open to considering offering further support to writers, and the facilitator can provide this privately. A list of organisations and funding organisations who can support you is attached.

Will there be a Lunch Positive/HIV Stories anthology?

There are no plans at this stage, but it may be considered in the future.

How is this programme funded?

The development of this programme has been funded by Arts Council England. Lunch Positive are funding the implementation of the programme with the support of the Rainbow Fund and the Edward Carpenter Trust.

Who are Lunch Positive?

Lunch Positive is a community based HIV charity, founded, led and delivered by and for people living with HIV, and our allies. Our values are acceptance, inclusivity, impartiality, respect and supportiveness of everyone living with HIV. With a small staff team, our community services focus on bringing people together for social and peer-support, and are largely delivered by an amazing group of volunteers who care deeply about our community. Lunch Positive was awarded the *Queen's Award for Voluntary Service* in June 2022 having provided support for people living with HIV in Brighton & East Sussex since 2009.

Website: lunchpositive.org

What experience does the facilitator have?

Simon Maddrell (he/they) writes as a queer Manx man, thriving with HIV in Brighton & Hove. Since 2019, over a hundred and thirty of his poems have appeared in twenty anthologies and numerous other publications.

Simon has had five pamphlets published: *Throatbone* (UnCollected Press), *Queerfella* (Rialto), *The Whole Island* (Valley Press), *Isle of Sin* and *a finger in derek jarman's mouth* (Polari Press). Also, Nine Pens Press published his collaborative anthologies *All About Our Mothers* and *All About Our Fathers* with *All About Our Parents* forthcoming in 2024.

Simon took part in the FLOURISH: Arts for Health & Wellbeing Programme with HERA Partnership and Creative Future in 2022/23. Simon has facilitated many workshops including for organisations such as Loving Men and Thrive (HIV Charity).

List of organisations who can offer emotional support

Your GP

		NHS 111
Mind Out, Brighton	mindout.org.uk/get-support/	01273 234839
The Samaritans	Telephone 116 123 (free)	03300945717
Grassroots Suicide Prevention	prevent-suicide.org.uk	Text 'Shout' to 85258
LGBT Switchboard	helpline@switchboard.org.uk	01273 359042

List of organisations who can offer writing courses

Brighton based:	New Writing South Creative Future
London & Online:	The Poetry School Faber Academy Out-spoken City Lit
UK-wide & Online:	Arvon Poetry Festivals all offer workshops in-person and online

List of organisations who can offer mentoring or development programmes

Brighton based:	New Writing South Creative Future
London & Online:	Out-spoken Academy New Poets Collective, Southbank Centre
UK-wide or Online:	New Writing North Prototype Development Programme

List of organisations offering grants for writing courses & mentoring programmes.

Arts Council England: Developing Your Creative Practice. The DYCP is a grant up to £15,000, which can be used for courses and 1:1 mentorship.

Arvon, Poetry School and Out-spoken offer both bursaries and concessionary rates.

Simon Maddrell Social Media & Contacts

Facebook Page:	@SimonMaddrellPoetry
Facebook Personal:	@SimonMaddrell
Instagram:	@simonmaddrell
Threads:	@simonmaddrell
Twitter:	@QueerManxPoet
SoundCloud:	@simonmaddrell
YouTube:	@simonmaddrell
Instabio:	instabio.cc/simonmaddrell

Buy Books: simonmaddrell.sumupstore.com

E-Mail: QueerManxPoet@btinternet.com

Therapeutic Benefits of the Arts & Poetry References

- ¹ David Haosen Xiang and Alisha Moon Yi, *A Look Back and a Path Forward: Poetry's Healing Power during the Pandemic*, *The Journal of Medical Humanities*, 2020; 41(4): 603–608.
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7447694/#_ffn_sectitle [List of research references in 'Poetry in medicine' section].
- ² Fancourt D, Finn S. *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2019 (Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 67), pp. 30-33, 48-49.
- ³ *ibid.* pp. 52-53.
- ⁴ Davies P, Magee F et al, *What Literature Can Do*, Prof. University of Liverpool.
- ⁵ David Haosen Xiang and Alisha Moon Yi, *ibid.* 'Poetry in medicine' section.
- ⁶ *ibid.* 'The benefits of poetry in medicine and public health today' section.