

Art classes highlight local talent

Experienced and aspiring artists from Helmsdale and Brora have been gathering over the past year for a range of successful Art 'n Blether sessions, inspired by the picturesque views in and around Helmsdale.

Art 'n Blether, a project run by Dementia Friendly Communities Ltd, is led by Helmsdale-based landscape artist Anne Little who is originally from the small mining village of Calverton in Nottinghamshire. Anne is guiding and supporting participants through a variety of styles and techniques, including portraits and landscapes; painting with watercolour, acrylics and oils; glass painting and clay modelling; as well as drawing with pen and ink and charcoal.

Sessions, which are open to all members of the community over the age of 16, have often involved field trips to paint local landscapes, including Berriedale, Strath of Kildonan, Loch Brora and Helmsdale harbour. Each class is followed by a pop-up café, giving a chance for a break and extra socialising over a cup of tea or coffee and some home baking. In March this year, an exhibition of Art 'n Blether work was held at Timespan Museum and Arts Centre, which proved to be very successful.

Pat Kidd who lives in Helmsdale and regularly attends the classes says of her experience: 'I am new to Helmsdale and know very few people. Art 'n Blether has been just right, a new hobby and new friends!'

Maggie Adamson, also from Helmsdale, said: 'I started going to the art classes back in May this year. Originally, I went along to see how I fared as it was many years since my school-day art lessons! I enjoyed the classes from the start, learning new techniques and also meeting new people. Not to mention the scrumptious cakes! It's great to go along each week and catch up with everyone and also see how we are all developing our skills as time goes on. I particularly enjoy being pushed out of my comfort zone and challenged to try things I wouldn't attempt on my own at home. We continue to take completed work home most weeks, sometimes with just a little finishing touch to add later. My confidence, both in my abilities with various painting techniques and also in social situations has grown as the classes have continued.'

Jane Murray, Helmsdale, added 'As a fairly creative individual, I have never found it difficult to completely immerse myself in the often solitary pursuit of 'all things arty!' On Wednesdays however, I can happily continue to explore and widen my own experience but with the added bonus of being able to do this as part of a team of friendly makers and creators. I have found that since joining the group, Anne's class has already become a contributing factor to my own 'wellness' of mind. Anne's kind words of encouragement, along with her considerable experience as an artist, can only bring out the very best in her students!'

Anne says of the classes: 'I really enjoy tutoring our Art 'n Blether group. Our Helmsdale group have produced some fantastic artwork over the past year or so. Everyone thoroughly enjoys attending the classes and by coming together, have made new friends. We have covered many different techniques and the group have learnt many new skills. The group also tailor the classes to their needs in that if they have discovered something they really like, we will cover it again but with new ideas. Art is a wonderful way to bring people together, whether they have experience or

not. Creating your own painting or craft product is so very rewarding and great therapy in making you feel happy.'

The development of the art classes follows a local survey conducted by Dementia Friendly Communities Ltd as part of their social inclusive programme of activities in 2016/17, which revealed that art was a common interest among a number of local individuals. In March 2017, funding was secured from the William Grant Foundation to start the classes, which launched in May last year. The project's original intention was to reach local carers and provide them with some respite, however the project has gone on to benefit a much wider range of individuals.