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CULTURE THERAPY WITH PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES • Volume 1 Issue 4



Laura Drysdale DIRECTOR OF THE RESTORATION TRUST

We've been thinking about Human Henge lately. The online version has been an intense experience of fortnightly journeys that culminated at Stonehenge

one windy morning just before the Spring Equinox. The live streaming team of Yvette Staelens and Prof. Tim Darvill walked together into the Stone Circle, where the wind suddenly dropped so that you could hear a lark above. Duduk master Arsen Petrosyan played hauntingly beautiful music from his studio in Armenia, and we held pieces of blue-stone, each at our own computer, while people's photographs and words were laid on the ground

to represent them in the mysterious space. 'I can't believe that just happened', one person said when we returned to the ordinary Zoom world for coffee and biscuits. We are very grateful to everyone who joined us online, to Yvette, Tim and Arsen, to English Heritage and the Richmond Fellowship, the Cultural Recovery Fund and the extended tribe of Human Hengers who got us to this point. One person articulated our core values: 'it's about people. Equality of opinion, high quality scholarship, and it's a bit dangerous.' We will meet for a Human Henge gathering somewhere in the ancient landscape on 23rd June to celebrate friendship, summer and life.

Stepping Stones



HUMAN HENGE – IN PERSON AND ONLINE

ON 3 MARCH 2021, members of the Human Henge Online project saw, via Zoom, facilitator Yvette Staelens live stream from an English Heritage store. With the infectious enthusiasm of a skilled TV presenter, she highlighted some of the fascinating treasures English Heritage hold: a hopper from the top of a 1775 drainpipe, a "she-bible" and, most intriguingly, a ticket to visit Stonehenge that was a 100 years old. The visit was another example of how the Human Henge project, launched in October 2016, continues to adapt and thrive; in 2021, it overcame the challenge of Covid-19 by moving online.

Human Henge was the second project that the



■ Yvette Staelens (far right) leads the Human Hengers in some "wild singing".

Restoration Trust was able to fund via a grant (Change Minds being the first). Yvette has been there since day one: "I was approached by Laura Drysdale to take part," she says, "on the recommen-



■ The Human Henge exhibition toured Wiltshire between May 2017 and July 2018.



■ Martin Allfrey, Curator of Collections for English Heritage's West Territory, in the Zoom live stream on 3 March 2021.

dation of Professor Timothy Darvill, a friend and colleague at Bournemouth University.” An academic, musician and writer, Yvette is an ideal fit as Human Henge’s co-ordinator. Tim, a world renowned expert on Stonehenge, became Human Henge’s research lead, while other contributors include Daniel O’Donoghue of the Richmond Fellowship, Martin Allfrey of English Heritage and Dr. Sara Lunt, chair of the Human Henge project board.

The group was the first of the Restoration Trust’s projects to combine an appreciation of historical

landscapes with art and music. That it’s still going strong nearly six years later, and has become the main model for the Trust’s projects, is testament to its success. The first group ran between October and December 2016, with a second intake for January and March 2017, both based at Stonehenge Visitors Centre. A third group moved to Avebury for January to March 2018, and Human Henge Online began recruiting in December 2020.

Belonging

“You might say Human Henge saved my life,” says Mel Rogers, candidly. “It gave me back something I’d lost. Despite my mental health holding me back for so long in the past, I’d at last found something that had a positive effect on it.” Ria Walton has no doubts about what Human Henge has done for her: “When it came along, I was so disillusioned with the world and didn’t talk much. I started counselling, I was diagnosed with autism, and through it all Human Henge has been one of my anchors. Although it was hard work for me because of my autism, I enjoyed going to a group. I won’t say I felt like it all the time, but sometimes I really did feel like I belonged.”

Vicky Bareham, a member of Human Henge Online, praises its virtual tours around “ancient landscapes, reconstructed

“Human Henge is a community – and that feels wonderful.”

YVETTE STAELENS

scapes, reconstructed Neolithic homes and special finds stored by English Heritage.” She goes on, “HH also sent us regular parcels of mystery contents to help us make a connection with Neolithic peoples’ lives. I was born in Sussex, which has many old flint buildings, and later moved to Norfolk, which also has a strong heritage of flint buildings. Apart from handling beachcombed pieces of flint, I never had the chance to examine a small sharp piece of flint up close, in my own hands. Human Henge gave me that opportunity.” ■

HUMAN HENGE HAS BEEN FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND, WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, ENGLISH HERITAGE AND THE CULTURAL RECOVERY FUND

NEWS Welcome to Bethan Bright and Joanna Duchannes, who have started work as, respectively, our Mental Health Support Worker and Digital Engager.

■ Welcome too to new trustees. Debbie Tilson is an accountant with deep knowledge of the charity sector, and Melanie Rogers is a member of our Expert Advisory Board and a Human Henge (see above).

■ We’re delighted to have been awarded another Cultural Recovery Fund grant, which means we have the resources to make us more resilient as we emerge from this phase of the pandemic.