

20 May 2021

Birds of a feather flock together for mental health-boosting art project

More than 1,000 paper cranes have come home to roost at Aberdeen's Health & Care Village this month as part of a community art project designed to boost folk's mental health.

The colourful cranes have been fashioned out of folded paper in the Japanese "origami" tradition and have been unveiled at the Frederick Street health hub.

The show is the brainchild of local artist Janet Liddel, who was inspired by her and her family's uplifting experiences on the banks of the River Don during last year's local lockdown.



Janet said she, like so many others, were feeling isolated and confined during the Covid-19 lockdowns but took solace from secluded family walks next to the Don.

The Stoneywood family built an impromptu den by the riverside – and discovered after a few weeks that local folk had started leaving small artworks, painted rocks, flowers and decorations in the den.

Janet said: "It really began to feel like a little sanctuary on our daily walks. It felt like a little 'hello' from our neighbours and made us feel like we weren't alone, even though some days we might not see or speak to another soul. We really valued the den and the unexpected additions that appeared over the weeks."

Sadly, when the restrictions began to lift the den was vandalised and Janet shared the news of the den's destruction via social media.

She said: “To my surprise the local community got in touch to say how much they and their own families had enjoyed visiting the den while it was there and that the children were always excited to see the treasures that had been left.

“This inspired me to think about the mental health challenges that people may have been facing through the pandemic and to come up with the idea of setting up a special Facebook page and inviting people to help support their mental health and wellbeing by making origami cranes with a view to creating a community-inspired art installation.”

Janet posted online tutorials on how to learn the Japanese craft and how to fold the cranes – and she soon had hundreds of community members joining forces to fold more than 1,000 paper cranes.

In Japan, the folding of a crane is known as “orizuru” and symbolises peace. Creating 1,000 cranes, or “sembazuru”, is believed to make wishes come true or to promote recovery from illness or injury.

The art installation is on show at the Health Village for the rest of this month, hung on wires from the upper level so that people can enjoy them, as if in flight, from the ground floor reception area. An information board explains how the artwork came about and what it represents.

The Health Village exhibition has been facilitated by Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership’s Health Improvement Team. The 1,000 cranes may then fly off to other venues in Aberdeen.

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