

# **Narratives of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Creative Responses**

*Ability for All - COFFEE 'n' ART*

2020/21 submission by

*Katarzyna Pyrz*

Under a theme:

*Covid Complexities*

### About the author:

Katarzyna (Kasia) Pyrz is a Senior Executive Assistant in the School of Chemistry, a PhD Candidate in the School of Applied Psychology, and a Graduate of Crawford College of Art and Design in Cork.

Kasia joined UCC in 2010 as a mature postgraduate student. Between 2013 and 2017 she was working as an occasional teaching assistant, a tutor, and a researcher. She joined the Professional Support Services in 2017.

Kasia was born in Kraków, Poland and made Ireland her second home in 2002.

While crossing boundaries of countries, languages, cultures, and disciplines; but also, by advocating for her son born with hidden disabilities she is a passionate campaigner for diversity and inclusion for all underrepresented and disempowered groups.

Kasia is a member of the School of Chemistry EDI Committee, Mná@UCC, and a proud representative of the Rainbow Alliance.



[Edit profile](#)

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📍 Cork, Ireland 📅 Joined December 2013

## “Ability for All – Coffee ‘n’ Art” Initiative

COVID-19 and working remotely have impacted on the ways we cope with professional and personal challenges; they intensified exclusion for groups and individuals whose life and work are defined not only by their belonging but also by their difference, those who belong to minorities, who have been socially isolated by, for example, being physically removed from their communities due to migration, or a disability that impairs their communication.

Last eight months of 2020 and working amidst the global pandemic affected the general welfare and connection between colleagues.



Using art as a medium in facilitating wellbeing and participation is a long-proven technique in art therapy. The goal of this initiative is to use an online team open to all UCC staff to promote and enable participation in creative coffee mornings.

Its second aim is to use the platform to raise awareness about UCC students and staff with disabilities and about the challenges they may face.

The author uses both the educational methods, such as statistics through PowerPoint slides, and hands-one creative techniques to make the participants experience what it might be like to live with a disability.

The author worked closely with the HR Wellbeing and Development team in UCC (see appendix 1) and with the local EDI Committee to develop and gain support for the idea.

An online classroom/art studio/café was then created using Microsoft Teams (appendix 2). To increase engagement with the topics and inclusion within the group the facilitator limited the number of participants to 25, and introduced the coffee mornings as a thematic course that is best experienced as a series of sessions.

Each session focuses on a specific area of ability/disability, which is then connected to a creative activity or activities that further explore or refer to the topic. For example, in “Perceiving Differently” session colleagues are asked to blind draw or draw without using their hands. They are subsequently asked for their live impressions and thoughts while the facilitator reflects on their experience.

This submission is supplemented by a presentation during which the author voices some of her thoughts on diversity and inclusion being, first of all, the “lived experience”. She also stresses the need for visible role models and fair representation for all diverse minorities in any workplace as a foundation of the true inclusion (see appendix 3 for the link to, and an original script of the submission video).

## Appendix 1

### An email from HR Staff Wellbeing to All Staff.

**From:** Staff Wellbeing <[staffwellbeing@ucc.ie](mailto:staffwellbeing@ucc.ie)>

**Sent:** 02 November 2020 12:34

**To:** All Staff <[AllStaff@ucc.ie](mailto:AllStaff@ucc.ie)>

**Subject:** COFFEE 'n' ART



## *Ability for All - COFFEE 'n' ART*

*Dear colleagues,*

*From November, we will be holding creative coffee mornings online. During these 30 minutes or so we will chat and get creative: drawing, paper-craft, painting, collage, anything feasible within the limits of our time, media and ... imagination!*

*A list of basic art supplies will be provided prior to each meeting.*

*The facilitator is a trained Fine Art and Psychology graduate and has been using both disciplines to aid staff wellbeing since 2017 in the Art Relief classes. The facilitator is also a member of an [EDI/Athena SWAN Committee](#) and would like to raise awareness and advocate for the "Ability for All" world of inclusion and equal opportunities for all people with various physical and mental (dis)abilities.*

*The participants are welcomed to make a small 'cup of coffee'-cost donation to a local charity for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (optional, details will be given).*

*Coffee 'n' Art series will run for 8 sessions every two weeks on Friday mornings 11.00 - 11.30 a.m. starting on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020 until 5<sup>th</sup> or March 2021 via Microsoft Teams.*

*Please contact [kpyrz@ucc.ie](mailto:kpyrz@ucc.ie) to be added to a team and subsequently receive further details about this initiative. Places are limited and will be offered on a first-come, first-serve basis.*

*No previous art experience is required, and all abilities are very welcome.*

*These sessions will be facilitated by [Kasia Pyrz](#).*

Best wishes,

*Staff Wellbeing & Development*

[Staff Wellbeing](#) | University College Cork, T12 YN60, Ireland. | [@UCCWellDev](#)

## Appendix 2.

### Link to an online Team 'Ability for all – Coffee 'n' Art'

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3a85afa7dba4014a9b96935295eb19114d%40tread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=9f325b90-d281-4705-896c-484668028af9&tenantId=46fe5ca5-866f-4e42-92e9-ed8786245545>

## Appendix 3.

### Link to 'Ability for All – Coffee 'n' Art' submission video

<https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/f9b8e049-ce1f-467c-abe5-242d1eea0b14>

### The original script for the submission video.

*Hello Everybody.*

*In 2013, I finished my first degree in Applied Psychology here in UCC, I was already a graduate of the well- loved Crawford College of Art and Design; an artist who had produced art exhibitions and helped to set up independent art studios in Cork.*

*I was then, what you may call, 'at the top of my game'. I won a PhD scholarship to investigate the management of chronic illnesses, especially allergies in a large EU-funded study. For four years I worked with some of the most respected experts in the field in Europe and beyond. I was the most junior in the crowd in all meanings of the word. It was a dream challenge, as on many occasions I could not even pronounce some of the immunological terms I was supposed to use.*

*And yet, I felt empowered. Why?*

*I was surrounded by people who spoke like me, with accents, sometimes searching for just the right word to express themselves; people who shared if not my specific background then the very fact of being different as based on their race, class, and culture. I was surrounded by women who were powerful and influential professionals, and yet would talk frankly about their caring duties and how much they were part of who they were, for better or worse. It meant a lot for a mature student and a parent like me.*

*Why am I telling you all this?*

*Because I would like to make two main points before I introduce my initiative.*

*The first point is that the representation matters, the role models matter.*

*The second point is that diversity or inclusion are not intellectual puzzles, or metrics, or statistics, they are lived experiences.*

*Cannot stress this strongly enough – people like me, any many of my colleagues and students in this university are defined by their diversity, by their difference and one of the main qualities of this experience is its complexity.*

*Covid-19 created additional barriers to people, who live their diversity every day, and who rely on inclusive workplaces to truly develop, to thrive. Employees with caring duties, single parents struggling to work from home and care from home simultaneously, those of us who by the very fact of being uprooted from their communities and extended families might have ended up isolated in terms of their social contact and support. People with various physical or emotional difficulties – all of them without a doubt impacted by the rapidly changing modes of working.*

*So – my initiative: I wanted to use the skills I gained through studying art and also psychology to counterbalance the emptiness Covid-19 and working remotely created – the void of spontaneous social interaction between colleagues whom we do not work with directly, who might be strangers initially; but also the scarcity of play, of creative fun. My second goal was to use my lived experience of difference to facilitate greater understanding of walking in somebody else's shoes.*

*I created a series of brief, 30-minutes lasting creative sessions delivered online. The sessions have a double focus – firstly, on creating together, secondly, on raising awareness about the lived experience of disabilities. For a practical reason I use Teams - here you can see my virtual studio/classroom/café ...*

*I called this experience 'Ability for All – Coffee n Art'. We meet every two weeks on Friday mornings for 8 sessions. To make the experience as comfortable as possible for all I do no record sessions, but these are some of the interactions we would have.*

*In the first creative coffee morning we explored the concept of perceiving differently. I asked participants to draw with their eyes closed, then to do the same with a non-dominant hand, and while using only their mouth to draw. The lack of control we all felt while doing these exercises was both amusing and unsettling. Finally, to further encourage them to walk a bit in someone else's shoes I read a short story in my native language (Polish). My participants were asked to draw of what they heard; the sense of confusion in our virtual arty café was tangible.*

*During our second coffee morning I introduced attention difficulties and some of the ways these could be accommodated by colleagues and managers if they are aware. We did an origami project, as it was a hands-on experience of learning through doing, and learning through step-by step instructions, which are always preferred by persons who struggle with the focus to some broad guidance.*

*These two meetings are just a sample of what "Coffee 'n' Art" project aims at and more sessions are to follow in 2021.*

*To finish my submission, I would like to stress the main points behind it: that Covid-19 and working remotely are complex phenomena on their own but for minorities, those who face additional barriers due to their disability, social isolation, a difference, whichever way you define it: these experiences can be particularly difficult, and we are only at the start of a conversation about the full impact of the past eight or so months.*

*Visual art and craft are wonderful media to create meaningful links between the lived experience, the community, and opportunities for wellbeing so I am immensely grateful to be able to use my skills this way.*

*I am immensely grateful to the HR Staff Wellbeing and Development team in UCC, Dr Anne Gannon, Mary Horgan, also to Silvia Curran to give me a platform for my creative initiatives and for their support over the past three years.*

*Finally, I am very thankful to my colleagues in the School of Chemistry, the school's manager Claire Tobin, and the chair of the school's EDI Committee Dr Florence McCarthy for their unwavering encouragement and enthusiasm towards my initiative.*

*They are allies whom underrepresented people, or those facing barriers need critically to be truly included.*

*Thank you for this opportunity to present and share my initiative.*

