

<b>Institution:</b> Keele University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA27 English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> From Emergency Poet to the Poetry Pharmacy: Transforming Public Understanding of Poetry and its Therapeutic Capacity		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr James Sheard	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	2008 - present
Deborah Alma	Honorary Research Fellow Lecturer in Creative Writing	2016 - 2018 2018 - 2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The Emergency Poet / Poetry Pharmacy provides the world's first and only mobile poetic first aid service. It has embedded the idea of poetry as being both accessible and therapeutic across a broad range of audiences, with a reach unparalleled in its field. Engaging over 5000 members of the public at hundreds of events, this innovative project has transformed public understanding of poetry and its uses, brought therapeutic poetry into multiple professional practices, and enhanced well-being in a range of communities.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Alma's research focusses on the design and realisation of 'spaces' which allow for the intimate and therapeutic 'prescription' of poems [3.1, 3.4], and the capacity of this performative practice to broaden the reach and status of poetry across communities, institutions and well-being services. Alma has performed as The Emergency Poet (EP) since 2012.</p> <p>Since 2014 Sheard has engaged in a creative partnership with Alma, collaborating on further development of the EP project. This collaboration enabled Sheard to extend his interest in questions of transparency, accessibility and intimacy in the 'space' of the poem, resulting in a reworking of his approach to poetry which influenced the retrospective curation of his published work [3.2] and was more fully realised in his collection <u>The Abandoned Settlements</u> (Cape 2017) [3.3].</p> <p>Since 2014, Alma and Sheard have refined their approach to engaging non-traditional audiences with poetry. They designed a mobile venue using a vintage ambulance with an attached 'pharmacy' [3.1]. This embodied their conception of the potentially therapeutic role that poetry might play through creating a consultative, diagnostic and prescribing space. It also facilitated moments of intimacy and connection between the poets/poet-advocates (Alma and Sheard), and individual patients with individual consultations in the space of a 'pharmacy' attached to the ambulance [3.2, 3.3].</p> <p>Although the design metaphor of EP is medical and pharmaceutical, involving consultations, pills and prescriptions, it also deploys humour and theatricality [3.1]. The EP is an evolving and iterative</p>		

methodology. As the reputation of the EP grew, invitations to perform at hospitals, literary/arts festivals, academic or practitioner conferences, libraries, schools and universities extended the reach of the project. These invitations from professional bodies and organisations providing health and mental health services and training necessitated the adaptation of the project to facilitate experiential learning, enabling health professionals to observe and participate in performances, thereby facilitating spaces of reflection on the potential for the model to inform their engagement with their patients.

This research culminated in 2019 in the permanent placement of the EP model in a high street in Bishop's Castle, a market town in Shropshire. A sympathetic conversion [3.4] of a former ironmonger's shop created a theatrical experience – an Edwardian Pharmacy – which makes poetry accessible through use of prescribed and self-prescribed 'cures and remedies', embedding the EP model within the community. A consulting room enables the intimacy formally provided by the ambulance, while the workshop space and accommodation extend the therapeutic metaphor to groups, enabling community courses in poetry.

### Key Insights

- That the intimate space of a poem is enhanced by the intimate space in which it is encountered
- That the design of poetry 'spaces' is a creative act as important as the creation of poems themselves
- That existing ideas of poetry 'prescribing' are enhanced by a holistic process which engages and entertains the 'patient'
- That professionals in mental health, medical and well-being services are keen to incorporate poetry into their practice
- That there is a much broader potential for public and community engagement with poetry than is generally accepted

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Alma, D. & Sheard, J. *Ambulance Space* (2014-19)

[3.2] Sheard, J. *Poetry Archive Recording* (60 minutes), 2016

[3.3] Sheard, J., *The Abandoned Settlements*, Cape 2017 (Shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize)

[3.4] Alma, D. *Poetry Pharmacy Interior*, 2019-20 (Alma, D. *ACE Grant* 8.2019-8.2020 (£12,190))

[3.5] Alma, D. & Amiel, K. *These Are The Hands*, Fair Acre 2020: with a foreword by Michael Rosen

The research quality is evidenced by the fact that Sheard's 2017 collection was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. Alma's anthology *These Are The Hands* is grounded in high-quality practice research co-production with GP Dr. Katie Amiel and a variety of NHS-based worker-poets. The collaboration with Amiel resulted in NHS workers (at all levels) submitting poems about their experiences of intimacy, trauma and healing within the spaces and rooms of the NHS. The poet Michael Rosen has written a foreword to the anthology; other prominent public poets (Poet Laureate Simon Armitage, and Lemn Sissay) have endorsed the work. Alma has also received ACE funding for her work, as well as recognition from NCCPE.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

#### Demonstrated a successful model for bringing poetry to 'non-traditional' audiences:

- The EP ambulance brought a cross-section of the public into its 'space' at over 100 venues, with 5000-6000 one-to-one engagements with poetry relevant to the participant's life and needs [5.2].

## Impact case study (REF3)

- Pre-COVID 19, the Poetry Pharmacy (PP) attracted an average of 40 visitors a day and provides an ongoing opportunity for all sections of the community to engage with poetry in a range of innovative formats.
- 56% of those who have engaged report an improvement in their sense of well-being, with 31% inspired to make changes in their lives [5.1]:
  - *“It made me sign up for an Action for Happiness Course for myself. I now practice daily mindfulness and am presently on a course for health and mental wellbeing”.*
  - *“The physical location of the Poetry Pharmacy made me think about running community events as a way to get [my] project going again...”*

**Influenced debate about poetry as an accessible art with meaning for all:**

- The unique design of both EP and PP has countered a widespread lack of media interest in poetry. Articles and reports on the project have appeared in local, national and international media, including: *Daily Telegraph, Metro, El Mundo, Daily Express, The Guardian, The Hindu, Prima, Woman’s Weekly, Spirit and Destiny Magazine*); broadcast media: *BBC Breakfast, Front Row, Woman’s Hour, Sky News, ZDF*; and social media. Audience reach is more than 7.9 million [5.2].
- Widespread media engagement provided the opportunity [5.2] to stimulate public debate about poetry and its purposes. EP and PP participants reported changes in how they think about poetry (69%); and in their vision of how arts practice could work (66%) [5.1]:
  - *“It shows what is possible with focus and vision which is an inspiration to us all - poetry can have a voice and an impact on all walks of life, ages and cultures”.*
  - *“The Pharmacy ... suggests new routes into wider engagement with poetry, without dumbing down...It has real potential in terms of poetry breaking out of its currently limited audience”.*
  - *“It has demonstrated that poetry ... can have a real and lasting impact on people’s everyday lives and mental wellbeing. Words can and do change lives”.*

**New engagement of a range of communities with arts therapy and volunteering:**

- 387 contributors, nationally and internationally, were inspired by the idea of PP to donate £15907 to contribute to the renovation works at the premises. [5.3]
- 30 members of the local/regional community were inspired to volunteer during the Pharmacy renovations, working alongside paid tradespeople. A team of 6 continue to work occasionally to develop the project.
- 10% of those surveyed felt that the project had led them to increased engagement with volunteering and/or participating in their community. [5.1]
- The Pharmacy’s location – an important historical property in the high street of a small town – offers the community both hope in the battle to keep high streets active, and a community space to connect with. [5.1]
  - *“I have noticed the impact of the Pharmacy in the town and the way in which the premises and its practitioners have given the High Street a new lease of life”.*
  - *“Visitors are making a dedicated journey to the town to spend time at the Pharmacy, which inevitably will have a positive impact on other local businesses...”*
  - *“In an economy with a 3bn annual tourism deficit, having a bold creative base like this can make a real impact into the domestic staycation and international cultural visit market...”*

**Stimulated debate and informed professional practice in the health and well-being sector:**

- 20 dedicated performances at events involving mental health and well-being professionals have demonstrated EP’s unique social prescribing model to psychologists, GPs, nurses, mediators and care staff.
- A sampling of 30 professionals in these fields who had engaged with these events showed that 26 [5.1] felt that it had influenced or changed their professional practice:
  - *“The very idea of ‘prescribing’ poetry is wonderful... I give poems to my patients to help them explore emotions and heal from trauma”*

## Impact case study (REF3)

- *“Running an event about mental health showed very clearly what impact poetry has on people and its therapeutic benefits”*
- This project has further embedded the relationship between poetry and therapeutic healing in the lives of over 100 practitioners in the health services. GP Dr. Katie Amiel says:
  - *“As an NHS GP, I am very aware of the importance that projects such as those led by Deborah and her incredible poetry pharmacy make to wellbeing, connection and community - both locally and online”*. [5.4]
- The project was able to engage with a broad range of practitioners in the health services. On one such occasion reaching a group of 450 psychologists and psychological therapists at the bi-annual conference for Psychologists and Psychological Therapists at Sussex Partnership NHS Trust. Dr Adrian Whittington says:
  - *“Deb’s work with us allowed creativity to re-ignite the spark of passion for the work for a lot of red and stressed staff”*. [5.5]

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Stakeholder Survey Results April 2020 (Appendix 1)

[5.2] Interviews, Articles, Features (Appendix 2)

[5.3] Kickstarter Fund <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1245541163/the-worlds-first-poetry-pharmacy>

[5.4] Testimonial Dr Katie Amiel, GP The Statham Grove Surgery

[5.5] Testimonial Dr Adrian Whittington, Director of Education and Training | Trust Strategic Lead for Psychology and Psychological Therapies Training, Workforce and Governance Consultant Clinical Psychologist | Honorary Senior Lecturer, University of Sussex