

## *Helena and Edward's story...*

**Helena was angry.** She had gone into hospital for an operation that had had serious complications. She had contracted meningitis. Now she was confined to a wheelchair, facing the possibility of having either one or both of her legs amputated. She had become very withdrawn and unwilling to engage with the world. Her social worker was desperate to get her reconnect. She saw a productive future for Helena, if only she could accept her new situation. Finally the social worker persuaded Helena and her husband Edward to open up their home to a series of BCA outreach workshops. Their home had been newly adapted to meet Helena's needs, and here Helena could host groups including other disabled people.

In the beginning Helena was angrily unresponsive within the workshops, but gradually she began to open up. She surprised herself with one of her first drawings, which after careful editing of experimental ink marks, showed a powerful image of birds in flight. Their strength and movement contrasted strongly with her own sense of captivity. Helena's opening up to the group resulted in Edward and Helena hosting a workshop for the regular participants as well as school and business volunteers. It was called *Coping with Change*.

Helena's social worker was also a participant in this workshop, and at a point, when owing to organisational restructuring, she was experiencing herself as being de-skilled – no longer allowed to do the creative and challenging individual work she had been enjoying with her clients. An assistant at a local day centre for adults with disabilities, as a result of this same restructuring, had been asked to do more work than he felt he was capable of handling. He was invited to the *Coping with Change* workshop. He came, but very reluctantly. School children came, frustrated with the impossible expectations of their education system and imminent career changes. A Bank Clerk came, nervous at the re-organisation of his bank, and so his career.

By the end of the workshop, all the participants had spoken about a difficult situation in their lives. Every member of the group was enabled to feel empowered because they had helped someone else. Professional status, age and experience had been no barrier.

Helena and Edward went on to take a leading role with the BCA programme and team, hosting many workshops and gatherings in their home. And Helena went on to take up an advisory role with the local council; her husband felt less isolated in his new role of carer, and Helena's social worker felt that her goal had been achieved.

*"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost"*

*Martha Graham*

*Helena's Birds in Flight...*



*"I enjoyed helping others to do what they did not realise they could do"*  
*Volunteer with a disability*