**Pictures of You – Empowering and representing people with disabilities through art (long version)**

Have you ever tried to explain to someone what it is to be YOU? Either to a friend, a partner, your family, a professional – even to yourself?

This can be a particular challenge for those with lived experience of mental and physical disability, needing to define themselves in a world where many people fail to get past identifying them by their disability, looking past this to the PERSON. Still others have a disability that is not immediately apparent or visible, which creates its own challenges.

Yet an image: a single depiction of mood, personality and interests, can say so much more. An image that is YOU, that sums up who and what you are, a source of pride and truth that you can keep and show others and say…” this is me”.

That said, as with words, many of us lack the basic ground level skills not just to produce such an image, but to look at ourselves with a sense of perspective, to honestly interpret ourselves. Care workers and professionals don’t always have the basic or creative skills for this, but imagine having access to an empathic artist, professionally trained in interpreting and gaining insight into a subject.

Someone whom you can work with as an equal partner, collaborating in a mutually beneficial relationship, to express yourself outside of the formal care setting – giving and gaining insight in the process of creating your image in a safe environment.

The end result is “Pictures of You” – an exhibition of portraits born of joint working between the subject and artist, each being an equal work using the artist’s natural creative ability to empathise with and interpret their subject in new ways by working WITH the consumer.

That is the vision of the “Pictures of You” initiative - linking physically disabled and mental health consumers with an established artist and gallery, working together to produce a portrait honestly reflecting you, the human being not just the consumer.

A true Picture of YOU**. [341 words]**