Health centre shows the art of healing

For Andrew, a mental health client of Redfern Health Centre, showing his paintings as part of a public art exhibition at the Centre was daunting, however his fears turned out to be unfounded.

“It has actually been a very rewarding experience,” Andrew said.

“We all received lots of positive feedback from members of the local community about our art work.

“Showing my creative work was far more positive than I originally thought it would be,” he said.

Andrew’s paintings were among 40 mixed media works created by mental health clients for a recent art exhibition at the Centre.

SLHD Clinical Psychologist, Redfern Community Mental Health, Dr Sandra Darmain, said the art project, which also involved poetry writing, was a way of encouraging participants to acknowledge their talents and to enhance their self-esteem.

“Most of our clients, although their work is exceptional, actually believe that they are not very creative due to the mental illness,” Dr Darmain said.

“This process has enabled them to explore beliefs about themselves and gradually change their negative perceptions into positive statements about themselves. “

Dr Darmain said the clients were asked to write a journal while painting their art work so they could keep a record on how they were feeling throughout the process.

“This journal was then used in therapy with their psychologist to explore the different emotions they were experiencing,” Dr Darmain said.

“The resulting art works symbolises the clients’ doubts, worries and lack of self-esteem and the creative act of expressing those feelings and having them acknowledged notably assists with their recovery and rehabilitation.”

The Mental Health Service located at Redfern Health Centre provides assessment, psychiatric consultation, acute care, case management and rehabilitation programs for adults experiencing a range of mental health problems.

The Service also provides support and education for families and carers of people with these mental health problems. The Acute Care Team is available 24 hours a day and provides prompt interventions and crisis care in people’s homes or at the centre.