

New Lodge Arts Response to Committee Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities

1. About Us

- 1.1. New Lodge Arts provide innovative, fun and educational activities that stretch right across the community and political divide in north Belfast. We are based in New Lodge and were established in 2003 by Ashton Community Trust, as a project seeking to remove barriers to participation in the arts ensuring that young people from some of the most disadvantaged communities could access quality artistic provision, develop creative skills, increase confidence, self esteem and express themselves freely. Working with approximately 2000 children and young people each year, New Lodge Arts has embedded itself at the heart of north Belfast. With a strong community focus and a passion for supporting the needs of young people, New Lodge Arts provide creative opportunities and challenges that unlock young people's potential inspiring them to grow and succeed.
- 1.2. All our projects are aimed at engaging and empowering young people from disadvantaged areas in north Belfast in arts activities by promoting participation and involvement. Working in close collaboration with young people themselves, youth/community organisations, artists and other arts organisations, New Lodge Arts ensures their programmes are appealing and appropriate to young people.
- 1.3. New Lodge Arts operates with one full time Manager and five part time staff.
- 1.4. Funding Breakdown

Annual Turnover approx £300,000

Funders:

- Arts Council for Northern Ireland
- OFMDFM (procured through Ashton Community Trust)
- Belfast City Council
- Children in Need
- Lloyds TSB Foundation
- Dept of Foreign Affairs
- Belfast City Council Parks Dept
- Belfast City Council Anti Social Dept
- Belfast City Airport
- Trusthouse Foundation

1.5. Core Activities

Each year, New Lodge Arts manage a range of projects aimed at meeting the needs of the community. These projects include:

- 1.6. Arts Academy - a range of weekly arts classes delivered throughout the school year including Dance, Visual Arts, Drama and Youth Leadership/Event Management. The aim of the Arts Academy is to improve participation and increase access to the arts for children and young people aged 3 to 18 years through the provision of a consistent and quality programme of arts activities. While the Arts Academy is primarily focused on Greater New Lodge, elements are delivered in other communities, for example ballet in Mount Vernon and pop style dance in Mountcollyer. Our vision is to see the Arts Academy expand across north Belfast so that all children and young people have the same opportunities to access arts provision regardless of their background, class or financial capacity.
- 1.7. Taster Projects - a series of taster art projects offered to various community groups across north Belfast. Taster sessions are a vitally important element of the Arts Academy providing an opportunity for New Lodge Arts to make initial contact with children and young people

who may not have been involved in New Lodge Arts' activities before; offering them a one-off taster session in a particular activity with the aim of enticing them into the Arts Academy.

- 1.8. Youth Development – a series of weekly classes, accredited training and events led by a part-time Youth Worker. Projects include Leadership in Youth Work, Event Management, Youth Advisory Group, Sexual Health, Drug/Alcohol Misuse Training, CV Support, Career Guidance, Volunteer Development and Youth Achievement Training.
- 1.9. North Belfast Lantern Parade – part of our annual 'Community Pride Programme' and supported by a steering group of community representatives from across north Belfast this celebration of good relations includes an outreach programme delivered across north Belfast of lantern making workshops culminating in a large scale lantern parade, the only non-political of its kind in north Belfast, and a Magical Evening event in the Waterworks Park.
- 1.10. North Belfast Winter Fest – also part of our annual 'Community Pride Programme' it includes a variety of Christmas themed activities for people across north Belfast including a youth Pantomime, Santa's Grottos, Christmas Quiz's and Pensioners Dinners.
- 1.11. Outreach projects – a series of good relations projects with other youth organisations from across the political divide, uniting them in a positive experience using the arts as the foundation. The most recent, 'Temporary Places' delivered in partnership with PS² and Glandore Skegoneil Common Purpose saw the creation of 'temporary' (or 'Pop Up') spaces Glandore/Skegoneil and another in New Lodge. In the New Lodge, the proposal made use of an empty shop front while in Skegoneill/Glandore, a temporary shipping container was installed on the interface housing several artists who engaged with the wider community to create art works and re-imagine the space.

1.12. Partnerships

- 1.13. The value of partnerships remains the key to all of New Lodge Arts' endeavours. Alliances are formed with local youth and community groups in a bid to promote a shared and positive future for the north Belfast community. New Lodge Arts also works in partnership with other groups and citywide, national and international arts organisations to deliver various projects and ensure north Belfast residents have the opportunity to access arts venues, performances, participate in large scale productions and performances.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1. In response to the Terms of Reference outlined by the Committee Inquiry New Lodge Arts believes the key challenges and barriers to the involvement of disadvantaged communities in the arts are as follows;
- 2.2. New Lodge Arts is committed to ensuring the arts are accessible to children, young people and the wider north Belfast community and have outlined above the various initiatives we deliver to enable participation at grass roots level, within the community. We are also committed to encouraging programme participants and the wider north Belfast community to access arts venues and events across the City and beyond. We firmly believe that everyone should have the opportunity to attend arts performances, events, exhibitions and festivals and that organisations delivering such should prioritise outreach that removes barriers of engagement and encourages active participation.
- 2.3. In the past 12 months New Lodge Arts has brought programme participants to a range of performances and events including Belfast Children's Festival performances, the RUA exhibition in Ulster Museum and a workshop of Sugar Metropolis, 'Hatch' at the MAC,

'Cinderella' at the Lyric, 'Macbeth' at the Grand Opera House and 'I am my own wife' at the MAC. Each of these opportunities was made possible by support from the arts provider, from free transport to reduced rate or free tickets. While this is extremely positive this support is not always the case and not all arts venues operate in this way. Lack of transport and expensive ticketing can limit the audience opportunities provided to our participants.

- 2.4. The cost of ticketing can be expensive for people on low income and therefore a limited disposable income creating a barrier to attendance. Venues in Belfast provide reduced rate tickets from time to time however these are often last minute, when seats have not been filled and therefore challenging for community groups to organise bringing groups. In addition, by offering reduced rate tickets to fill seats, venues are not considering the appropriateness of performances for audiences, potentially risking negative experiences of new audiences and reducing their likelihood of return attendance.
- 2.5. New Lodge Arts proposes that a percentage of tickets for performances be reduced rate agreed in their funding package.
- 2.6. In our experience many people from working class and disadvantaged communities feel that the arts, and arts venues in particular, are not for them. Often programming does not appeal and, when visiting a venue for the first time, new audiences can feel intimidated, stepping in to the unknown. Through bringing programme participants to city arts venues, New Lodge Arts supports new audiences with their first attendance at an event or venue. One example is by programming our own performances at city centre arts venues. In June 2013 we held the end of year Arts Academy showcase in the Baby Grand in June 2013 and several parents commented that it was their first visit to the Opera House.
- 2.7. The outreach activity of arts venues and bodies with respect to how they make a meaningful contribution to social inclusion within working class communities; including the degree to which they can help tackle particular social issues, can vary from venue to venue. Sometimes outreach appears as merely a box ticking exercise, to meet their targets of engaging people from working class communities without real meaningful engagement. Outreach should be about more than simply giving out free tickets, it should be about meaningful engagement and building relationships with communities and potential new audiences. One great example of outreach was a partnership New Lodge Arts had with the Ulster Museum, on a national project called *National Memories, Local Stories*, which culminated in the participants work being exhibited in the Museum. One participant wrote on a social networking site later of her pride at exhibiting in the space, and disbelief as she put it as coming from 'the flats' at having her work taken that seriously
- 2.8. In relation to initiatives like Test Drive the Arts we are unsure how many people in working class communities know of its existence.
- 2.9. New Lodge Arts believes that building programmes with the community as opposed to simply providing free places for young people to participate in youth education initiatives where our young people are not confident enough to participate is a better way to engage young people.
- 2.10. One example of this is a project New Lodge Arts has developed with The Mac focused on training young people in events and venue management. The MAC have taken our suggestions on board around the programme.
- 2.11. It is important that venues take outreach seriously and are congruent in their reason for partnering communities, that they treat the work created as a serious contribution and give it the respect it deserves within their venues rather than exhibiting it in the lesser space as we have experienced previously.