



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities: New Lodge Arts

26 June 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Basil McCrea
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan

Witnesses:

Ms Anne Delaney	New Lodge Arts
Mr Ryan McMahan	New Lodge Arts
Ms Katrina Newell	New Lodge Arts
Ms Caoimhlín O'Neill	New Lodge Arts

The Chairperson: Katrina Newell is the head of arts and youth development. You are very welcome to the Committee. Would you like to introduce your team?

Ms Katrina Newell (New Lodge Arts): Thank you very much, Chair. I thank members for the opportunity to come along and present. I am head of arts and youth development for Ashton Community Trust and New Lodge Arts. Anne Delaney is our arts and programme manager for New Lodge Arts. Ryan McMahan is a former participant and now a work colleague: he is our office assistant and youth worker. Caoimhlín O'Neill is a programme participant.

As I said, thank you very much for the invitation to come along. We are going to provide you with a brief overview of who we are and what we do, and we will give a quick summary of the key points of our submission and some practical suggestions and recommendations.

New Lodge Arts is a community-based arts organisation that started over 11 years ago as a one-year pilot project delivered by Ashton Community Trust. Our aim then was, as it still is, to provide access to high-quality arts programmes and activities on the ground in the community to children and young people from the age of three to 17 years and their families.

When we began 11 years ago, one local youth worker asked why we were bringing arts into the New Lodge, how relevant they were, and what real impact they would have on young people with the multitude of issues and difficulties they were facing, but the proof of the pudding was in the eating, as one might say. He saw the positive impact that participation had on young people's confidence, self-

esteem, skills development, problem-solving, creative thinking, and understanding and accepting others. The list goes on. Since 2003, New Lodge Arts has grown to become an organisation in its own right as a subsidiary of Ashton. That youth worker became our first chair when we did so. Through the impact that he saw, he had a complete shift in thinking.

We are completely embedded in the north Belfast community. We recognise that there are barriers to participation, such as finance, confidence, feeling out of place in art venues, and so on. Our role is to attract resources and deliver programmes on the ground in communities that address those barriers and then encourage and bring young people and children to venues and other establishments that provide arts-based activities and performances across the city and beyond.

We have a strong community focus and a passion for supporting the needs of children and young people in the area. We want to provide creative opportunities that unlock their potential. When we began in 2003, our primary focus was the greater New Lodge, but our work now spans across north Belfast. I will hand over to Anne, and you will hear more about our current work and its impacts.

Ms Anne Delaney (New Lodge Arts): In the last financial year, we delivered 820 workshops, with over 4,300 children and young people from across north Belfast attending. We have worked with 25 community groups and 16 schools. The organisation has grown organically over the last 11 years, delivering a programme that has had a positive impact on the lives of many young people across north Belfast.

New Lodge Arts belongs to the young people. It provides them with opportunities where they can be free to express themselves and access skills development, and it challenges and inspires them to learn, raise their aspirations and grow emotionally and intellectually. We believe in the transformative power of the arts, which enable young people to see themselves as creative beings.

There are a raft of issues affecting young people in the north Belfast area, such as interface violence, drug abuse, suicide, self-harm, poor mental health, poverty, low educational attainment, a lack of role models, depression and drug dependency. Our programmes continue to have a positive impact on young people by building aspirations, providing training and development opportunities, promoting health and well-being, building good relations and increasing creativity. We want to enable young people to be artists; not simply to receive the arts but to make and be actual contributors.

We work in the community, where people live and where the need is. However, we also see the value in bringing young people to venues across the city to experience new art forms. We brought groups to see opera in the Opera House, contemporary dance in the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC), pantomimes in the Lyric and the Waterfront, and exhibitions in the museum and PS². We are generously supported by the Arts Council as our primary funder, Belfast City Council, Children in Need, OFMDFM through an Ashton Community Trust project, and various trusts and foundations.

Ms Newell: One of the key challenges relevant to our submission is accessibility to arts venues across the city. The cost of ticketing and transport remains a challenge for us as an organisation. As we mentioned, we want to bring children and young people to see performances and events elsewhere because that will feed their imagination and feed into their creative development and practices. It will also give them new experience and broaden their horizons. It is bringing them to parts of Belfast that they would never have been to, let alone bringing them to London or Belgium, where we have recently come back from. We work with organisations like the Lyric, which provides with free or reduced-rate tickets. That enables us to bring young people to performances. Other organisations provide reduced-rate tickets, but usually only when they are having problems filling their seats, so it can be last minute. We want to provide the opportunities for young people, but we have a challenge with getting support workers, parental consent and the kind of practicalities of bringing young people to those performances. In our minds, it is less about inclusion and more about simply filling seats.

We welcome collaboration with other organisations through their outreach programmes. Anne talked about different organisations we work with. They include Prime Cut and DU Dance. We have just finished an excellent programme with the Ulster Museum. The most successful collaborations for us are those where we are involved from the very outset at the idea stage, so that we can input our ideas and discuss some of the challenges around, and barriers to, participation. One of the challenges we have is with young people not feeling confident. Because of where we are situated postcode-wise, we are often offered bursaries for young people to participate in different programmes, but because of their lack of confidence, young people are not picking up on those. We feel that we need to bring the young people to those, at least so that they feel supported. Often when we are doing outreach programmes, if the outreach programme has already been developed, there is no opportunity to have

a support worker as part of that. So, we are either looking to our own resources or are going along ourselves. You are competing with having to write funding applications and evaluate programmes on the administrative side of things, as well as developing a whole raft of other programmes. Those are the key challenges. As I say, when we are involved from the onset, we can highlight those challenges with the other organisations.

Another challenge is meeting needs across communities in north Belfast. More and more groups want to avail themselves of our services and, while we deliver taster activities across north Belfast and events, programmes and outreach programmes relating to our core programmes, we have an arts academy, which is our core programme that is primarily focused on greater New Lodge due to the resources that we have for that. As much as possible, we would deliver those activities in neutral venues, or as satellite tasters happening in other communities, but we would really love to expand that to provide consistent programmes within other communities in north Belfast so that young people, regardless of what community they come from, can access that, and choose to come along. We have had people as young as five years turning up for ballet, because they heard about it from their friend in school. They come along on their own because they are choosing what extra-curricular activities they want to get involved in at that age; but that is because it is on their doorstep, they can access it and it is free. That is why, for us, it is extremely important to provide access in their communities. We had a recent application in with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to develop that. It was unsuccessful, but it is something that we are continuing to work on.

Ms Delaney: I will now address our recommendations for improvement of the policy. We would like better cross-cutting themes across Departments, for example, using the benefits of the arts within healthcare. We suggest a more collaborative approach by arts venues to outreach, as Katrina has already addressed; and that venues provide a percentage of free ticketing for disadvantaged communities alongside free transport. We also encourage larger venues to support community arts organisations by offering discounted or free venue hire and technical support. We also recommend sustained investment in community arts activities.

New Lodge Arts wants to continue to expand and grow. Our challenges for the next few years are to expand the arts academy and seek funding from various trusts and foundations. We also want to employ an artist in residence to work within the community and normalise the idea of being an artist. We want to develop our programme of accredited training to encourage the development of young people. We want to have a clear focus on creative industries and social enterprise and expand our international project offering.

I now hand you over to Caoimhlín O'Neill, who is a young person who has been involved in our programme for many years. She will give you a bit of an insight from a young person's perspective.

Ms Caoimhlín O'Neill (New Lodge Arts): I have been involved with New Lodge Arts for eight years and have had so many great experiences. I have participated in weekly dance and drama classes, performed in the Grand Opera House, exhibited artwork in the Ulster Museum and National Portrait Gallery, travelled to Belgium and London on a history trip, and took part in a merge-dance project with DU Dance.

New Lodge Arts has supported me to develop my talents. Last year, I took part in the Grand Opera House annual youth summer production of 'Annie'. Without my experience in New Lodge Arts, I would not have had the confidence to get involved in something like that outside my local area. I have always felt intimidated by bigger arts venues and organisations, but New Lodge Arts brought me to see several shows and I realised that I could be part of them.

I have made many friends from different backgrounds through my involvement with New Lodge Arts. Two of my best friends are Protestants from Ballysillan. I met them at the New Lodge Arts panto two years ago. I would not have had the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds had I not been involved with the company.

I am a more confident young person and I feel that New Lodge Arts is like a second family. Everyone involved is caring and supportive, and young people are all treated equally. I am excited about future projects with the company.

Ms Delaney: I now hand you over to Ryan McMahon, who is currently employed with us as our office assistant, but he has been a former participant.

Mr Ryan McMahon (New Lodge Arts): Hi guys. I live in the New Lodge, and I have lived there all my life, and I am now working in New Lodge Arts. I am an example of how the arts has made an impact on young people in disadvantaged communities. I got involved in New Lodge Arts six years ago through its dance and drama projects. I was attracted to their classes because they were free and were right on my doorstep. I would not have had the opportunity to go outside my area to access classes, because my mummy would not have been able to pay for the transport and it would have been too expensive to splash out on. I would not have had the confidence to sign up to other drama projects in arts venues, because I would have felt out of place. I had the perception of being judged by others who came from more well-off areas, and I would have felt that they were all looking at me.

Over the years, through my involvement in New Lodge Arts, I have performed in local venues in north Belfast, and the most exciting experience was performing in the Grand Opera House. Throughout the years, New Lodge Arts has brought me to shows in the MAC, the Lyric, the Grand Opera House, the Waterfront Hall, the Crescent Arts Centre and London's West End. I have gained a lot of skills through my experiences in New Lodge Arts. When I was a teenager — Katrina can back me up — I was difficult to work with. New Lodge Arts taught me to grow as a person and develop my confidence and self-esteem and really improve my communication skills so that I can now talk, with manners, to people.

After GCSEs, I left school and spent two years on jobseeker's allowance — the buroo — with no motivation or direction in my life. Over the last six months, I have been on a placement with New Lodge Arts, and I have developed a lot of skills in the workplace, so much so that I have been offered a full-time job until next March. I now know where I want to go with my life. I now have a purpose to get out of bed, and I am committed to supporting young people in the local area, because I know what it feels like to have no direction and to feel lost and not be given a chance. I think that other young people should be given the same opportunities that I have had, such as apprenticeships and placement schemes to help them in their future careers if they want to go into the arts. Thanks, guys.

Ms Newell: That is us. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation, and I thank Ryan and Caoimh  n for sharing their experiences. You talked about the transformative power of the arts and the idea that it promotes health and well-being. Can you give some examples of how that has manifested itself in your community?

Ms Newell: We have delivered projects in the past, working with PIPS, and we have worked with families and looked at some of the impacts of suicide on families and provided them with an opportunity, through the arts, to use not so much a creative approach but arts-based activities to share their experiences. In the past, we have also worked with young people and looked at issues around homophobia and xenophobia and issues around people from other countries coming into the area and challenging some of the perceptions that young people from the community have.

A lot of the work that we do is firefighting. Projects have come up based on needs, so projects have been developed around the issue of bonfires. We worked with a group of young people who had been involved in challenging behaviour in the community, and we looked at an alternative way of building bonfires or an alternative way of using the activity that they enjoy doing, which was collecting wood and building bonfires, and they created a fire sculpture that was part of a community event. For them, it was an opportunity to participate as positive citizens within the community, and it gave the community an opportunity to see them in a positive role. They ended up volunteering at the event and handing out leaflets to the children and families who were at the event. It had a really positive impact on their perception of themselves and the perception of the wider community, and also the police. During the event, the police asked us whether the young people were part of the event. We said that they had contributed quite a lot to the event that everyone — the whole community — could enjoy. There are real impacts, and those are just a few of the examples.

The Chairperson: Do you have any direct links through to the Belfast Trust?

Ms Newell: Yes. We have links through some of our other work and our connections with the Ashton Community Trust. We deliver through our connections with Ashton. I am involved in the New Lodge Youth Centre. We work through a family support programme, which involves the delivery of arts activities. As part of that programme, there is a range of other programmes around looking at health and well-being, cooking, horticulture and gardening. In the past, we have delivered projects in which artists have been brought in to encourage the community and residents to come together more and to

come up with their own ideas. The artists have been encouraging the dialogue and creative thinking. One of the most significant projects that we have delivered in Glandore/Skegoneill is a community garden, which, pardon the pun, grew out of the project. It was completely led by the community, and it was something that they felt that they wanted to achieve. From that, a community developed around that garden. That is one example.

The Chairperson: That is great. Can you elaborate on the links that you have with other arts groups in and around Belfast?

Ms Delaney: We have experience of working with a number of arts organisations. A good example is our work with the Prime Cut theatre company. It is about offering young people the opportunities to experience a high level of theatre activity and work with top artists and directors from Dublin, who come together. The strength in working with them is that they are collaborating with us from the start. They involve us in planning the programme, look at the needs of the young people and develop the programme in line with them. Last year, we worked with the theatre company on the boundaries project. What they set out to do at the start was not necessarily what they ended up with, but the collaborative approach with the young people really made an impact. We see that as being very important for going ahead. People approach us, and they want us to get involved in their outreach programme because we tick a box; we tick that BT15 box that they may want to tick. But we are very strict about who we work with. We want to make sure that they have the same values and ethos that we have as an organisation. That is the type of process that we take going forward, because we want it to be a nurturing experience for the young people, and we want to widen their access to the arts. We want to make sure that we are doing that with the right type of organisation.

The Chairperson: What type of facility do you have?

Ms Newell: We do not have a facility; we have office space in the Ashton Centre, and we use whatever facilities or spaces we can get our hands on across north Belfast. There is a lot of positivity to that, because it breaks down the idea of parochialism. Young people will travel to other venues; they do not feel that they belong to one particular venue. It also means that the young people go into different communities. We do not have a space.

Ms Delaney: The other thing is that it has forced us to go into other communities. It has expanded our programme across north Belfast in that we go into different community and youth groups offering a variety of arts activities. If we had one space in the New Lodge, for example, people from those other areas may not come to what we are doing. So, it is a strength. We are in a crowded office, but it works. I suppose that we want to focus more on participation. Using the other venues has helped us to do that.

The Chairperson: That is very positive and a good example for others who feel that they need to have their own space in order to do a piece of work. I congratulate you for that.

Mr Hilditch: Thanks for the presentation; it has been very useful. I know that you do a lot of fine work over the 52 weeks of the year, but do you have a dedicated arts festival?

Ms Newell: We take the lead on a community pride programme, but it is in partnership with other community representatives from across north Belfast. It is called the Community Pride programme. Depending on funding, we deliver a one-week summer youth arts programme, and we run a north Belfast lantern parade. It is one event, but it has an outreach programme attached to it. That runs for two months, and the actual event has activities delivered over several days. This year, we are looking at developing that more into a festival. That happens at the end of October. We also have Winter Fest, a winter festival programme, but it is not run by just ourselves. All of our work is about collaboration and participation. We do not need to do everything. We need to support one another and work together more effectively with other communities and arts organisations. If other groups in north Belfast — for example, in Whitewell, White City or wherever — are delivering events during that period, we all promote our work together as part of the festival. Again, the Community Pride steering group advises on that. It is very much about how we can collaborate and bring our work together.

Ms Delaney: The strength of the Winter Fest programme is that we normally provide free activities; it is free to take your child to see Santa and to take part in various arts activities, and there is free food. Hundreds of people come to those events and also to our Christmas pantomime, which Caoimhlin has experience of performing in. The tickets are £2 each, and it really is a brilliant show. A lot of families

that we work with cannot afford to pay £20 for the Opera House or anywhere else, for that matter, or pay £7 or £9 to see Santa. So, we are providing those activities in the area at low cost or no cost. That is a real strength of what we do and is how we want to continue in the future.

Ms Newell: One example from the Winter Fest is working with other organisations or collectives — events for all, for instance. It is not simply about Santa's grottoes; there is a whole series of artists there, and it is about encouraging families to think about how they can play together or create things together out of recycled materials. That takes place in Duncairn Gardens, which is an interface area, but it brings people together from both sides of that interface and across north Belfast to take part in a free activity and experience something really positive. So, it has all the knock-on effects of promoting good relations, shared space and so on.

Mr Hilditch: Given the proximity of north Belfast to the Cathedral Quarter, Culture Night has been an example of how to bring the arts into the public space. Do you take part in that?

Ms Delaney: Yes, we have had very positive experiences with Culture Night. Last year, we had a group of young people performing in a 10 feet by 8 feet shipping container— again, Caoimhlín does nearly everything that we do. The play was devised by a group of young people from Cliftonville Community Centre, and it was about how young people are perceived in their community. We had four participants in this little 10 feet by 8 feet box, and audiences of between 10 and 13 people were invited in and locked in the box for an eight-minute show. It was looking at how young people are perceived by older people in their community and asking whether, if they are wearing a hoody, that makes them a bad young person. It is also about how they are treated. It was a really exciting night. We decided to do four performances that night and ended up doing about 13 because the kids like to please their audiences.

Mr Hilditch: That is a good way to break down barriers.

Ms Delaney: Definitely, and it is also a good way to showcase our innovative work. That is one example.

Ms Newell: The previous year, a dance squad participated, and I think that it did three performances. It is fantastic for our people to participate at that level. Some people have a perception that community arts is lower quality or lower down the ladder. For us, it is about saying that we are delivering performances that are at the same level as other professional arts organisations and delivering professional, quality performances.

Mr Hilditch: It is an opportunity to showcase that.

Ms Newell: Exactly.

Mr Hilditch: I have a basic question, which is perhaps more controversial. As a grass-roots community-based organisation, how do you rate the assistance or the interaction of the established well-known arts organisations? You said that you worked with the Lyric, but people at the high end of the arts gave evidence about how great they are at working in the community and whatnot. Do you see that? Is that your perception or experience?

Ms Delaney: We definitely had a positive experience with the Opera House last year. For our end-of-term showcase, which brings together various dance and drama projects, it offered us two free nights in the Baby Grand studio, which was a fantastic experience for us and gave young people a chance to perform in the studio. It was very exciting. We were also able to bring families down to the Opera House, many of whom may not have been there before. Again, we provided free tickets for the show, and we also provided transport. It was definitely a welcomed opportunity from the Opera House, and we are keen to continue that in the future.

Mr Hilditch: Perhaps things like that are not happening as much as the Committee is being told.

Ms Newell: I think that more could be done. As Anne mentioned, we are fussier now as well. In the past, when I started working with New Lodge Arts, I was saying yes to every opportunity that came along, but the opportunity was coming along as a package: it had to be a certain amount of young people from one community and a certain amount from another community. The actual medium, the subject matter and so on was packaged. There was no role for us to engage. There was no

opportunity for us to engage on our experiences of what the barriers might be or for the young people themselves to engage with the idea. If and when that happens, we will say no if the values and ethos are not there, because, as Anne said, it has to be about the right nurturing experience. A lot more could be done on outreach and ticketing. I brought that up with Belfast City Council previously when we were working together on its strategic plan and operational plans.

Some big organisations take up quite a lot of the funding. Their postcode also gives them a base, one could say, in a disadvantaged community. As Anne mentioned, there should be something in their contracts for funding that ensures that they are meeting the needs —

Mr Hilditch: A social commitment.

Ms Newell: It should include a social commitment and meeting the needs of a community and not just be a tick-box exercise.

Mr Hilditch: That is good; thank you.

Mr D Bradley: Morning. Thanks very much for your presentation. I want to explore Mr Hilditch's point about outreach. Even the provision of ticketing could be very short-term — a flash in the pan — with young people seeing one show in one theatre, and then it is gone. It would be useful to have more developed outreach, with, say, a large theatre, orchestra, venue or whatever linking into your project for a longer period of perhaps one to two years and developing a project so that it is not just about one night in the Opera House or the Lyric. Professional producers, actors, technicians and so on from the theatres could work with young people in your community on a longer-term basis so that outreach becomes more embedded.

Ms Newell: That is an excellent idea, especially given the high numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. It could be a holistic package, and you could look at real training opportunities in the creative industries and, as Ryan mentioned, apprenticeships, perhaps in event management and the technical side as well as the performing side. We definitely welcome those suggestions. While we have had one-off opportunities to attend performances, which, as I said, leads into young people's own artistic practice and development, it would be great to have —

Mr D Bradley: I am not saying that you reject everything completely.

Ms Newell: In addition, it would be great to have those opportunities. We prefer to think of collaborations as ongoing relationships, like, for instance, the project that we completed with the Ulster Museum, which was part of a National Portrait Gallery programme. We have continued that conversation and relationship to look at other ways to develop work moving forward. That project started off a relationship that we want to continue, so we are definitely open to that. It is about creating working relationships that are longer than the duration of a project.

Mr D Bradley: As part of the procurement process, when companies get government contracts — for example, the contract to build Windsor Park, Casement Park or the new stand at Ravenhill — social clauses are built into them, which means that they have to take on a certain number of apprentices and employ a certain number of people who have been long-term unemployed. Would it be useful — Mr Hilditch hinted at something along these lines — if social clauses were built into the funding arrangements for the arts here?

Ms Newell: It would be very helpful. It would help us to do our job and to make it a lot easier.

Mr D Bradley: Briefly, what do you see as the advantages?

Ms Newell: If there were social clauses in, for example, ticketing that meant the provision of a certain number of reduced rate or free tickets, the advantage to us would be that venues would open up to young people who would never have accessed them before. When the young people were performing in the Opera House, I spoke to their parents, who had never been there before even though it is open to the whole country and further afield. Social clauses would allow us to open young people's imaginations, feed their work and give them aspirations to be on that stage or to create work to be hung in that gallery.

Mr D Bradley: Would you go further and say that the type of thing that we were speaking about — prolonged outreach projects lasting a year to two years — could be built into those social clauses?

Ms Newell: Yes. It would be excellent if outreach programmes were built into social clauses, but there must also be a framework on how they are developed so that there are clear partnership agreements, and it is not just a tick-box exercise when a venue has an idea of what it feels the arts should be. They should be open to our ideas: it is not just about an elite idea of high-brow art.

Mr D Bradley: There should be agreement between the two partners involved.

Ms Newell: Yes.

Mr D Bradley: Your submission states that, in your experience, many people from working-class and disadvantaged communities feel that the arts and arts venues in particular are not for them and that the programming often does not appeal. Do you feel that what you are doing is making progress on breaking down that perception?

Ms Newell: Yes. We have two examples of young people who referred to that in their presentations. They said that they had felt that they did not belong in, or were uncomfortable going to, some venues, yet they are now happy to perform in those venues. Our work has definitely opened up spaces to young people that they now feel are theirs — rightly so. It is their city, so it is important that those venues are theirs.

Ms Delaney: As we said, we bring young people to the likes of the Opera House, the MAC and the Lyric to see various shows throughout the year. We took young people, including Caoimhlín, to see an operatic version of 'Macbeth'. They may not necessarily have wanted to see that, but we are taking them to see things that challenge their imaginations and give them new experiences. At Christmastime, we took a group of young people aged between six and eight to see a show in the MAC. When one young person walked round the corner, her eyes lit up as if to say, "What is this place?" It is a five-minute walk from her house, yet her parents would probably never have taken her there or even known of its existence. You could see the excitement on the face of that little five-year-old, so we want to continue to see those experiences with the young people. We want to realise that these venues are for them. If it means that we are the people who have to take them to those venues, we will continue to do so.

Mr D Bradley: When young people are performing at the venues that are available to you locally and, in some cases, at bigger arts venues down town, are you able to engage their families to come out, watch them, support them and be part of the audience?

Ms Newell: In the majority of cases, yes, but some parents do not come along because of social and other issues that we deal with. Some parents are dependent on prescription drugs, have mental health issues and so on, so there are hard and sad examples of young people performing, and no one has come to watch them. However, in the majority of cases, family members are there, and, for us, it is about everyone making that experience special for the young people who are on stage, because we want them to come off feeling as if they are 10 feet high.

Mr D Bradley: If 2,000 young people are involved, there is an added value because you have also drawn in their families to support them, to watch the performances and to be part of the audience.

Ms Newell: Yes. We got them to come along to those venues that I mentioned, like the Opera House. Two years ago, as part of Culture Night, our young people exhibited photography and artwork at Belfast Exposed — I had forgotten about that — and their families came along as well. Walking in through the doors of a gallery can be a bit intimidating, as can going to the Ulster Museum to see their work being exhibited. One young person from the flats wrote on Facebook that she could not believe that her work was displayed in the museum. That confidence lift and sense of self-belief, and the number of comments from her peers and family members about how proud they were of her, were great. It is very much about the ripple effect of our work.

Mr D Bradley: Thanks very much.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very impressive, and it is great to hear from Ryan and Caoimhlín, who have benefited and flourished as a result of involvement with New Lodge Arts. That makes a big difference.

I will touch on an issue that other members mentioned, which is feeling out of place in arts venues and introducing people to them. Does everyone respond positively and change their mind, or do some, having been to venues, still feel that it is not for them?

Ms Newell: As with all things in life, no matter what, not everything will be for everyone. We are quite careful about where we take young people for their first experience. We do a lot of research about a performance or exhibition to try to make sure that it is relevant to them and that they will want a second experience. I once took some young people to a contemporary dance performance, and it was not for them. They were left wondering what was going on on stage, and it was a bit strange for them. A few weeks after that, they went to a drama performance and absolutely loved it, but it is the same as me going to performances.

When we first started, we had a group of young people who were involved in film-making; they did not think of it as drama because that would not have been cool. There was a wee bit of risk, but there was a performance in the Old Museum Arts Centre (OMAC), as it was then, that I thought would really make an impact on them. I wondered how I was going to get them there, so we went on a magical mystery bus tour and ended up in an art gallery. They went to an exhibition first and then saw a performance, and they wanted to go back the next day. They said to me, "We would never have gone in. If you had told us, we wouldn't have turned up". There is measured risk taking; we do a lot of research into what will be relevant for young people so that they have a positive experience. Sometimes we take them to see things that will just not be for them. Anne mentioned taking people to the opera and the ballet. When the Waterfront had its reduced rate ticketing scheme on a much bigger scale than it now has, we took 50 young people to 'Swan Lake'. I wondered how it would go down. I thought that, if it did not go down so well, we could leave at the interval, as anyone can choose to do. However, they loved it; they came out dancing around, and we now have two or three ballet classes. It is about feeding that imagination.

Ms McCorley: I am very impressed to hear about your ballet classes. I think that this is the first time that we have heard of ballet classes in a local community project. Well done. You sound as if you have really pushed the boat out to break down the exclusivity that people might feel. You are proving the point of our inquiry into working-class exclusion from the arts: once you break down those barriers and open people up to experiences, everybody will find something they enjoy. People from whatever walk of life will like some things and not like others.

You said that lower-priced seating is more to do with filling empty seats. Have you challenged the venues on that? It is an important point.

Ms Newell: We have probably not done it as much as we could have.

Ms McCorley: Maybe the Committee could raise that point.

The MAC is probably on your doorstep. Representatives were here last week, and they gave a very impressive presentation on what the MAC does. Have you had direct engagement with the MAC about how it can help to cater for your needs and to facilitate you as a group?

Ms Delaney: We had some experience with the MAC. We had discounted tickets for its Christmas show, but that did not include transport, so again, we paid for the transport to get the children and young people there. I think that it had transport for other groups as part of that scheme, but it was all used up. That puts the onus on us to find the funding to take the kids to and from the building.

The MAC also offered us free space in its Den to use for event management, which involves young people aged 17 to 19. Why would young people go down there just to use a space? We expected a more collaborative approach and for the young people to get something out of going to the MAC. Our youth arts worker and Ryan worked with the MAC's outreach officer to develop a programme to look at what happens in the MAC, including backstage experiences like sound and lighting and marketing. They developed a programme over — was it eight weeks?

Mr McMahon: It was 12 weeks.

Ms Delaney: — to get a feel of what goes on in an arts organisation. That was an opportunity for us to give the young people a different experience as opposed to just going down and using a room. They were able to see what goes on in the MAC. Some of our young people may have performed but are not as interested in performing any more, but they may be interested in sound and lighting, front of house etc. It was an opportunity for them to learn about the MAC. That is our experience.

Ms McCorley: I sense that you feel that you could get more from it.

Ms Newell: There are probably more opportunities for collaboration. I will put it in context. We are a very small organisation. I work with New Lodge Arts and the New Lodge Youth Centre. Anne is full-time, but the rest of the employees — there are five, including Ryan — are part-time. We do a vast amount of work, the majority of which is on programmes. We are doers, but that is the case for anyone who works in the community. For us, it is about the arts as a tool for youth and community development. We are on the ground firefighting and dealing with whatever comes up, as well as trying to plan and be strategic. It is about making the most of the opportunities to collaborate when they come up. Sometimes, we think that there are bigger organisations that have a lot more staff and a lot more capacity that could perhaps take a few more steps towards engaging.

Ms Delaney: We would love to bring a showcase to the MAC over a couple of nights and use its main stage, but the cost is prohibitive for us. As we want to put so much of our funding into programming and the activities for the young people, we cannot really justify spending a couple of thousands of pounds to hire a venue, including the technical support etc that comes with hiring that space. Yes, we can use a local church hall, such as St Kevin's, which we have used on a number of occasions and which takes a lot of work to get it functioning, but we have to weigh up cost against delivering the programmes we do. The programme activity wins every time for us. So, if there was an arrangement with the bigger venues that a percentage of nights had to go free to community organisations, we would definitely welcome that opportunity. We are not like other organisations that charge £10 or £15 for a ticket. We could not even charge £5 for a ticket. At the most, we could push it to £3, but that would never cover the costs of using the likes of the MAC or any other venue. We would definitely welcome that and would love to have a couple of nights in the MAC. People could walk down and would not have the transport barriers.

Ms Newell: I am sure that there are a lot of people like that five-year old, who walked around the corner into St Anne's Square and was blown away by it.

Ms McCorley: I remember the first time that I went into St Anne's Square. I did not know that that place was there. I can understand how somebody might feel that way.

I have one last question. As a result of working with your group, Ryan and Caoimhlín have obviously developed talents that they maybe were not aware of. Would you say that there is much untapped talent out there that could be developed if there were enough resources to do so?

Ms Newell: Definitely. There is a lot of untapped talent. It is about consistent delivery. It is not about going in and doing a one-year programme. It is about working with those young people right along and them feeling a sense of belonging and feeling supported and nurtured. For instance, we have a young man who went through several of our programmes, one of which was the drama programme that I mentioned earlier that dealt with drug awareness and xenophobia. He is now in New York and is performing there. He said that he would never have thought that he would be interested in drama or acting, let alone be in New York, until he started making a film about an issue-based piece. There is a lot of untapped potential.

There is a lot of potential within our young people. Caoimhlín mentioned taking part in our activities, but she has also had the confidence to take part independently of New Lodge Arts in the Opera House. There are others who have gone on to work with Music Theatre 4 Youth. So, yes, there is a lot of untapped talent.

Mr Irwin: Thanks for your presentation. I suppose that most things have been fairly well covered, but there seems to be a physiological barrier that prevents working-class engagement with the arts. Is there anything more that you see that could be done to overcome that?

Ms Newell: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

Mr Irwin: There seems to be a physiological barrier that prevents working-class engagement with the arts. Is there anything more that you can do or anything more that could be done to overcome that barrier?

Ms Delaney: Our arts academy programme is focused in the New Lodge area. We run taster programmes across north Belfast from White City to Westland and from Ardoyne to Mount Vernon — all around. We go in, deliver maybe 12 weeks of programming and come out again. We get another pot of funding from somewhere, and we go in and meet the needs again. Those groups have said that they would welcome a year-round programme of activities. We could be going in and delivering, let us say, hip hop every Monday in Mount Vernon or drama in Westland, but, at the minute, we do not have the funding to extend the programme. We are working on that, and we were very hopeful of getting funding through Esmée Fairbairn, but, unfortunately, that was unsuccessful.

We think that there are needs in those communities, and we will work over the next few months to raise more funding. A lot of those areas have little arts infrastructure. We find that the young people who take part enjoy what we are doing and want more. We would love to be able to give that to them, but we cannot do that at the minute from within our capacity and funding.

Mr Irwin: With more funding, you could do more.

Ms Delaney: Yes, we could. I suppose that everybody has said that.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for the presentation. It was very interesting. The one thing that is missing from your presentation is disability. There is no mention of that.

Ms Delaney: There are a couple of examples. I will come at it from our programme. We have worked with the 174 Trust, which is based in the Duncairn Centre for Culture and Arts, for many years. It has three disability groups: one for those under 10, one for 10- to 18-year-olds and a third for those who are 18 years-plus. We have various examples of working with that group to deliver drama projects and big art projects throughout the years. Our most recent project was delivered through a taster project with the council, and we delivered photography workshops with the three groups. A photographer worked with the groups individually, and then we brought them together for a final celebration night, when we exhibited all their work in the new Duncairn Centre for Culture and Arts. I think that there were about 62 images that the young people and adults had all taken as part of the project. They were on display for an evening and their family and friends could come to see their work.

From my point of view, that programme was a real success, and even the parents were so excited to be able to see work that their young people had been involved in. The projects have very little funding, and they do not have many opportunities to involve the families with what the young people have been doing, so to come to that celebration evening was a real highlight for them.

Since then, we have implemented a weekly programme with the disability groups, where they come and use the New Lodge Youth Centre on a Friday night, and we offer them a range of arts activities and some sporting activities. The core of what we do is addressing the needs of the young people and what they want to do, and we have been working with the groups to continue to develop that.

Ms Newell: If I could come in on that, I think that it is fair to say that all our programmes are fully inclusive. Regardless of a young person's ability or disability, the programmes are open for them to participate in, and we will meet their needs as best we can while they are involved in that programme.

Mr McMullan: I think that it would be more to your benefit if you highlighted that.

Ms Newell: OK.

Mr McMullan: I am quite amazed at the amount of work that you do from the base that you have, and I do not think that you are blowing your trumpet loudly enough. I think that that is an omission and that you should include it. I have listened to bigger groups, and, quite honestly, they are not putting on a quarter of the activities for people with disabilities that you have just told me about.

I just want to finish by saying that ballet dancing on the New Lodge Road is certainly a new one.

Ms Newell: You would be welcome to come along and see it.

Mr McMullan: Well done. I am very impressed with you.

Ms Newell: Thank you.

Ms Delaney: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: You need to purchase a trumpet.

Mr Humphrey: Thanks very much for your presentation. Katrina, you spoke about confidence and young people feeling out of place. I am impressed to hear the amount of work that has been and is being done to address that. Ryan and Caoimhlín are exemplars and have shown that they have been able to take part when previously there were barriers. When I suggested to the Committee a number of months ago that we do this piece of work, there was a reaction from the establishment and some in the media that there was not an issue. I have listened carefully to what you have said, and the outreach that has been done with 25 community groups and 16 schools is tremendously good. It needed to be done because there is an issue. Your presentation confirms that.

Ryan, you said that you got involved because it was on your doorstep and if it had not been on your doorstep, coming from the background that you and I come from, you would have felt out of place. Can you expand on that a wee bit?

Mr McMahon: If I had gone outside the New Lodge and into a venue in town that I did not know, I would have felt that I was not allowed to be there. If someone had said something, I would probably have just died from embarrassment. I just would not have done that in case someone had said something. I would have felt intimidated. If I were to go somewhere now, it would not even faze me because I have grown up.

Mr Humphrey: So, out of that experience, you have the confidence to go along. Is it fair to say that had you not had the facilities and opportunities in the New Lodge, the experiences you had and the confidence you gained would not have happened?

Mr McMahon: Yes, definitely. If New Lodge Arts had not brought us out and taken us to places other than the New Lodge, I would not have left. I would not then have grown in confidence to go out. They took me to different places, and I thought, "Right, maybe I can go out or go in here and nothing will be said." After that, it just built up and now I am happy.

Mr Humphrey: You were talking about larger venues in the city centre that could be used by yourselves. You should have a word with Belfast City Council because I am fairly confident that in the clause that was negotiated for the money that went into the refurbishment of the Ulster Hall, a certain number of nights each year were set aside for when the community has access to the Ulster Hall.

Ms Newell: That would be brilliant. It is fantastic to have that, but we also need to think about the technical side of it and whether we have to use their technical assistance when we go into those venues. That can be a few thousand pounds in itself, which knocks it out, whereas we could use the local church hall and try to do the equipment ourselves, even though it would not be anywhere as good.

Ms Delaney: There is even the catering. Sometimes when you use the likes of the Ulster Hall, you have to use its in-house caterers. If you have 80 kids performing, you are then into hundreds of pounds, whereas we can make sandwiches, sausage rolls or whatever it might be. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Humphrey: Thanks very much.

Ms Newell: Those are some of the real barriers. We bring young people to perform, but we also need to provide food for them because they might be coming straight from school or have not had anything to eat. We are bringing someone in to do the catering or are making sandwiches, providing fruit or whatever.

The Chairperson: I thank you for your time this morning, for sharing your experiences and for the positive work that you do in the community.

Ms Newell: Thank you.