

Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities

*Our mission is to place the Arts at the heart of our social, economic and
creative life*

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland's submission 13th March 2014

SECTION ONE

Preamble

More than any other activity, the Arts have the power to broaden and enrich our lives, to look at the world differently, to transform the familiar, to deepen at every contact.

Never has there been a more fitting time for the arts to demonstrate how they speak to us in myriad ways. Their role in education and learning; their value to the economy; their importance to the health and vitality of communities; how they are changing the image of Northern Ireland at home and abroad; helping us to celebrate our diversity and their role in drawing us together.

Individual artists are the cradle of our creativity as a society. Their ability to innovate; to challenge preconceptions; to broaden and enrich our lives; to create work of international acclaim; to transform the familiar, is fundamentally rooted in a search for excellence. As an Arts Council, our role is to invest in artistic excellence and ensure that work of quality is presented to the widest possible audience.

This is allied to a firm conviction that since all subscribe to public investment in the arts, all should benefit. Achievement of such a goal remains both a continuing challenge and ambition for the Arts Council. We want to ensure everyone has access to excellent art, recognising that there are evident inequalities in the extent to which arts are available to all, especially amongst those who feel marginalised, isolated and voiceless. We recognise this problem is particularly, though not exclusively, prevalent within our working class communities, both in rural and urban areas. The extent of that problem needs greater analysis, both in terms of its causes and its effects and, most importantly, how it can be remediated.

The CAL Committee Inquiry

The Arts Council, therefore, welcomes the announcement of the Committee's Inquiry and its focus and pledges itself to work with the Committee in conducting its analysis and research into the related issues as well as making a contribution to the potential interventions designed to mitigate the perceived and actual barriers experienced by some who live in our working class communities.

Executive summary

- the range of cultural and artistic activity and engagement by people in working class communities is more complex and varied than might at first be thought - and more than could possibly have been encapsulated in the time available for the research document prepared for the Committee

- people make their arts and cultural choices in disparate ways and from a vast array of possibilities. It is important to respect these choices and to attempt to include as full a picture of cultural participation as possible
- it is important to avoid the risk of underestimating, or undervaluing, the cultural engagement of people in working class communities
- it is even more important to recognise the extent to which they do not have comparable access to certain arts
- it is appropriate and important to look, in particular, at publicly funded arts
- a key principle for the Arts Council is that everybody should enjoy an equal opportunity to make their arts and cultural choices from the fullest range of options. The Arts Council's obligations under Section 75 and the Disability Discrimination Act are relevant here
- the Arts Council has a multi-layered approach to this issue.
 - ~It works at knowing what is happening and having a starting point from which to assess future performance
 - ~it has articulated this issue as a key policy priority in its Strategic Plan which will be followed through in annual business plans
 - ~we are close to the completion of our Community Arts Strategy which has a key relevance
 - ~we have a range of sectoral strategies which are designed to ensure that some important areas have a particular focus in our work but which, in turn, ensure that a range of approaches are undertaken which will help broaden access and participation in working class communities

Our Five Year Plan

Within our Five year Strategic Plan 'Ambitions for the Arts', the Arts Council has outlined its ongoing commitment towards striving to deepen the value of arts to individuals and wider society, target resources to meet social and community challenges, deliver improved access, reach new audiences and enhance community engagement. We will achieve this through a range of partnerships with key government departments and bodies, through targeted programmes and interventions and, above all through working closely with our own funded arts organisations, encouraging them to strengthen further their engagement with working class communities.

We have already established a number of art-form policies and strategies designed to broaden the appeal of the arts to those who feel excluded from accessing them, for whatever reason, and believe the forthcoming Community Arts Strategy will provide further opportunities to access and increase participation for more people and communities, including areas of high deprivation and disadvantage.

Whatever the art-form area, be it music, opera, drama, visual arts, dance, traditional arts, poetry or literature, the ambition of making excellent art accessible to all, remains paramount.

The Arts Council's direction of travel over the past decade and more has been based on such an ambition and, indeed, a conviction that the arts enrich individual lives as well as the wider society and everyone should have an equal opportunity to access that enrichment should they wish to do so.

At a practical level, we have shifted our historic patterns of funding to help realise that bold ambition, recognising that deep-seated, complex, multi layered problems require long term interventions and are rarely, if ever, the preserve of one body or authority. However, no-one agency should abdicate its own responsibility for striving to ensure that the benefits of public funding are distributed equally and/or weighted in favour of those most disadvantaged in our society, depending upon circumstance. Collectively, we can make an appreciable difference and this is at the heart of our approach.

SECTION TWO

So what do we know about the problem?

2.1 The Arts Council welcomes the contribution of the **NI Assembly paper 'Examining social inclusion in the arts in Northern Ireland'**, as a good starting point for dialogue.

2.2 However, we would contend that it does not capture the full range and diversity of arts activity that takes place across communities in Northern Ireland. It is important to note that the arts and cultural offer is much richer and more diverse than has been captured and that access to it is wider than suggested. The paper, for example, focuses exclusively on the publicly funded arts: but we know from our own research, conducted independently by NISRA, through the mechanism of the General Population Survey (GPS), that a broader and more diverse range of people access arts. These are areas of activity that require little public investment and which are commercially viable and popular, such as film and music, for example.

2.3 Furthermore, there is a great deal of non-ticketed and non-venue based arts engagement which hasn't been captured as part of the research.

Arts activity does not just take place in dedicated arts spaces such as theatres, concert halls and galleries, but also in schools, libraries, community centres, Orange and Parish Halls etc.

The latter group of non-dedicated venues are crucially important, given the purview of this Inquiry and, in order to fully appreciate the current landscape with regards to inclusion in the arts of working class communities, the Arts Council recommends that the CAL committee further explores the full range and diversity of non-venue and non-ticketed based activity that takes place, as part of its Inquiry.

2.4 We also note **the research makes no reference to the value of the voluntary arts** in Northern Ireland. Throughout Northern Ireland there is a very significant level of engagement in voluntary arts: from amateur music groups, choirs and a youth orchestra, to video production; from drama groups to salsa dancing and ballroom; from floral art to craft-making. It is a hive of creative activity through which people participate in local arts and crafts groups in their own communities.

The Arts Council values the richness and diversity of voluntary arts in Northern Ireland and its ability to offer a range of platforms for local people to participate in arts activity, many for the first time. The voluntary arts are important to the vitality of local communities, both rural and urban. They encourage a culture of life-long learning and provide significant personal benefits. The committee should consider the benefits of the Voluntary Arts in Northern Ireland when weighing up the inclusivity of participatory arts in working class communities.

What do we mean by the term ‘Working Class’?

2.5 The Arts Council notes that the Inquiry centres on the inclusion in the Arts of ‘Working Class Communities’. For the purpose of this submission, the Arts Council draws on the definition used by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which often characterises working class communities as:

- Those living in neighbourhoods that are in the top 20 per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation
- People in social economic groups C2, D and E

When framing the question of working class communities’ access to the arts, it is important to consider the wider societal context, especially the prevalence of economic inequality in Northern Ireland and the attendant lack of educational and cultural opportunities that often arise as a consequence.

Evidence suggests that Northern Ireland has levels of social exclusion that are well above other regions of the United Kingdom, living standards that have persistently lagged behind GB (with the main factors being lower levels of employment and productivity, as exemplified in our highest economic inactivity rate in the UK of 27%); economic markets that are experiencing lower levels of growth; and a comparatively smaller private sector.

In addition, around 355,000 people live in relative income poverty in Northern Ireland, with child poverty rates being particularly dispiriting. This is a wider societal trend that has grown over the past 15 years with the gap between the rich and the poor increasing, in spite of targeted anti-poverty interventions.

We also know from evidence that a correlation exists between the most economically deprived and their ability to avail of certain public services, including access to education, a healthy living environment, social care services, policing and justice and employment and learning opportunities. Arguably, the link between poverty and education is the most significant when it comes to considering how working class people access the arts.

The central importance of education

2.6 For many years the Arts council has argued the central importance of high quality arts education within the curriculum, especially at an early stage in a child’s development. Numerous studies have shown that such an approach confers whole life benefits in terms of skills development, confidence building, cognitive enhancement as well as future personal enjoyment. We welcome the current policy emphasis on creativity in the curriculum but do not accept that it should be confined to STEM.

Evidence from the work of our arts organisations involved in developing the creativity of our children provides a powerful testament to that fact. For example, **Cahoots' Lights, Camera, Math'a'magic** is an interactive digital media magic show designed to ignite interest in maths for children in NI primary schools. The project increases access to families and schools regardless of their economic circumstances by providing performances free of charge. Performances also take place in disability specific schools.

Barriers Encountered in Accessing the Arts

2.7 More broadly conceived, it is recognised that the barriers preventing engagement with the arts are often multi-dimensional and include a range of financial, social, cultural and physiological factors. Whilst the scope of this Inquiry focuses on Working Class Communities, research findings provide an insight into the perceived barriers across the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

2.8 Our analysis of the barriers faced by people in accessing the arts reveals commonly encountered barriers to participation. **Most frequently cited difficulties are: lack of time, location of venue, lack of public transport, lack of information and feeling uncomfortable or out of place¹.**

2.9 Interestingly, in relation to the cost of attending the arts, the evidence is split on whether this is, in fact, an actual barrier. In comparison to the cost of other types of leisure/cultural activity which is often more expensive such as pop concerts, football matches, etc, many publically subsidised arts activities are modestly priced.

2.10 For some the barriers can be quite specific. For disabled people, lack of suitable access or sensory support may be the main inhibitor. For others it can be language difficulties or lack of facilities for children.

2.11 Approximately one in five (18%) individuals living in private households in Northern Ireland has some form of disability (21% for adults and 6% of children). Findings from the 2012 GPS Survey show that persons with a disability are less likely to attend arts events than those without a disability (59% compared with 87%). Only 25% of persons with a disability participated in arts events that year, compared to 31% of persons without a disability. These trends are consistent with findings from the 2009 GPS survey.

2.12 The Equality Commission states that in terms of the three types of disability - physical, learning or mental ill-health, the last of these evoked the greatest number of negative responses from the general public. Negative attitudes towards those experiencing mental ill-health are prevalent in Northern Ireland.

¹ <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/Barriers0908b.pdf>

Such attitudes adversely affect the experience of disabled people, discouraging their participation in wider civic society. The Equality Commission reported a 9 percentage point increase in 2008 in negative attitudes in towards mental ill-health. These perceptions can inhibit participation in normal daily activity, including participation in the arts. Research conducted by the Arts Council (3) identified a number of specific obstacles faced by persons with a disability. These included physical barriers such as ease of getting to and from a venue given transport restrictions (in urban and rural areas) and often the need to depend on a family member to help. Financial constraints were also identified including the added cost of transport and parking. The use of concession pricing was perceived to be 'discriminatory'; separating disabled people from other users. Social barriers were highlighted: signage, staff attitudes, lack of appropriate CRM and access within the venue.

Developing Best Practice in the field of disability and the arts

2.13 With these difficulties in mind, the Arts Council has taken a number of mitigating actions over recent years. The capital build programme has been used to improve venues (physical features: entrances and exits, emergency escape routes, internal and external doors, general layout and design). New venues have put in place other methods to support access (induction loops, Braille literature and disabled seating areas). Some venues offer a 'buddy' scheme which allows a carer a free ticket. The Arts Council supports the Arts & Disability Forum, a disabled-led development agency working towards cultural equity and funds clients to deliver a range of arts and disability projects such as the Arts & Disability Awards Ireland grant scheme, for individual disabled artists. The Equality Charter, offers 'kite-marking' for venues encouraging and rewarding good practice and the Arts Council encourages take up through the Promoting Access Group.

So what else has the Arts Council done to help mitigate barriers and promote access to the arts in our most deprived communities?

2.14 First, whilst recognising the complexity and scale of the challenges with which we are confronted, we need to be realistic about what can be achieved given the modest resources we invest in the arts in Northern Ireland. **In 2013/14 this equated to £6.83 per person, from the exchequer funds** allocated to us.

This is not to say that more cannot or should not be done.

The Arts Council has already put in place a number of initiatives to help ensure that a wide range of communities, particularly those from disadvantaged areas, continue to benefit from public investment, examples of which are referenced throughout the document and which are described in more detail later.

2.15 In addition, a significant level of funding is made within the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland; our pattern of funding (both sources: Exchequer and Lottery) over the past 3 full years shows that, in terms of the totality of awards, £40.7 million of funding went to the top 20 per cent most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs), representing 74 per cent of all funding awarded over that period.

An even larger proportion of exchequer funding was awarded to disadvantaged communities, with 79 per cent (£28.7 million) being distributed to arts organisations in the most deprived SOAs.

The obligations of our funded arts organisations

2.16 Bearing in mind the pattern of funding across Northern Ireland, we are conscious as a grant giving body, that our ability to democratise access to the arts by all, is reliant on our arts organisations and the degree to which they engage beyond a traditionally perceived “audience for the arts”.

2.17 It is pleasing to note that our arts organisations as a whole have a widely regarded track record in this area, achieved, in part, through targeted interventions and dedicated programmes, offered by us. For example ArtsCare, a unique Arts and Health Charity based in Northern Ireland, through its partnership with Health and Social Care Trusts engages a 19-strong Artists-in-Residence team. They co-ordinate workshops and performances in a range of health and social care settings, making all forms of art accessible to patients, clients, residents and staff. It is increasingly recognised that the Arts have a vital role to play within healthcare and contribute to enhancing the overall quality and experience of healthcare services (US Society for the Arts in Healthcare 2009). A variety of arts activities have been integrated into many programmes of care to assist with the challenges presented by conditions such as mental illness, chronic disease, dementia, brain injury, physical disability and learning disability, with the aim of improving health outcomes and quality of life.

2.18 There is now an emerging body of evidence on the benefits of arts in health, including economic benefits resulting from shorter hospital stays, less medication, fewer complications, staff retention, less stress-related illness and better quality of care. The arts have contributed to enhancing the health and wellbeing of service users, staff and visitors within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and other Trust through the successful delivery of innovative arts projects and programmes.

Colm Donaghy, Chief Executive, Belfast HSC Trust said at the launch of the strategy: “There is growing evidence that shows the benefits of the arts in health and social care, improving the overall quality and experience of care for users and carers and improving outcomes.

This is why, despite continuing economic and financial pressures on our services, embedding the arts in health and social care is more important than ever and why the publication of this strategy is so timely.”

2.19 As a public body, the Arts Council for many years has placed obligations on its funded organisations to extend their outreach activity to ensure that the arts can be accessed by all communities. Such an approach was initially introduced through specific Lottery funded programmes to encourage community engagement (“Access to the Arts”) but is now mainstreamed in the core activities of arts organisations.

2.20 In the past two years, and, in light of both our own statutory obligations and Ministerial priorities, specific targets have been set for our core funded clients asking them to demonstrate what extra measures they are taking to engage with those suffering from poverty and social exclusion and these form part of their conditions of grant with the Arts Council.

The Evidence from our Survey

2.21 Our regularly funded organisations’ survey shows that, collectively, methods used to target socially and economically deprived communities in 2012/13 were effective in reaching nearly three-quarters of a million people, through performance and participation based activity alone.

2.22 Analysis also demonstrates that almost half of all participation based activities (45%) delivered by the Arts Council’s regularly funded organisations takes place in neighbourhoods that are in the top 20 per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

2.23 In relation to the accessibility of arts performances for working class communities, data from the Arts Council RFO survey 2012-2013 informs us that almost two thirds have taken place in neighbourhoods which are located in the top 20 per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation to communities in Northern Ireland (64%).

1. Some examples of accessibility and outreach activity from ACNI Regularly Funded Organisations:

Replay Theatre Company engages with over 10,000 children and young people in both urban and rural areas through its artistic programme, creating work for audiences which are underserved and/or lacking in access in high quality theatre and arts provision.

Replay’s UP programme brings high quality arts experiences to pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in schools across NI.

The Ulster Orchestra runs a number of initiatives to ensure increased access to the arts for all members of the community.

Under the ‘Hear our voice’ programme, Ulster Orchestra players work with marginalised community groups. Regular educational workshops will engage with up to 10,000 individuals. Focus will be given to areas of specific social and economic disadvantage.

The Lyric Theatre makes 1,100 tickets accessible at £5 each to areas of low income and those in most need through its community ticketing scheme.

10 bursary places are provided for those from low income families as part of its Lyric summer school. In addition, the Lyric delivers a theatre programme to 180 pupils on emigration across primary schools in areas of multiple deprivation in NI.

In 2014/15, **the Grand Opera House** will conduct a programme of 10 local productions reflecting the diversity of NI culture. It is estimated that 2,000 members of the public will benefit from this programme.

In November 2014, a cross community outreach project will involve pantomime workshops in six primary schools located in areas of social deprivation. The outreach project will be delivered to 168 children aged 9 who will stage their own pantomime performance using the skills gleaned in the workshop.

The Playhouse's education based projects are delivered to groups experiencing disadvantage. The total number of beneficiaries from the programme is estimated to be 10,000-15,000.

In 2014/15 the Playhouse will deliver OCN accredited training for young people aged between 16-18 from disadvantaged parts of Derry and surrounding areas. They will also deliver Open College Network arts training to promote literacy skills with 30 young people in Strabane.

In 2014/15, **Youth Action** will run the 'Kaleidoscope' project which will deliver 60 workshops in disadvantaged communities with one festival performance to 250 members of the local community. 45 young people will participate weekly as part of this project.

A total of 2,400 marginalised young people from the Youth Arts hub and College Square North will engage in performances from the Rainbow Factory pantomime and summer musical.

In October 2014, **The MAC** will hold the M.A.D.E (Music, Art, Dance and Everything) festival for people aged 14-18 from Belfast, many of whom will be from hard to reach communities.

The Den Collective initiative provides a collective space designed by young people from hard to reach communities within the vicinity of the MAC: the main catchment area being North Belfast which is amongst the top 5 most deprived wards in the city. A total of 680 young people will be engaged

Young At Art's *Life is for Living* project will deliver events in hard to reach areas and communities. 24 community events will take place in year 1, delivered to an estimated audience of 1,250.

Young At Art's education programme connects schools, particularly those in areas of high deprivation. More than 50% of participating schools come from the top 10% areas of high deprivation. Measures include CPD sessions for teachers to build capacity and assisted transport and ticket schemes.

Artscare's approach to delivering the arts through the engagement of professional artists ensures that the arts are accessible in hard to reach communities.

Artscare continues to increase access to the arts in a community health context. *Let the Dance Begin* promotes peace building in socially deprived areas of Strabane. Through its older people and younger people's services, Artscare will reach into rural areas of unmet need in border regions such as Armagh, Strabane and Derry/Londonderry.

Open Arts has three visual arts groups in operation. One of the groups is based in the Divis Community Centre and is specifically for blind or visually impaired people.

The *Open Arts Community Choir* is inclusive of anyone aged 16 and over regardless of disability, race, political affiliation, gender or musical experience. The Choir has been running for 13 years and delivers 38 workshops and 6 performances on an annual basis.

In 2014/15, **Drake Music Project's** *Educate with FigureNotes* entire programme will involve outreach workshops in communities, thus increasing more opportunities for creativity and learning.

In collaboration with Cedar, Southern Area Trust and the Nerve Centre, *Music for all* will afford increased access for adults and children who would not otherwise avail of such opportunities from the Drake Music Project.

SECTION THREE

Approaches to Tackling Barriers:

3.1 There are many different approaches designed to engaging people in the arts, especially those who do not naturally gravitate towards the diverse offering and opportunities that the arts present. Strategies to overcome barriers such as physical location, ease of attendance, the price of a ticket are important considerations as previously stated: but these are surface manifestations of what is a deeper problem related to the fundamental democratic and egalitarian principle of equal access for all. All too often the latter is circumscribed by class, educational advantage and/or family tradition of being involved in the arts. What is required is longer term, sustained approaches designed to engage those who, for whatever reasons, have not had the opportunity to enjoy the benefits that the arts confer until now. For that to succeed working in partnership is key, be it with artists, and arts organisations who are central to all that we wish to achieve; with the Minister and the Department; with other cultural agencies with whom positive collaboration can yield rich dividends; with the education and health sectors where the arts can be enhanced and profoundly beneficial.

We have much to learn from and to offer. We also know that there is a technological revolution taking place in which the emergence of digital and social media is profoundly affecting how we relate to each other and the wider world. This is especially true for children and young people. Whilst it poses real challenge, it nonetheless offers huge opportunity for creative self-expression and the ability to overcome barriers to access and participation that have endured for generations. One of our priorities as a public body is to ensure that we can fashion imaginative programmes of engagement, through our arts organisations and artists, to unlock the creative potential of our young people and bring the richness of the arts closer to them in the process.

But we are not starting from a blank page. We have some of the most resourceful and creative organisations in these islands engaging in these issues. It is often the heartbeat of their work.

The ensuing examples illustrate that fact.

The Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture:

3.2 It is a strong example of a whole city approach, concentrating on ensuring that those who live in the most marginalised communities were at the centre of the arts and cultural programme throughout the year, thus fostering greater social cohesion in the process.

Major events that drew large attendances regardless of class or background included: the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the biggest celebration of Irish Culture anywhere in the world and for the first time held north of the border since its foundation in 1951. More than 430,000 people descended on Derry over the course of eight days making it the largest since the event began; the Lumiere Light Festival was a huge success which saw 179,000 people from across all ages and communities visit the city across four evenings; the BBC Radio 1 Big Weekend flagship event was attended by 40,000 people and helped to bring communities and new audiences together through their shared passion of world class music. In terms of social inclusion to the arts, these three events share a common theme – attendance was free of charge and all communities were drawn by a high quality artistic production.

It is often queried whether large scale events have an enduring impact beyond the sheer immediate experience of those participating. However, reflecting on what the City of Culture UK achieved, the Chief Executive of Derry City Council, summed it up thus: “ There was a palpable, shared sense of civic pride in the city – a belief that we were capable of delivering world class events and, as a consequence, our self-confidence has taken a huge step forward.” Such intangibilities may be hard to translate into cold economic outcomes, but, we would argue, remain essential building blocks of any new re-imagined future for the city.

Capitalising on those arts and cultural experiences that local people enjoyed and extending that engagement into the future is both vital and necessary. As part of its modest contribution to realising that ambition, the Arts Council has joined with Derry City Council to support a legacy fund of £900,000 over three years to ensure the momentum built up under the City of Culture 2013 is sustained and communities from across the region, including those from a working class background, will continue to engage in and access high quality arts.

Rural Working Class Communities

3.3 The Arts Council recognises that working class communities' access to the arts is not only an urban related phenomenon. Working class people living in rural communities often face even greater barriers to accessing the arts due to social isolation, poor transport infrastructure and general service dispersal, in a way that cities and towns don't. Alongside supporting arts organisations rooted in local communities, we have also encouraged our arts organisations in major conurbations to engage with rural communities. An example is set out below:

3.4 The Verbal Arts Centre iStory digital arts programme is targeted at those living in **working class rural communities** and aims to tackle digital exclusion amongst older people by helping them articulate their stories, thoughts and experiences

The project consisted of a partnership between Verbal Arts Centre and 12 community and statutory partners, including Derry, Coleraine and Belfast Councils, U3A, Age NI, Arthritis Care and Engage with Age in order to widely promote the project. iStory was conducted over a 52 week period with 45 creative sessions delivered (135 hours activity) in Derry, Belfast and Coleraine. Older people living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, people with dementia/other health problems and those at risk of isolation were targeted via community networks. All participants received non-accredited digital training for story-telling and story-boarding.

The use of digital technology as an art form was considered to be innovative and demonstrates that older people on low incomes are unlikely to be able to afford the latest technology and are less likely than working adults or schoolchildren to have access to computers. **The levels of attendance illustrate that the arts are wide-ranging and relevant to people from disparate backgrounds, not just the middle classes.** iPads are expensive however and Verbal Arts Centre invested in seven which will continue to be used in other projects.

3.5 Through Lottery Funding, ACNI currently support community based arts projects in Castlederg, Coalisland, Omagh, Donaghcloney, Rosslea and Donaghmore to name a few. These projects are devised by communities with a focus on developing and extending access to the arts for those living in rural isolation. Many projects deal with specific rural issues including Sliabh Beagh Development Association who have developed a project that encourages younger and older farmers to engage and participate in the arts.

Test Drive the Arts

3.6 Another approach aimed at persuading people of the value of engaging in the arts is evident in the 'test drive' approach adopted by Audiences NI. Initially targeting individuals and groups that hitherto had not experienced the arts, it has now moved to incorporate an area based approach by working with housing associations and community organisations in West Belfast. It is a good example of promoting social inclusion in the arts, helping anyone over 18 years of age to apply for free tickets to venues they haven't attended before.

In December 2013, Test Drive the Arts reached a milestone reaching its 20,000th participant with around one third of Test Drive tickets (6,825; 34%) provided to people living at postcodes in the most deprived areas of Belfast.

Evidence suggests that the initiative has been successful in attracting new or re-engaged audience members to attend further arts events in the future; around three quarters of those surveyed indicated they had re-attended an arts event since their Test-drive experience (73%) . The following quotes have been provided by those who have already benefited from the Test Drive the Arts initiative:

"Test Drive is an excellent service and opportunity to for people to experience local arts venues. I have passed the website info on to all of my friends and family, who have all successfully tried some of the events. It encourages people to return to certain venues and realise how easily accessible the arts are to everyone. Very prompt replies from staff."

(Event: The Beat & The Very Specials @ Féile an Phobail)

"Had a really great time, thanks to Test Drive I was able to attend this event which otherwise I would have missed."

(Event: Stendhal Festival of Art)

Arts and Older People

3.7 The Arts Council has launched the Arts and Older People Programme 2013-2016 which aims to engage with vulnerable and isolated older people using participation based approaches. It is a means of promoting social inclusion, recognising the barriers which prevent older people from participating in a wide range of activities are different. A number of aims under the programme are relevant to the inquiry including: the ambition to achieve a more peaceful, fair and inclusive community that does not discriminate on grounds of age and ethnicity; improve the quality of life of older people living in disadvantaged, marginalized and deprived areas; create activities for older people that promote positive mental health and wellbeing and strengthen the voice of older people. The programme is inclusive of all communities and focuses heavily on tackling the specific social justice issues of fairness, equal rights and opportunities for all based on the themes of isolation and loneliness, social inclusion and poverty.

An evaluation report from the first phase of the Arts and Older People (2010-2013) was published in October 2013.

Re-imaging Communities

3.8 Building Peace through the arts: re-imaging communities programme is Northern Ireland wide but targets particular local communities' access to public art and continues to connect with artists and local communities imagining a different future for themselves as a result of the 'peace process' through developing new artworks to address the visible and non-visible signs of sectarianism and racism.

The Programme has extended to the border counties of the Republic of Ireland thanks to Peace III EU funding. For many involved in this process, it is their first experience of participating in a creative arts-led venture and one which engenders considerable local civic pride in its achievement. **The programme helps tackle issues of peripherality and rural isolation.**

An evaluation report from the first phase of the programme evidenced a number of benefits such as the inclusion of marginalised people or groups who might not normally have a say in community matters and increased participation in the arts for all involved. Almost three quarters of projects were based within the most deprived super output areas in Northern Ireland:

“To date 123 projects have been funded under the Re-imaging Communities programme with 73 per cent of these based in areas categorised as being located in some of the most deprived super output areas in Northern Ireland. Many of the projects are based in predominately Protestant and loyalist areas, which is perhaps not surprising as it could be argued that the incidence of symbolism is often greater in these areas. Monitoring data in relation to 51 projects indicated that 6,893 people participated in workshops and focus groups in these projects; over three quarters of them being 25 years or younger.

The current programme aims to support the delivery of approximately 80 Public Art Projects by mid-2015. Roadshows, information sessions and funding fairs have helped to ensure a strong geographic spread across the programme by supporting communities across Northern Ireland and the border areas that want to tackle signs of sectarianism and racism. Early projects include:

- Bonds Street Community Association (Waterside, Derry/Londonderry)
- Charter for Northern Ireland (East Belfast)
- West Belfast Athletic and Cultural Society (Shankill, Belfast)

STart Up Programme

3.9 ACNI's Start-Up programme provides funding to areas where there is weak cultural infrastructure. The aim of the programme is to provide support to organisations that have not previously availed of Arts Council funding, with the intention of making a real difference to smaller community groups, particularly those who have not been engaged in arts activity who struggle to find sources of funding including those that display the characteristics of rural working class communities.

Examples of funded projects under the Start-UP programme that enable a broad and diverse range of the population to participate in culture, arts and leisure activities include: Cuan Mhuire Rehabilitation Centre (Newry); North West Women's' Collective (Derry/Londonderry, rural); Syzdalimit (performance arts programme for those with disabilities, Omagh); Council for the Homeless (youth film group, Portadown).

APPENDIX ONE

Examples of Impact

The following provide examples of impact on individual lives from Arts Council clients in relation to accessibility and outreach work.

DU Dance (NI) Case Study 1

Mary (name has been changed to protect the identity of the person)

Mary is a woman in her late 70's living with her husband in a sheltered housing scheme in Belfast. Her husband is suffering from dementia and Mary was spending all her time looking after him. They never socialised, ventured out only to go to the doctors or to shop, people hardly knew them. Mary got involved in a DU Dance performance project only because the workshops took place in the sheltered housing scheme where she lived. (2011/12) To begin with she came down from her room, leaving her husband for just 15mins to join in warm ups. A few times she left after 5mins as she was anxious about her husband's safety. After a few weeks she was able to take part for longer periods of time and felt able to leave him for half an hour. Eventually her husband came down with her and enjoyed sitting and watching the work. Mary went from being anxious to being relaxed and having fun, enjoying the company of others in the centre. They also enjoyed her company and felt that the work had "unlocked" her. Mary started meeting up with the other women for coffee mornings and taking part in other activities. In the dance workshops she became more vocal, sharing memories and thoughts and opinions on life's changes. When it came to the performance Mary's husband was there at every one. The staff and others from the centre recognized that this was very important for Mary but she needed support to participate.

Mary said – "Mentally and physically this has been good for me. There was a while I was doubtful I could do it, I couldn't leave (), but it was something I really wanted to do and I knew I had to stretch myself. () and (), (women in the centre), have been a great help and they're a good laugh too".

Mary's husband is now in full time care. Mary still lives in the sheltered housing scheme, but now she has friends and is not socially isolated. Recently a group from the centre went to a performance at the opera house, Mary was with them.

The group has already signed up for another DU Dance project in autumn 2014.

DU Dance (NI) CASE STUDY 2

John (name has been changed to protect the identity of the person)

John lost his father and very shortly afterwards his grandmother, when he was 13 and went off the rails. At 14 his behaviour had become so bad that he was kicked out of school. His first contact with DU Dance was through a performance project the company ran involving people from a drop in centre. In his words –

“I was in a bad place. I didn’t know where my life was going.

I was hanging out with the wrong crowd, missing school, getting into bother. Many days, I couldn’t even manage to get out of bed.

When they asked me if I was interested in taking part in a dance project, my first reaction was ‘no way!’

Dance? Could you imagine the flak I would get?

That first performance completely changed my life.

Instead of someone shouting at me for not doing something,

I was surrounded by applause. It was unbelievable.”

That was in 2002. John went on to do three more projects with DU Dance before joining the company’s apprenticeship scheme. He spent a year gaining skills, control of his anger and channelling his physical energy into dance. He also gained GCSE’s in Maths and English that year. Nine years later and numerous projects later John is still involved with DU Dance. Now he works as a full time a personal carer for a man with profound physical disabilities and part time with a dance company who focus on disability work. He is regular visitor to the DU Dance office and volunteers on most of the company’s performance project.

The patience, understanding and thick skin of the DU Dance artistic team, (John put his head through the wall screaming with anger on the first dance rehearsal), and the ability to be creative while being physically challenged have moved John from an angry young teenagers to a sensitive, caring young man. It has been a journey and only possible because the company is a development company and in for the long haul.

Belfast Community Circus outreach in Lurgan

Belfast Community Circus uses the medium of community circus as a platform to share positive experiences for young people from different communities across Northern Ireland. This work uses a dynamic approach of arts-based education known as 'Social Circus' to teach skills to marginalized young people, including an Outreach element involving a team of experienced tutors delivering training to young people within their own communities. In 2011/12, this service was availed of by the Link, a faith-based youth centre, offering a range of arts and recreation-based activities for young people in Lurgan.

As well as engaging with Belfast Community Circus to deliver community training skills, the Link has also worked with Replay Productions, a youth theatre company producing cutting-edge work for performances at a range of venues including community centres. In 2011, the Centre hosted a performance of 'The Flock' which explored life on the streets through the eyes of a fourteen year old, female, gang member.

The Links Youth Centre is located on the interface between the north end of **Lurgan** which is considered largely Catholic and the south end which is considered Protestant. Its perceived 'neutral' location draws marginalised young people from two sides of a divided community which is characterised by sectarian violence and anti-social behaviour. Services include an After Schools Drop-in centre (known as the Underground), a dedicated dance studio, a detached youth work unit and a range of diversionary activities delivered every Friday night.

The lack of positive role models leaves disenfranchised young men vulnerable to recruitment by paramilitary groups in the area. The Link provides positive alternatives to this route using a structured programme of artistic interventions such as dance and drama, designed to explore cultural and social heritage and express a more constructive sense of identity and place. This allows participants to develop a mutual sense of respect and tolerance for each other, breaking down feelings of resentment and mistrust often developed over generations and compounded by multiple layers of deprivation.

For the majority of young people, the Link has provided young people with their first real engagement opportunity in the arts outside school. In the majority of cases, those interviewed expressed surprise at the enjoyment gained from the art-based interventions. Comments included: **“I wasn’t sure what to expect to begin with but I really enjoyed the freedom it [circus skills training] gave me to express myself and be creative.”** Another participant stated that **“It’s not something I get a chance to do really. The art allowed me to think about the journey I’ve made since I started going [to the Link] and how much better things are now.”**

The opportunity to socialise with young people from different backgrounds was picked up by a number of young people: “It keeps you off the streets and allows people to mix with different religions. It’s really fun.” Another participant described how “We don’t normally get a chance to meet with people from different religions. Normally it’s just home and school, that’s it. It’s really different.”

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