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the Knowledge

Learning from London



THE ARTS CASE

WHY THE ARTS
MAKE A DIFFERENCE
GERARD LEMOS

City Bridge Trust



Foreword

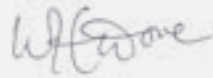
City Bridge Trust has built its reputation as a generalist funder of London's Third Sector with clear well published programmes delivering social outcomes.

But we are not usually known as major funders of the arts, culture or heritage. So why did we commission Gerard Lemos* to make a case for the arts? Well, last autumn when funding announcements on reductions in public funding shook the arts community we wanted to stimulate a national debate on the purpose and value of the arts. An analysis of each of our seven grants programmes revealed that the Trust funds an incredible variety of inspirational arts activities. Each is helping either improve mental health or increase the participation of disabled people or assist with the rehabilitation of offenders, for example.

The public expenditure reductions, in the wake of the economic crisis have hit the Third Sector hard. Now more than ever, when competition for funding is ferocious, many organisations, and arts organisations in particular, must demonstrate how their work makes a difference and improves people's lives. Whilst it is self evident that arts activities contribute to people's well-being, it is

harder to show how they can stop people from reoffending or help older people remain longer in their own homes. It is a tough funding environment and payment by results is here to stay and we want to showcase some of the enormous range of creative activity, which can literally transform the lives of people who are from some of the most isolated and disadvantaged communities in London. *The Arts Case* hasn't got all the answers but we hope it will accelerate national dialogue on the value of arts activities as mechanisms for achieving improved health and well-being, increasing participation and unleashing creative potential with real and measurable social outcomes.

We are indebted to the charities who opened their doors to us and generously shared their experience. Whether you are a grant-maker, commissioner or an interested observer, we hope you find *The Arts Case* useful.



Billy Dove MBE JP
Chairman, City Bridge Trust

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*Disclaimer

Responsibility for the views expressed, together with responsibility for any errors, remains with the author Gerard Lemos, (Lemos&Crane).

Introduction

David Hockney, a longstanding technophile, uses his iPhone to paint the dawn light from his bedroom window in North Yorkshire.

“What clearer, more luminous light are we ever afforded? Especially here [in Yorkshire] where the light comes rising over the sea... But in the old days, one never could, because, of course, ordinarily it would be too dark to see the paints; or else, if you turned on a light so as to be able to see them, you’d lose the subtly gathering tones of the coming sun. But with an iPhone..., I just reach for the device, turn it on, start mixing and matching the colours, laying in the evolving scene.”¹

A technology that assists in ‘subtly gathering tones of the coming sun’ must be something special. Hockney’s enthusiasm extends to the unmediated dissemination to friends, avoiding hard-headed dealers, galleries or customers.

“It’s always there in the pocket, there’s no thrashing about, scrambling for the right colour. One can set to work immediately, there’s this wonderful impromptu quality, this freshness to the activity; and when it’s over, best of all, there’s no mess to clean up. You just turn off the machine. Or even better, you hit send and your little cohort of friends around the world gets to experience a similar immediacy. There’s something, finally, very intimate about the whole process.”²

Arts funding tends to go either to companies that make artistic work or venues that produce and promote it. In addition, education has in recent years been prioritised by arts funders. However, the case for the arts goes far beyond creation, performance and education. Drawing on the experiences of arts projects funded by City Bridge Trust, lessons are drawn here for funders and commissioners of services for vulnerable people who might not traditionally fund the arts but for whom the arts potentially represent a highly effective way of achieving their desired outcomes.

“...the case for the arts goes far beyond creation, performance and education.”

¹ ‘David Hockney’s iPhone Passion’, Lawrence Weschler, New York Review of Books in *The Best Technology Writing 2010*, Yale University Press, 2010, p81

² Ibid, p82

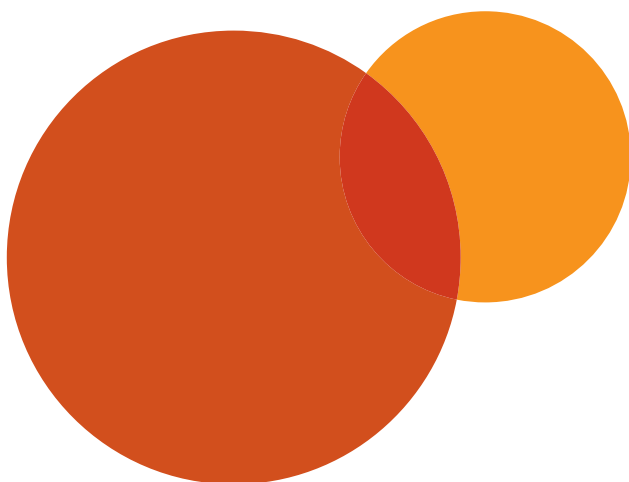
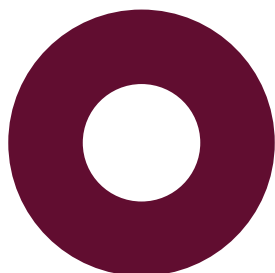
The projects

We reviewed a database of several hundred arts organisation that Lemos&Crane has compiled over many years. These included arts projects promoting literacy, working in prisons, in community centres, in theatres and art galleries, projects which focused on particular client groups such as homeless people, people with mental health problems and prisoners and ex-offenders. The database included projects engaged in creative writing, storytelling, music making projects, choirs, book clubs, visual arts classes and exhibitions, drama workshops, theatre skills, playwriting and digital arts.

From these we selected a range of arts projects to visit, watching and discussing their work, in a range of settings, including a care home for older people, arts centres, a women's prison, a young offenders' institution, secondary schools, a training centre, Sadlers Wells and the Albany in Deptford.

The activities, like the settings in which they took place, were tremendously varied: drama workshops in a secondary school, a women's prison and a young offenders' institution; a reminiscence session in a care home for older people, a super hero club night for young adults with learning disabilities at the Albany; script writing and film making workshops for people over 60 and another for those who had experienced mental health problems, a theatre design class for women ex-offenders, music workshops, drawing and art classes and exhibitions.

The participants we encountered were hugely diverse: people with mental health problems, both those living in the community and inpatients; older people in care homes, people over 60, young people, young adults with learning disabilities, offenders, including people serving life sentences for murder, people from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, men and women.



Age Exchange

Age Exchange Theatre Trust is long-established and has been a pioneering force in intergenerational work and work with older people through the arts. They are leaders in reminiscence work. They gather invaluable reminiscence materials which are then used in a range of settings. The workshops take place in the community as well as in residential care homes and hospitals. Age Exchange has translated and interpreted the experiences and memories of thousands of older people into touring productions, schools work, training projects, arts programmes and cultural events. As well as the benefits to the participants, which are well-established in research, work in care homes contributes to making professional care of older people more personal and less depressing. Loneliness, helplessness and boredom are the triangle of curses that afflict too many older people living in care homes and reminiscence work of the sort undertaken by Age Exchange is a welcome corrective.

We attended a workshop in a residential care home. Some of the residents who attended were living with dementia, the group for whom reminiscence work is most effective. The session about food used songs, pictures, cookery books, advertisements, kitchen utensils, a bar of soap and a tea cosy. Responses included, "On Fridays Mum didn't cook but brought in fish and chips."

Another resident noted, "My dad was a miserable bugger."

Most of the discussion focused on childhood rather than memories from adult life. The facilitators were skilled and enthusiastic, showing a touching and admirable kindness and gentleness; perhaps the most important thing.



Clean Break

Established in 1979 by two female prisoners, Clean Break Theatre is recognised nationally as a leading arts education and training provider for female prisoners, ex-prisoners and ex-offenders. Clean Break is a theatre, education and new writing company which works through theatre for personal and political change, involving women whose lives have been affected by the criminal justice system. Its ethos is that engaging in theatre creates new opportunities for women with these histories, developing personal, social, artistic and professional skills. Clean Break's principal activities include a nationally accredited education and training programme in theatre and the performing arts; an annual touring production within theatres and prisons; and training and education using the medium of theatre for prisoners, offenders and other professionals working within criminal justice.

We attended part of an excellent theatre design course for a group of about ten women. The course was highly structured and demanded intensive time and attention. The impressive focus was on tasks, making things and achievements. Reflection and debate were not part of the methodology. From observation and conversation it was clear that the participants got a great deal out of the course as well as the wider encounter with Clean Break. As well as skills, camaraderie and a considerable boost to their self-esteem was delivered by achievement on the course.

In informal conversation many of the women told us that their lives, though much improved, were still complicated and in some ways difficult. For some of them their lives had never been easy regardless of entanglement with criminal justice. Their early experiences of education had been unsatisfactory and disempowering; relationships had been disappointing and ephemeral; parenthood proved demanding; jobs had not been easy to come by. And drugs had in some cases played too large and destructive a role in their lives. Their confidence as well as their quality of life was greatly enhanced not just by what they were learning and the skills they were acquiring, but also from the mind-expanding, life-enhancing stimuli and pleasures of going to the theatre with friends and becoming involved in the arts more generally. Their involvement with the arts, while not solving all their problems, was making their lives bigger, and thereby making their problems relatively smaller; a profound and unarguable benefit.



Company of Elders

Sadler's Wells set up an over 60s club in 1989 with four day centres in Islington. The focus is on dance, with the emphasis on movement rather than ballet, plus an educational input from leading choreographers and dancers. Members are sometimes taught by visiting choreographers to the main theatre and perform with some of the professional dancers. The Company of Elders is a pioneering dance company with an average age of participants of 75. Half the members are over 80. Most of the company have had no formal dance training prior to joining the company and yet are able to achieve the highest standards culminating in a performance in the Sadler's Wells Theatre before an audience which has paid the full price for tickets. The company is over-subscribed and therefore closed to new members.

We attended a performance by the Company of Elders as part of a mixed bill in the studio theatre. The bill featured dancers of all ages from various Sadler's Wells' activities and programmes. There was no hint of populism or dumbing down. The look, feel and movement was highly contemporary; more Pina Bausch than Strictly Come Dancing. In conversation with the dancers afterwards, it was clear that they took the work extremely seriously, seeing it as self-expression and artistic creation, not just a leisure pastime or social activity. One of the dancers observed tartly that she thought much contemporary dance featuring young dancers was 'soft porn'. That rather acerbic observation speaks of a great deal of pride and commitment; seriousness of purpose and resolute creativity – all requirements to be an artist.

Core Arts

Core Arts, established in 1992, provides visual art, music and multi-media opportunities for people with mental health problems living in Hackney and surrounding areas. The levels of mental ill-health in deprived boroughs such as Hackney are significantly above the national average. Surveys of local in-patients in mental health wards show considerable interest in artistic therapies as a means of self-expression, an assistance to peace of mind and recovery. Each week Core Arts offers 52 workshops for painting, creative writing, music and singing. Service users are involved in the planning of classes and activities, for example, they proposed a change from open sessions to time tabled classes. Participants wanted to encourage regular attendance with the kind of structure which they sought in their lives as a whole.

We visited the Core Arts centre, observing and meeting people taking part in life drawing classes, music teaching, a jam session, art classes and IT skills sessions. Musicians worked together and had good technical equipment for recording and producing CDs. The art sessions were for hospital in-patients with mental health problems. The atmosphere was calm, focused and productive. The artists in the life drawing classes seemed pretty accomplished to our untrained eyes. An exhibition of the work of Rudolph Lindo, a Core Arts member, was also on display.

As with Clean Break the focus was on the task and the output. The emphasis was on making art, not reflecting on or debating personal experiences. As with Clean Break the prevailing ethos was seeking to de-stigmatise the experiences of members by widening their opportunities and range. Labelling and stereotyping of people and mental health problems were actively avoided and the focus was on the people and the art, not the problems and the past.

Heart 'n' Soul

Heart 'n' Soul is a leading organisation in the disability arts movement based in the Albany, a community arts centre, in Deptford. Heart 'n' Soul provides opportunities for adults with learning disabilities to create musical and theatrical productions which then tour and are also performed at open events in mainstream clubs.

We attended a club night for 300 young people with learning disabilities and their families and carers at the Albany in Deptford. This was a splendid occasion. The theme for the evening was superheroes and costumes for dressing up were available, as was photographic equipment to record the memorable experience of becoming Spider Man or Super Man for the evening. On the main stage the Fish Police were playing, a band that had been formed by people who had attended Heart 'n' Soul activities, some of whom had learning disabilities. One was deaf and another played bass with Grace Jones. This was interspersed with DJ and VJ sessions, as well as an open mic session. In the rooms around the centre there was a tranquil 'midnight garden' for relaxing and calming down, a computer games room, an art zone, a 'unique boutique' and a parents' and carers' room along with the café and the bar.

The atmosphere was exceptionally convivial with much dancing by (not so old) parents as well as young people. Many of those attending were obviously friends, pleased to see one another again, in lively conversation. Romance, (or at least a few kisses) blossomed among some young people. Although, a different kind of project to Clean Break or Core Arts, Heart 'n' Soul sought not to dwell too much on problems, preferring instead to think about possibilities. The fact that the evening was specifically for young people with learning disabilities meant that the participants could rest assured of being free from prejudice, stigma or hostility and could be unconcerned about seeming conspicuously different and therefore shy or anxious. The experience was lively and life-enhancing.



Spare Tyre

Spare Tyre is a long-established and innovative theatre company which works with marginalised groups giving opportunities to express themselves through creating and performing pieces of theatre on subjects important to them. Spare Tyre began life more than 30 years ago as a radical women's theatre project, but has since broadened its remit significantly, seeking to address disadvantage in a range of areas.

Hot Pots are an ensemble of artists over 60. Hot Pots are 'role models speaking to their own community and challenging social prejudice'. Hot Pots are uniquely placed to articulate and celebrate the voice of older people. They devise and perform their own shows, often based on personal experience. Hot Pots also tour to audiences in community and arts venues. "They are committed to having their voices heard – enlightening audiences about the potential of older people." The ethos of the Hot Pots group was very specific. They wished to interrogate their own experience, turn it into theatre or film and perform with a clear goal of challenging prejudices about older people like them. They were using theatre and film to campaign through speaking out in an authentic and different voice to prevailing negative stereotypes. Their artistic practice was a study in assertiveness. The benefits are felt in the gaining of pride in being yourself, being different.



During our encounters they were being trained by a freelance actor/director in how to write, script, film and appear in a short film. Some of them had already produced ideas and half-written scripts and they made a good deal of progress in working together to develop a story board, validating the individual achievement of the person whose original idea they were working on, but working together to realise it creatively.

The group clearly had a strong, bonded collective identity as a group of artists, as well as people who wanted to challenge negative received wisdom about older people. As individuals, they seem to have embraced the identity of an artist for themselves. So, while they may set as their mission influencing other people's perceptions, the primary and immediate impact was on their impressions of themselves.



Synergy Theatre Project

Synergy Theatre Project was established in 2000 specialising in working with prisoners, offenders and ex-offenders through drama for better rehabilitation and to enhance their skills. Its work also aims to raise debate about imprisonment and its consequences in the wider public arena. It has a strong programme of supporting prisoners to write, produce and perform their own work. One of the important strands of Synergy's work in recent years is to harness the experiences and 'life-skills' of the offenders and ex-offenders to use drama work with young people – especially those deemed at risk of offending – to challenge their preconceptions and attitudes. Synergy has developed strong links (and received funding) from local police forces and crime reduction agencies and has garnered much praise for this work, including their work in schools.

We visited a women's prison and two schools where Synergy were working, all as part of the same project. The project was built around a play called 'Random' by Debbie Tucker Green about the reactions of family members to a stabbing and killing. It is an emotionally powerful and poetic one-woman play which was performed in the prison and also in a theatre where the school children saw it. After seeing the play all three groups discussed it, as well as participating in drama workshops about putting on a play like this themselves. Some of the women in prison had lived through similar experiences themselves and the emotional effect was powerful and cathartic. In the discussion there was considerable disclosure of personal experiences and emotions, all skilfully and empathetically handled by the facilitators.

Empathy was the main theme of the debate. For people who have committed a violent crime, understanding and empathising with the experience of the victim and their family is a critical dimension in coming to terms with the crime committed, moving on from it and not reoffending in a similar way. Someone who simply cannot see the world through the eyes of the people on whom their behaviour impacts is ill-equipped both to manage their own emotions, relationships and behaviour in the future and to reduce the likelihood of doing something similar again. This was a rather different ethos to what we had encountered in the more task and accomplishment-based projects we had visited. In this case, the emphasis was on reflecting personal experience and drawing lessons from the artistic encounter which might help in understanding and making sense of them.

In the workshops in schools, teachers had included young people who were at risk of exclusion or had been in some kind of trouble, though they were not singled out or identified. The emphasis in the workshop was therefore more on having a preventative and deterrent impact through the insight gained from the play's themes. The atmosphere in the drama workshops was busy and creative, rather than reflective or disclosing. The young people were left to deduce the important messages relevant to themselves. The emphasis, unlike in the prison, was rather more on the creative process of making a play than on a therapeutic emotional encounter.



Summary

Though the settings, activities and methods and participants were so enormously varied, there were also striking similarities. All the projects used highly structured, focused, clearly defined methods. Notable by its absence was time-wasting, drifting, lassitude and pointless activity. This may not sound like much, but these are often features of activities in community and youth centres. Allied to the clear, structures and methods, was that the facilitators, trainers, group leaders, theatre directors and so on were all skilled professionals, highly motivated and committed. These are again not qualities encountered everywhere.

Well-intentioned projects often struggle to motivate and engage people into the activities. Few incentives are on offer; stigma may be attached and the activities may be dull and too much like hard work. In prisons or institutional settings people can be obliged to participate since they have few other choices and are susceptible to moral pressure, particularly if, for example, they know that compliance and participation may assist in the granting of a parole application. In community settings however, people may not be interested or motivated and cannot easily be cajoled or persuaded. However, in these arts projects, there was no shortage either of demand or enthusiasm. Many of the activities, groups and projects were fully subscribed, even with a waiting list, such as the Company of Elders. Others, like Heart 'n' Soul's club night at the Albany, attracted more than 300 people. Some came considerable distances in assisted transport.

Demand for these activities and attendance at them is not necessarily the same as enthusiasm or impact. But we encountered many examples of enormously animated discussions, for example, about the Synergy theatre production of 'Random' by Debbie Tucker Green for example, a play about someone being killed by stabbing and the traumatic emotions brought on in the family; themes which resonated with the experiences of the women in the room, some of whom disclosed that they had been convicted of homicides

themselves. Discussions often took a personal and disclosing turn, becoming intimate and emotional. A powerful space for personal reflection had evidently been created along with the possibility of new insight leading to a change in attitude and behaviour in the future.

There are evident differences in ethos, approach and values between these projects. For some the emphasis is on skills and task, without reference to experience or reflection. For others, emphasis is placed on using a work of art to enhance reflection and the gaining of insight into your past experiences in order to seek to influence your future. And in others, there was an emphasis on personal experience as a seam of creative material to be drawn on to make an assertive creative and artistic impact; to transform the participants' sense of self.

All had in common an emphasis on collaboratively working together and building relationships towards a shared group identity and a sense of belonging and community. They also all had in common an emphasis on learning and understanding creative processes, making artistic products and gaining recognition not just through involvement, but also through performance which brings acknowledgement from a wider audience and the larger community. In order to make the art, the facilitators and participants all knew that some educational input was needed on the better understanding of what art is and what it can do as an essential pre-requisite to the making of the art itself.

Understanding what art can do and learning how to do it brings the possibility of becoming an artist yourself. And once you have some of that confidence and skills artists are no longer just distant people to be admired, but something you have become and continue to grow into. A fundamental transition has taken place in how you see yourself; in your identity. You have, as it were, gone backstage to be the maker of your own life, not just a wary, watchful and occasionally amused or disturbed member of the audience of life's drama.

What is achieved by art?

Meaning, magic and mystery

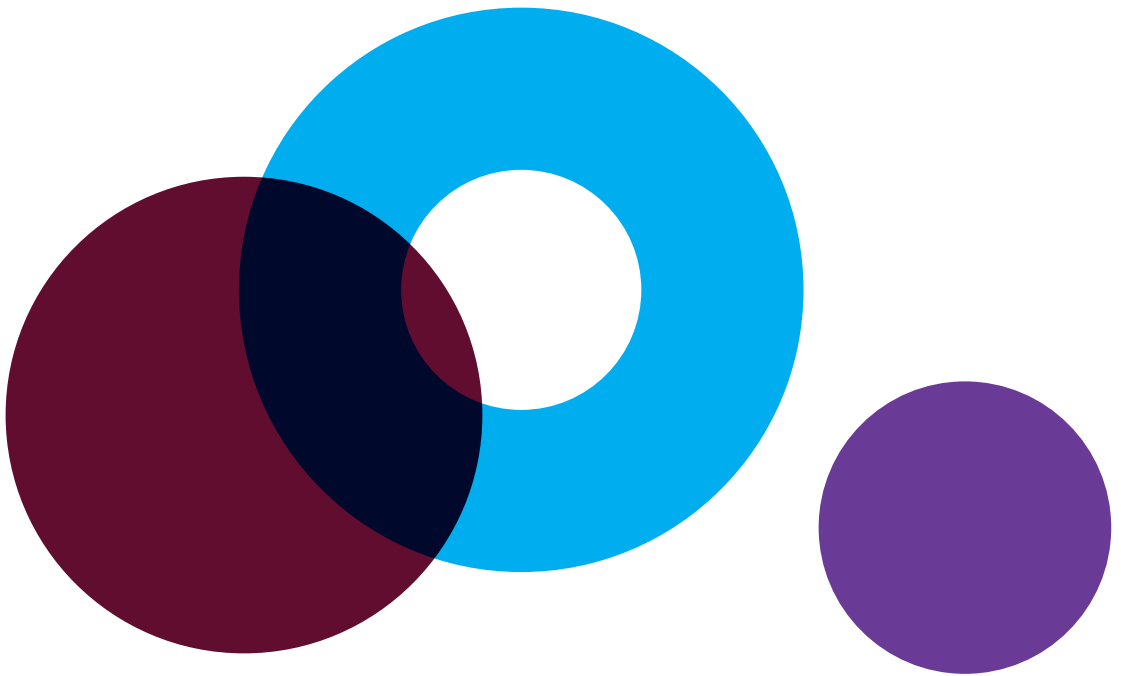
Art can summon up profound emotions, insight and identification with the artist and the reflection into the receiver's current condition. One aspect of that, according to Picasso, is 'controlling terrors and desires',

"[Painting] could have a 'magical' role of capturing and controlling terrors and desires, pinning them down with colour and form. The day I understood that," Picasso said later, "I had found my path."³

Objects can be imbued by a special power by an artist. This is the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss discovering his reaction to Picasso's paintings. In his own mind he has gone from the object, even banal objects, to a more threatening social reality – and the agent of that journey is art and the artist.

"Even prosaic objects – bottles, glasses and pipes – were somehow edgy and full of suspense, 'immersed in the still, apprehensive atmosphere that precedes accidents, riots and disasters.'"⁴

This way of understanding objects in art as something else, something more than they seem and investing them with powerful resonances creates the possibility of a revealed meaning in art, which may even seem magical. The historian Keith Thomas noted that as long as so many things remain inexplicable, people will always believe in magic. Since some things will always remain inexplicable and incomprehensible, the idea of magic remains and finds one of its homes in art. The belief that everything can ever be explained is itself a kind of magical delusion.



³ Claude Levi-Strauss: *The Poet in the Laboratory*, p16, Patrick Wilcken, Bloomsbury, 2010

⁴ *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the code of culture*, p33, Claude Levi Strauss, Schocken, 1995

⁵ *The Meaning of Art*, p267, Herbert Read, Faber, 1931

⁶ *ibid*, p261

A state of wonder and admiration: Thinking about thinking

A number of the projects we visited noted the important ability of artistic activity to raise self-esteem. This is linked to artistic practice. Drawing on the Buddhist idea of mindfulness, the suggestion is that focused concentration on artistic striving, because it requires meditative patience and searching reflection, brings with it a calmer and perhaps more spiritual state of mind. Here is the critic Herbert Read talking about the calming effects of art.

“The real function of art is to express feeling and transmit understanding...We come to the work of art charged with emotional complexes; we find in the genuine work of art not an excitement of these emotions, but peace, repose, equanimity...It is true that the work of art arouses in us certain physical reactions: we are conscious of rhythm, harmony, unity and these physical properties work upon our nerves. But they do not agitate them so much as soothe them...It is better described as a state of wonder or admiration, or more coldly but more exactly as a state of recognition.”⁵

Calm may also reside in a greater coherence or unity of thought. The world can never fall into rational analysis but the details of thought can be sorted into some less chaotic, arbitrary shape – and that brings an undoubted uplift of mindfulness. As the great 20th century British abstract sculptor, Barbara Hepworth, noted

“Working realistically replenishes one’s love for life, humanity and the earth. Working abstractly seems to release one’s personality and sharpen the perceptions, so that in the observation of life it is the wholeness or inner intention which moves one so profoundly; the components fall into place, the detail is significant of unity.”⁶

This is what the neurologists called meta-cognition, the benefits of which are well established – thinking about thinking.

“Art can summon up profound emotions, insight and... reflection into the receiver’s current condition.”

Reducing and removing stigma

Many of the participants in the projects we visited were members of groups too often labelled and stigmatised and many of the activities were at least in part to challenge that stigma by combating the feelings of inferiority: the belief that you are worth less and deserve less because of an externally imposed group identity. One way of doing that is ignoring the disability or stigma. Because other people put too much negative emphasis on a particular characteristic the way to combat that is by not giving that characteristic any special attention or credence at all. Disadvantages, so it is said, are socially constructed out of natural differences, not deficiencies. If people are treated equally, the theory goes, they will feel more equal and if they feel more equal, they will feel more included. The unspoken assumption is that their behaviour will conform more to the norm, and they will display less of those transgressive qualities making them less likely to be stigmatised and discriminated against in the first place. A virtuous circle has been initiated, rather than the alternative vicious circle of being treated unfairly and therefore feeling inferior and so not joining in. Staying away from the mainstream brings about permanent exclusion. The benefits are perceived to derive from letting go and moving on from the negative experiences, thereby changing not just behaviour but identity and sense of self.

But there is also a contrary ethos, which is also practiced in the arts project: which is to acknowledge, explore and 'work on' the aspects of the person's own behaviour, history or condition which led to their stigmatisation. The exploration is of motive, consequence, impact on self and others and, if accepted, the need to find ways of not repeating the same behaviour again. The idea is that re-visiting the scene of the crime mentally and emotionally, reflecting on what has happened and talking to sympathetic, non-judgmental professionals, will result in insight into both the pebble that diverted the stream in the wrong direction and, furthermore, the way in which the stream can now be diverted again to its truer, better, more socially acceptable course. This view is particularly applied in relation to offenders, where the intention is to avoid repeating patterns of offending behaviour and the belief is that the better understanding of those events and patterns will help in their future avoidance.



Left: Clean Break
Above: Core Arts

Community

The gaining of community by participating with others in shared creative activity is an often commented on aspect of group artistic activities. All artists, though they may be reluctant to admit it, are troubled by whether their work will have any value after their death. However much one's work is celebrated, history shows that art given great contemporary recognition often turns out to have little lasting value and, worse still, art which does have true lasting value is all too easily forgotten. The poetry of John Keats, now one of the most popular English poets, attained little or no recognition until long after the end of his short life. In order to overcome this anxiety about making temporal ephemera Herbert Read argues that art must inevitably speak to some notion of community, a shared sense of values. Without that, supposed art will in fact turn out to be narcissistic ephemera.

“Can the artist, on the basis of his own sensibility, and without the aid of mass emotional and traditional ideals – can such an artist ‘good, great and joyous, beautiful and free’ create works of art which will hold their own with the greatest creations of religious art...No artist can work well without the sense of an audience...Art is communication, and though it works by and with the sensibility, there is simply no reason why it should not communicate a sense of values. The answer to the question whether great art can exist independently of religion will therefore depend on our scale of values. The court of judgment is sooner or later the community. It would seem, therefore, that the artist, to achieve greatness, must in some way appeal to a community-feeling. Hitherto the highest form of community feeling has been religious; it is for those who deny the necessary connection between religion and art to discover some equivalent form of community feeling which will, in the long run, ensure an historic continuity for the art that is not religious.”⁷

A shared sense of belonging and the feeling of simultaneity

Artistic practice can be a solitary, expressive activity, bringing together personal insight and reflection, objective qualities like shapes or geometry, or more subjective tastes like colour or texture. But there is a special pleasure and satisfaction in collective artistic activity. The book club is the opportunity to supplement the individual, private pleasures of reading with the possibilities of discussion, bringing other perspectives and interpretations of the author's intentions or achievements. And there is the added pleasurable possibility of being with people with shared interests, perspectives and empathy; a new possibility of friendship. Joining a choir adds the benefit of performing and the recognition that comes from it. Above all there is the sense of shared creation which making music together brings, what Claude Levi Strauss called the ‘feeling of simultaneity.’⁸

⁷ Ibid P88

⁸ Op cit, Wilcken, p 271

Craft and 'create-ability'

Art involves making things and part of the benefit of the art is not to the audience that sees or appreciates the work, but the benefit is gained by the maker in the making itself. Of course the benefits of making things are not only derived and enjoyed by artists. Bricklayers, cooks, gardeners, knitters and needlewomen also know the pleasures and satisfactions of making things if made well. Nor are any of these activities, not traditionally artistic, without commitment to and achievement of aesthetic appeal and use value. They are, as it were, all crafts and they involve creating something specific, even unique. That is the magic of making. And it is accessible to almost everyone.



Connecting of thought and action is the way that problems are identified and then solved. The skills required to do this are to specify, localise and contain. The second stage in making things is reflecting, understanding, evaluating options and making choices, which contain both inherent harmony and the possibility of communication. Skill is gained from knowledge, insight, practice and confidence. Practice needs to be a habit, repetitive action becomes a rhythm, as well as adding to the rhythm of the day; the rhythm of someone's life; a counterweight to chaos, boredom, idleness, frustration and lack of purpose.

There are many benefits of arts appreciation, economic benefits of creativity, the value of participating and inclusion, but above all those undoubted benefits, there is the urge to make things. This is partly intellectual and emotional, because we are drawing on 'witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism' and partly to do with the joining of intellectual and manual activity in a restful, reflective, questing emotional harmony. The creation of harmonious habits, of a calm mindfulness and of a strong individual identity, however traduced by others, as well as the appeal of the created object – these are the artistic instincts. They are present in everyone, all too readily driven out by modern life's insufficiently rich tapestry. We all have 'create-ability' and having it gives us the possibility of a richer emotional life. In the end our emotional lives are more important than our intellectual lives, and that is the case for the arts.

“We all have ‘create-ability’ and having it gives us the possibility of a richer emotional life.”

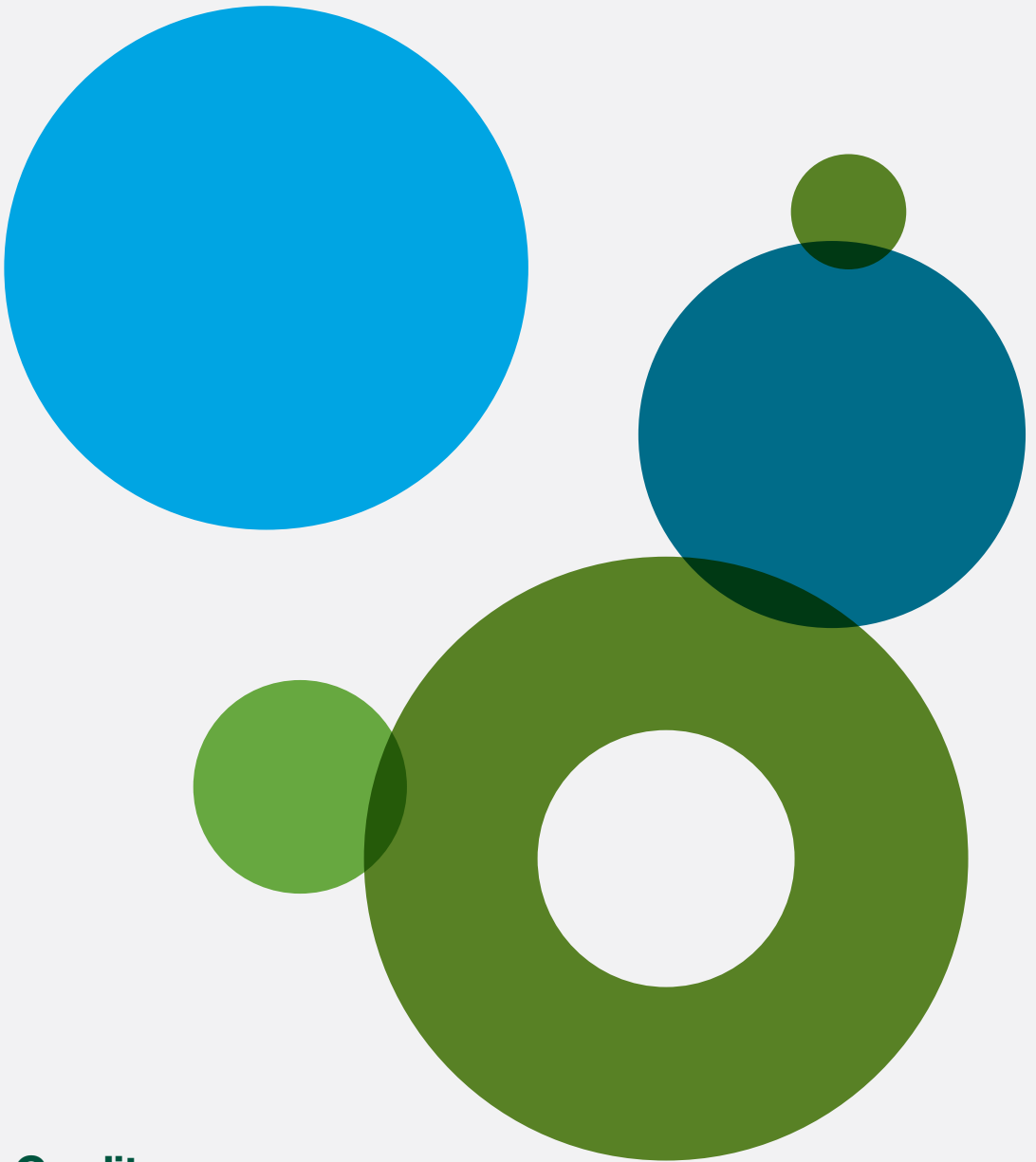


Left: Core Arts
Above: Heart 'n' Soul

The Arts Case:

Ten good reasons to support arts projects working with vulnerable people

- 1.** Arts projects can help to achieve positive outcomes for many groups of vulnerable people including homeless people, people with mental health problems, older people, people with learning disabilities and prisoners and ex-offenders.
- 2.** Arts activities do not have to take place in traditional settings. They can happen in care homes, prisons, schools and in neighbourhoods and communities.
- 3.** Arts activities are varied and stretching for participants. Facing up to and achieving the challenge is part of the benefit.
- 4.** Arts activities attract a huge diversity of participants who may not be attracted to more traditional ways of working. Arts activities give a powerful voice to many who would otherwise go unheard.
- 5.** Arts projects work with structured, focused and clearly defined methods. This is very welcome to people whose lives are often unfocused and unstructured.
- 6.** Facilitators in arts projects are generally highly skilled and sympathetic, not always the case in youth and community settings.
- 7.** Demand for arts projects is high. Many are over-subscribed. Levels of motivation and engagement among participants are also high.
- 8.** Many arts projects use enhancing creative skills as an effective way of reducing stigma and exclusion; making lives bigger by making problems relatively smaller.
- 9.** Arts activities can inculcate mindfulness and 'meta-cognition' – thinking about thinking, which has proven benefits in helping people to manage and change their behaviour.
- 10.** Making things – becoming an artist – is the best possible way for people to understand and manage their emotions better. That is one of the most important ways to a better life.



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