

Invest to Save: Arts in Health Evaluation

Exploring the Impact of Creativity, Culture and the Arts on Health and Well being

Introduction and Background

Over the last three years the alliance of Manchester Metropolitan University; Arts Council England, North West; and the Department of Health, Northwest Public Health Group has developed and evolved. Under the management of Arts for Health, the aim of this alliance has been to explore the role of creativity, culture and the arts in building greater capacity for health and well being across the North West of England and to engage in collaborative approaches to tackling key issues.

The arts and health field has grown in presence and activity, particularly over the last five years, as health policy throughout the world has embraced empowerment principles and partnership working, as well as shifting responsibility for healthy living towards the individual (DOH, 2004). In response, new and creative approaches to delivery have been called for, facilitated by investing creatively in the very people and places that seek to both support and live those changes (Coates, 2004). Arts and health initiatives are presented as a means of facilitating the change and transformation of individual and community health (ACE, 2004), and of empowering service users and staff towards greater health and well being.

The objective of the Invest to Save: Arts in Health research project, was to evaluate and encourage development of arts based practices in a range of different settings and to understand more fully those benefits. The team has also provided advocacy, networking and training opportunities around this agenda. This report summarises the key findings from the evaluation process at the heart of the work and highlights key elements of the learning gained from the evaluation and partnership processes, which underpin recommendations for future developments.

In September 2007 we published an interim report *Towards Transformation* and held an event at the Lowry to begin both dissemination and consultation around our findings. This summary document takes into account feedback from this event and broader input and shares the key findings of our work. Full details of the research and process, activity and future developments can be found on our website.

Findings

Successful Arts and Health Projects

Projects that are successful house a culture of openness, co-operation, mutual learning, creativity and organic growth; they are responsive, user-led, and able to plan long term. The arts and health practitioners working within those projects, work within a creative approach that is based on their values, experience and knowledge. Within this approach practitioners aspire to be self-aware, open to feedback and responsive to developments from inside and outside their work. Where projects have not been successful, there have been weaker underpinning structures, such as irregular funding, lack of critique, evaluation and reflective learning in practice. Equally there are inconsistent relationships within teams and with stakeholders, a limited awareness of health or education priorities or a lack of clear aims and objectives in relation to the goals of the host area (i.e. health/education).

Environment

Environmental concern emerged as a key central theme of perceived value across stakeholder groups. The quality of the environment was of importance to all stakeholders, whether it was the physical environment or the culture of the people within it. Optimum environments were perceived as stimulating, creative and supportive spaces which embodied a creative culture, holding high expectations for health and well being. In these environments staff and service users felt inspired and valued, as well as finding it an environment where it was safe to express themselves openly. Service users found these were places where they could practice being well rather than focusing on their illness. This was valued as many service users had poor previous experiences and expectations of learning and health environments.

Engagement

Those engaging with the research in projects were predominantly older, white females, who were looking to improve their quality of life or address lifestyle issues associated with ageing, coping with depression, or associated changes in life. Initial barriers to engagement with arts projects were found to be around lack of awareness of the potential, appropriateness and relevance of the arts activities to an individual's health or lifestyle. Once engaged however, service users typically successfully accessed a range of art forms. There was some suggestion that benefits were inhibited where there were not clear progression routes available for individual development within single arts forms; also that the activities did not attract a balance of male, younger or socially representative participants.

Perceived benefit

Service users reported a number of benefits from their experiences of arts engagement. They experienced greater confidence, self-esteem and interest in life, particularly feeling more engaged and involved in general. They felt greater personal concern for health and well being, and felt more empowered to make choices in relation to health, as well as having greater capacity to cope with illness or infirmity.



Older people valued having broader choices, a social outlet and appreciated the arts activities as a means of personal development. There was a common belief that arts engagement had opened up lives that had become narrowed due to isolation, diminished social networks or ill health.



David Bailey

Those coping with depression experienced a significant reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression with adjacent improvements in confidence, self-esteem and motivation towards healthy living and well being.

Well Being

Engaging in culture, creativity and the arts significantly improves health and well being by engaging people in challenging activities and giving them the opportunity to be creative and experimental. This in turn gives people the confidence and capacity to see and do things differently. This leads to raised expectations, and a greater inspiration and motivation for learning and personal growth, which were felt to be central to promoting feelings of well being. It was acknowledged that well being is not always about feeling good and in fact many processes of change involved experiences of great personal challenge and difficulty. In gaining the capacity to rise to those challenges, by learning and developing personally, and gaining more control and mastery of their environments, people experienced a resultant 'Eudaimonic' form of well being. (*Eudaimonic well being encompasses ideas of self-development, personal growth and purposeful engagement and has an impact on both mental and physiological health (Ryff et al 2004)*)

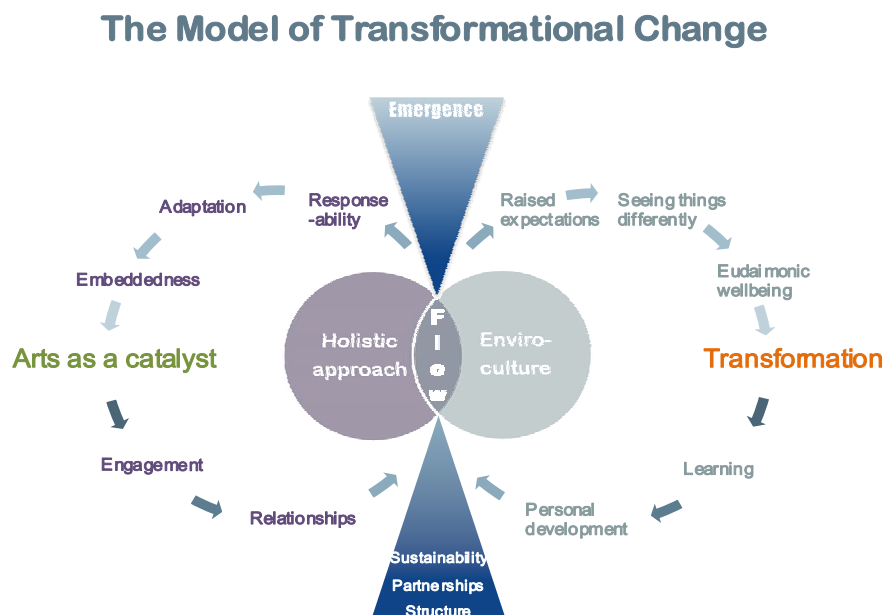
Understanding transformation

The transformative changes observed within the study came in response to certain conditions; namely where the artist or art form connected through engagement with a service user/aspiring artist. During this period of connection and activity there arose a possibility of entry into a 'creative flow state' where people typically experienced absorption, deep concentration or engagement in what they were doing. This in turn opened up time and space which provided a means of 'forgetting' about pain, illness or concern beyond 'distraction'. This experience was seen to stimulate a pattern of response typically described as follows:

There is a lift in mood and expectation, which opens up perceived possibilities for change; people begin to see things differently and from this arises a greater sense of well being. In response to this change in state, comes the possibility of a shift or transformation of existing thinking or patterns of behaviour, which are changes which are consolidated by becoming more embedded into personal development and changes in behaviour. This is achieved within a supportive environment/culture, often in response to repeated cycles of activity where the person can 'practice being well'.

This process is visually represented within the model of Transformational change, which was developed from these themes and observations that arose from the research. (Further descriptions of this model will be detailed in a separate paper).

Figure (1)



Kilroy A.J. (2007)

Development and Sustainability

Engagement with the arts we have observed can trigger a transformative experience, whether the service user attends one, or a series of events. To embed that transformative experience into real change however, there is a need for sustained engagement, support and development to realise the potential for personal growth and change. This level of support requires a number of sustainable structures to be in place which can underpin practice and development.

These take the form of:

- o clear, focused aims and objectives for health
- o strong and responsive partnerships
- o sustainable funding
- o a culture of reflective practice, learning and critique
- o a criteria for quality in arts practice/products
- o a programme of education and training activity



Overall, the findings from the evaluation place a greater emphasis on the importance of encouraging and supporting 'aspirations' towards wellbeing as well as health; the findings emphasise the importance of placing partnerships and alliances at the heart of encouraging new means of challenging old ways of looking at health problems (Flint, 2006), and are therefore we feel, timely and relevant to helping address current strategic objectives in both arts and health fields. Expectations were high within projects that were working well, and this enabled those who came into the environment to feel uplifted and valued, in response to the inspirational and considered nature of the creative culture, and much can be learned from this approach. Optimum environments are places in which those present experience learning, challenge, potential for experimentation, along with support, shared experience, non-competitive and non-hierarchical structures and here in these spaces, people find opportunity and support to 'practice being well'.

Process

The evaluation had at its heart clear aims to utilise a participatory approach in collaborating with arts and health projects, and the design of the evaluation facilitated and encouraged a highly collaborative process. The aim of this was to:

- explore practice and learning, and thus to
- build capacity and a language for evaluation and evidence gathering that would
- enable meaningful and relevant measurement tools to be identified and lead towards
- more creative and generative data collection methods.

We utilised Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider, 2001) workshops at the outset of the project as a means of bringing the diverse stakeholders together to explore consensus around defining good practice and optimum perceived outcomes. This format facilitated relationship building between collaborators, promoted investment and engagement with the process, and stimulated mutual awareness of desired outcomes for the project.

AI seeks to discover people's specialties – their essential contributions and achievements, and it is based on principles of equality of voice. Within this approach teams were able to explore their diverse views within a guided and positive framework to meet the overall objective of identifying perceived elements of value or impact in their practice. They were also able to collaborate with researchers through a mutual learning process, to identify the best means of understanding, capturing and measuring anticipated changes.

Within this strategy there was the additional opportunity for teams to come together at the outset of the process to explore their practice within rich narratives. Here they explored both individual elements of practice, and a more overarching idea of the 'vision' or higher aspirations of what each was trying to achieve. This served to unify stakeholders within common values and aspirations, and promoted mutual understanding and greater clarity around desired outcomes. The consultation process generated the following key areas for potential measurement, and these were used as a focus for recording pre, and post intervention changes.

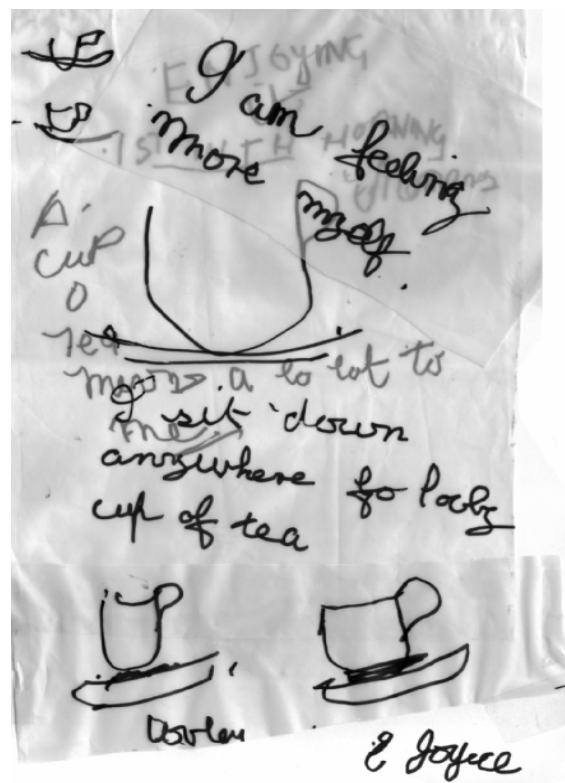
These areas were as follows.

- Well being (Riff's Scale of Psychological well being)
- General Health (General Health Questionnaire)
- Depression (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale)
- Job Satisfaction (Warr, Cook and Wall Work and Life Attitudes survey)

In addition the research team conducted semi-structured interviews with project participants, teams, artists and stakeholders.

These mixed methodological tools enabled broad data generation that included both measurements of change around the key identified areas, and exploration of the meaning inherent within those experiences from differing perspectives.

The findings from this process encompass both measurement of changes and perceptions of value and whilst they go some way towards demonstrating the benefits of arts engagement, they also highlight areas for further research and development.



Recommendations:

- We recommend that there is support for the development of a range of arts projects that are responsive to user needs and reflect a more user-led approach. Specifically, to build on existing successes and to make activities more relevant and accessible particularly to older male, younger and harder to reach groups.
- We recommend the utilisation and development of creative and participatory approaches to research and evaluation and to greater relationship building and partnership working across stakeholder groups.
- We recommend investment in initiatives to support and develop the 'evidence-based arts and health practitioner', whose practice will increasingly be based on a combined dynamic blend of research evidence, practitioner knowledge/skill and service user need or preference.
- We recommend investment in increased support and training for arts and health practitioners to enable them to set clear, informed and relevant project aims in relation to health and other strategic objectives.
- To build on knowledge gained around perceived benefits of arts engagement with arts activities, we recommend investment in the development of quality art-health environments that specialise in housing creative activity and approaches as a means of promoting health and well being.
- The model of transformation has emerged from the data collection and observation of practices within projects; we recommend that there is further exploration of practical means of embedding knowledge of the transformative cycle into sustained behaviour change in key priority areas via:
 - Role development
 - Education and training
 - Exploring application to areas of practice
- A key strength of this evaluation process has been the learning relationships and culture of participation between diverse partners. We recommend partnership working and particularly support the use and development of creative methodologies as a means of facilitating relationships, generating a language of communication and raising awareness of mutual needs and values.
- We recommend support for developing, encouraging and supporting greater efforts towards critique, reflection and learning within the Arts and Health community. Central to this is a recommendation for practitioners to embrace critical discourse, peer review and reflective learning as part of development.
- The participatory process enabled a clearer picture of practitioner needs to be established. In response to findings in the area we call for the support and development of best practice guidelines.
- Although this evaluation has demonstrated clear support within the field for the transformative effect of arts activities, equally it has revealed the need for a strong structural foundation to encourage sustainability and development. In response we call for investment in sustained funding beyond short programmes, within successful existing projects and support for developing project capacity for sustainability.
- We recommend support for the commissioning of high quality arts and artists for maximum impact; and recommend guidelines for quality are developed to encourage maintenance of standards.

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Collaborating Projects:

The ***Wear Purple*** project offers a range of arts activities to older people to promote positive ageing, health and prevent illness. It's important for people as they get older, to meet other people and have something different to talk about to prevent isolation.

Contact Simone Cobbold 01244-347831

www.wearpurple.co.uk

The ***Stockport Arts and Health*** project; ***Arthur and Martha*** is a project at the outset of the study that offered visual arts and creative writing activities to older people in rehabilitation care. The aim is to document peoples' lives and engage them in activity that might lift their spirits.

Contact Phillip Davenport/Lois Blackburn 01663 744113

www.arthur-and-martha.co.uk

Start in Salford is a project which offers a range of arts activities to people suffering from mild to moderate depression. Inner cities create social isolation, this project uses the arts to support and develop people that get involved.

Contact Bernadette Conlon/June Wilcock 0161-351-6000

www.startinsalford.co.uk

Pendle Leisure Trust offers referral options for health professionals in the form of three art forms to people who were suffering symptoms of depression as a result of personal, social or environmental issues. It provides a creative learning environment for people in rural isolation, to learn and socialise as a means of combating symptoms of depression.

Contact Russell Tennant 01282-661784

The ***BlueSCI*** project is a partnership project based on the collaboration between an artist and a health professional. Its' aim is to develop a combined arts/health/cultural approach to promotion of health and well-being within an environment that is designed to stimulate learning and well being and addresses mental health issues.

Contact Alicia Clare/Stuart Webster 0161-912 4828

www.bluesci.org.uk

The Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital, ***Alder Hey*** is an arts initiative that has brought together a range of high quality cultural champions to improve the environment and culture of health facilities and improve the health and wellbeing of staff and patients alike.

Contact Vicky Charnock 0151-293-3530

