

Arts and Communities Programme



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This report was prepared for Arts Council England by Andy Parkinson and Jamie Buttrick at Consilium Research and Consultancy Ltd.

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About this report

The aim of this report is to showcase the progress and achievements of the activity which has been delivered through the Arts and Communities programme and to consider the learning from the different approaches to programme delivery in each locality. The report considers the significance of the role of local authorities in the delivery of arts and cultural programmes which build common ground within communities. The report includes a series of case studies, tips and guidance to support the development of future programmes working to achieve similar aims. This report is not intended to provide an evaluation of the programme although it does draw on the learning outlined in the localities' respective evaluation reports, copies of which can be accessed using the following links:

Birmingham – Connecting Communities Through Culture programme

Bristol – Arts and Communities programme

Burnley – Mechanics at Home programme



Introduction

Background to the programme

The Arts and Communities programme was an initiative by Arts Council England and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It aimed to support and showcase good practice in arts and culture that brings communities together by increasing participation, building common ground and promoting stronger and more integrated communities. The programme provided funding to the localities of Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol and Burnley.

Objectives and outcomes

The programme provided grant funding to support local-level arts projects that locate culture at the heart of community life and use the arts to deliver the two key pillars of DCLG's approach to integration, namely:

- allowing people of all backgrounds the opportunity to participate in the arts
- building a clear sense of shared values, aspirations and common ground

Arts Council England developed the Arts and Communities programme to deliver the following outcomes:

- high quality local artistic projects that have a positive community impact and actively contribute to stronger communities
- a wider participation in local arts activity amongst diverse communities
- a bank of good practice that can be used to inform policy development, inspire communities and practitioners, and advocate the beneficial impact of the arts
- disseminate the learning that emerges to inspire further activity at a national level, and a national understanding of the kinds of support available

Funding

Funding was provided for a period of two years between 2014/15 and 2015/16 with lead organisations in each locality able to bid for a maximum of £40,000 for each year from the Grants for the Arts programme, which was match-funded by DCLG. In each of the four localities the lead organisations were able to lever in additional funding and in-kind support from a range of organisations. This meant that the programmes were able to engage a wide range of people and achieve strong local impacts for relatively small levels of grant funding.



Locality delivery models

mechanism to engage local people



With the exception of Bristol where community theatre company **acta** took on the role as lead organisation, the programmes were led by the local council's arts development team. The grant funding provided lead organisations with the flexibility to develop their own bespoke approaches to meeting the objectives of the Arts and Communities programme. Each locality was selected either due to their existing strong record in using the arts to strengthen their communities or because of innovative arts activities being taken forward. All of the localities incorporated elements of co-design and co-delivery into their programmes as a mechanism to engage local people and also to help shape the content and focus of arts activities and events.

Birmingham Connecting Communities programme allocated equal amounts of funding across the 10 districts¹ of the city in each year of the programme, as part of its cultural strategy to stimulate engagement with the arts in areas with historically low participation rates and to strengthen arts infrastructure across the city.

Overseen by **Bradford** Council's Cultural Services Department the programme established community arts projects in the six target areas of Manningham, Canterbury, Holmewood, Ravenscliffe, Buttershaw and the city centre which were identified as communities with low arts engagement, high-levels of deprivation and changing communities.

In **Bristol** the arts and communities funding was used to support a programme of intercultural and intergenerational community theatre in the district of Redcliffe and across the city. Building on the momentum established through a four-year BIG Reaching Communities programme, **acta** set out to develop and extend the company's existing local neighbourhood development and integration work.

The project in **Burnley** was originally conceived as a partnership between Arts Development at Burnley Council (now Burnley Leisure Trust) and four arts organisations, namely Burnley Youth Theatre, Ground UP, Grizedale Arts and Ultimate Holding Company (now known as Guild). The project focused on the two wards of Bank Hall and Trinity which were selected on the basis of existing relationships with the partners or because changing demographics in the community created a need for arts engagement activity.

Although the lead organisations focused on developing arts activities and events in their respective localities, there has been a degree of mutual support and sharing learning throughout the delivery of the Arts and Communities programme. This has enabled each area to benefit from the wider experience and ideas of partners from across the four localities through regular meetings and most notably at the Connecting Communities Through Culture Conference hosted in Birmingham in March 2015.

¹ Birmingham is divided into 10 parliamentary constituencies and every constituency is divided into four wards.

Cultural co-design and co-delivery

Enabling and empowering local people to engage in a process of co-designing and co-delivering arts and cultural activities in their community was incorporated into the delivery model across each of the localities. The rationale for this approach is reinforced in the work of the Warwick Commission on the future of cultural value. Their 2015 report, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*², cites the value of encouraging individual creativity and building confidence through collaborative cultural co-design and co-production in helping to strengthen connections between neighbours and to support community cohesion.

Fundamentally the process of shaping and creating artwork provided an opportunity for dialogue across different community groups and this shared experience encouraged people from different backgrounds to learn more about each other. Supported by effective and trained artist facilitators this process can engender a greater sense of trust, respect and recognition that different groups are bound by a shared sense of place.

“Co-production when thoroughly and consistently implemented, flexibly applied and genuinely conducted as a collaborative undertaking is indeed a powerful tool in enabling local people to take responsibility for developing and sharing their own cultural identity and capacity.”

Producer, Birmingham

The Arts and Communities programme has provided an opportunity for localities to test different models of cultural co-design and co-delivery. What is evident from local

reflection and evaluation is that there is no one size fits all model. Rather, there are a set of principles and steps through which artists and arts organisations can engage, involve and empower people from different backgrounds to come together to produce artworks that make a genuine connection with local communities.

Work in Birmingham on cultural co-design and co-production found that artistic projects that were most successful in developing co-design were those that encouraged participants to contribute their ideas and shape the product as well as help make the work. All four localities reported that sufficient time was necessary for individuals to have an opportunity to build their confidence and deepen their level of engagement at a pace that felt comfortable for them.

The following factors enable co-design to take place:³

- **space** must be created for people to come together to discuss what is important to them
- **open, frank dialogue** on ‘why, what, who, when, where and how’
- a **shared vision** should be agreed
- **investment in building relationships** is essential
- **time** for trust to be created
- a **skilled co-ordinator/facilitator**
- **professional artists** with community engagement skills

²Warwick Commission, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, University of Warwick, 2015

³Garry, K, Goodwin, P, *Towards Cultural Co-design: Connecting Communities Through Culture (Birmingham) Year 1 evaluation summary report*, Merida associates, 2015

The work on cultural co-design in Birmingham culminated in the production of a model of working which was informed by the experiences of the Arts and Communities programme. It provides a valuable resource for others seeking to create a product, programme or cultural activity where arts professionals empower, encourage, and guide participants to develop solutions for themselves.

Cultural co-design model⁴

1. Identify a ward or neighbourhood as a focus for the project
2. Recruit a producer to facilitate a cultural co-design process
3. Conduct research in the local area to identify existing arts infrastructure and activities and make contact with venues, groups, organisations and individuals who can help make the project happen
4. Listen to local voices and work with key stakeholders to identify the project vision and goals
5. Plan arts activity to achieve the vision and goals – using cultural co-design approach where possible
6. Commission support from professional artists – using cultural co-design approach where possible
7. Create a 'focus of enquiry' question, linked to the project vision, to gather evidence of the difference the project will make and decide with a steering group how information will be captured
8. Provide a range of opportunities for people to take part – as participants, audience members, steering group members, technical or event management support, etc
9. Deliver activities
10. Capture monitoring and impact evidence
11. Provide opportunities for local people to showcase their achievements



⁴ CHOICES cultural co-design model adapted by BCC Culture Commissioning Team from C2 Positively Local model

Programme outputs

Between 2014/15 and 2015/16 the Arts and Communities programme delivered 613 community events which engaged 19,764 people in arts activities. These events covered a range of artforms including visual arts, crafts, theatre, music, storytelling and dance. A central feature across all activities was ensuring that they enabled participants to have fun and an opportunity to socialise:

"If there hasn't been laughter in your workshop, then something has gone wrong... for the neighbourhood audiences we aim to engage, the community theatre process makes theatre that is fun and relevant to the lives and experiences of local people, many of whom are coming to theatre for the first time."

Neil Beddow, acta Artistic Director

Three of the four localities used workshops with local people to produce artworks that were showcased at local festivals and parades, and provided important opportunities for communities to celebrate cultural diversity and promote community identity.

Across the four local areas the programme was supported by 355 local volunteers who donated 3,414 hours to facilitate the delivery of a range of arts activities in their neighbourhood. These volunteers played a valuable role in helping to facilitate the participation of other people in their community. They also worked alongside professional artists to enhance the quality of the artistic activity and output. The cash, in-kind and volunteer contributions achieved across each locality provides a good indicator of a strengthening infrastructure for arts and cultural activity in the neighbourhoods engaged with the Arts and Communities programme.

355 local volunteers who
donated **3,414** hours



Programme impacts

Artistic outputs and participation

The Arts and Communities programme aimed to deliver high quality local artistic projects as well as encourage people of all backgrounds to participate in the arts. Local delivery involved the use of a range of artforms to appeal to a variety of interests. Participants were able to undertake different roles within projects which for some meant helping to devise the content of the project and for others taking on performance roles. This ensured that a wide range of people were able to get involved at a level they felt comfortable with and which met their particular interest. All four of the localities were able to benefit from momentum gained through previous arts development work, for example the BIG Art project⁵ in Burnley or the C2 Positively Local asset development model⁶ that had been piloted in three neighbourhoods in Birmingham as a process for developing co-production and co-design in arts and culture. As a result, the lead organisation in all areas was able to draw on existing relationships and networks in order to develop the artistic ideas and vision for the programme and to facilitate the process of reaching and engaging new communities.

A common feature across the four localities was their ability to offer a range of ways for local people to gain experience of arts and cultural activity. Frequently the first step was for local people to experience the arts as an audience member by attending a community event, performance or exhibition. However the design of these events provided a space for discussion, debate and interaction which offered opportunities for local people to deepen their arts engagement – through participation in an

activity, by volunteering to support the delivery of an arts event or activity, or by becoming actively involved in organising, delivering or managing an arts project or event.

Many of the projects delivered through the Arts and Communities programme were developed and managed by local artists with existing strong links to the community. Their local connections and knowledge was valuable in ensuring that they had credibility within the target neighbourhoods and also an understanding of the most effective approaches to connect with new groups and audiences.

However, whilst local knowledge and connection was advantageous in one regard, equally as important was the commissioned artist's experience of socially engaged practice and their ability to bring fresh ideas and inspiration to new audiences and participants. In Birmingham and Burnley the lead organisations recognised the benefits of facilitating collaboration between commissioned artists in order to inspire new arts and creative activities and also to share learning.

There are numerous examples across the four localities of people with little or no prior experience of engaging in arts and cultural activity being supported to develop their artistic skills and playing an active role in co-designing, co-producing and delivering local arts activity.



³ The Channel 4 Big Art Project was established to inspire the creation of unique works of public art in selected sites across the UK.

⁴ Gillespie, J, Hughes, S, *Positively Local: C2 a model for community change*, CfWR & University of Birmingham, 2011

Yusuf Can't Talk, Bristol

Following an approach from Nura Aabe, the founder of Autism Independence, a new organisation that supports Somali mothers of autistic children in Bristol, acta began workshops to create a new community theatre show with Somali women. Nura was aware of the work of acta as she had attended a performance led by a group of Somali women two years earlier and recognised the potential of theatre to tell a story about the experience of Somali mothers with autistic children.

Over a period of 15 weeks the workshops engaged a total of 11 Somali British mothers to create a show. It's starting point was to help the organisation raise awareness of autism within the Somali community.

While many of the women were clear from the outset that they were not prepared to perform in the final show, they were all able to contribute to the devising process and felt a strong ownership of the resulting play. The devising workshops were enormously significant for them all, giving value and raising self-esteem through the sharing of their stories.

The process of developing and performing *Yusuf Can't Talk* not only provided a platform for the work of Autism Independence but also provided founder Nura Aabe with the confidence to extend the project beyond the Arts and Communities programme. Acta secured funding from Wellcome Trust, working with Nura and Autism Independence, as well as other partners, including the University of Bristol. Despite having no prior performance experience Nura performed a one woman version of the show for a national tour in 2016.

The project has been successful in raising the profile of Autism Independence, which has established links with the local Healthwatch and children's services team at Bristol City Council. The performance was attended by a wide range of health and education professionals, which helped Nura to develop relationships to support the future work of Autism Independence.

The organisation has also been featured by the BBC World Service. *Yusuf Can't Talk* has demonstrated the potential of using community theatre to reach out to previously isolated communities and has helped to address the issue of stigma within the Somali community of mothers caring for children with learning difficulties.



Yusuf Can't Talk
© Mark Simmons
Photography

Supporting local people to take the lead as performers or arts facilitators can be a powerful and effective approach to encouraging the participation of others. The work delivered through the programme provides numerous examples of local people providing a role model and inspiration for others to engage in arts activities.

While communities need support to take on producer roles, this can be empowering and can help to shape local cultural programming to ensure that it is more culturally relevant and

appealing to local audiences. In many cases performances and projects were co-designed and co-produced by the local community which provided considerable value in connecting with local audiences.

A common feature across the four localities was the focus on participants' understandings of their community, identity and sense of place. This has proven effective in engaging new audiences and participants in arts activities and events that draw their inspiration from both historical and contemporary events and issues.

Designs in the Sky, Birmingham

The Designs in the Sky community arts project was delivered in the second year of Birmingham's Arts and Communities programme and aimed to inspire and enable people from the inner city area of Witton to take action, raise issues and express their thoughts about their neighbourhood. The project culminated in the presentation of a series of community street banners representing the local area, co-designed with over 200 participants from a diverse range of nationalities and cultures.

The project highlighted the role of 'community gatekeepers' in supporting engagement with communities, with a priest undertaking missionary work in the local Tesco supermarket. It provided a link across people of different faiths, nationalities, languages and ethnicities from a position of trust and familiarity with the local community.



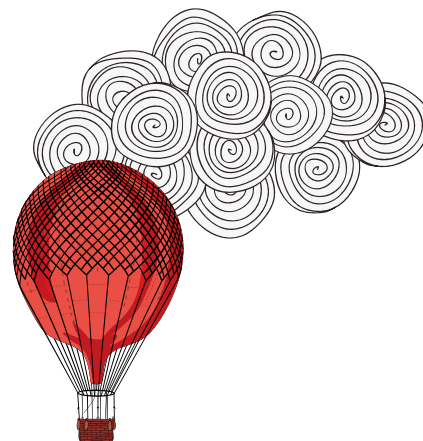
Designs in the Sky © R.M. Sánchez-Camus

The support of a local supermarket was crucial in providing both resources and facilities but also permission to hang the banners on its perimeter fence to maximise access to the work. Importantly in terms of impact and sustainability, the banners have not been vandalised since being installed despite being at ground level. This suggests both buy-in from the local community towards art which is 'culturally relevant' to them, and vindication of the co-design approach and subject matter of the artworks.

Rooting activity within the heart of communities has been an important aspect of the approach to widening participation in arts activities. Central to this has been the identification and use of existing community venues and places where people already come together such as community centres, schools or places of worship. Identifying 'familiar and safe' spaces was highlighted by lead organisations as important in encouraging initial engagement, in particular in areas with traditionally low levels of participation in arts and cultural activities.

Equally important was the use of community enablers and leaders to facilitate reach into communities and promote participation and engagement. In Birmingham a portion of the Arts and Communities funding was allocated to the 10 Local Arts Fora (LAF) to enable them to map existing provision and consult on local priorities and aspirations. This enabled each LAF to identify potential partners, facilities and communities with the desire and capacity to support future programming in specific target areas.

Projects have also provided opportunities for participants to attend local cultural venues for the first time. This has been an important step in tackling negative perceptions of arts and cultural venues within some communities and encouraging continued and self-directed engagement at future arts events and performances.



**In Birmingham a portion of the
Arts and Communities funding was
allocated to **10** Local Arts Fora**

St Mark's Community Cinema, Burnley

After members of a local action group identified community cinema as an area of interest and need, Burnley based artist collaboration Ground UP commissioned a local artist and activist to develop a community-led cinema group. Sandra Moolgaoker, Church Warden at St Mark's church in the Trinity ward which now hosts the cinema group, was a key enabler for the project. The project is run by members of the Monday Afternoon Club at the church, an over 50s group which also includes a group of stroke survivors. Sandra has overseen the church for the past eight years since it lost its vicar and has developed a range of activities which ensure that the space continues to provide a valuable resource for the local community.

The initial focus of the project was to provide film events targeting elderly and isolated people. From this it grew to incorporate the needs of local families. Members of the cinema group were very involved in programming and in developing activity which added value to the screenings – such as hosting craft sessions as part of showing a children's film or providing food for audiences. Community ownership of the project has been important in ensuring that the films have a connection with Burnley. This has helped to reach new audiences including older males who were attracted to the screening of a film about a local mining disaster, introduced by former miners. The cinema group regularly attracts audiences of between 20 to 50 people and provides an opportunity for the local community to come together at St Mark's church.

"We were swept up with the ideas of the community cinema group, we thought it was amazing! The first film we showed was *Miner's Hymns*. There's a strong connection round here with the Hapton Valley pit disaster. People came and we had a bugler who played the Last Post and we thought this is going to work."

Sandra Moolgaoker

Following the Arts and Communities programme the cinema group has been successful in securing funding from East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group and BFI to deliver a further programme of screenings, ensuring that St Mark's church continues to provide a venue for the local community to come together and enjoy a range of films.



St Mark's
Community Cinema
© Cath Ford

Community integration

The notion of integration and community cohesion was necessarily interpreted differently in each of the localities. This flexibility has allowed lead organisations and their partners to consider the best approach to engaging culturally diverse communities relevant to their local setting. Local arts activity funded through the Arts and Communities programme has focused on different communities of interest, race, ethnicity and religion. A shared characteristic across each of the localities

was the aspiration to enable people of all backgrounds to 'tell their story' and in many cases for the arts to provide a voice and visibility for previously 'hidden' communities.

Many projects provided an opportunity for different communities to showcase and celebrate their cultural heritage. This process has been effective in helping to identify shared values, aspirations and common ground that transcend cultural differences and foster a greater understanding and respect for different perspectives and traditions within a community.

Connecting Communities Through Culture Programme (CCC), Birmingham

Each CCC project took a different approach to promoting integration. The Arts and Communities programme created opportunities for conversations within and between communities and enabled people to talk with others who are not the same as them. These conversations provided a chance to understand more about people from other cultures, faiths and abilities to foster the

spirit of integration and understanding. For example, a partnership between [Cerebral Palsy Midlands](#) and St Augustine's Church, North Edgbaston – *The Bird's Wedding Day* – focused on celebrating spring time and involved puppeteers and film makers working with people to tell their stories. Workshops were held in the church making birds from recycled materials. The project culminated in a unique event linking church history with a new opportunity to host an art exhibition and performance by CPM members who were valued for their art contribution rather than their disability.

Although it is too soon to say what the impact of bringing people together to share arts and cultural activities will be in even the short term, it is clear that CCC has brought together different groups of people who may not have come together in any other way, and has delivered arts and cultural activity that has been inter-generational and ethnically diverse.



Cerebral Palsy Midlands
© Chris Nottingham

Feedback from participants and audiences across a range of activities delivered through the programme has reinforced the value of the arts in bringing communities together and providing opportunities for social interaction, discussion and collective participation for people from different backgrounds.

**"Today we come to know
about different other cultures.
Indeed it was great experience.
It was a great tea party
we enjoyed a lot."**

Hall Green Tea Party participant,
Birmingham

**"I met new people and we
shared ideas on how to write
poetry and creatively which I never
did before. I benefited from being
shyish to being more confident and
involved with the group,
I would do this again!"**

Young participant, Bradford South
CAN Artworks group

The Arts and Communities programme has contributed towards engendering a stronger sense of civic pride, a greater connection to the local community and making people feel better about the area they live in. The confidence and enjoyment gained through their participation in the arts has provided a stepping-stone for many to engage in other activities within their local community, thus helping to reduce social isolation.

**The Arts and Communities
programme has contributed
towards engendering
a stronger sense of civic pride**



TheNow (*Then & Now*), Bristol

A group of eight African Caribbean elders from the Malcolm X Community Centre in the St Pauls areas of the city requested an opportunity to take part in their first integrated community theatre project – to create a play with four younger white British acta participants whom they befriended on an acta trip to a community arts festival in Rotterdam in March 2014.

Following some initial workshops in autumn 2014 to explore ideas, the group began weekly evening workshops in February 2015, meeting in their local community of St Pauls.

The group decided to develop a sketch show that explored the differences between life in 1985 and 30 years later in 2015. The acta staff working with the group recognised that the cast preferred not to use rigid scripts, but to improvise and actively encourage audience interaction. While this approach included an element of risk to the quality of the final show it enabled the energy and enthusiasm of the performers to shine through and make a genuine connection with their audiences.

To ensure a wide range of people were able to access the show several performances were hosted at the Malcolm X Community Centre. The final show was also performed five times at the new acta centre in September 2015 with coach transport organised for people from the Malcolm X Community Centre. These shows were extremely well received by a total audience of 273 people. An estimated 40 per cent of the audience were Black or minority ethnic, and although many of the audience were African Caribbean friends and family of the cast, there were also significant numbers of Somali people in the audience, who had heard about the project through other acta groups.

“It was really nice working together, not uncomfortable at all; no difference between us, just like one big, happy family. Not like we were people from different cultures, just all the same.”

Participant

All cast members have expressed an interest in working together on future community theatre projects.

TheNow © acta Community Theatre



Unexpected outcomes and impacts

The commitment to supporting the genuine involvement of the community as co-designers and co-deliverers of local arts activity has meant that the artwork produced through the Arts and Communities programme was often inspired by themes and events that were not usually visible within local arts and cultural programming. Across the four localities the arts activities have covered a wide range of themes of relevance to the local communities including:

- challenges of living in a new country (Fatima and Sumaya, Bristol)
- challenging perceptions of people with disabilities (Cerebral Palsy West Midlands, Birmingham)
- children learning about their cultural heritage from their parents (A Tale or Two for You, Bristol)
- domestic violence (Keighley Flash Girls, Bradford)
- local heritage (Canalside Weekender, Burnley)
- mental health (Hodge Hill, Birmingham)
- mining disaster (Cinema Group, Burnley)
- relationships and friendship (Totem pole project in Buttershaw, Bradford)
- social action (Wurr Bradford, Bradford)
- social pressures of poverty and debt (Selfies, Bristol)
- tea ceremonies and traditions from Christian and Muslim communities (Hall Green, Birmingham)
- the high prevalence of autism within the Somali community (Yusuf Can't Talk, Bristol)

By covering such a range of themes and everyday issues faced by the local communities targeted by the programme, projects and activities were able to demonstrate the relevance and value of the arts to new audiences and participants, many of whom had not previously engaged in the arts.

Although skills development and employability has not been an objective of the Arts and Communities programme, it is evident that for many people their participation has supported a range of positive outcomes. For many of the participants in Bristol, a significant proportion of whom speak English as a second language, their participation in drama and theatre improved their communication and presentation skills, and importantly, their self-confidence (*A Tale or Two for You*, Bristol). One previously isolated participant has been able to use the communication and coordination skills gained in the co-production of a theatre performance to help her secure employment. In Birmingham a number of participants have secured food hygiene qualifications as a result of their participation in a food themed arts project (*Café Arts at KFC*, Birmingham).

The success of the arts events in building participants' confidence, self-esteem and awareness of other social activities in their community has contributed to reducing social isolation and associated anxiety and depression, and improving health and emotional well-being.



A Tale of Two for You, Bristol

Following an approach from the Community Development Coordinator at Hannah More Primary School which is located in the multicultural neighbourhood of The Dings in the heart of Bristol, acta began working with a group of 22 isolated Somali women, all of whom speak English as a second language. The women were all completely new to the concept of theatre so the weekly workshop sessions focused on the participants' progress through the process and on improving their confidence and self-esteem.

The women all had limited access to local services and community activities and they welcomed the opportunity to create a show to perform to children at the school, with wider community benefit. They decided to create an educational show for children to learn more about their cultural heritage and the importance of respecting their elders, and devised and rehearsed their original show, *A Tale or Two for You*, in a series of 22 weekly term-time workshops. The funding provided through the Arts and Communities programme enabled acta to provide on-site childcare for the participating women which was an important factor in supporting their engagement in the community theatre project.

The final show was performed in October 2014 by a cast of six women to audiences of Year 1 and Year 2 children and other parents in the school. A subsequent performance was arranged in early November 2014 to an intergenerational audience of local older people and Year 4 children.

"I have heard RAVE reviews from all sides and the mums seemed really pleased with themselves...this has been just such an amazing positive thing for them and for the wider school community."

Community Development Coordinator

The process of developing the theatre production has supported the participants' language skills while also building their self-esteem. This has provided the participants with the confidence to access local services and engage in other aspects of civic life in their community, thus contributing to wider objectives around social inclusion and integration.

Engaging adults from migrant communities in drama and theatre by offering drama workshops as a tool to improve communication skills was a successful strategy throughout the Arts and Communities programme, with many participants choosing to continue their engagement and involvement in future productions and getting involved in other community activities and events.



Hannah More Primary School (note this is a performance of 'Fatima and Sumaya' but it is the same women that performed 'A Tale of Two for You')

© Mark Simmons Photography

Making a Song & Dance About..., Bradford

Irregular Arts worked with a variety of girls and women's groups in Bradford and Keighley to help them highlight what matters most about their lives and communities.

The work included the development of The Flashgirls of Keighley, a group of 9- to 10-year-old girls from Eastwood Primary School who produced their own message of what they would do if they ran the world. Their message of 'kindness, hope and peace' was delivered through a song and dance routine developed with the support of the Soropomists and Mothers of Eastwood (SAME) – part of a women's organisation with a mission to make the world a better place for women and children. The piece was performed at the Women of the World (WOW) festival celebrating the achievements of women and girls and

at the Arts in the Community Reflections event in Bradford in October 2016.

The increased confidence of the community to come together through the arts was highlighted by many of the girls' mothers supporting the events, with many responding to a call to make some very simple movements and gestures to add value to the girls' performances.

Community
Arts Festival
© Nick Hirst



**Making a Song
and Dance About**
© Dipak Mistry



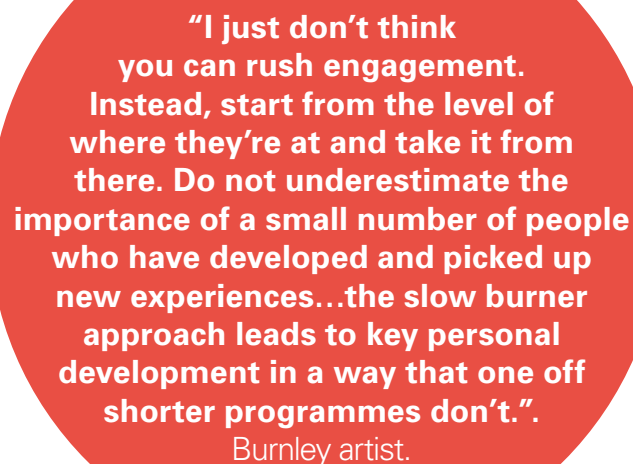
Cross-cutting learning points

Overarching learning points

Bringing different artists and arts organisations together can lead to exciting and innovative collaborations which can inspire communities and raise their artistic ambition and aspirations. However, although collaborative working may happen naturally it often requires careful management and facilitation to create a common approach and vision for work with new audiences and participants. The Arts and Communities programme has also provided opportunities to bring together arts and non-arts organisations to develop artworks that are responding to community needs.

Achieving genuine engagement and involvement of local communities takes time and requires continuity of approach and the ability to build and maintain relationships. Although outreach work can be resource intensive it is nevertheless an essential part of reaching new audiences and engaging new communities. The success and effectiveness of outreach activity can be assisted by working with organisations and services that already have links into target communities.

Bringing different artists and arts organisations together can lead to exciting and innovative collaborations



"I just don't think you can rush engagement. Instead, start from the level of where they're at and take it from there. Do not underestimate the importance of a small number of people who have developed and picked up new experiences...the slow burner approach leads to key personal development in a way that one off shorter programmes don't."
Burnley artist.

Community integration can occur at multiple levels within and outside individual arts projects. This may include artists integrating with marginalised communities to co-design and co-produce new artworks, but may also include different groups in different neighbourhoods coming together to share their arts experiences and ideas and inspire collaboration. While arts organisations and artists can provide a context and space that can support community integration it is often an organic process that cannot be artificially created.

One of the learning points highlighted through the delivery of the Arts and Communities programme has been the importance of avoiding the use of exclusive 'arts' language and jargon which can act as a barrier to encouraging local communities to get involved. Equally important is the need to promote the 'fun' and 'social' aspects of participation as opposed to focusing on the artistic aspects of activities. This is particularly relevant when working in disadvantaged communities where local people may be facing a number of challenges.

For lead organisations and commissioned artists it is important to recognise the inherent risks in working within communities where participation in arts has traditionally been low – in particular when using models of co-design and co-delivery. Not all engagement activities will necessarily end up in the production of artwork or a performance but what is important is the learning and reflection that can inform future approaches and activities.

Arts organisations and artists have to be comfortable with taking a step back, in particular where communities are taking the lead in delivering arts activities and performances. At the same time, given the potential reputational risks to professional artists and arts organisations, the skill is knowing when and how to intervene in order to ensure the quality of the artistic output is maintained.

**It is important to
focus on the fun
and social aspects
of getting involved**



Critical success factors

Learning from across the four localities highlights the following as critical success factors:

- Building relationships based on mutual trust and respect is an integral part of engaging local communities and widening participation in the arts. Continuity of staff and/or artists is important to maintaining these relationships and supporting people in the community to broaden or deepen their engagement and involvement in arts and creative activities.
- Arts activities and events need to be culturally relevant to the community. Drawing inspiration and ideas from a community's sense of place and shared identity can prove effective in bringing different groups of people together.
- Facilitation skills are a key factor in the success of working with communities, in particular in the use of co-design and co-delivery models. Artists and arts organisations need to strike a balance between raising aspirations and managing expectations, letting go but retaining control, and ensuring that the quality of the engagement process doesn't compromise the quality of the artistic output.
- Using local assets including familiar community spaces as well as local leaders is essential to gaining reach into previously disengaged or hidden groups. Don't rush engagement; it takes time and needs to start from the level of where people are at. It is important to focus on the fun and social aspects of getting involved and ensure that this is clearly communicated and promoted within the community.

Legacy

The Arts and Communities programme has been successful in creating a demand for participation in arts activities in areas and communities where participation levels were previously low. The arts activities and events have provided a voice for different people and groups in the community and opportunities for people to come together. People engaged through the programme have maintained their involvement in helping to develop and deliver local arts activities. It has showcased numerous participatory arts projects that have met demand and evidenced the creative potential of everyone, and explored the various barriers to engagement in communities where participation was low.

In Burnley the crafts group continues to meet on a weekly basis at Burnley Mechanics and has established links with Super Slow Way, the Creative People and Places programme covering the Pennine area of Lancashire. They are also commencing a project with Tate Liverpool and continue to attract new members to the group. In Bradford the community in Ravenscliff have secured funding from BIG Lottery's Reaching Communities fund which has enabled them to continue their arts activity. In Bristol acta have continued their work with several of the

community groups and participants engaged through the Arts and Communities programme, having been successful in securing funding from a range of trusts and foundations.

One of the main challenges to legacy across all four localities is securing funding to enable them to support the continued participation and progression of local people.

Partnerships

Across the four localities there is evidence of continuing partnership working to build on the momentum and activities delivered through the Arts and Communities programme. In Bradford the council's cultural services team has continued to work closely with the neighbourhoods team to engage new communities in arts activities. In Bristol acta is developing partnerships with migrant groups and refugees to inspire future community theatre productions. In Burnley and Birmingham the programme has facilitated greater collaboration between arts organisations and artists which is helping to shape new arts activities and engage new audiences. Across the four localities the programme has enabled a range of organisations to come together – and in many cases these links have been maintained – and has supported collaborative bids to a number of funding bodies.

Arts infrastructure

The Arts and Communities programme has enabled the four localities to establish new, or strengthen existing, arts infrastructure. In Bradford the programme has supported the creation of Community Arts Networks in five neighbourhoods, and the council's cultural services team is continuing to support these networks to develop the skills and confidence to deliver new arts activities and events.



Crafts group © Louise Crosby

Partners have an ambition to establish the Reflections community arts festival as an annual event for Bradford District which showcases community arts developed throughout the year.

In Birmingham a new self-organised co-operative organisation called No. 11 Arts has been formed by the lead people from across the 10 Local Arts Fora covering each district of the city. This new organisation will facilitate future collaborative working across the city and continue to engage local communities in arts activities as participants, audiences and co-designers.

In Bristol the programme has enabled acta to extend its links with community groups and develop new intercultural and intergenerational community theatre beyond the programme. Similarly in Burnley, several of the groups supported through the Arts and Communities programme, such as the crafts group and cinema group, have continued to flourish and have been successful in securing additional funding to support local arts activities and events. The programme has also helped to encourage more local people to access activities at Burnley Mechanics, which in turn is helping to sustain this cultural asset.

Across the four localities the programme has helped many artists to develop their skills in facilitating community arts and using co-design as an approach to shape and organise arts events and activities in the community. In light of continuing pressures on local councils' arts development budgets, this pool of community artists provides a valuable resource to support the creation of high quality arts projects that have a positive community impact and actively contribute to stronger communities.

Models of working

The models of co-design and co-delivery used across the four localities throughout the Arts and Communities programme continue to influence the approach used for ongoing arts activities in local communities. These models have wider relevance for the arts sector and can provide a template for use in Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme and more broadly across the organisations supported through the National Portfolio.

The Arts and Communities programme has enabled a range of artists and arts organisations to develop their knowledge and practical experience of using co-design and co-delivery to engage people in communities where arts participation has traditionally been low.

"[I learnt] that the participants are eager for affordable cultural and creative activities within their local area. Also that they wish to learn and assimilate more with the rest of Birmingham. I discovered that if the workshops are well structured and that I work with the co-producers to gain insight and research of the communities, that a wealth of value is gained by the participants and expression of wanting to reduce their isolation starts to come through."

Artist, Birmingham

Cascading this approach more widely across the arts and cultural sectors can help future programmes to establish genuine connections with communities. These connections can allow people of all backgrounds the opportunity to participate in the arts and build a clear sense of shared values, aspirations and common ground.

Arts Council England
The Hive
49 Lever Street
Manchester
M1 1FN

Website: www.artscouncil.org.uk

Phone: 0845 300 6200

Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk

Textphone: 020 7973 6564

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