



## South East England Regional Assembly Select Committee on Poverty and Inclusion

### 1. Introduction

Arts Council England is the development agency and lottery distributor for the arts in England. Our ambitions for the arts are: supporting the artist, enabling organisations to thrive, not just survive, championing cultural diversity, offering opportunities for young people and encouraging growth.

We welcome the Assembly's scrutiny on the effectiveness of policies and responsiveness of mainstream agencies to the social inclusion agenda. The 'Context and Issues' paper is a useful guide in thinking about how social inclusion links with national, regional policies and local initiatives. We welcome the acknowledgement in the paper of the role that the cultural sector plays in the social inclusion agenda.

We support the response submitted to the Select Committee from Culture South East. This paper considers the issues from the arts perspective, and offers some examples on the role of artists and arts organisations in addressing social exclusion.

### 2. Why are we committed to social inclusion?

As the context and issues paper rightly points out, social exclusion includes poverty and low income, but is a multidimensional disadvantage leading individuals or groups being wholly or partly excluded from *full* participation in society.

Arts & culture enables one to make sense of one's existence, communicate and challenge thoughts and views, express oneself, learn new skills, socialise with others and feel a sense of well being. Thus, the ability to participate in the arts as an audience member, participant or maker, for everyone, is a crucial element of inclusion.

In 1999, the Social Exclusion Unit reported through Policy Action Team (PAT) 10 on the role of arts and sport on neighbourhood renewal. A key finding of PAT10 was that participation in arts and sports could support community development

through impacting on the indicators of health, crime, education and employment. (DCMS, 1999). Arts Council England's response to PAT 10, *Addressing social exclusion: a framework for action* (ACE, 2000) included a programme of evaluation of arts projects with social inclusion aims. In our manifesto *Ambitions for the Arts*, we state our belief in the transforming power of the arts and want to ensure that everyone, irrespective of their background, is able to experience quality arts. Over the years, we have been involved with national, regional and local partners to enable arts to contribute to the social inclusion agenda.

In this paper, we wish to highlight the role of artists and arts organisations, illustrate how the arts contribute to the cross cutting themes of social inclusion and provide comments and suggestions for more effective working between partner agencies and ourselves.

### **3. The role of artists**

Artists have a lot to offer within the place they live and work. Artists naturally have an open, reflective, questioning, lateral and apolitical approach to thinking that accepts a diversity of viewpoints and resists forgone and superficial conclusions. As well as the intrinsic value of the arts, artists contribute to improving the quality of lives of those they work with. With socially excluded groups, the arts provides a mechanism for a voice, building confidence and a sense of identity, creativity and social skills, improving literacy and numeracy skills, providing a safe space to explore issues and express emotions and build communities. Below are examples of how artists bring rays of hope to the communities they live and work in.

#### **Dominic De Light and clients of First Base Day Centre, Brighton**

Dominic De Light has both arts and education qualifications. She is an author, freelance writer, writing lecturer and facilitator with the Big Issue, Brighton. In 2004, she approached us for a grant to enable her to work with homeless clients at First Base Day Centre, a healthy living centre in Brighton. Brighton Housing Trust, the host organisation is very supportive of her work. Clients at the centre enjoy one afternoon a week participating in a writing club, focusing on health topics and they can drop in to see Dominic to discuss ideas before the session. From January to March 2005, another artist helped clients in developing their

photography skills. Their work was displayed at a two-week exhibition in a gallery in May 2005. The group has now started a book club where they discuss their favourite books and write reviews. Both the staff at the centre and clients are buzzing with enthusiasm and the clients have gained confidence.

### **Christine Brooks-Abraham and Carmen Hughes and Motivation group**

40 children of all ages are bouncing about with big grins on their faces. This is the Motivation dance class led by two artists, Christine and Carmen. "We started Motivation in 1998 to help young people from the black and Caribbean communities in Slough get motivated," Christine explains. "When kids come here we see a drastic improvement in their behaviour. It gives them something to look forward to and they feel included instead of excluded from society." (Slough Inspired, 2004). The group was awarded the Mayor's Arts award and Christine was recognised with the Ranjit Mann Award for Women in the Arts.

## **2. The role of arts organisations**

Many arts organisations want to engage with people in the communities in which they are located. This can help to embed their work in the social fabric of villages, towns and cities. Arts organisations can offer useful resources to help communities to develop new skills, community cohesion between different groups, and investment in lifelong learning.

### **Artworks-MK and Milton Keynes Gallery**

Milton Keynes gallery is a purpose built contemporary art gallery and present 8- 10 free exhibitions a year. Artworks-MK is an organisation that supports and promotes participation, learning and development through arts and crafts activities, projects and events in Milton Keynes. With funding from the Arts Council, they jointly ran a photography and mixed media workshops with 10 older people (aged 60 and above) and 20 younger people (12-18) living in Coffee Hall, a deprived area of Milton Keynes. Its aim is to establish an understanding of the cultural needs of socially excluded older and younger people in Coffee Hall. The work was exhibited at Milton Keynes Gallery and at Coffee Hall Arts Workshop. 10

participants visited the gallery for the first time and participants felt a sense of pride. Both organisations have continued to build on this experience to work with non-arts agencies to improve the quality of lives for their local communities.

### **Interaction**

Shed MK is a newly formed inclusive theatre project devised by Interaction - Milton Keynes, supported by directors, designers and writers where young disabled and non-disabled people aged from 4- 14 work together to stage plays and performances in theatres and outside spaces in the city. 'It's simply as you are watching life as it ought to be' Mandy Holland - Director IMK. The themes for the work belong to the young people together so that any sense of exclusion they themselves dissolve into a jointly held artistic expression of what it is to be young, what it is to be different and what it feels like to belong.

### **3. The arts contribute to the cross cutting themes of social inclusion**

The arts can help to address the cross cutting themes of social inclusion. The Arts Council considers the instrumental use of the arts to meet other policy objectives a valid approach. There are many examples of the contribution the arts can make to addressing issues of health, crime, education and employment and we outline some of these in Appendix One.

### **4. Working more strategically together in tackling social inclusion**

The South East Social Inclusion Statement was a useful impetus to the thinking around social inclusion and that the indicators are still relevant. However, with introduction of new partner agencies such as Children Trusts and Local Strategic partnerships and new initiatives such as Area Investment Frameworks and Local Area Agreements, there is a need to review and renew the Social Inclusion Statement and to encourage new partner agencies to be involved.

However, in order to engage in the structures which are set up to address social exclusion, the capacity of organisations to get involved is an issue. Often organisations working in the field of social inclusion are small, and do not have the resources to engage in the wider debate around the development of strategy and

allocation of resources. We suggest the development of a range of mechanisms for involvement ranging from time limited working groups, biannual forum days and e-mail sharing of networks.

Feedback from arts and community organisations suggests the focus on hard economic outcomes appears to make it harder for arts organisations to engage with contributing towards inclusion programmes. Arts organisations contribute to softer outcomes like building confidence, first steps to learning etc which are equally important in reaching excluded people. In partnership with Culture SE, we will continue to build evidence of the impact of arts on hard economic outcomes. However, this requires evaluation of large scale projects of long duration in order for data to be sufficiently rigorous.

In order for arts to contribute to social inclusion at local level, we strongly advocate local arts and cultural representation on Local Strategic Partnerships.

## **Conclusion**

As highlighted in this paper, the arts have much to offer in promoting social inclusion both in ensuring that everyone has access to quality arts provision and in contributing to the cross cutting themes of social inclusion. As illustrated through the above examples, artists and arts organisations contribute to tackling social exclusion in the areas in which they live and work.

Arts Council England is committed to working with partners, helping to influence and shape the agenda on tackling social exclusion in the region. We are pleased that culture is now part of regional strategies that relate to social inclusion. Now the challenge is for arts & culture to be translated in strategic joint actions both regionally and locally. A review of the Social Inclusion Statement involving new partners, rationalisation of networks and groups, diverse ways of engagement of stakeholders on the social inclusion agenda and representation of arts & culture on LSPs would be welcome.

## References

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## Appendix One

### Health

According to the Public Health report published by the Regional Director of Public Health, there are enormous health inequalities in the region. The most deprived areas in the region suffer the highest mortality rate, morbidity, have highest teenage pregnancy, long term illness rates among young people under 20, etc. (2004 Annual Report of the South East Regional Director of Public Health)

Arts Council England South East is working in partnership with other partner agencies in tackling health inequalities through the arts. The South East Arts and Health Partnership Group chaired by Ron Turner, regional director of NICE consists of representatives from the Arts Council, artists, Primary Care Trust, Social Services, Sure Start, NHS Trust and universities. This group oversees the strategic development of arts in health in the south east and advocates for the value of the arts. A number of sub-regional networks have been set up in Surrey, Brighton, Kent, Hampshire, East Sussex and Oxfordshire and are beginning to show evidence of local ownership, increased networking, increased range and quality of arts activities and the embedding of arts in local policies and planning.

Nationally, the Arts Council will launch its Arts and Health strategy in late summer 2005. The Strategy focuses on the following priority areas

- Healthy communities
- Built environment
- Children and young people
- Workforce development
- Older people

The arts can contribute to addressing health problems which are created through drugs and alcohol abuse, homelessness, obesity, isolation, lack of community identity, racial tension, eating disorders etc. Examples of recent projects we have supported include the following

- Thames Valley Partnership's 'The Way it really is' project – young people worked with a professional theatre and video artist to produce a show based on the dangers of alcohol. This video was brought to a number of schools with the young people involved leading the discussion.

- Reading Borough Council's 'Sexpressions' project using music, dance and drama to work with young people on the issues of sexual health and teenage pregnancy.
- In partnership with the South East arts & health partnership group, Sport England, and GOSE, we are promoting 'Stepping Out' in October 2005, a project aiming to tackle obesity with hard to reach groups through physical movement focusing on dance and walking.
- Healing Arts as part of the Isle of Wight NHS Trust runs a green room poets group. These are Mental Health service users and they are able to use their time expressing themselves, socialising and gaining confidence. Their recent photography and poetry exhibition 'Riverlines' showed the enormous talents of the participants.

## **Crime**

The Arts Council recognises the link between crime and excluded groups in deprived areas. We have been working in partnership with Youth Justice Board to look at how the arts can contribute to the literacy and education skills through the Plus Strategy. Various arts enrichment modules will be used by artists working in the Youth offending context and will aid in showing evidence of improving literacy and numeracy skills. We are collaborating with The Youth Justice Board and Nottingham Trent University in a research project aimed at exploring the role of the arts in the criminal justice system. It will also explore the arts as means of re-engaging socially excluded young people 14-18, who are detached from mainstream education, training or employment.

Nationally, our arts and criminal justice strategy is being developed and launched in late summer. The areas of focus are

- CPD of artists working in criminal justice system
- Working in pupil referral units
- Developing arts in Positive Futures programme (Government programme to divert young people from substance misuse)
- Implementing PLUS Strategy and arts enrichment in partnership with Youth Justice Board

The Anne Peaker Centre for arts and criminal justice, the national umbrella organisation for people who work in the arts & criminal justice system is based in this region. They produce research, provide information, guidance and training to artists and others who work in this area of work. Artsworld, an umbrella organisation for youth arts based in the region provides information and training to those working with young people at risk and is developing a national youth arts network.

We have made contact with youth service, Connexions, Youth Offending teams, prisons, foyers, social landlords, NACRO, Crime and disorder partnerships, voluntary groups and local authorities etc.

We have been involved with Positive Activities for Young People for the past two years, advising and signposting artists and arts organisations to the lead delivery agencies and hosting events that share good practice in PAYP arts activities.

A number of youth arts partnerships have been set up across the South East. These organisations have good track record of working with young people at risk and partnership working with multiple agencies.

We have supported a number of projects demonstrating the link between the arts and the criminal justice system

- HMP Emley worked with the Irene Taylor Trust late last year to provide quality music workshops to a group of inmates, culminating in a final performance.
- Theatre group, Inside Out, is working with two prisons on the Isle of Wight
- University College of Winchester is working with inmates of Winchester prison to produce a play, called 'Our Country's Good' in April 2005.
- Oxfordshire Youth Arts Partnership's 3 year project 'Reaching the Parts' working with young people at risk and youth offenders. Partners include with Oxfordshire Social Services working with looked after children.

## **Education and employment**

We recognise that people not in education and employment (NEET) are most at risk of exclusion and encourage the importance of progression routes for participants in arts projects. Many arts organisations have developed or are developing accreditation with Open College Network or local colleges for their participants' achievement.

Nationally, our Young People Arts awards, which have similar concept to Duke of Edinburgh awards, will be launched in Autumn 2005.

Through support from the Phoenix Fund, we will extend our network of Creative Business Advisers working across the region, helping creative practitioners to identify their own solutions to business problems, with a focus on excluded groups.

Creative Partnerships, a joint partnership between DfES and DCMS, have been established in areas of neighbourhood renewal areas to bring creativity back into schools. Creative Partnerships delivers innovative projects in partnership with children, teachers and the creative and cultural sector. In the south east, Creative Partnerships programmes are based in Kent, Slough, Southampton/Isle of Wight and Hastings/East Sussex. The success of the initiative is partly recognising the different learning styles of young people and using arts to demonstrate how these can be recognised.

**Ends**