

September, 2020

Community Arts, Participatory Arts and Non-ticketed sectors

Creating Recovery and Building Back Better

Consultation

Following on from the DfC Recovery group meetings, Conor Shields, ceo of Community Arts Partnership offered to develop a response looking at the Community Arts, Participatory Arts and Non-ticketed sub sector. Various conversations and responses are framed here, within this document.

Overview

The Creative Ecology in an Emergency

In the interdependent setting of a creative ecology, all components feed from and into the ecosystem, creating life and regeneration. But without the environmental conditions to support that cycle, the arc of that possibility can only narrow. Balancing the equilibrium by assisting the most in need in terms of client populations, not the most able, would seem an appropriate intervention. Seen positively the creative ecology model moves away from industrial, discipline-centred understandings of the work of artists and arts organisations and instead places focus on the system of relationships and interdependent need present within and across the widest community. Such ecological thinking is currently being applied in many sectors, from psychology to finance, as part of the search for more effective ways of analysing and responding to a context of rapid change and disruption such as our current global pandemic.

As such, an ecological response cannot be Darwinian, instead one of nurture and sensitive management, relating to the interconnectedness of our fragile eco-system in the arts. Ecology particularly seeks to learn about symbiosis within natural systems, as a mutual exchange of benefits that draws nutrients and energy from the environment while at the same time helping to sustain it in the process. Therefore creative ecology is an emerging concept in cultural policy that places the arts and creativity within a more including, holistic worldview and reveals interdependencies with economic, social, cultural and environmental systems.

At this time, we understand just how decimated our working environment within the creative ecology of community hubs/associations/groups/care settings and schools has become; how fearful and under-resourced most community organisations are, given the range of health threats to the most vulnerable and marginalised in our community. These are the very populations that those working in community arts and socially engaged practice aim to support year after year.

Our schools and education centres, care settings, health settings and voluntary arts groups are all struggling to cope – without the connection of community arts, hundreds of thousands of people will be cut adrift without the connection of creative engagement – increasing the already deep deficits of wellbeing and health of this section of the population.

Our deliberations would point to an inclusive scaling of support that can be assessed against not only organisational needs but the environmental context of an organisations' work and the locus of its practice in a wider system.

In such a model, the outworking would anticipate greater levels of support for organisations working in less favourable environments and areas of artistic practice and endeavour that have struggled for recognition and funding but have much higher levels of engagement, participation and indeed potentially audiences, mostly non-ticketed.

"We don't all work on a level playing field. Some organisations work in areas where there is very little capacity to contribute. This could lead to larger organisations being prioritised as being able to meet community needs because they have access to more funding rather than knowing what is going on, on the ground"

Our sub-sector has consistently and professionally engaged with the most fragile area of the arts ecology and for this express reason, needs greater levels of support to assist the most vulnerable at this time and in the future as we look to recovery and renewal.

<https://www.nicva.org/article/voluntary-and-community-sector-in-northern-ireland-significantly-impacted-by-covid-19>)

This is an emergency – not only for the arts but for our society as a whole. In terms of financial support, we have all understood that we have had an ongoing crisis in the arts, due to historical underinvestment, but Covid 19 has further undermined our collective viability. Much has been made of how resilient the sector is but it must be restated that resilience comes from being exposed to challenges that are not overwhelming however, for a great many within our corner of the sector, the additional burdens and challenges related to the multi-layered impacts of Covid 19 pandemic may mean that this period of upheaval may overwhelm us all.

Key Needs

1. Financial viability

In our conversations we have identified a range of immediate and longer terms needs. We also have a range of proposals and propositions that enable a more collaborative sector to emerge from this crisis – whenever that may be.

In the immediate term, we need monies to support our operational capacity, just to keep our organisations working and our core missions to support the communities we serve, alive. For a great many organisations, this means maintaining staff levels, enabling freelance artist/facilitators to survive this crisis, and develop the capacity of organisations, personnel and communities to access different ways of working and creating collectively for now and the future.

We also need financial assurance that we can build back from this crisis in the years ahead and to this end, there is a widespread necessity for additional funds and support in 21/22 and indeed beyond.

2. Operational funds to maintain operational costs

The community arts / participatory and non-ticketed sector needs to maintain its position currently – and to see its resilience supported financially – given that our sub sector accounts for c15% of outcomes but only 7% of funding, it is necessary for us to see an increase in funding across this area of practice.

3. New equipment to allow a move towards digital production

We require investment in new equipment to help reach communities and participants increasingly isolated by the pandemic. High grade digital equipment and infrastructure is costly. Each organisation in this area could very quickly utilise funds for updated computers, buying software (which traditionally has not been included in equipment grants) and paying for on-going interactive services like Zoom etc.

Developing digital services that are professional and robust requires the purchase of high grade equipment - eg an adequate DSLR/Video camera, with tripod and lighting, plus microphones and editing software alone costs upward of £1,750 each at minimum.

1. Upgrading computers and laptops to edit, stream and package digital material has further equipment costs – Computers with up to date software ability cost between £800 and £2,000 each.

2. Upgrading web-based capacity with greater broadband speed of a minimum 1 GB p/s requires additional investment – securing funding to install fibre-optic connections for organisations, or satellite based systems for those away from metropolitan centres where cable connections are not possible. Again, for many these are prohibitively expensive but could now greatly enhance the ability of those organisations to maintain their missions and support their audiences and participating client groups.

3. Funds for training regarding digital production

Staff and facilitators require additional funds for training in these new digital areas as well. Training can be expensive but is wholly necessary if the investment in new technology is to yield results and outcomes. Training budgets have been decimated over the years and currently, organisations concerned about their survival are not necessarily looking at areas of skills development or capacity building in house. Budgets of £1,000 to £5,000 per organisation would assist many to secure this necessary development.

Within the digital economy, which can be not only a participative practice but is also talent led, science and knowledge based, it has at its most precious asset, people with creative skills and potential. Any training is not done in isolation; it is not only how to make the technology work for our sector but about how it can enhance hands-on training on projects which are creative, encourage innovation and *build back better* as we move our sector through and beyond this pandemic.

4. Outdoor performance & activity space

There is need for outdoor performance space which can accommodate Covid-secure, socially distanced activity all year round

We have also noted that for a great many organisations in our area, outdoor, Covid-secure spaces are at a premium. The Hill of the O'Neill in Dungannon for example, is an outdoor facility used by a number of organisations to great effect over the summer and it has been one of the few spaces across N Ireland capable of hosting workshops and events during the pandemic. But, as the weather changes here, it is not possible to use such facilities outside the summer months. Temporary, large scale outdoor spaces that are both well-ventilated, warm, dry and secure are required. Such spaces require considerable capital investment – never mind the concomitant need to access sites that are amenable and practical for workshop participants, audiences and performers. Developing a series of these sites, to be programmed on a shared and collaborative basis, would allow for the investment to enable a host of organisations and their participants to re-engage with creativity in a sustainable and sufficient manner.

Securing such amenities would allow for a range of engagements – and permit greater levels of socially-distanced and bespoke programming across all areas of the arts. But there are supplementary needs here. For a great many organisations, transport costs to bring participants to such venues are prohibitive and over the last years, the capital programmes to assist with minibuses and vans capable of facilitating such engagements have not been readily available. A fleet of arts vans and buses, to cope with not only programming externally to venues (either community or schools based) but transporting equipment, PPE etc, would be welcome, as would the obvious additional costs in maintaining, equipping and running such vehicles. Many organisations rely on personal transport and coach hire, which are wholly inadequate to meet the current challenges.

5. People with express and more challenging needs:

People with particular physical and mental health needs face a more challenging set of circumstances for organisations to accommodate safely and securely. For those with physical challenges, the ability for groups to congregate in Covid-secure ways demands greater capacity for organisations. For example, outdoor venues have to be disability accessible; accompanying carers needs have to be factored in; safeguards and risk assessment for all these areas requires time and accurate development for each and every person and situation. Each and every individual need of any given participant must be accounted for and responded to.

At present, the deaf/disabled community is really struggling to maintain connection. Where previously the creative engagement was enjoyed across this population, this has now fallen away due to the pandemic. These individual clients and their local associations require novel ways to engage – and more traditional ways to foster creative development. Braille services, equipment and software is required. For facilitators, mobile induction loop systems, high contrast audio-visual equipment, audio describing equipment would enable and enhance the ability to engage with this particular population. Again, such equipment is expensive and specialised and requires greater levels of training and indeed transportation.

6. Digital Access for people with disabilities and for remote communities

Isolation, particularly in rural areas, was a constant challenge to client groups in pre Covid-19 days but now, that challenge is all the greater. Enabling a programme of broadband investment or dedicated satellite-based broadband services for the arts, would enable at least greater contact and connection for organisations with their participants. For a great many organisations within community arts and non-ticketed sector, the use of digital platforms has been both necessary and indeed advantageous. Many are programming development and workshops via interactive platforms and maintaining high levels of challenging creative work – across physical theatre, poetry and creative writing, visual arts, dance, drama, music etc. But without adequate broadband speeds, many in our rural areas and indeed some metropolitan areas, struggle to have adequate capacity. A dedicated programme to extend and amplify the sector's ability to connect digitally

would massively enhance general capacity but have a significant betterment for rural and isolated groups.

7. Access to existing facilities

Much has been made of the creative ecology of our sector as a whole but many organisations have struggled with collaborative programming. Whilst social distancing restrictions demand that certain premises are not to be used at present, there are a great many organisations that could programme their client groups in specific “social bubbles” that would allow them to use centres that cannot programme work themselves. In Belfast, non-venue organisations would welcome collaborative programming of venues such as the Ulster Hall, Waterfront Hall and Odyssey Arena etc.

The challenge to-date has always been the additional expense in hiring these spaces – but if in this emergency, some collaboration and enabling of such venues to act as Covid-secure hosts were established, it would allow for many organisation to avail of the spaces and timetable weeks of secure programming. Adequate risk assessment and response could allow for a range of community-based practice to continue to have meaningful engagement with client groups. This again requires more labour intensive capacity, but these currently fallow spaces could be opened up to such small, secures groupings without need for audiences etc. Potential collaboration could ensue across agencies and artforms given the size of some of the spaces mentioned.

8. Community and Participatory organisations driving social and economic recovery require renewed investment

If we are to *build back better*, providing access, supporting participation, enhancing innovation, origination, authorship and creativity and ultimately ensuring the ownership by participants of their creative and cultural choices, then greater support for community arts and socially-engaged practice is essential. A strategy to see this investment realised and to then support its on-going and necessary development and implementation is crucial to both the sector’s survival but also the necessary participation that is so unquestionably craved by communities across our region (see responses p.11-12).

Allowing for a greater horizon of funding timelines – returning to funding on a multi-year basis, seeing supported community artists embedded in communities across N Ireland, as local experts, artistic translators and arts advocates would also enhance all areas of participation.

Supporting new collaborative working, where practitioners from diverse disciplines are enabled to work creatively together, would see an uplift for practice and engagement alike. Innovation programmes, offering funding and ongoing specialised support, building on the expertise within the community arts/participatory sector would enable better levels of engagement and fire creativity in new and unexplored ways.

As a major employer in N Ireland, and indeed offering significant opportunity for freelance artists/facilitators, not to mention engagement with high profile creatives across the full spectrum of the combined arts, our area of the sector can enable rapid economic recovery within the creative field and of course beyond. By enhancing immediate opportunities for employment, we are securing the current and future capacity of our staff, creative teams and indeed client organisations to once again understand and express how we can advance this society, applying creativity and radical ideas of development across a range of areas: environmental; health and wellbeing; apprenticeships; mentoring and job shadowing; research and development; education etc.

9. Research & Development

Further to this, this sector has been starved of resources to develop research that leads to improved practice and better outcomes. Within any emergency funding, it is vital that we find the space to reflect, explore, analyse and apply new learning, not only within our collective practices but in looking at the changed social and economic environment presenting to us as we hope to move forward from the pandemic. Research funding will have a crucial role to play in this. Issues like greater unemployment, mental health and wellbeing, digital poverty, loneliness etc need careful thought if we are to find appropriate solutions and make our services more effective in the recovery.

Emergency investment must be enabled with sufficient revenue to see this sector not only maintain its current infrastructure and position, but be capable of meeting the greater challenge of recovery, re-engagement and renewal of our society – helping healing through expressive arts practice and assisting in the rehabilitation of a society traumatised by lockdowns, outbreaks, fear, anxiety, bereavement, fear of violence, sectarianism, racism and homophobia. All resulting in less social cohesion in an already divided society.

This part of the sector has always worked with those sections of the population that have been most marginalised, through socio-economic obstacles and circumstances, sexual orientation, or through cultural or life choices. Working with such a range of significantly disabling social situations, community arts and socially engaged practitioners will face some of the greatest challenges to emerge through the pandemic.

Social isolation and dislocation, job losses, domestic violence and abuse, educational disruption, untreated ill-health, heightened fear and anxiety; all these areas of deficit that were always in chronic need in N Ireland will now be further exacerbated. The role of this area of arts practice will be crucial to supporting recovery, not just of the arts and cultural industry, but more profoundly, of our society. Inclusive arts practice can make meaningful and consistent interventions in supporting how are communities renew themselves – amplifying health messaging, exploring novel and easily accessible expressions of community rebuilding and developing the wellbeing and confidence of a huge swathe of our society to re-engage.

This community-based area of the sector works more closely with people – where they live and are assisted, educated and supported. In any building back recovery of the arts, greater access to programming funds and indeed core support of this non-ticketed area of work, will offer greater societal impacts.

10. Lost income and opportunity

If revenue funding from the principal funder of the arts, The Arts Council of N Ireland, were to be realised at the same level of neighbouring jurisdictions like the Republic of Ireland and Wales for example, that would once again see National Lottery money become an additional support for the those developing community-based initiatives, rather than offering a stop-gap financial intervention which is does currently. Providing a stable foundational platform within our community based arts organisations is fundamental to this mode of recovery.

Per Capita Spend 19-20*

REP IRELAND	£14.50
WALES	£13.94
SCOTLAND	£11.56
ENGLAND	£10.56
-----	-----
Average	£12.64
-----	-----
N IRELAND	£9.62
- more than NI	31%

*based on pre-emergency funding

Given that all organisations in this area have seen whatever enterprise activity they once undertook almost completely vanish, the emergency funding must make good that deficit for organisations. At present, anywhere between 10 and 40% of turnover is being lost in this area of the sector, undermining any notion of practical resilience. If a funding stream were available for specific Covid-19 related working that did not exclude AFP clients of the Arts Council but allowed them to enhance their programming, this would be an obvious boon. Streamlining the distribution of that funding would also be advantageous and efficient. Employing sectoral lead organisations, whose constitutions allow them also to be grant-making, could allow for greater and more effective and immediate distribution and consequent development of a coherent Covid19 recovery response. There is a range of such organisations that could manage such distributive programmes, with networks and relationships both with funders and government and, perhaps more crucially, with other organisations, practitioners and indeed communities.

11. Recovery, renewal and remembering

The emotional fall-out from Covid-19 is deepening. As we move towards a winter with uncertainty and apprehension, the true impact of Covid 19 will be better understood. For arts organisations working in communities and settings that have been devastated by bereavement (such as care homes), dislocation, isolation, loss and anger, increased levels of sensitive and appropriate community arts and socially engaged practice will be needed to assist our society to remember and memorialise this process and move forward with hope.

As the arts organisations most attenuated to the therapeutic power of the arts, the community arts and socially engaged arts sector should be recognised and effectively enabled to assist communities and individuals reflect and rebuild beyond the tragedy of Covid 19. This area of practice reaches more deeply and sensitively into our communities than any other so it is completely practical that this area of relational arts activity be offered the maximum assistance to help our communities repair. All organisations involved in this area of practice know fundamentally and understand intuitively, the sensitivity of approaches and techniques of engagement better than any. Enabling through funding, this sub-sector of the arts, will catalyse recovery. Offering meaningful large scale packages of recovery funding to these organisations will pay dividends in social rehabilitation and recovery.

Issues and concerns reported to CAP via consultation around COVID19 July 2020.

- *Being together and how we manage that allowing the children to have fun*
- *Keeping connected*
- *Loneliness*
- *Maintaining mental health and wellbeing for all participants and continue to connect with an aim and purpose to explore taking heart and hope along with the impact of recent events.*
- *Lack of opportunities for our youth in recent months. This programme will provide an outlet.*
- *Social interaction, loneliness and mental health issues*
- *Maintaining and strengthening our connectivity and creativity under current constraints*
- *Family time, community, health*
- *Finding a way to ensure group members can take part in any online activities.*
- *Our children fight every day to find there place in this world, the therapies and intervention that is in place to ensure they are safe, looked after, and able to manage day to day life, has all been put on hold, parents are working so hard to carry this on at home, but they are not professionals, our children need social interaction to encourage there speech, and social awareness, we need to work hard to ensure we are doing everything that we can to prevent regression in their social development as it does not come naturally*
- *After isolation, the need to look forward with hope. To feel resilient and able to connect with friends.*
- *Our main concern is members losing interest in our group as we are not functioning physically at the moment*
- *Social isolation and having access to the arts*

- *A lot of our members are feeling forgotten. Although they are extremely resilient and staying as positive as they can, but they feel that the impact of lock down on their lives has been underestimated and overlooked. It has highlighted the importance of their support network and the need for conversation, participation and feeling that they are a part of something. Maintaining contact and being able to continue being creative and interact through their creativity has been essential in enabling them to make sense of the situation and understand that we are all in this together.*
- *How to rebuild connections and hope and purpose*
- *The young people were currently working are isolated as many of the tailored programmes that allow them young people to get out of the house once or twice a week have now been cancelled or are happening online. A programme like this would bridge the gap until programmes resume, giving young people some interaction. Some young people may be experiencing anxiety as a result of the current situation. As arts have been proven to help reduce anxiety, we believe this programme would help young people to reduce their anxiety and see the positives in the current situation.*
- *Social isolation due to lock down restrictions and the dependence of carers for support. Deterioration in mental health due to lack of social interaction and physical activity. A lot of our members struggle to fully understand the restrictions placed on them and have gone from being highly independent and having a full and interactive social life, to not having left the house in over 10+ weeks and receiving only a few hours of contact per week. Members have very limited resources at home, some not even having internet access or a mobile phone.*
- *Drug use during lock down tensions*
- *Due to covid, we are not allowed any visitors and we are running out of our own resources to provide arts and crafts sessions for residents, so we are noticing a low morale in residents who miss their families and visitors*
- *Our members would regularly face lack of inclusion in the local community and in particular the issue of isolation during lockdown.*
- *Social isolation is a very big issue at the moment for the groups as they cannot get out to meet. The issue of difficulty in using technology due to the age of some group members.*
- *Social isolation and having access to the arts*
- *A lot of our members are feeling forgotten. Although they are extremely resilient and staying as positive as they can, but they feel that the impact of lock down on their lives has been underestimated and overlooked. It has highlighted the importance of their support network and the need for conversation, participation and feeling that they are a part of something. Maintaining contact and being able to continue being creative and interact through their creativity has been essential in enabling them to make sense of the situation and understand that we are all in this together.*
- *Anxiety about what the future is going to look like and how can people socialise, learn and play safely again.*
- *The biggest issues facing our members today is loneliness and isolation due to so much time away from their friends, family and general daily routine. Being able to meet again and work on a project*
- *Many of our service users are feeling lonely, bored or isolated. They miss their routines, their friends, day care workers and the activities they enjoyed at the Day Centre and in the community.*

- *Maintaining and strengthening our connectivity and creativity under current constraints*
- *Our participants issues of concern range from, low self- esteem, poor mental well-being and high levels of anxiety, due to the recent pandemic. Our participants have adapted to the COVID changes but the disruption to daily life and routine has had a detrimental effect on some our participants.*
- *Social exclusion, isolation and regression is a growing concern. Training and learning outcomes have regressed and a small percentage of participants have chosen not to engage and have become extremely socially isolated and removed from the community as a result of COVID-19. The arts can help.*
- *The young people were currently working are isolated. Some young people may be experiencing anxiety as a result of the current situation. As arts have been proven to help reduce anxiety, we believe this programme would help young people to reduce their anxiety and see the positives in the current situation.*
- *After isolation, the need to look forward with hope. To feel resilient and able to connect with friends.*
- *We need to feel stronger together, mental health, isolation, family and friendship, lack of education, anxiety*
- *Keep doing what you are doing - such excellent work*
- *Creative activities that could be done at home*
- *Help providing resources for our lower income families to ensure they were able to take part in these activities, tailored to the needs of the young people we work with.*
- *Any collaboration with local artists to help us with our engagement levels and improve the learning experience for our participants is welcomed. We have access to many participants within the community, who have Autism and learning difficulties and of a wide age group, through our varied social groups and transition services that we offer.*
- *Help providing resources for our lower income families to ensure they were able to take part in these activities. We would love staff to work closely with CAP facilitators to ensure programmes are tailored to*

12. Budget

CREATING THE RECOVERY*

Lost revenues	£227,500
Research & Development	£100,000
Recovery Organisational costs	£455,000
Equipment	£530,000
Digital Training/Literacy	£200,000
Broadband Support	£175,000
Digital Production/Projects	£350,000
Outdoor Space/Appropriate indoor venue space	£1,750,000
Health and Wellbeing, disability programmes	£500,000
Collaborative Partnerships/Projects & Long term partnerships	£150,000
Inter-Community & inclusion	£250,000
Legacy and memoriam project	£500,000
TOTAL	£5,187,500

* based on median estimates/costs

Organisations judged to be in this sector:

1. Community Arts Partnership**
2. Northern Visions Ltd.**
3. Accolade
4. Arts Ekta
5. Beat Carnival**
6. Belfast Community Circus School**
7. Culturlann McAdam Ó Fiaich*
8. Down Community Arts
9. DU Dance*
10. Greater Shantallow Community Arts
11. Green Shoot Productions
12. Festival of Fools**
13. Kabosh**
14. Kids in Control**
15. New Lodge Community Arts
16. Open Arts**
17. Partisan Productions**
18. Prison Arts Foundation
19. Replay Theatre**
20. Sole Purpose
21. Spanner in the Works
22. Sticky Fingers
23. Terra Nova Productions
24. Wheelworks

* responders

** endorsers

Report compiled by Conor Shields, ceo CAP