Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing

The Short Report

July 2017
The time has come to recognise the powerful contribution the arts can make to our health and wellbeing. A substantial report, Creative Health, by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, sets out comprehensive evidence and numerous examples of practice which demonstrate the beneficial impact of the arts.

In the full report, we present the findings of two years of research, evidence-gathering and discussions with patients, health and social care professionals, artists and arts administrators, academics, people in local government, ministers, other policy-makers and parliamentarians from both Houses of Parliament. Our partners in this Inquiry have been the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing, King’s College London, the Royal Society for Public Health and Guy’s and St Thomas’ Charity. We are extremely grateful to our funders, Wellcome, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. More than 300 people have contributed to this process, and we are profoundly indebted to them for the insight and knowledge that they have shared with us. We have been privileged to hear moving personal testimonies from individuals who have experienced remarkable improvements in their own health and wellbeing from engagement with the arts.

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We hope that our report will influence the thinking and practice of people working professionally in health and social care as well as of artists and people working in cultural organisations. It is addressed to all who are thinking about the future of these crucial public services.

We offer a challenge to habitual thinking and ask for new collaborations to be formed across conventional boundaries. We are calling for an informed and open-minded willingness to accept that the arts can make a significant contribution to addressing a number of the pressing issues faced by our health and social care systems. The evidence we present shows how arts-based approaches can help people to stay well, recover faster, manage long-term conditions and experience a better quality of life. We also show how arts interventions can save money and help staff in their work.

Culture change cannot be imposed by government, and we are not asking for legislation or organisational upheaval or more public spending. Government can, however, support the process of change. We hope that our report will help to develop the case that is already being made, by ministers and the NHS as well as others, that we should work towards a healthy and health-creating society.

Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport
Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing.
This includes hospitals, GP surgeries, hospices and care homes.

A mental health recovery centre co-designed by service users in Wales is estimated to save the NHS £300k per year.

The heart rate of new-born babies is calmed by the playing of lullabies. The use of live music in neonatal intensive care leads to considerably reduced hospital stays.

Arts therapies help people to recover from brain injury and diminish the physical and emotional suffering of cancer patients and the side effects of their treatment.

Music therapy reduces agitation and need for medication in 67% of people with dementia.

Arts therapies have been found to alleviate anxiety, depression and stress while increasing resilience and wellbeing.

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Participatory Arts Programmes
This refers to individual and group arts activities intended to improve and maintain health and wellbeing in health and social care settings and community locations.

After engaging with the arts 79% of people in deprived communities in London ate more healthily.

77% engaged in more physical activity
82% enjoyed greater wellbeing.

£216

Arts on Prescription
Part of social prescriing, this involves people experiencing psychological or physical distress being referred (or referring themselves) to engage with the arts in the community (including galleries, museums and libraries).

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Medical Training and Medical Humanities
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Within the NHS, some 10 million working days are lost to sick leave every year, costing £216 per patient.

Over the past two centuries, life expectancy has increased by two years every decade, meaning that half of people being born in the West can expect to reach 100. Arts participation is a vital part of healthy ageing.

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Key Messages

• The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.
• The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health.
• The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.

When we talk about the arts, we mean the visual and performing arts, including crafts, dance, film, literature, music and singing, as well as the culinary arts and gardening. The cultural field embraces concert halls, galleries, heritage sites, libraries, museums and theatres. The capacity in which arts engagement may take place include health and social care environments and community settings. We emphasise the importance for health and wellbeing of architecture, design, planning and the environment.

There is an expanding body of research and evaluation to support the case that the arts have an important contribution to make to health and wellbeing. This evidence is being developed through scholarly work and in everyday practice; it is being disseminated through dedicated journals and other platforms. There is growing interest in the field from professional bodies, including government agencies, and new strategic partnerships are being developed. However, the potential contribution of the arts to health and wellbeing has, as yet, been all too little realised. Too often, arts programmes for health are seen as temporary, and provision is uneven across the country. For this to improve, culture change is needed. The key to progress will be leadership and collaboration across the systems of health, social care and the arts.

The Arts and the Social Determinants of Health and Wellbeing

The conditions in which we are born, grow, work, live and age have profound effects on our health and wellbeing. This report examines how engagement with the arts and culture can have a positive impact on these social determinants, enhancing health, wellbeing and quality of life for people of all ages. However, the evidence shows that engagement with the publicly funded arts is relatively low among people living in circumstances of economic and health disadvantage. We argue, therefore, that it is essential to improve access and engagement where they are lacking, so as to create and sustain healthier lives.

"The mind is the gateway through which the social determinants impact upon health, and this report is about the life of the mind. It provides a substantial body of evidence showing how the arts, enriching the mind through creative and cultural activity, can mitigate the negative effects of social disadvantage. Creative Health should be studied by all those commissioning services." 
Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director, Institute of Health Equity, University College London

A Healthy and Health-Creating Society

Funding aside, the greatest challenges to the health and social care systems come from an ageing population and an increase in the number of people with long-term conditions. NHS England’s Five Year Forward View (2014) called for a new emphasis on prevention and the development of community-based, non-medical responses to a range of physical and mental health and wellbeing needs. Next Steps on the Five Year Forward View (2017) brought into sharper focus the need to enhance primary and mental health care and encourage healthy ageing.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing sees itself as part of a growing movement advancing the ‘transformation of the health and care system from a hospital-centred and illness-based system to a person-centred and health-based system’. Our report shows that the arts can enable people to take greater responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and enjoy a better quality of life. Engagement with the arts can improve the humanity, value for money and overall effectiveness of the health and social care systems.

Place, Environment and Community

A chapter in the full report discusses how devolution of decision-making and budgets can provide better opportunities to create healthy places and healthy lives, building on individual and community strengths.

We consider the growth of social prescribing, whereby people are referred to activities in the community, in preference to medication. We look at the benefits to health and the cost savings arts-on-prescription activities provide.

Greater Manchester Devolution

In Greater Manchester, local elected leaders and clinicians have health and social care budgets of more than £6bn to meet the needs of 2.8m residents, many of whom have a lower life expectancy than people in other parts of England. The focus is on people and place, rather than organisations. The population health plan states an intention to ‘position the strong inter-relationship between arts and individual and community health as one of the key foundations of building sustainable and resilient communities across Greater Manchester’. Arts and culture are being included in partnerships with health service commissioners and providers, with arts activity a core element of future planning and provision. Arts and health commissioners and practitioners are stimulating debate on the arts and health as a social movement under the banner Live Well Make Art.

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Artlift Arts-on-Prescription Scheme

Artlift is a charity delivering an arts-on-prescription scheme in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Health professionals refer patients with a wide range of conditions—from chronic pain to stroke to anxiety and depression—to take part in an eight-week course of two-hour sessions, led by a professional artist working in poetry, ceramics, drawing, mosaic or painting. A cost benefit analysis of Artlift from 2009 to 2012 showed that, after six months of working with an artist, people had 37 percent less demand for GP appointments and their need for hospital admissions dropped by 27 percent. Setting reductions in costs to the NHS against the cost of Artlift interventions, there was a net saving of £316 per patient.

A participant, who attended the Artlift programme for six months following a stroke, describes how:

“I had split up from my partner, found myself without anywhere to live and couldn’t see my children. I couldn’t work as I wasn’t physically able to do the job and wasn’t in a position mentally or financially to start a building business again after going bankrupt. Since going to Artlift I have had several exhibitions of my work around Gloucester. I find that painting in the style that I do, in a very expressionistic way, seems to help me emotionally. I no longer take any medication and, although I am not without problems, I find that as long as I can paint I can cope. It doesn’t mean that depression has gone but I no longer have to keep going back to my GP for more anti-depressants. I just keep myself away and paint until I feel slightly better. I now mentor some people who have been through Artlift themselves and they come and use my studio a couple of times a week to get together, paint, draw and chat and I can see the benefit to them over the time they have been doing it.”

“Artlift has been heart-warming to hear about many examples in our system where, through involvement in the arts, people have been able to develop their talents and live fuller lives, taking more control of their health and wellbeing. We believe that the arts and cultural sector has a major part to play in the transformation of health and care in Gloucestershire.”

Mary Hutton, Accountable Officer, NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and Lead for Gloucestershire Sustainability and Transformation Partnership

Creative Families

Creative Families is co-produced by Southwark Council’s Parental Mental Health Team and South London Gallery, funded by Guy’s and St Thomas’ Charity and led by artists at the gallery and three local children’s centres. During a pilot phase, Creative Families worked with 46 mothers experiencing mental distress and 61 of their children under the age of five. Over the course of a 10-week art and craft programme, mothers experienced a 77 percent reduction in anxiety and depression and an 86 percent reduction in stress. The bonds between mothers and children improved, and the emotional, social and cognitive development of the children was stimulated.

Following the pilot, funding from the mental health team was secured to enable the project to continue.
Anxiety, depression and stress are leading causes of disability at any age. At one of our round tables, on Young People, Mental Health and the Arts, a young man who has suffered severe anxiety and depression since the age of 20 said:

"About my darkest time, I made a decision that I had one more thing to try and that was to stop hiding. I couldn't keep up this double life of portraying happiness to everybody. So it started with a poem. Putting it into poetry made it somehow easier to say. I filmed it and I posted it onto social media, which was terrifying, but quite necessary for me, because the support that I got from that was amazing, and it changed how I saw everything that was happening. Because, for the first time, I wasn't as afraid to talk about it. That was the biggest step for me. Poetry then turned into music when I realised that these words that I'd written could be lyrics. Then that became my next step, I guess, in this battle against depression.

In a chapter on working-age adulthood, we show that workplace stress, serious illness and the management of long-term conditions are all areas in which there is evidence of the benefits of the arts for prevention, recovery and improved quality of life.

We show how the arts can help with expressing difficult emotions and experiences for people in the criminal justice system and how arts therapies provide an effective non-verbal means of accessing painful memories for those with post-traumatic stress.

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Dr Jane Povey GP, Director, Creative Inspiration Shropshire Community Interest Company

The arts can support healthy ageing and counteract loneliness among older people. Staying Well workers in four community hubs provide opportunities for engaging in a wide range of art and craft activities at a charge of less than £5 per session. Evaluation has shown that almost half of 779 participants had a long-term condition and over a third two or more long-term conditions. Among the 55 percent of participants drawn from deprived communities, there was a higher incidence of long-term health conditions, lower quality of life and greater isolation and loneliness. Three of the four hubs showed a reduction in loneliness over the initial period, with some participants also reporting improvements in their health. Initially intended as a 12-month pilot, the project has been extended three times. Funding through Calderdale Clinical Commissioning Groups Care Closer to Home programme has been matched by the NHS Vanguard programme and Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

"Staying Well project in Calderdale aims both to reduce isolation and loneliness among older people and to ease pressure on health and social care resources. Staying Well workers in four community hubs provide opportunities for engaging in a wide range of art and craft activities at a charge of less than £5 per session. Evaluation has shown that almost half of 779 participants had a long-term condition and over a third two or more long-term conditions. Among the 55 percent of participants drawn from deprived communities, there was a higher incidence of long-term health conditions, lower quality of life and greater isolation and loneliness. Three of the four hubs showed a reduction in loneliness over the initial period, with some participants also reporting improvements in their health. Initially intended as a 12-month pilot, the project has been extended three times. Funding through Calderdale Clinical Commissioning Groups Care Closer to Home programme has been matched by the NHS Vanguard programme and Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council."

At the end of life, participatory arts and arts therapies can offer physical, social, psychological and spiritual support to people facing death. In the final life-course chapter, we discuss how the arts can open up conversations about death and enable people to cope better with dying and bereavement. In the words of a seriously ill 15-year-old boy during a drama workshop, 'Death is simply a door in the room that we have not yet noticed, and we won’t until our eyes adjust to the dark'.

**About Staying Well**

Staying Well is a programme that aims to reduce isolation and loneliness among older people, offering them opportunities to engage in a range of art and craft activities. The programme operates in four community hubs in Calderdale, providing sessions on a range of arts and crafts, including painting, pottery, knitting, and music-making. The programme is funded by the NHS Vanguard programme and Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council through the Calderdale Clinical Commissioning Groups Care Closer to Home programme. Evaluation has shown that the programme has been successful in reducing loneliness among participants, with almost half of 779 participants having a long-term condition and over a third having two or more long-term conditions. Among the 55 percent of participants drawn from deprived communities, there was a higher incidence of long-term health conditions, lower quality of life and greater isolation and loneliness. Three of the four hubs showed a reduction in loneliness over the initial period, with some participants also reporting improvements in their health. Initially intended as a 12-month pilot, the project has been extended three times. Funding through Calderdale Clinical Commissioning Groups Care Closer to Home programme has been matched by the NHS Vanguard programme and Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

**Scale scores and through interviews.**

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**Equal Arts session at Cranlea, Newcastle upon Tyne.**

**Photographer: Dave Charlton**

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**Strokestra**

Strokestra, a pilot collaboration between the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Hull Integrated Community Stroke Service within Humber NHS Trust, was funded through a £40,000 grant from Hull Public Health. Strokestra sessions ranged from percussion to conducting and culminated in a live orchestral performance at Hull City Hall. Evaluation focused on individual progress, measured by Stroke Impact Scale scores and through interviews. Eighty-six percent of patients felt the sessions relieved disability symptoms, citing improved sleep; reduced anxiety, dizzy spells and epileptic episodes; improved concentration and memory; and increased confidence, morale and sense of self. Ninety-one percent of participants said they would recommend the sessions to others.

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Recommendations

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e hope we demonstrate in Creative Health that the arts can make an invaluable contribution to a healthy and health-creating society. They offer a potential resource that should be embraced in health and social care systems which are under great pressure and in need of fresh thinking and cost-effective methods. Policy should work towards creative activity being part of all our lives. We make ten specific recommendations as catalysts for the change of thinking and practice that can open the way for the potential of the arts in health to be realised.

1) We recommend that leaders from within the arts, health and social care sectors, together with service users and academics, establish a strategic centre, at national level, to support the advancement of good practice, promote collaboration, coordinate and disseminate research and inform policy and delivery. We appeal to philanthropic funders to support this endeavour. We hope that the centre will also have the support of Arts Council England, NHS England and Public Health England as well as the Local Government Association and other representative bodies.

2) We recommend that the Secretaries of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Health, Education and Communities and Local Government develop and lead a cross-governmental strategy to support the delivery of health and wellbeing through the arts and culture.

3) We recommend that, at board or strategic level, in NHS England, Public Health England and each clinical commissioning group, NHS trust, local authority and health and wellbeing board, an individual is designated to take responsibility for the pursuit of institutional policy for arts, health and wellbeing.

4) We recommend that those responsible for NHS New Models of Care and Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships ensure that arts and cultural organisations are involved in the delivery of health and wellbeing at regional and local level.

5) We recommend that Arts Council England supports arts and cultural organisations in making health and wellbeing outcomes integral to their work and identifies health and wellbeing as a priority in its 10-year strategy for 2020–2030.

6) We recommend that NHS England and the Social Prescribing Network support clinical commissioning groups, NHS provider trusts and local authorities to incorporate arts on prescription into their commissioning plans and to redesign care pathways where appropriate.

7) We recommend that Healthwatch, the Patients Association and other representative organisations, along with arts and cultural providers, work with patients and service users to advocate the health and wellbeing benefits of arts engagement to health and social care professionals and the wider public.

8) We recommend that the education of clinicians, public health specialists and other health and care professionals includes accredited modules on the evidence base and practical use of the arts for health and wellbeing outcomes. We also recommend that arts education institutions initiate undergraduate and postgraduate courses and professional development modules dedicated to the contribution of the arts to health and wellbeing.

9) We recommend that Research Councils UK and individual research councils consider an interdisciplinary, cross-council research funding initiative in the area of participatory arts, health and wellbeing evidence-base. We recommend that commissioners of large-scale, long-term health surveys include questions about the impacts of arts engagement on health and wellbeing.

10) We recommend that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence regularly examines evidence as to the efficacy of the arts in benefiting health, and, where the evidence justifies it, includes in its guidance the use of the arts in healthcare.

Next Steps

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he All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing will campaign to secure acceptance of our recommendations and the culture change that we hope to see. We will seek opportunities to increase understanding of the benefits of the arts for health and wellbeing, not only with ministers and in parliament but also among the health and social care professions and others across the country. The process of the Inquiry – in particular the exchanges of ideas and experience of service users, health and social care professionals, artists and arts administrators, funders, academics, people in local government, policy-makers and parliamentarians – has generated energy and commitment. We will continue to enlist the help of those who are willing and able to join forces to shape a shared vision for change and bring that change into being. We will welcome advice from all who share our mission. Those who work with the arts in the health and social care sectors and are already expert practitioners will be powerful advocates of this change. The stories of people who have personally experienced the benefits of the arts for their own health and wellbeing are compelling. We ask all those who believe in the value of the arts for health and wellbeing to speak up. We will work with all who believe, as we do, that the arts offer an essential opportunity for the improvement of health and wellbeing.

“This is an impressive collection of evidence and practice for culture and health, which reflects the passion and breadth of engagement of the APPG and its partners over the last two years.”

Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive, Public Health England

“...This report lays out a compelling case for our healthcare systems to better utilise the creative arts in supporting health and wellbeing outcomes, building on a growing body of evidence in mental health, end-of-life care and in supporting those living with long-term conditions.”

Lord Darzi, Professor of Surgery, Imperial College London
The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing is very grateful for the participation of a number of service users and expert patients in the Inquiry. Many returned to take part in a focus group attended by the artist, David Shrigley. Our warmest thanks to David for the drawings that illustrate this report.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing has produced the Inquiry report in collaboration with King’s College London, the Royal Society for Public Health and Guy’s and St Thomas’ Charity. The secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing is provided by the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing. The Inquiry has been funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Wellcome, with additional support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. We express our deep gratitude to our project manager, Alex Coulter, and our researcher, Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt.

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More information about our work can be found here: www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg

References
THE ARTS ARE LIKE GLUE