

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Disability Arts Cymru

1. People participating in Disability Arts Cymru's arts activities include:

Disabled artists (visual artists, musicians, writers, actors, directors, dancers, photographers)

Disabled children and young people (9 to 25)

The term 'disabled' used here refers to the broad spectrum of disability: mobility impairment, sensory impairment, learning difficulties, mental health issues, hidden impairments such as diabetes, epilepsy etc

2. Budget changes affecting participation in the arts

a) For Disability Arts Cymru, the change in the way the arts are funded by the Arts Council of Wales has been a positive thing. Before the Investment Review we were seriously underfunded and struggling to survive. We are now part of ACW's portfolio of revenue funded clients, and our revenue grant has doubled. This enables us to employ officers to work in West Wales and North Wales, where before we only had a minimal presence. We have also increased the hours of our Development Manager in Cardiff and have a much needed Admin Officer. The result for DAC is that we are reaching more disabled people and developing stronger networks and working relationships with other arts organisations.

Also disabled young people have benefitted from funding through Power of the Flame, a 4 year programme of lottery funding from Legacy Trust UK which is managed and administered by ACW. As one of the Power of the flame partners, DAC runs *Whose Flame is it Anyway?* a series of arts projects for young disabled people across Wales. Through this project, which finishes September this year, over 300 young disabled people have participated in the arts in Wales. Many of these young people are new to DAC.

Significant changes in arts funding include the drop in Lottery funds due to money being diverted to the Olympics. This has had a negative impact on many arts organisations running participatory activities, especially those heavily dependant upon project funding.

When an arts organisation loses funding, the impact will always be felt by those who engaged in their arts activities. It takes time for any loss or imbalance to be redressed, and that may not always be possible in some cases.

All arts organisations funded by ACW have a duty to address issues of participation and engagement, especially by those groups and communities which are already marginalised (those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010). The reality of this is that some do very well, others less so. It takes time to change behaviours, especially where a cultural shift is necessary.

The economic recession has a big impact on participation in the arts. This is not just about funding for arts organisations / events. It is as much about the general cost of living, availability of transport, petrol costs, access support (care) and worries about benefits.

As well, economic recession makes arts providers more cautious, less likely to take risks in programming, therefore less likely to work with disabled artists whose work may be very different or challenging. It may also cause arts organisations to compromise on providing access at participatory events e.g. sign language interpreters.

b) Have certain groups of people been affected

Yes, marginalised groups (those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act) are usually the ones who feel the impact of any cuts. This is exacerbated by the fact that there has never been a level playing field in terms of opportunity to participate, though many changes have been put in place over the years which may lessen the impact to a certain extent.

3. Demographic or geographical gaps in provision

As outlined above, poorer communities will feel the impact due to the wider effects of recession. Poorer communities are more likely to include

marginalised groups and individuals, though disability is no respecter of income, ethnicity, age or gender.

4. Funding sources other than ACW

There are very few. Charitable trusts are over-subscribed and everyone seems to be scrabbling for the same pots of money. There are fewer local authority initiatives, and arts classes in further education being heavily cut.

5. Voluntary arts

We need the voluntary arts sector for its expertise in networking and supporting community and voluntary arts, which are often outside of the arts establishment, but are hugely valuable to those who participate. The voluntary arts sector is a great advocate for the arts, and especially for people who may be disengaged from arts activities.

6. Strategic relationship between WG and arts finding bodies.

We would like to see much stronger relationships developed. Much more can be done by WG and by Local Authorities to recognise the value of arts participation, and to fund their arts officers (where arts officers exist), to address the issues. Funding initiatives by local authorities would make such a huge difference to participation, which has untold benefits on peoples health and their sense of well-being. Arts can strengthen communities and ease the strain on the health / social services budgets.

7. Strategic Equality Plan.

The equality duties will definitely help to increase participation among under represented groups if accompanied by a robust action plans and by active partnerships with those organisations working with under represented groups.

Maggie Hampton

Director

Disability Arts Cymru