

## The role of arts and culture in addressing poverty and social exclusion

### Response by Conwy County Borough Council

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#### Introduction

Conwy County Borough Council believes wholeheartedly in the power of the arts to help address poverty and social exclusion. Across services, we recognise and support the use of creative engagement as a means of delivering our corporate aims. “Creative Conwy: Statagic Statement on the Arts in Conwy 2016-18” makes specific reference to the importance the arts have in delivering outcomes under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2017, the Arts Council of Wales Creative Learning Through The Arts – an action plan for Wales 2015 to 2018, and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Successive research projects have shown the impact that engagement with arts and culture has in improving life chances, enhancing wellbeing and creating cohesive communities. Arts and culture can play a significant role in the prevention agenda, helping to deliver budget savings for social services and health boards. We have many examples of this through our range of projects in Conwy, with arts interventions helping to keep young people in school; addressing issues within families to ease the burden on social services; encouraging older people to socialise and keep or gain confidence which in turn reduces their need for social services and health involvement.

We are grateful for funding delivered through the Welsh Government and associated bodies that enable us to carry out this important work that has such a big impact on our communities.

We believe that it is important that the Welsh Government, Welsh Government sponsored bodies and local authorities continue to work together to support and deliver culture and arts projects aimed at tackling poverty and wellbeing issues. We see great potential for growth and development in this area to improve outcomes for citizens and to help with financial efficiencies within social services, education and health settings.

## How effective has the Welsh Government been in improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty?

It is heartening to see the work that has been undertaken by the Welsh Government to improve access to culture through schemes such as Fusion, Lead Creative Schools and Creative Collaborations. In these times of diminishing funding we want to work in new and innovative ways to deliver our services and to achieve outcomes for our citizens. The work that the Welsh Government undertakes in encouraging and supporting cultural activities to assist with poverty and wellbeing agendas is important and could be further enhanced, building on the work of recent years and encouraging a broad range of providers to work together. The recent establishment of the North Wales Concordat between Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board, local authorities and arts organisations is a key example of cross-cutting working for the benefit of all our citizens. Where significant impacts are delivered by projects we would like to see Welsh Government support to enable roll-out across the country, rather than the current situation where projects are seen as exemplars of good practise but rarely extend beyond the confines of their own community.

## How effective have the efforts of Welsh Government sponsored bodies (namely the Arts Council, National Museum, National Library and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales) and local government been in using culture to tackle poverty?

The local authority in Conwy invests heavily in cultural activity to tackle poverty:

### **Community Wellbeing team:**

- Singing for fun was set up by the team and in Llansannan. A local member of the community was identified who was keen to set up and run the group on a voluntary basis and our Wellbeing Officer was able to secure the church hall free of charge. Sessions have been running since June and attendee numbers have grown month on month with an average of 14 people attending the sessions. As the sessions are free to attend, all residents living in Llansannan have the opportunity to participate, giving residents who would not normally be able to attend a paid session the opportunity to take part. When asked what they enjoyed most about the sessions, the majority said the “company” or “meeting new people” which speaks volumes in terms of tackling social isolation, particularly in rural areas which have a higher percentage of people living in poverty who are isolated.

- The team are currently running a programme of 'Art Therapy' sessions in Llandudno Junction which are led by a trained Art Therapist. The sessions are an 8 week programme which teaches participants to focus outside of the head to increase awareness of being in the moment and what this experience feels like. To increase self-care and good health. Participants suffer from chronic pain and/or a long term health condition. Chronic pain and illness can be incredibly isolating, making it hard for people to feel connected – even to those they love. These sessions tackle isolation by allowing participants to connect and share experiences with people who share their condition and having that peer support is proving to be very beneficial for many of the participants who have already built friendships within the group, which we hope will continue long after the programme has ended.
- Penbuskers is a community music making group set up by the Community Wellbeing team in Penmaenmawr. The group is run by volunteers and linked to the local community library. The group meets weekly with an average of 10 – 14 participants and the group leader reports that participants not only feel the creative but also the social benefits of the sessions. The participants have said they particularly benefit from the “social interaction” and “opportunities for building friendships” and appreciate the space which allows them to be themselves creatively and musically.

**Expressive Arts and Music Service:** The Expressive Arts and Music Service is dedicated to supporting all pupils to flourish and achieve in and through the arts, contributing to school improvement and pupil attainment and wellbeing.

The service invites schools and settings to participate in an exciting range of professionally led creative learning activities and to work alongside a highly skilled and experienced team of peripatetic music tutors and creative arts practitioners. The Music Service offers specialist instrumental and singing tuition and music education to pupils aged 7-18.

There is also partnership working with Theatre Fran Wen and Pigtown Theatre across primary schools.

The service provides opportunities for progression through after school clubs and other groups or ensembles on a county, regional or national basis. It organises regular festivals, events, gigs and concerts to encourage pupils from all backgrounds to engage with the arts and to fulfill their potential.

**Theatres and Conference Centre** have a focus on providing programmes for young people and for older people at risk of isolation and loneliness. Amongst the programmes run by this service are:

Young Creatives Programme: a broad range of regular groups such as graffiti art, poetry and photography all offered free of charge. All of the groups have participants from less affluent families, looked after children and children with additional needs. The programme gives participants out of school opportunities to learn new skills, gain in confidence and engage with others. The feedback from the participants and their families has been excellent with

participants engaging better at school, finding new friends and even gaining paid employment as a direct result of their involvement. This programme is largely funded by the Arts Council of Wales with additional funding from the county and town councils and Children in Need.

Dementia Friendly Screenings are run monthly at Theatr Colwyn, in conjunction with the Welsh National Opera, and have proved to be an important outlet for those living with dementia. Ticket prices are kept low and carers are all given free tickets to encourage involvement by those who would otherwise not be able to afford to visit the cinema or engage in activities outside of their home or community centre.

The service runs regular but ad-hoc events for older people at risk of isolation and has been asked by participants to run more events for this demographic. It is actively seeking funding to enable a more consistent programme of work to be established.

**Libraries**, situated within the heart of their communities have always played a major role in providing and enabling free access to a wealth of cultural material in Welsh and English.

They also work in partnership providing neutral spaces for important community activities to thrive. These include:

- Weekly shared reading groups for MIND service users engaging with classic fiction and poetry;
- Volunteer training for the national Reading Friends project to address social isolation amongst older people and those living with dementia through reading activities
- Monthly reading groups to discuss works of fiction and non-fiction including Welsh language reading group and welsh learners.
- Community space for Veterans hub to deliver art therapy, creative writing and mindfulness sessions, encouraging greater community engagement.
- Working with the local college to support and provide venues for individual exhibitions by those with complex needs, to encourage self- confidence and to earn an income.
- Collaboration with local college arts/drama group to deliver performances eg on loneliness
- Free use of space for band night to showcase young welsh musical talent.
- Dawns i Bawb sessions including during National Libraries Week.
- Clwb Cwtsh inclusive story time sessions for non-Welsh speaking parents to learn Welsh.
- Sessions delivered by Mudiad Meithrin in Libraries:
- Cymraeg i Blant Welsh story and rhymetime sessions.
- Baby Yoga sessions.
- Weekly children's reading group.
- FREE Bookstart story and rhymetime sessions for the under 5s delivered by library staff to encourage parents and carers to read and share books with their children.
- Provision of resources for beginner readers and for developing literacy in young people and adults.

- FREE Author/Storyteller sessions to encourage children and young people to read and write.
- Paws and Read Programme which allows children who struggle with reading to read to a therapy dog, as they are non-judgemental, attentive and perfect listeners.

The fact that the majority of library activities are free encourages and enables a wider range of people to access events. We know that our events and services are of great importance to those who have limited financial resources and therefore struggle to access similar activities elsewhere.

Welsh government grant funding is extremely valued for national events such as National Libraries Week and activities that open up opportunities for cultural engagement such as author visits. This funding ensures libraries can host activities which would otherwise be beyond our budgets and maintains access for all.

**Community Arts** deliver a number of projects and opportunities which are accessible to all and include the following –

- Criw Celf – Visual Art Masterclasses for ‘more able and talented’ (MAT) young people. Bursaries are available to support young people who have free school meals. Support towards transport also offered. A series of taster sessions has been held in Fusion area schools to promote the scheme.

The Nights Out scheme, a partnership between the Arts Council and local authorities, helps groups of volunteers across Wales bring the arts to the heart of their communities. Nights Out aims to encourage, enable and support:

- High quality professional performances in communities throughout Wales, many of whom have little access to arts events.
- The arts economy - providing a platform for performers from Wales and further afield to reach local communities.
- Community development, volunteering and the local economy and contributing to the use of village halls and community venues as viable hubs for local organisations.
- Promoter groups with advice, ideas and recommendations.
- Helps to combat social isolation in rural communities by providing opportunities to hold Cultural events in small communities.

## Exhibitions

The service provides opportunities for artists to showcase their art work in dedicated gallery spaces in Conwy libraries. In the past year we have hosted exhibitions by a wide range of artists of varying levels including local students studying art, a learning disabled artist and exhibitions which use the arts to create greater awareness of rare diseases and disabilities.

Oriel Colwyn, run by the Theatres and Conference Centre, provides a city-quality photographic gallery and associated dark room in a community first area. Outreach work with young people, students and older people are central to the work of the gallery.

## **Culture Centre, Conwy outreach**

- Visual art taster sessions working with a wide range of groups and organisations to promote the new Culture Centre development and provide access to museum collections. Groups include Conwy Adoption group and Extra Care housing schemes (working with older people).
- Projects tailored for specific groups including a dance project with care home residents for people living with dementia which will tour to fusion areas (old community first wards) to promote the Culture Service Collections.
- Photographic workshops for young people from the county including Fusion area schools.

## **Arts grants**

Small grants awarded to a wide range of organisations including a number of wellbeing focussed projects, for example –

- TAPE Mondays Taster Sessions – Creative Wellbeing and Therapeutic sessions – support people at high risk of isolation to engage with creative activity as a means of reconnecting with the wider community. The sessions help to promote togetherness and community as people will be mixing with others, who they may otherwise not have contact with, to achieve creative goals.

## **Revenue Organisations**

Under a service level agreement, Conwy County Borough Council works with the following organisations who deliver outreach activities across the county including in former Community First areas –

- Mostyn – art workshops in rural Conwy in care home settings / reminiscence sessions and work with students with additional learning needs in the gallery setting.
- Royal Cambrian Academy – rural outreach art sessions & disability arts support in the form of workshops and exhibitions.
- Dawns i Bawb – Youth dance sessions across the county and work with rural Conwy Schools and wellbeing initiatives in care home settings.

## **Central Government**

In Conwy the **Arts Council** has played a significant role by funding art activities in the County. They have funded art projects, Criw Celf and the Nights Out/Young Promoters incentives. These have been offered to schools and participants in Fusion areas. They have funded the Young Creatives scheme at Venue Cymru / Theatr Colwyn and early project funding for Create at Venue Cymru has led to a sustainable project being developed for young people experiencing mental health difficulties (the project is currently funded by Children in Need).

The **RCAHMW** has funded activities related to the U-Boats project. This has given volunteer opportunities at Conwy Archives and also funded a school project for Ysgol Bro Aled who have had a storyteller, a reenactor, and an artist working on the escaped WW1 submariners from Llansannan to Llandudno.

The **National Library** – through the People’s Collection Wales – will deliver digital scanning Agored course in January for volunteers.

## What impact has the Welsh Government’s Fusion programme had on using culture to tackle poverty?

**MALD** (Museums, Archives and Libraries Division) has established the Fusion programme, which has been instrumental in bringing partner organisations in Conwy together, with a view of offering opportunities in culture and heritage where otherwise this would not happen. Fusion Conwy works in the old Communities First areas and areas of rural deprivation. Conwy is one of the eight areas in Wales where Fusion is in operation.

The scheme is dependent on partnership working and as such partners contribute to the scheme by offering activities, placements, volunteering opportunities, training and contributions towards health and wellbeing of Fusion people.

Fusion has created opportunities for partners to speak to each other and support each other. Fusion has offered opportunities for young children as well as adults to receive a rich medley of opportunities which works on giving people experiences, qualifications, life chances they otherwise would not get. Over 1000 children in Conwy will have benefitted through Fusion. We work closely with Home-Start Conwy. Work experience, volunteering placements and the chance to gain qualifications make people more ready for the workplace and Fusion works with Communities for Work, ADTRAC and OPUS to make this happen. We are striving to improve people’s digital skills and both we as an authority and Grwp Llandrillo Menai offer accredited learning. Our aim is also to improve attitudes to formal learning by providing educational but fun activities, taking the children out of their classrooms into Museums, Archives, Libraries and Galleries. We are also working to improve the health and wellbeing of people suffering deprivation of some kind. We have worked with Surf Snowdonia for example to offer free surfing lessons to Grwp Cynefin tenants’ children who could not otherwise afford such luxuries. Seven employees at Surf Snowdonia have obtained paid employment after attending the Saturday Surf Club. We are working with Veterans Hub Conwy to improve the quality of life for Veterans and give them some experiences that might lead them into a new occupation or leastwise to improve confidence and mental health.

Although Fusion in Conwy has been very successful, there are areas in which the programme could be improved. The programme relies heavily on certain post codes – ie areas which are designated areas of deprivation. This can be somewhat stigmatising for people who are only allowed to take part if their postcode defines them as ‘poor.’ Widening

the criteria could enable us to understand different sorts of deprivation (such as loneliness) which aren't based on economic status.

Other programmes requires participation to be measured by strict criteria (such as stipulating period of engagement). It would be helpful to be able to measure participation in one-off events and value that level of participation too. Even if it isn't sustained we could begin to understand the benefits of these one off sessions for people and see whether it opens doors to other opportunities by trying to come up with a method to track those individuals and what they do next.

Funding: apart from staffing costs, there is no budget for delivery of Fusion activity. A small activities' pot would have made a great difference in being able to seed fund activities, especially when many Fusion Conwy partners are small organisations.

## How effective the Fusion pioneer programmes have been in stimulating local collaboration?

As noted above, the Fusion pioneer programme has provided a stimulus for existing groups and projects to collaborate more effectively, combining resources and talent to improve reach. However, lack of funding for the programme has meant that many good projects and collaborative potential have not been properly explored or developed.

## Testimonials

...my daughter, has special needs and she finds vertical dance a way of expressing herself which she really enjoys. It is the only group she has consistently been keen to attend and she feels accepted and part of something exciting. Her confidence has grown since attending vertical dance and I can't recommend your group highly enough.

*Parent of Young Flier*

When i signed her up she was coming out of a very difficult time at her school, she had ended up being bullied and it had knocked her confidence, young fliers really helped with regaining that. The skills learnt extend beyond those of dance and rope work but also into personal confidence and social skills

*Parent of Young Flier*

My 15 year old son is attending for the second academic year and has thoroughly enjoyed working on a range of techniques. It is not easy to enthuse teenagers for three hour long weekend sessions, yet my son looks forward to attending these eagerly.

His English GCSE teacher has commented how significantly his style and maturity advanced in the past year, and credit for this must go to Where the Poetry is at.

I would also like to say how positive it is to see creative indoor activities funded for teenagers. My son is a cardiac patient who cannot participate in sports or risk low outdoor



temperatures, so Winter is a challenging time for leisure activities. Venue Cymru is an ideal location with good disabled parking and access.

*Parent of Where The Poetry's At participant*

Both my daughters have benefited a huge amount from attending this brilliant festival - my eldest daughter was able to dip her toe into the media world by taking part in the video production workshops at a very young age - this gave her the confidence to continue developing this passion and now, at the age of 17 she's proficient enough to be able to secure paid work directing, filming and editing short video productions and is now applying for University to study Television Production.

*Parent of take pART participants*

I had been working in bars and supermarkets, writing in my spare time.... Getting a job in arts criticism in the future was becoming less and less of a reality... It was hard enough to find a job.... two months ago I was in Edinburgh for the first time, watching around five shows a day, writing in any spare time I had. A few posters even had words from my reviews quoted on them, and shares on social media gave my blog more hits than I thought would ever get. Without the Young Critics scheme, this opportunity would never have arisen – and today I'd probably be in the same place I was in 2015. I may even have given up.

*Young Critic*

Being part of the Young Critics has helped develop my social, communication and critical thinking skills. My mental wellbeing has improved, in part, thanks to the opportunity given by the Young Critics scheme.

*Young Critic*

It has been an invaluable tool in building his confidence and self-esteem as a young person with ASD, and has led to friendships with like-minded people that he could have only ever dreamed of.

*CPN, Conwy CAMHS regarding Create project*

Participation in the County Orchestra and Wind Ensemble has greatly benefitted my daughter's improvement in her chosen instrument, giving her motivation to improve and practice and, as part of her Home Education programme, is an essential part of her curriculum, both from an academic and socialisation point of view. My daughter has grown in confidence through her membership.

*Parent of Young Musician, Conwy Music Service*

My daughter has physical disabilities which have made her socially isolated and unable to attend school for long periods of time. The music service has been a lifeline for her, allowing her to socialise, and pursue her passion for music. It boosts her confidence, improves her mental health by easing anxiety, and it gives her joy. She practices endlessly at home to better her skills, because she is very driven and wants to succeed, in spite of her health problems. The music service makes her dreams seem possible.

*Parent of Young Musician, Conwy Music Service*

As a recent graduate from Guildhall, the music training I have received has allowed me to perform regularly with Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, be on trial for Welsh National Opera and Philharmonia Orchestra and work with Royal Shakespeare Company all over the UK and Europe. The Welsh music education system is the single reason that I am where I am today. The experience, tuition and level of music making I was exposed to in North Wales, 4 Counties and National Youth Orchestras gave me a platform which was unrivalled, even when up against the international students in London's top Conservatories.

*Martin L, ex-pupil Conwy Music Service*

We are writing this email to offer a huge thank you. The children and staff of Ysgol Talhaiarn have thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of learning our dances with Emma Jane. The sessions were fun and interesting and Emma Jane was brilliant. Once the children had performed in the Dance Festival they were buzzing with excitement. The staff and children loved the whole experience. They're still talking about it now. We even had the opportunity to show off the dance to parents on a sunny Friday afternoon. The feedback was very positive. It's experiences like these that allow children to express themselves and explore in different ways without feeling stressed or silly. Some of our children were nervous and self-conscious before the festival and came back full of confidence and smiles.

*Ysgol Talhaiarn, Conwy*