

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

2023/24 Lottery Programme Evaluation Summaries

Summary of evaluation reports produced by independent service provides on:

- The Young People and Wellbeing Programme
- Rural Engagement Arts Programme
- Arts and Older People Programme

April, 2024

1. Young People and Wellbeing Programme

Contractor: Ruth Flood Associate

Summary of findings

1. The Young People and Wellbeing Programme is a National Lottery funded programme which aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people (aged between 12-18) by engagement in high quality arts.
2. Applicants were encouraged to design projects to include young people experiencing higher levels of disadvantage or exclusion as well as vulnerable groups such as those living with a mental health condition, eating disorders or addiction. Arts Council Northern Ireland awarded funding to 24 projects; the average grant size was £7,938.
3. These evaluation findings are derived from the 18 projects which submitted end of project reports, and 58 responses from the online survey with young people who had participated in 16 of the projects.
4. The 18 projects reported that a total of 1,289 young people participated in the projects. The projects involved a wide range of young people from different backgrounds and with diverse experiences.
5. Estimated data provided by 16 projects indicates that the projects reached a proportionally higher percentage of young people from minority ethnic groups (estimated 17% total) than are present in the total NI population.
6. Estimated data provided by 16 projects shows that the projects appealed more to young female participants than to male participants: just under two thirds of participants were female (62%), and a third were male (33%).
7. In the young people survey, there was also a higher proportion of female respondents (70%). Over half of respondents were aged 12 and 13 (54%). This raises the question as to whether the projects may be appealing more to younger (12-13) than to older teenagers (17+).
8. Postcode data analysis shows that the projects were dispersed across Northern Ireland. However, there appears to be no representation from projects in the North East and South East.
9. Over two thirds of the 19 mappable project locations (n=13), were located in the most deprived 20% of Super Output Areas (SOAS) in Northern Ireland. Postcode data analysis from the young people survey shows that over a third of the 35 respondents (n=13) who provided postcodes lived in the most deprived 10% of SOAS; 9 were in Derry City & Strabane and 4 were in Belfast.
10. The projects involved a wide range of art forms: drama, music, visual arts, dance, literature, craft, traditional art forms.

11. Data from 17 projects reports that 99 artists were involved in delivering the projects. 28 volunteers were recorded as providing 670 hours support to the delivery of 7 projects. This time translates to an estimated value of £6,981.40 based on the National Living Wage from April 2023 of £10.42 per hour for adults aged 23 or over.
12. Twelve projects partnered with other organisations during project delivery. These project partners therefore had exposure to the use of arts to support positive wellbeing of young people. The project partners included the following sectors: mental health, health and wellbeing organisations, arts / crafts organisations, community and voluntary sector organisations representing specific communities, education sector, youth services and local authority.
13. Sixteen projects estimated that their activities reached audiences of between 15 and 3,000 people. The total estimated audience was 9,211 people.
14. Projects were asked to report on the various impacts that their project achieved. The most frequent impact reported on was the increased wellbeing of participants and increased arts-based skills, with all 18 projects who completed a report, reporting these two impacts. The next most frequent impact was increased participation in the arts from under-represented groups, with 14 projects reporting this impact.
15. The young people survey supports the feedback from the end of project reports. Involvement had a positive impact on survey respondents' wellbeing, with net agreement scores of between 88% and 90% for the four wellbeing statements. Involvement also had a positive impact on awareness of the importance of good mental health/how to cultivate it, with net agreement scores of between 80% and 93% for the mental health related statements.
16. Projects were asked to provide short free text summaries of the impact that their projects had on young people. Analysis of these finds that the three main impacts identified by projects were: Increased confidence and social skills, improved mental health, and artistic skills development, growth and expression.
17. Feedback from the end of project reports provides evidence that the programme has delivered against its main intended outcomes: young people have improved wellbeing; young people have increased awareness of the importance of good mental health and techniques to cultivate it; young people have increased skills in a range of art forms.
18. Some projects identified specific learnings from their experience of delivering the projects which they could use in future to enhance project delivery.

Recommendations

1. Consider ways to broaden the projects funded to include a greater focus on boys, older teenagers, more ethnic minorities, and participants from a wider geographic area.

2. Continue to encourage projects to complete the end of project report and to ask their participants to complete all of the young people survey. This will strengthen the evidence about the impact of the programme on young people.
3. Publish these evaluation findings and share this report with projects and key stakeholders such as DfC.
4. Hold a reflective participatory session in Arts Council NI offices with Year 1 and Year 2 projects to celebrate achievements of the programme so far and to discuss learnings from their delivery of their projects. Arts Council NI to use the learnings from this to inform the development and sustainability of the programme from 2024 onwards.

2. Rural Engagement Arts Programme (REAP)

Contractor: Annabel Jackson Associates

Summary of findings

1. In Round 1 of the Rural Engagement Arts Programme (REAP), ACNI awarded £493,602 to 71 organisations across Northern Ireland. The key findings from an analysis of applications, End of Project Reports and a survey of unsuccessful applicants are that:
2. Social cohesion: 100% of grantees showed their project reduced isolation or promoted social inclusion. 86% of grantees said that all or part of the project was cross-community. 54% grantees said that all or part of the project was intergenerational.
3. Reducing isolation and promoting social inclusion was inherent in the work of most of the grantees. Grantees tended to work in a highly collaborative way in designing, marketing, and delivering projects.
4. The programme reached vulnerable people who would not seek help in a more direct form; an intensive activity that drew people back; a positive structure for cross community work; and an identification and often a celebration of the history and special nature of the place.
5. Projects enhanced wellbeing by: providing enjoyable creative activities which gave a sense of achievement and distracted participants from their worries with the feeling of flow and absorption; targeting people or groups who were isolated because of gaps in services or lack of transport; giving families time together including respite for carers; fostering interaction between participants, including social contact; producing an artwork that represented pride of place and an aspect of hope; and referring participants to other services or sources of support.

6. The contribution of the arts to wellbeing is well known and well evidenced. REAP simply extended these benefits to rural areas.
7. All grantees showed their project enhanced the wellbeing of participants or audience members. 60% of grantees said that the project included specific support for participants' mental health.
8. 84% of the grantees said that volunteers helped to deliver the project. The total number of volunteers involved in the projects was 622.
9. 95% of the grantees said that artists were involved in delivering the project, with a total 308 artists employed. More than half of these live in a rural area.
10. 87% of grantees said their project included artist-led workshops with local people. 56% of these said that 90-100% of their participants attended three or more workshops. 97% of grantees said their project developed the skills of participants or audience members.
11. Access: 78% of grantees said that the project was free to all participants. 37% of grantees said that free transport was provided to grantees.
12. Quality: 92% grantees showed the grant allowed their organisation to deliver higher quality artistic work than they had delivered previously.
13. Additionality was high. 76% of grantees said their projects were new. 79% of grantees said they wouldn't have been able to deliver any of the project without ACNI funding.
14. Design: 98% of grantees said the REAP programme was a good fit with the project they wanted to deliver. 98% of grantees said the application form was easy to understand. 97% of grantees said they received the support from ACNI that they needed to complete their application. 100% of grantees said they would apply to REAP again.
15. Demand: 78% of grantees said the project increased their organisation's interest in delivering arts projects in rural areas.

Recommendations

1. REAP has started well and reached a competent and eager group of grantees. The programme is to some extent a victim of its own success because the increase in demand will require ACNI to narrow objectives in the next round if it wants to avoid a higher rejection rate (which wastes applicants' time).

2. The social objectives are relatively broad and so compatible with the existing ethos of rural organisations (in terms of reducing isolation) and the power of the arts (in terms of enhancing wellbeing).
3. I recommend that ACNI reflect on, prioritise and communicate more precise its arts development aims. This should include specifying the desired balance of support between new grantees and repeat applicants.
4. Some of the projects are similar e.g., the same artist or artform. Does this matter? Should later rounds encourage applications from underrepresented art forms like circus. Should ACNI encourage similar projects to connect so they can learn from each other?
5. Only three applicants are Annual Funding Programme (AFP clients). Is this good or bad? Does ACNI want to support arts organisations to work in rural areas (experience might inform their programming and marketing) as well as encouraging community organisations in rural areas to develop their arts activity?
6. Relatively few applicants took participants to a show or exhibition in an arts venue. Should applicants be encouraged to include this as an element in their project? This would support venues and support new audience development.
7. Is ACNI seeking to build art's infrastructure in rural areas? If so, what are the priorities for this? What is ACNI expecting to be the legacy from REAP?

3. Arts and Older People Programme

Contractor: Una Lynch, Sonrisa Solutions.

Summary of Findings

1. ACNI awarded £216,571 to 29 projects during 2022/23. Seven of the organisations funded were new to the programme. A total of 2,173 participants took part and 1,542 contact hours were delivered by arts organisations.
2. Informed by the Arts and Older People Programme (AOPP) logic model, the evaluator used qualitative case study approaches to demonstrate outcomes. A storytelling approach was used to illuminate defining aspects of the programme.
3. In November 2023 a roundtable symposium was held involving the ACNI staff and representatives from the community, voluntary, private, and statutory sectors. The aim of the symposium was to reflect on the programmes successes, identify how to strengthen support for older people and work collectively towards the same goal.

Qualitative case study findings:

1. The **Golden Thread Gallery project Bon Voyage** highlights how the AOPP works with older people living in areas of economic and social deprivation. It demonstrates the skills needed by community artists to facilitate discussion, support people to try new things and help build confidence.
2. The **Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum** creative shed project illustrated how the arts were harnessed to promote mental health. People became involved with the project because of an interest in learning how to paint or how to make leaded glass. In addition to the fun and enjoyment they experienced by engaging with the AOPP Creative Shed participants also became connected with other services and broadened their social networks. Combatting social isolation and loneliness these are exactly the type of initiatives that are advocated the NI Mental Health Strategy (DOH, 2021).
3. **Occasional Gardener delivered by the Kabosh Theatre** used the arts to combat the stereotypical image of care home resident. Inspired and influenced by personal experience of a friend who moved to live in residential care the artist described the importance of 'seeing the individual' and giving residents back their voice.
4. The **Northern Ireland war memorial project Victory Voices** was a small-scale project. Funded for the first time through AOPP. The artists put together an afternoon of entertainment for some care home residents and their family. The concert brought great buzz into the home and was transformative for participants. This experience has helped forge relationships between artists, care home residents and staff. In so doing it lays the foundation on which to build a more bespoke and interactive programme that will amplify the voices and make visible the personalities of residents.

Recommendations

1. Reconvening the AOPP steering group would help to shape the programme and focus for evaluations.
2. An investment in communication and a proactive approach to 'sharing the learning' through the AOPP partners and extended networks could galvanise this process.
3. The AOPP has been successful in enabling participants to become socially included. Greater emphasis on elevating those voices through perhaps an initiative like AOPP champions.
4. The success of the AOPP is dependent on the highly skilled artists that have been involved with it. To ensure that the richness of the AOPP model continues capacity development of artists across NI is vital.
5. The AOPP is a public health intervention that is focused primary and secondary prevention of ill-health. As such the total impact is likely underestimated. A cost benefit analysis could yield powerful evidence of the far-reaching impact of the arts in alleviating social isolation and loneliness, supporting cognitive health and wellbeing, and combatting frailty.