

# Wellbeing case studies of Arts Council of Wales venues and exhibitions

April 2014

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## Document Purpose

The purpose of this document is to

- Describe how Arts Council of Wales funded events might be considered as local wellbeing generators within their communities.
- Provide case studies about how Arts Council of Wales venues and exhibition spaces contribute to individual and community wellbeing.

Note: This document is to provide copy for the advocacy document. An introduction, forward or detailed explanation of wellbeing hasn't been included in this point in time, as the tone of the document hasn't been established.

## What is wellbeing?

Lles Cymru Wellbeing Wales uses the sustainable wellbeing model as a framework for learning, discussion, policy development and evaluation in the context of wellbeing. It is based on four subcomponents (see figure 1):

1. Physical and Psychological Wellbeing
2. Economic and Material Wellbeing
3. Community and Social Wellbeing and
4. Environmental Wellbeing.

The remainder of this document will take each heading in turn.

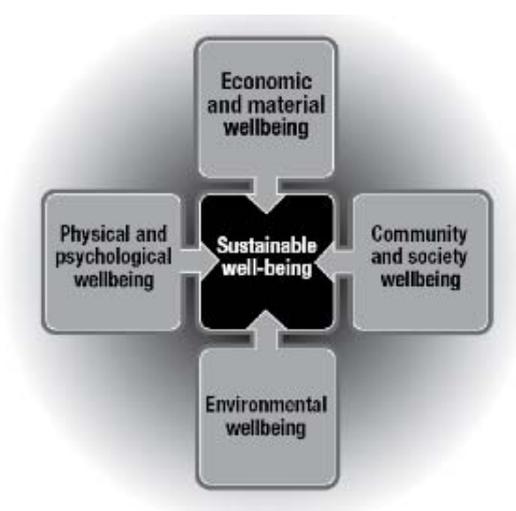


Figure 1: Sustainable Wellbeing Model

## ENVIRONMENTAL WELLBEING

We all have a responsibility to protect and enhance our local and global environment. According to our Environmental Policy<sup>1</sup>, the Arts Council of Wales, like other public, private and voluntary sector organisations is committed to "managing the environmental impact of its activities."

The following section provides a series of case studies detailing what some of the events, presenters, and venues are doing to enhance Wales' environmental wellbeing.

### Reducing Environmental Impact

Venue Cymru is situated on the long crescent promenade of Llandudno, nestled between the stunning coastline of North Wales and spectacular Snowdonia National Park. Such proximity to the obvious environmental jewels has promoted the team at Venue Cymru to do all it can to protect the local and global environment.

As Sarah Ecob, General Manager for Venue Cymru says, "We're challenging people to change their ways in order to protect the environment. Our in-house Business Improvement Team has been working with all areas and levels of the organisation to improve our own environmental performance."

The practical steps the Team have taken include:

- clear labeling of bins within the venue whether for general waste or recycling;
- working on ways to reduce the amount of waste produced by Venue Cymru
- ensuring that all cups at the venue are recyclable
- putting easy access cycle racks for use by staff and the general public alike
- include logos in all Venue Cymru publications that clearly show that we welcome cyclists and walkers to our premises.
- Produced a 'How to run a Sustainable Event' pack for staff and organisations who book the venue

Sarah went on to say "For example, lots of work has been done to reduce the energy consumption at Venue Cymru. This includes replacement of older lights with LED and improving the lighting system so that were only using the lights we really need."

The Wales Millennium Centre is an exemplar venue, which has achieved a great deal to reduce its environmental impact. In 2012,

the Centre won the British Institute of Facilities Management much-coveted award for Sustainability against tough competition from leading FTSE 100 companies.

Energy savings in one year alone equate to two thirds of the Creative Learning team's annual budget. The Centre is continually seeking ways to be more efficient cutting costs to enable more work with children, young people especially in disadvantaged communities, within the Centre's own square mile and in the South Wales Valleys in particular.

For example, the Centre was able to make the case to replace all the halogen 50 watts bulbs in the Centre to low energy light bulbs throughout the venue. The savings made here alone equated to the cost of taking Only Kids Aloud to Russia.

The Centre undertakes a wide range of activities to reduce its environmental impact, including operating a travel plan which encourages staff to use more sustainable forms of transport, to get to work. Investment was made in more cycle sheds, training and publicity to encourage staff to change their travel behaviour.

Using the website, the Centre also encourages the general public to use sustainable forms of transport such as car sharing and public transport. In 2012/13, 400,000 people came to the Centre to watch our performances on coaches - that 16% of our total audience.

### **Reducing Green House Gas Emissions**

According to the Welsh Government's<sup>ii</sup> Climate Change Strategy for Wales, every sector has a role to play in reducing the effects of Climate Change. Theatre Hafren is playing its part in helping its audience get to the Theatre using Dial a Ride in a way that reduces the environmental impacts of going by car.

Sara Clutton of Theatre Hafren said, "The distance between services like ours and where people live can really put people off. Dial a Ride provides a minibus pick up and drop off service for the local community in rural Powys. We let them know how many people need a lift, where from, where to and by when. We even provide a ticket for the volunteer bus drivers. So everybody wins."

### **Conserving the Artistic Streetscape**

The Oriel Myrddin Gallery was formally opened as in its current guise in 1991. Prior to that, the building housed the Carmarthen School of Art - which was originally opened in 1892. As one regular user put it "The

Oriel Myrddin building is part of the local arts history. Its a landmark within the community."

There are similar stories from across Wales. The Ucheldre Centre is a refurbished convent, whilst the Pontardawe Arts Centre was originally a Public Hall and Institute opened in 1908. It formally opened as an arts centre in 1996, but has managed to help maintain the character of the area by ensuring the old building remains open and busy. It's even managed to conserve a ghost which is said to haunt the venue. Both the public and staff have had spooky experiences there, including hearing the piano play by itself and witnessing ghostly sightings at night.

### **Third Places**

In a recent survey<sup>iii</sup> into the impact on community wellbeing of Arts Venues and Exhibition spaces, one focus group member said that their Centre was, "providing a focus for the community. It's more than a community Centre. Its very well known."

This feeling was echoed by 68% of a survey sent out to Arts venue and exhibition users from across Wales who felt that these centers helped them feel part of their community. A further 66% of respondent's agreed that their local arts venue reflects the interests of the local community.

Ray Oldenburg<sup>iv</sup> defines the third place as the social surroundings separate from the home and workplace that are "anchors of community life" that "facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction."

The Commission on Wellbeing and Policy<sup>v</sup> makes a similar point. "Spaces that create opportunities for people to dwell and meet, be they parks, porches, or post offices, provide the soil for the seeds of friendship and connection to grow" can ultimately improve community wellbeing.

### **Connecting with the environment**

Vetch Veg is a community Vegetable garden created in collaboration between residents of the Sandfields in Swansea and the artist Owen Griffiths. Together they created a thriving urban utopia in the city centre. The *Sandfields Festival of Ideas* was a weekend of art, cooking, performance, music and activities which put art at its heart by inviting artists, thinkers, curators, activists, who think and work in similar ways, to come and share the conversation about this project.

During the Festival of Ideas, workers from the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery helped the residents conceive, build, paint and eventually play with a coconut shy. They were also involved in planting apple trees with children and families. The festival was an opportunity for the public to add to the sustainability of the Sandfields as well as improving health and well being through outdoor activities to create stronger and more supportive communities.

### **Attending Venues, Participating in Arts**

In a recent survey<sup>vi</sup> into the impact on community wellbeing of Arts Venues and Exhibition spaces, it was clear that most of those who visited the centres were there to see a performance or exhibition. Or as one respondent put it, "that's the reason I'm here." In this particular survey, 41% of them use the venues at least once a month, with 75% of the total sample saying that they always end up seeing a performance or exhibition once they visit.

## PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

The Welsh Government's Healthy Future sets out the foundation for government ambitions for public health. It includes actions to promote health and wellbeing throughout life and focuses on prevention and early intervention. To put that into context, the overall cost of mental health problems alone in Wales is estimated at £7.2 billion a year<sup>vii</sup>.

There is evidence that demonstrates participation and involvement in the arts helps promote good individual health. A recent report by the Royal Society for Public Health which stated "access to and involvement in creative activity and the arts in all its forms is an important component in both the overall health and wellbeing of society and for individuals within it<sup>viii</sup>." This section will cover case studies that are making considerable contributions to the Welsh Government's strategic ambitions.

### Health Boost

In a recent survey<sup>ix</sup> into the impact on community wellbeing of Arts Venues and Exhibition spaces, almost every focus group spoke about the health benefits they felt from attending an arts venue or exhibition. Comments range from, "I had a period of physical ill health, I always felt that I could come here. They looked after me;" to "[it's] nothing to do with the art directly, that [a visit here] is an opportunity for contemplation – something that people crave really badly."

64% of respondents to a national questionnaire agreed that a visit to an Arts Centre is an important boost to their health. This sentiment is echoed in words like 'happy,' 'uplifted,' 'inspired,' 'stimulated' and 'satisfied' used by a combined total of 370 respondents in the exercise, or 46% of the total sample.

### Exercise of a different kind

The Ucheldre Centre runs a number of courses throughout the year open to anyone who wants to join. One participant on a life model course said the opportunity helped them "exercise all the muscles that you would care to mention. Ones that exist in reality and ones that exist in my mind. It helps my imagination, memory, attention, focus, all of those cognitive skills are very important to keep moving else there's a danger you start to lose things if you don't use them." The experience of doing something together, being pushed and achieving was an extremely positive. As another participant put it, "Its intense. You forget everything else – any issues you may have. You're concentrating.

You're exhausted when you've finished, its mental exhaustion, but it's a really good feeling. I know I'll go away from here on a high."

Peter Doran, Artistic Director at Torch Theatre felt that the experience of visiting the theatre was to help people see the arts in other things, "as its happening all over the place." A visitor to Oriel Myrddin in Carmarthen expressed it slightly differently, "In terms of physical activity, the activity helps people be healthier. But it's actually the recovery that helps the body. This gallery helps aid the essential recovery of the body. This [visiting this gallery] helps digesting the scenery."

### **Helping the Elderly**

The Glynn Vivian Art Gallery runs a regular Afternoon Class for over 55 year olds. The group has been active since March 2009 with funding from Engage Cymru and regularly attracts 20 to 25 participants. The class is designed to inspire adults with a wide range of specialist interests. It offers the opportunity for our adult audiences to discover their creative side through classes focused around the collection, touring exhibitions and exploring a range of media through regularly visiting the Gallery. Refreshments are provided and members of the group regularly bring in cake, as well as the opportunity to look and discuss some of the artworks and to meet new people. These events are aimed at individuals; hence you do not need to come as a group. Most importantly, you do not need to be an 'art expert' as they are suitable for those new to gallery-going, new to modern, contemporary or even art in general.

A similar project in the Ucheldre Centre has made a considerable difference to the lives of the participants. As one regular user said "If you're talking about older or retired people, I'm in my sixties now, people who are retired and who, particularly in they are widows, they are going to be unhappy if they're not doing anything creative, bored and unhappy, lonely and frustrated and prone to depression, to come out here and have a lively morning, a coffee ... its self indulgent in a way, you let all your emotions out you can paint what ever you like, you can pretend you're Picasso or whatever."

A regular user of the Wales Millennium Centre has a different take on how the arts centres and galleries can help her peers. She regularly organises group and individual visits from her community. She said "It's a comfort to [their families or carers] that their mother is doing something independently – having a meal, coming here, going to the performance, then going home happy." Again back at the Ucheldre Centre a supporter said, "My mother ... is in here all the time. Can't

keep her out. The glad rags go on and it's really fantastic for her. I mean she's 82 you know and it's wonderful."

### **Increasing aspiration**

Hawthorne School in Pontypridd participated in a major dance project with Wales Millennium Centre as part of its ambitious Creative Learning programme with choreographer Mathew Bourne's company Re-Bourne. The project culminated in a curtain raiser performance before a sell out Sleeping Beauty in the Donald Gordon Theatre, attended by 200 from the school and family members.

"We had one pupil in there with severe anxiety, was almost school phobic; she developed such a wonderful confidence throughout the whole project that her focus now is attendance and she's getting on near enough 100% attendance all the time now. A lot of pupils came forward in leaps and bounds from where they were at the very beginning of the year, before the project started, and even now, months later you still see that positive impact that it's had on behaviour and emotional wellbeing. It really has done wonders not just for the 27 pupils involved in the final project, but the whole school. It was incredibly inspiring for everybody - the staff, the head, because it changed us as a school." Kelly Phillips, Teacher, Drama and Theatre Studies, Hawthorn School, Pontypridd

Another parent had the following to say about the Riverside Theatre's young programme. "My son is dyslexic and has never been given a part in a school play or concert. The youth theatre class at The Riverfront has built his confidence and self esteem so much. The tutor is so patient and breaks everything down for him to follow."

### **Promoting Physical Activity**

The Riverside Theatre has an older Adults dance group, which was initially set up for personal enjoyment rather than for performance. Three or four years later on the group were up on stage. Nic Young Director at the Riverside Theatre said "Funnily enough, this group don't attend other performances, unless its pushed by the tutor and they get free tickets!"

The 'Lads and their Dads' dance classes have been very popular at the Torch Theatre. Normally a very difficult group to engage in this kind of activity, staff at the Theatre has been pleasantly surprised of its popularity.

Venue Cymru relies very heavily on over 100 volunteers who steward for the theatre during events and performances. In addition to stewarding, this group of people has started a walking group to meet up regularly, spend time together and get some regular physical exercise.

As one of the walkers said "A 24 volunteer stewards got together and thought we'd like to go walking. Its just something we wanted to do and its great fun. I'm also responsible for the volunteer rota, which is a hell of a job, but it keeps my brain working. These group walks are different, something else for us all to do together."

### **Centres that Energise**

Professor Neil Frude<sup>xxvi</sup> talks about *Interventions that Energize*. In it he states, "There is a simple, traditional, formula for happiness which, although not derived from positive psychology, is certainly in line with research in the field. The formula states that in order to be happy, a person needs a) something to do, b) something to love, and c) something to look forward to"

According to a survey<sup>x</sup> into the impact on community wellbeing of Arts Venues and Exhibition spaces, 75% of the total sample said that they always end up seeing a performance or exhibition once they visit. It would seem that the venues are provide " b) something to love, and c) something to look forward to," which results in visitors feeling healthier and happier as a result (see earlier notes).

### **Wellbeing Generators**

Users of Oriel Myrddin describe the gallery as a kind of sanctuary to help cope with the pressures of modern life, "everyone is in a rush, they don't have time for each other. There is stress. Then you can come here and have more contemplative conversations." They feel that the gallery provided "a space that is safe and [people] can be themselves.' It feels that the venue has some intrinsic value all of its own that can only help improve their wellbeing.

In a recent survey<sup>xi</sup> into the impact on community wellbeing of Arts Venues and Exhibition spaces, the participants were asked a number of questions from the European Social Survey<sup>xii</sup> based on discussions with the focus groups.

Nearly all the respondents to the questions used in the European Social Survey on the issues of trust and belonging; vitality; supportive relationships and life satisfaction - scored higher than the mean value in

each instance. Although the sample wasn't big or diverse enough to demonstrate a causal link – the observation that users of arts centres and venues score better on these issues certainly warrants further investigation and echoes what users said in the focus groups.

## **Combating Isolation**

According to the Royal Voluntary Service<sup>xiii</sup>, "loneliness .... is associated with a number of negative health outcomes including mortality, morbidity, depression and suicide as well as health service use<sup>xiv</sup>." The Royal Voluntary Service report goes on to say "A 2008 study from the University of Chicago found that chronic loneliness is a health risk factor comparable to smoking, obesity and lack of exercise and contributes to a suppressed immune system, high blood pressure and increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol."

In addition to having a walking group, the volunteers at Venue Cymru have also organised trips to Manchester to see other shows and organised regular coffee mornings so that they stay involved with the venue and the friends they've made over the years. Its hardly surprising when three-quarters of over 75s that live alone say they feel lonely<sup>xv</sup>. One regular user at the Ucheldre Centre said, " people who have been on their own for a while, get back in a social situation ... it is a huge thing, positive experience." A user in Oriel Myrddin felt that " People want to be connected. They want to somehow make connections with other people ... there is a desire to be connected." So its clear the venues and galleries across Wales have a role to play in improving the psychological wellbeing of their users.

In the Park and Dare Theatre, the National Dance Company and Welsh National Opera worked in partnership with local arts organisation, Artis Community, to produce the other centenary commemoration for the venue. "Hedfa'r Dychymyg/Flights of Fancy" was a true partnership production, which also featured a performance by members of the Cofio Dance Project, whose participants range from 61 to 95 years of age.

## **Physical or Learning Disabilities**

The Wales Millennium Centre is one building that contains 8 other companies, who also contribute towards people's wellbeing. They are

- Hijinx Theatre<sup>xvi</sup> (including Odyssey Theatre)
- Touch Trust<sup>xvii</sup>
- Urdd
- Welsh National Opera

- BBC National Orchestra of Wales
- Literature Wales
- Ty Cerdd
- National Dance Company Wales

One of the founding objectives in including such a diverse group of companies under the one roof was that they would collaborate and that the sum of the parts would therefore be greater than the whole. As the Centre has matured so have the collaborations and relationships.

When Naomi Perkins turned 18, it was recommended that she be placed in an old people's home. She has severe cerebral palsy, had no awareness of self and was classified as clinically depressed. Her parents introduced her to the Touch Trust in 2005. She has been coming to the Centre regularly, for her sessions, which use touch, music and movement. She has discovered her voice and now enjoys going to theatre performances, but especially opera and classical music. Through the Touch Trust and musical therapy she has 'blossomed' and particularly enjoys singing during the live performances. Wales Millennium Centre allows Naomi and her parents to use with a sound proofed viewing gallery, which allows her to sing to her heart's content as enthusiastically as she likes.

"If I could bottle that (performance by Live Music Now Musicians Ginge and Cello Boy) Naomi would be happy forever". Mrs Sandra Perkins, Naomi's mum.

## ECONOMIC AND MATERIAL WELLBEING

A vibrant economy is at the heart of a geographical community. When people live, work and spend their money and their time in the same area, strong bonds of friendship and mutual support can be formed<sup>xix</sup>. Local shops and businesses help to provide the social glue that keeps communities together. For instance, they are more likely to know their customers personally, have the flexibility to meet individual requirements and often act as places where information can be exchanged about what is happening in the local area. A local independent business is far more likely than a national chain to source goods and services locally, leading to greater 'local multiplier' effects – in other words, ensuring that money circulates within the local area for longer<sup>xx</sup>.

In the next section, the case studies will give some examples of where Arts Council of Wales funded events, presenters, and venues are providing that social glue, be places where information is available and ensuring that money circulates within the local area.

### Keeping Money in the Local Economy

Wales Millennium Centre has commissioned numerous evaluations of its economic and social impact<sup>xxi</sup>. In Professor Calvin Jones of Cardiff Business School (*needs a reference*) estimated that the Centre contributed in excess of £40 million into the Welsh economy in 2008. The Centre's turnover is now £23 million, and it is estimated that its contribution has increased to in excess of £50 million.

The Wales Millennium Centre has worked with Welsh Government on its food sourcing policies to increase the produce source in Wales. Now over 80% of all ingredients are sourced in Wales, with fish coming from Anglesey, salt marsh lamb from Gower, venison from the Brecon Beacons, smoked meats from Monmouthshire, smoked salmon from the Black Mountains, cheese from Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, and so on.

Essentially this means that the Centre is supporting jobs across Wales. For example, the Centre purchases some 64,000 tubs of ice cream every year from a Rhondda ice cream supplier, which essentially supports 3 jobs. In turn from supplying a prestigious venue like ours they secure other contracts.

The Centre has shared its best practice in terms of Welsh sourcing with other venues and attractions across Wales, to encourage more businesses to use local.

Other smaller examples exist in Wales, but all have an impact locally. When National Theatre Wales held its VIP night for its production of *Tony and Pandemonium* at the Park and Dare in Treorchy, the local chip shop, A Fish Called Rhondda, was rushed off its feet providing refreshments after the show.

On a larger scale, when Grammy Award winning American country and folks singer / song writer Lucinda Williams played a gig at [Coliseum Theatre, Aberdare](#) in June 2013 there was a tangible impact on the local economy. The 600 seat theatre was sold out with people travelling from all over to see the famous singer perform. Guesthouses, restaurants and bars all over Rhondda Cynon Taff welcomed visitors from across the UK. Visitors from Bath to Machynlleth; Pembrokeshire to Penzance; Rainham to Weymouth spent time and money in the area. That vital injection into the local economy wouldn't have happened without the efforts of everyone at this busy venue.

For the last 30 years, a volunteer at Venue Cymru has been organising the Llandudno Opera Holidays in association with the Welsh National Opera. Barbara Sandbach says "Last year I had over 150 people coming to the area to see the shows at Venue Cymru and stay locally, most of them for about 4 nights. They come here to spend time and money from all over Europe and America. I have a mailing list of over 2000 contacts, so it's quite a big operation and I get fantastic feedback."

## **Adding Value**

Wales Millennium Centre receives revenue subsidy of £3.7 million from the Arts Council of Wales. This amounts to a mere 19% of the Centre's total income. (£23m in 2012-13). The Centre therefore earns over £4.00 for every £1 of public subsidy, thereby punching well above its weight in comparison with other centres of this scale. The Barbican and the Southbank in London, for example, receive in excess of 50% subsidy every year.

## **Supporting Creative Industries**

The Torch Theatre is one of only three production company theatres in Wales. It aims to engage, inspire, entertain and challenge its audiences with a vibrant programme of work that celebrates 'the essential power of live performance to promote social and personal change<sup>xxii</sup>.' In so doing that it provides a hub for the creative industries in South West Wales, aiming to provide opportunities for partnership work, learning, innovation and leadership.

Rhondda Cynon Taff Cultural Services / RCT Theatre wants to support the creative industries in the area. Some examples include:

- Cwmni Martyn Geraint and Frank Vickery who regularly audition and rehearse in the Park and Dare Theatre in Treorchy.
- Julie Barclay who rehearses at the Muni Arts Centre in Pontypridd.
- the RCT Professional Panto Company rehearses in the Park and Dare before moving its production to the Coliseum Theatre in Aberdare each year and
- the National Theatre Wales which has relocated to the Park and Dare for a number of months during 2013.

Not only do these companies provide a chance for aspiring actors to perform their art; they also provide work opportunities for local technicians who help put the shows together. To help new technicians get good practical grounding and experience of what is required to work backstage in a theatre, Rhondda Cynon Taff has recently put in place a number of technical theatre apprenticeships.

The Riverfront has a range of initiatives to stimulate income and interest within the local creative industries. It ranges from working with audiences, individuals and companies to create markets for these products. It also works with individuals so that they get the right mix of skills, knowledge and experience to look for work in the performance and technical sides of the creative industries.

Officers at Cardiff School of Management wanted to congratulate the Riverside Theatre " for helping one of our undergraduate students .... to pass his second year by providing a work placement. Without the time, experience and generosity of placement providers such as The Riverfront, we would not be able to deliver on our commitment to helping students develop their employability skills."

The Young People's Project was run by the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery to help young people connect and engage with art galleries through a series of workshops, projects and events. The target *group is made up mainly of young people not in employment, education or training*. The objectives of the project were to work with young people aged between 14 –19 years old, to engage them in the Gallery's programme and the local community. The aim was to empower and integrate them into the Gallery's activity by making them central to the evaluation of their own initiated projects as well as being involved in steering groups for the Gallery's future activity and evaluation.

Bethany, a participant on the Glynn Vivian Young People's Project said of the experience, "It was a challenging and rewarding experience.

The projects chosen and given were great opportunities, which are hard to find elsewhere. Our first chosen project run through the summer of 2012 was a music event "Battle of the Bands" which was the most challenging of the lot. I learnt organising skills, people's skills, design skills and promoting skills, the results were awarding at the end, with 5 bands and an audience over 100.

All of these examples aim to grow the creative industries in Wales and provide sustainable and skilled jobs across the country. As such, these activities are contributing to the heart of the Welsh Government's anti poverty agenda.

### **Supporting Creative Thinkers**

As one user in Oriel Myrddin put it, " I don't get a lot of opportunities in work to talk and think about ideas; I come to the gallery because that's where that happens. Life can be hectic, with work the family and everything. It's all lovely, but I don't have much time to think, reflect, contemplate, or think about ideas." Oriel Myrddin provides an opportunity for individuals to reflect and deal with the stresses and strains of life. This kind of low level intervention which could help keep that person in work and maintain their long term health and wellbeing.

### **Combating Economic Exclusion**

The Arts Council of Wales sees its job is to remove the barriers that hold people back from enjoying what the arts in its widest sense can provide. Across the board, galleries and venues in Wales do their utmost to encourage participation in the arts and try to remove barriers - particularly financial.

That might mean ticket prices to make sure there are opportunities for everyone. For example, Rachel Thomas a regular at Pontardawe Arts Centre and mother of three children wanted to give her children the experience of seeing a range of cultural experiences. The Family Friendly Scheme provided the ways and means, " this scheme has enabled our family to visit the theatre together regularly, take risks and enjoy a wide variety of events from comedy to drama and music. It wouldn't have happened but for the £1 children tickets."

Wales Millennium Centre provides free tickets and sometimes transport for socially deprived families/schools for specific shows. For example Lionboy by Complicité targeted members of deprived communities in Cardiff and South Wales Valleys attend. For many this was their first visit to a theatre, and they were seated on the stage making it very special and memorable.

Project 21: The Centre has been working with seven schools in seven Community First areas every year since 2009, with a commitment to work with these same children until they are 21. The seven areas are: Merthyr Tydfil, Splott, Ystradgynlais, Maesgerichen, Bangor, Barmouth, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Townhill in Swansea. Each year a different artist goes out to these schools to work on an outreach project with these children. The annual project culminates in a showing of their work at the Centre. For the Wales Millennium Centre's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary they are working with children from these communities on an 18<sup>th</sup> month performance project which will culminate with a performance on the Donald Gordon Stage to mark the opening of our anniversary year.

Rhondda Cynon Taff Cultural Services / RCT Theatre want to create inclusive and accessible participatory arts activities for all in the area. One way of doing that has been to reintroduce a cinema programme at the Coliseum and Park and Dare Theatres. The local response was fantastic - with over 9,500 people attending in the first six weeks of the scheme.

## COMMUNITY AND SOCIETAL WELLBEING

'Community' means different things to different people. Communities can be geographical or interest-based, but they share a common feature: they provide a basis for social interaction, which is a critical element of wellbeing<sup>xxiii</sup>. Researchers<sup>xxiv</sup> have identified four key elements that characterise a strong sense of community:

- Membership – identifying oneself as part of a clearly delineated group.
- Influence – members of the community feeling that they have some power to shape it.
- Needs fulfilment – people find membership of the community personally rewarding.
- Shared emotional connection – people feel an emotional bond with the community and others within it.

### Volunteering

According to the Arts Council of Wales<sup>xxv</sup>, "Amateurs and volunteers are as much part of the cultural DNA of Wales as our award winning artists and national companies." The range of volunteering opportunities with arts venues and galleries across Wales provides a range of means to promote community wellbeing.

For example the Ucheldre Centre, is a registered charity where responsibility for the policy and care of the Centre is entrusted to a management committee of some 15 volunteers, elected by members of the Ucheldre Centre Friends Association. As one board member put it, "I like social contact. I like to come here for a chat or be helpful [as a volunteer]. Also you use your brain. No two days are ever the same here. The customers are generally lovely and give you information about where they live. You can then talk about these places and interact socially."

Volunteers assist the manager of the Ucheldre Centre with about 100 hours of volunteering a week. As the manager of the Centre put it, "The Centre could not survive without this help, and new volunteers are always welcome." Their input certainly provide these individuals with the opportunity to feel fulfilled and influence something they care deeply about.

Volunteering at Arts Venues and Galleries across Wales can be less intense, but no less reward. Solas a Newport based charity, works with people who are vulnerable, homeless or at risk of homelessness. We provide accommodation, support, advice, education, training and employment. The Solas Volunteer Coordinator couldn't wait to

feedback about the experiences of one of their clients who had been volunteering at the Riverside Theatre.

"Thank you for the fantastic opportunity that you gave Anthony. His volunteering with The Riverfront really has had a big impact on his confidence, behaviour and attitude, which has been noticed by us in Solas but also by his social worker who has written to express the positive changes that she has noticed. We have no doubt that this is largely down to his volunteering and Anthony has articulated the benefits he has felt through his time with The Riverfront."

### **Taking Part**

Glynn Vivian Art Gallery is using another way to get people involved, but also to give them the opportunity to get their points of view across to create change. The Community Café aims to create regular meetings around key issues related to the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery's future development. These discussions will help inform the gallery's future programme of events and will become a place where members of the community, including the un-represented and the mis-represented will have a voice.

### **Community Support**

The Torch Theatre has a long tradition of supporting its local community. Whether that's through the putting a float into the Christmas Carnival, providing free tickets for Pembrokeshire Action to Combat Hardship or supporting local community organisations with the technical know-how when they put on a show. It all helps.

Guy Woodham, General Manager for the Torch Theatre said, "The difference between us and a community venue is that we're a professional theatre where we produce our own shows to a very high standard. But that doesn't mean we don't want to help support the rest of our local community in their own activities. We hire out our equipment, technicians and our facilities so that everyone can benefit from the resource we have here in the Torch Theatre."

### **Building Communities**

In 2013, the Wales Millennium Centre provided space for two Summer Schools for multicultural groups Project Fio and Butetown Women's Workshop. The latter would normally meet in a run-down building in Butetown.

Being able to participate in dance and arts workshops in a creative space was life changing for the young people. The two week long summer school culminated in a presentation to parents and friends and relatives. One Somaliland mother spontaneously stood up and spoke eloquently saying she had no idea that Wales Millennium Centre was for 'people like us'.

Maureen Ready, Project Leader, of the Women's Workshop who used the Wales Millennium Centre said of the experience, "I cannot tell you how inspiring it has been, and what an impact it has had on the girls from spending two weeks working on arts activity in this creative environment. It has been a huge boost to their confidence, and allowed them to develop their social skills as well as friendships."

Similarly, three groups of adults with learning difficulties are regulars at the Pontardawe Arts Centre. They come to the Centre to practice their performances before putting on a show.

"For the last 8 years, service users have been attending numerous courses and events at Pontardawe Arts Centre. This has enabled service users to participate and be involved in the local community and interact with others" according to Stephen Davies, Day Service Officer, Pontardawe Day Service. " The service users have enjoyed these experiences so much, their confidence levels are soaring. Its obvious that they now feel better about themselves as a result."

This increased self confidence has meant that the group members attended other performances and films that are open to the whole community. This is something that they wouldn't have done in the past.

Pontardawe Arts Centre's work with these groups has encouraged parents of children with learning difficulties to use the Centre as a safe and central venue where they can get together to meet up. This group provides invaluable peer support to its members - and is completely self organised. They get together to share their experiences and learn from one another.

Pontardawe Arts Centre also demonstrates how similar centers can help individuals who have shared an emotional connection the past deal with the challenges of the future. After her husband passed away, Marion Littlepage, wanted to explain how the Centre had helped her cope with such a traumatic event. "My husband and I used to enjoy visiting the Arts Centre together. After he died I had to learn to live in a different way. The Arts Centre was one of the few places I felt I could come on my own, confident that I would be welcomed and feel secure."

## Working With Schools and Young People

Arts venues and galleries across Wales regularly work with local schools and young people. This can help people feel part of something and learn from the experience.

Officers from Rhondda Cynon Taff Council were proactive in their support of the Pontardawe Arts Centre Shake It Up Shakespeare Project. They staged a performance of Macbeth as part of the project at the Coliseum in Aberdare and at the Muni Arts Centre in Pontypridd. A total of eight comprehensive schools came to see the production, which gave the students the opportunity to really get to grips with this dark and powerful tragedy through a bespoke workshop with run by the show's director and actors.

According to St John Baptist High School teacher, Mathew Doherty, "the workshop added a new dimension to the understanding of the pupils. They were engaged from the very beginning and the project certainly contributed to giving the pupils a deeper knowledge of the dynamics of Macbeth."

Visitors from St John Baptist High School in Aberdare thought that the venue, workshop and production for the whole project were excellent. In a very practical sense, teachers felt that this experience will help their pupils feel less intimidated by productions like 'Macbeth.' Others were at pains to say that the Shake It Up Shakespeare project was "a positive experience all round."

In 2013 Oriel Myrddin hosted the Big Draw with the Draw Tomorrow Theme. Its purpose was to get participants to imagine man's relationship with nature in the future by working with an artist in residence. Activities included using microscopes, drawing on walls and working with wire to grow a living wall.

Whole families took part in the event, with children and their parents benefitting from the activities. Ioan, aged 10 said, "It was very enjoyable and fantastical – there was something for everyone. To start with I felt a bit shy but people were very kind." Sophie his mum added, "It was a very special atmosphere – very peaceful and calm. The children loved drawing with them both and for me – it was a unique space where the children were happy drawing and being helped by others when needed so I could have a draw, and make and explore quietly myself – a truly rare treat!"

The Take pArt participation work in RCT Theatres led by Audience Development Manager Angela Gould engages with young people aged from 7 years to 18.

Angela said "This class is really popular amongst the local community. There aren't many things on offer in the local community - so its great that they young people can do something like this."

Angela went on to say "Its also fantastic watching these young people grow in so many ways. Its no small thing to put on a successful show - I take my hat off to them."

By getting involved with Take pArt, members are able to audition each year for the RCT Theatres professional pantomime in the Coliseum Theatre in Aberdare.

A Take pArt "graduate" Tamara Brabon, was one of three young actresses to gain the role of Danielle in the NTW Production of Rachel Trezise's "Tonypandemonium."

RCT Theatres want to ensure that a whole range of the community get to regularly access their venues - and not just for performances. The weekly dance classes held at the Muni Arts Centre and Park & Dare Theatre are always popular, as are Welsh language classes delivered in association Gartholwg Lifelong Learning Centre.

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