

# Our Space funding programme

An interim review of the pilot phase



April 2015

Wales One World Film Festival, Chapter (image: Jon Pountney)



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## Foreword

At the Arts Council of Wales we're passionate and unapologetic about the arts. We want to support the best arts that we can, and to encourage as many people as possible to enjoy and take part in creative activity. We want to see the people of Wales inspired by arts that are vibrant, compelling and engaging – arts that reach out and touch us; arts that ignite our imagination and creativity; arts that challenge us to search for a better understanding of our being and the world around us.

Our strategy for developing the arts can be summed up in just three words:

### **Make   Reach   Sustain**

We're interested in the way that these meanings fuse together – reinforcing each other in a single sense of purpose. Making art, ensuring it connects and giving it a durable legacy are all part of the same picture.

If we **Make** well, we inspire. And if we inspire, people get it. They want it and value it. So we must inspire the people of Wales to enjoy and take part in the best that our nation has to offer.

This, then, is at the heart of our ability to **Reach**, and crucially to reach further than before. If in doing this, something of worth is created in what is made or who is embraced, then we should ask how we protect and **Sustain** these things in ways that will endure.

These are bold ambitions. But we remain firmly committed to our vision of a creative Wales where the arts are central to the life of the nation. After all, the arts illuminate and give life to the wide range of strategies that underpin public life. From arts and health to cultural tourism, public art to town centre re-generation, the arts bring meaning, authenticity and enjoyment to our everyday lives. They create and sustain jobs, enrich education services, bring people together, improve our quality of life.

Yet in spite of their manifold benefits, we know that there are many people in Wales who either believe that the arts aren't for them, or who face social, financial or physical barriers that prevent them from taking part.

Creating new opportunities for people to access to the arts – or breaking down some of these barriers to engagement – is the bread and butter work of many of Wales' arts organisations. But are we sufficiently aware of the new strategies and techniques that can breathe fresh life into familiar audience development strategies? Have we spotted those who've developed insights and ideas that offer different ways of engaging with so-called 'hard to reach' audiences? This is the territory that the *Our Space* programme set out to explore.

At the time of writing we're half way through the programme. From the outset we knew that it would be very important that we assessed and evaluated the emerging outcomes and took account of the lessons learnt to date. In this we're indebted to independent

consultants Kirkhill Associates whose evaluation for us of the programme provides much of the raw material for this publication. We also thank the participating projects in the *Our Space* programme. They have been unfailingly generous in their feedback and frank in their assessments of their own projects. We are grateful to them for their openness.

Finally, in this pilot phase, we've intentionally kept *Our Space* as open as possible. We don't want to pre-judge outcomes – we want to see experimentation and new thinking. Perhaps projects in the programme will 'fail'. Or it might just be that there's nothing new under the sun and that the tried and tested ways are the best ones. The *Our Space* pilot projects will, we believe, provide some answers to these and many other questions.

Arts Council of Wales  
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## Introduction

### Piloting new ways of delivering the Arts Council's priorities

The *Our Space* Engagement Programme for New Audiences was launched by Arts Council of Wales in December 2012. In the period January 2013 to December 2014, we made 10 awards to 8 organisations as part of the programme.

The development of the *Our Space* programme coincided with a wider review of our arts development strategies. Whilst we were confident in our advocacy of artistically excellent activity, we were less sure that we were helping a wider audience to experience this work.

The other factor that informed our thinking was the growing evidence that public funding was being squeezed. It was becoming increasingly obvious that arts organisations could not assume that public funders would be able to maintain existing levels of arts funding. The prudent organisation would seek to reduce its dependency on public funding. By growing new sources of income and strengthening links with its local community (however 'community' might be defined), organisations would hopefully become more resilient and sustainable in the longer term. *Our Space* was conceived as a pilot programme designed to 'test' some of the new thinking.

### Matching funding programme to policy and strategy

All of these issues underpinned the development of our new Arts Strategy, *Inspire: creativity and the arts...* The launch of *Our Space* took place more than a year before we published *Inspire*. Nevertheless, we believe that *Our Space* directly meets several of the Strategy's creative challenges:

- *Making More of our Arts Buildings.* Six of the eight recipient organisations are building-based, and one of the others, Theatr Iolo, has based its project on improving how it can work with venues. *Our Space* has opened up important debates about 'ownership' of venues, and how to ensure that the widest range of users find them to be accessible 'Third Spaces'.
- *More people creating, enjoying and taking part in the arts.* This challenge could effectively be said to provide the 'strapline' for the *Our Space* programme. We know that given real opportunities for meaningful community engagement, it is rare for people not to respond to those opportunities and to understand better the benefits that the arts can bring to their lives.
- *Putting Communities First.* We want to see Wales' key arts organisations rooted in, and connected to, the communities that they serve. This is important in and of itself. However, it also helps the arts to contribute to the Welsh Government's Child Poverty and Families First priorities.

- *Making new places.* The emphasis here is on 'new models of enterprise, social cohesion and well-being for communities'. The projects delivered by Llantarnam Grange, Celf, WOW/Chapter, and – at least in intention Redhouse – all seek explicitly to address this, whilst it is implicit in the projects run by Pontardawe, Theatr Iolo and Theatr Brycheiniog.

### **Learning from our experience**

Independent consultants Kirkhill Associates were engaged to review the success of the pilot programme. Their thorough and detailed evaluation provides the basis of the information set out in this document.

This is not a formal evaluation of the programme. At this stage we want to share some of the early learning and so the content that follows is presented with that objective in mind.

## What we set out to achieve

### A new approach to funding creative activity

The Programme's aim was to reach out to new audiences and to persuade more people to enjoy and take part in the Arts. In promoting and managing the programme we were keen to encourage imaginative and innovative proposals. However, as well as the cultural and social objectives, we also wanted to pilot different ways of running and managing a funding programme. So one of the steps we took was to simplify the application process as much as possible.

*Our Space* has required no application form, offered a rolling process of awards without deadlines. It has also provided the opportunity for applicants to 'pitch' for one or both of two stages – research and development, and action research.

### New thinking, new ideas

The guidance, whilst emphasising the desirability of imaginative, exciting and innovative proposals, also stressed that we were looking not for a quick fix, but to the longer term. We wanted to encourage more people to get involved in the arts and to entice them to return. A clear priority was projects targeting children and young people, and families. We also highlighted our interest in projects based on creative collaboration and partnership, and to projects which sought achievable and sustainable outcomes.

The process of application was equally uncomplicated: applicants were given room to shape their proposals in their own way provided that they contained it to 4 sides of A4 paper, and included a description of the project; details about partners and their respective roles; the target audience and any objectives; an evaluation plan; a budget and timescale for the programme; and a statement of the funding requested.

## Delivery of the scheme: what actually happened

The projects supported so far had a wide range of objectives and proposed outcomes. Each of the projects is summarised below.

### **Cariad Interactive (awarded £4,860)**

Funding towards a Research & Development project to develop Enfys (Rainbow), a scalable interactive arts and performance project aimed at preschool children and families. The overarching goal of the project was to generate collaborative performances between peers, early years setting staff and families, through the medium of Welsh language. Partners included Mudiad Meithrin (a voluntary organisation which aims to give every young child in Wales the opportunity to benefit from early years services and experiences through the medium of Welsh), and the National Eisteddfod which was essentially a venue for the performance.

### **Celfogwmpas, Llandrindod Wells (awarded £8,500)**

A Research & Development project to investigate the feasibility of developing a three year audience development project. Working with pupils at four Powys schools (including specialist educational units) the proposal's long term objectives were to encourage local children and families to visit Celf's gallery, and in the longer term to encourage new audiences to visit other galleries and arts centres in mid Wales and beyond.

### **Llantarnam Grange (awarded £54,450)**

Llantarnam Grange was awarded both Research & Development and Project funding towards its proposal 'Gallery in a Box'. In essence, the vision of the project was to create a small mobile 'gallery' and handling collection of applied and visual art. This would be supported by an online hub of resource and interpretative material, and would enable the Gallery to engage with new and more diverse audiences across the region.

### **Pontardawe Arts Centre (awarded £24,958)**

Support for a one year pilot project targeting disadvantaged communities in and around Pontardawe. Through a series of workshops and interactions, the aim was to promote the Arts Centre as a usable and comfortable place to be; to broaden and extend people's arts experiences; to actively engage with groups and individuals which are traditionally hard to reach and have a very low take up of arts activities; to encourage intergenerational working; and to train key members of the community to empower and support them to manage dedicated arts activity in their own communities.



## Redhouse:

REDHOUSE received two awards for projects which broadly aimed to engage with local community groups to foster ownership of the new venue in its year of opening and beyond:

- **Regional City – (£36,592)** A multi artform proposal featuring a range of participatory/community based activities to develop audiences for the REDHOUSE *Old Town Hall/Hen Neuadd Y Dref*. This is a new arts complex in the heart of Merthyr Tydfil opened to the public on St. David's Day 2014, following an extensive £8M capital redevelopment programme supported by the Welsh Government, European Regional Development Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund & Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
- **Constituent Parts - (£24,300)** A mixed media presentation to celebrate the public launch of REDHOUSE under the creative direction of Ian Rowlands, featuring community inspired artwork from Merthyr Tydfil's eleven electoral wards, and a specially commissioned short film evoking the history of the Old Town Hall.

## Theatr Brycheiniog (awarded £49,646)

A proposal to develop audiences of children, young people and families utilising digital outdoor water projections. The project included participatory activity to increase audiences for the digital performances, and to increase the awareness of digital arts as an art form. Digital technologies including QR codes, mobile phones, the internet and social media were used to gain feedback and 'data capture' to better inform the venue's audience development strategies and future programming strands.

## Theatr lolo (awarded £17,500)

A two-strand Research & Development project exploring how to i) communicate more effectively with family audiences – including the use of social media and ii) examining the barriers - particularly transport - to attendance. Findings could ultimately be targeted on engaging more effectively with, and developing, family audiences, and would be shared across the producing/presenting sector.

## WOW & Chapter Arts (awarded £16,200)

Support for a 3 year project involving women-only film screenings for BME communities in partnership with Chapter Arts Centre, and also via 'pop up' screenings in culturally diverse communities throughout Cardiff. A main aim of the project was to consider how venues and their existing audiences could engage with wider – and as yet disengaged – communities.

## What have we learnt so far?

### A scheme with merit

The evidence from recipients suggests that *Our Space* was considered to be timely, flexible, a stimulus to creative thinking, and a means of funding much needed research and development. Its distinctive features — open guidelines, no application form, no deadlines, no set budget, no pre-determined outcomes — have enabled it to meet both the Arts Council's own priorities, and those of the funding recipients.

On the positive side, recipients warmly welcomed the unusual format of the *Our Space* scheme:

- “Breath of fresh air to be able to write one’s own application, and not be confined to rigid guidelines”
- “A scheme that allowed for exploration without a forced outcome.”
- “Never found an easier or more straightforward application process.”
- “It was a dream! Didn’t have to bend the project to fit the scheme.”
- “Important to be able to open and loose, and not have everything fixed at the start.”
- “Not having an application form was challenging – made it much more of a collaborative process, with a lot more debate that crossed all staff areas”.

As one award recipient stated: *“ACW got it absolutely right—encouraging organisations to approach the same heading in completely different ways. It allows ACW to guide rather than direct, prompt rather than require.”*

### A diversity of approaches offering a diversity of ideas

The diversity in the background of the recipients, in the nature of their projects, and in their interpretations of such concepts as ‘hard to reach’ and ‘audience development’ provided a rich variety of different approaches.

These included:

- a children’s theatre company; three visual arts centres; a software research and development team; a performing arts venue; a film festival; and a new cultural centre.
- participatory visual arts projects; research into attitudes and transport obstacles; a ‘gallery in a box’ and related online resources; an open air performance relayed online; work with schools and community groups.

- a definition of the arts that included music technology and digital production; building bridges with people who consider themselves to be on the margins of society and who have little or no direct experience of any culture or entertainment.
- projects taking place in areas of social and economic deprivation.

The more open-ended nature of the Programme enabled us to look at some more unconventional projects.

***Case Study: Going out on a limb - Cariad Interactive and 'Enfys'.***

On paper, this seemed like the 'wild card' project, involving neither a conventional arts organisation, nor professional artists. But it may yet prove to be the most widely influential of all the *Our Space* projects. The existing partnership between Cariad Interactive, as an independent IT development company, and Cardiff Metropolitan University meant that there was no need to hire in expertise, and equally the pre-existing links with Mudiad Meithrin and the National Eisteddfod ensured that the project would have immediate practical applications. Most important, Cariad Interactive's previous work brought in Raspberry Pi, and the potential for the new software to be rolled out commercially through that existing platform.

All of this is clearly a good use of a modest development grant, but the question might well be asked: what has it to do with the development of audiences for the arts? The initial findings, taken together with other work in which the team has been involved, begin, tentatively, to suggest an objective, research-based understanding of the fundamental importance to the individual of performance, of defining one's own sense of identity through one's interactions with the environment, whether that be pre-school children engaging with the Enfys software, or teenagers on stage taking part in a Young Farmers Club performance which they have themselves devised. It may also help to develop a richer understanding of what it means to be a member of the audience at a live performance, and how a mental mirroring of the physical and emotional actions on stage may mean that audiences are far from passive.

As a result of the *Our Space* investment, the ultimate ambition is to create software to benefit under-resourced early years settings, bringing user-friendly affordable technologies to some of the most deprived communities in Wales.

## **Research & Development pays dividends**

The potential to seek an initial Research & Development grant before embarking on a full-scale project has proved both welcome and effective. Where recipients applied for R&D funding, the results in some cases enhanced the quality of the outcomes and delivered better value for money.

### ***Case Study: Taking time--Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre***

Llantarnam Grange was the only applicant so far to be funded for both research and development, and a delivery phase (the latter only starting as this document was being prepared).

The Centre Director, in interview, stressed how much he valued the lack of deadlines in the *Our Space* scheme, as it allowed more time for internal discussion and planning, and more involvement of other team members. The R&D phase then allowed for time and resources to hammer out the details of the idea and test the water. The project as it is now being delivered has changed quite significantly since the original application. The scale has been reduced to a more practical level, the partners involved know what is expected of them, and there has been a greater, and more independent, emphasis on the online component of the project.

As a result of the *Our Space* investment, Llantarnam Grange were able to ensure that their proposal to grow audiences was pertinent to the needs of their local communities. The subtle adaptation of initial ideas to meet real challenges has arguably secured the potential for a better - and more relevant - outcome for all involved.

### **Partnership has been a key feature of projects**

The programme guidelines placed great emphasis on creative collaboration and partnership, and these have proved central to most of the projects. The nature of the partnership development that resulted varied in type and scale. However, it can be broadly described as:

- long standing partnership development which built a coalition of support, making the conception of the project feasible (WOW and Chapter, Cariad Interactive and Cardiff Metropolitan)
- taking time to find the relevant arts partners who would share the benefit of the project (Brycheiniog and Galeri, Celf and Oriel Davies)
- marshalling the right skills necessary for the project to succeed (Redhouse and Kartoon Kings, Brycheiniog and Fallon Films)
- bringing on board partners who would themselves be the route by which new audiences would be reached and engaged (Celf and Trefonnen Primary School, Cariad Interactive and Mudiad Meithrin)

In one case (Pontardawe Arts Centre) the identification of partners followed the confirmation of funding for the project.

## Innovation v. the 'tried and tested'

Our Guidelines placed particular emphasis on 'new ways of working', 'new ideas', 'ideas that are new and exciting', 'innovative development programmes', etc. It has been suggested that this almost relentless focus on the new may well have discouraged many potential applicants. This is a proposition that drives to the root of the *Our Space* principles. It therefore deserves careful consideration.

It's clear that several of the most successful projects were built on long-standing partnerships, existing productions, and/or giving a new twist to tried and tested models. As such, the Kirkhill Associates evaluation argues strongly that 'effective' should take priority over 'innovative'.

Kirkhill point out that in the current scheme Guidelines the word 'innovative' is used four times, the word 'effective' not at all. They suggest that some of the most successful *Our Space* projects – the WOW Film Festival screenings; the Llantarnam Grange 'Gallery in a Box'; Celf's work with a local school; Brycheiniog's outdoor event – have been successful precisely because they involved the effective, and well managed, application of tried and tested models and approaches. The reasonable point made is that there exists much first-rate experience among the Arts Council's clients and that more should be done, through schemes like this, to ensure that such expertise is shared and built on, rather than pressing organisations to be constantly innovating.

### **Case Study** 'Innovative' versus 'Effective'--WOW Film Festival and Chapter Arts

On the face of it, the practical elements of the application from the WOW Film Festival and Chapter Arts were not particularly innovative: targeted screenings, and 'pop-up cinema'. What appears to have made the project successful, however, and a potentially transferrable model, is the care and planning that went into their effective realisation.

The project was led by an experienced and well-connected coordinator, and every effort was made to make the screenings in Chapter friendly and inclusive, including a welcome at the door, crèche facilities, teas and coffees, and a debate after each film.

A holistic experience, in other words, carefully prepared to impart a sense of 'ownership' in the venue among those least likely to otherwise acquire such a sense.

Similarly the 'pop-up cinema' event was not simply a screening, but a much broader celebration of 'Bollywood', including food, and live music. There is no doubt that such an approach is resource-intensive, and therefore hard to sustain, but, on the evidence available, its impact has exceeded expectations, in terms not only of sheer numbers, but, more importantly, in terms of a demographic, socio-economic, ethnic and cultural mix.

As a result of the *Our Space* investment, Chapter and WOW were able to create a bespoke space for women from BME backgrounds to access contemporary film.

Opening the doors to cultural provision in this way has led to a wider use of Chapter outside its core activities, and for those beyond its core audiences.

We accept the cogency of Kirkhill Associates' analysis. Kirkhill argue, with some conviction, that the effective application of previously tested models and approaches will often trump 'innovation' by providing a surer foundation on which to build engagement with new audiences, encourage them to acquire 'the habit' of art, and break down the physical and perceived barriers associated with social isolation. We would also agree with Kirkhill's contention that proper importance should be attached to the delivery of 'effective' strategies and outcomes.

This analysis raises interesting issues.

We would accept that the additional investment of time, effort and money in tried and tested strategies should – logically – deliver proportionately enhanced outcomes. However, if achieving this enhancement depends solely on the increased application of subsidy, the approach risks becoming self-limiting at a time when public funding is reducing.

Given the pilot nature of this programme, we're not yet ready to give up entirely on the potential benefits of exploring the innovative and the new. From the Guttenberg printing press to the manipulation of 'big data', technology has, over many centuries, offered new ways of delivering better results at a cheaper cost. For example, the tried and tested way of manufacturing motor cars used to be the traditional assembly line, whose productivity largely depended on the number of people deployed. Nowadays, most assembly lines are almost entirely automated with minimal human intervention. And if supermarkets didn't experiment and innovate with the products they offer, previously 'exotic' ingredients such as *crème fraiche* and kiwi fruit wouldn't be the almost essential staples of the modern diet that they are today!

To some extent what *Our Space* is actually advocating is an intelligent and informed approach to risk-taking.

Being creative sometimes requires us to take risks. So we shouldn't be afraid, when the time is right, to take a few risks – not haphazardly or irresponsibly, but knowingly and confidently, equipped with our best instincts, knowledge and expertise. Because if we push beyond our comfort zones of the known and the familiar, with courage and curiosity, we might just bring into sharper focus ways of working that are different and challenging, with art that is perhaps more interesting for the very audiences that we're trying to reach.

### **Enabling dialogue and exchange**

In setting up *Our Space* we chose not to assume or imply that we already knew what would be the best ways of achieving our own strategic objectives. Instead we wanted to promote a dialogue between ourselves and our clients, and to devolve to those clients the opportunity to develop the most fitting and appropriate projects within their own contexts.

## Getting directly involved

*Our Space* demonstrated that there's no substitute for staff working on the ground directly with the groups and the communities that they wish to engage with. There are two important consequences from this: first, that such work takes time, it is not a 'quick fix'; and second, that, when simply measuring outcomes in statistical terms, the expenditure of resources might seem disproportionate to the actual number of participants or beneficiaries. Context, therefore, is everything when evaluating the impact of these projects.

The absolute number of women who attended WOW film events might be small, but the diversity of their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds is telling, and the 'ripple effect' over time of these successful events is hard, at this stage, to estimate. This is an area where soft measures dominate, where the reactions of individuals, or of small groups, are key to assessing the project's long term impacts.

### *Case Study: A Steep learning Curve—Pontardawe Arts Centre*

The team at Pontardawe have had a particularly challenging experience. But have been remarkably open and honest about the difficulties they have faced, and how they have learned from these to modify, or indeed transform, their fundamental approach. It is to their credit that they have stuck with their original concept, and that *Our Space* was able to support them in doing so, with the result that the project is now starting to deliver genuinely valuable returns.

They have learned important and transferrable lessons: don't confuse potential users by offering too wide a choice; don't devalue what you offer by making it free or under-priced, unless you also make it clear how and why the offer is being subsidised; don't rely on an external freelance workers to make the connections for you – get out and do it yourself.

As a result of the *Our Space* investment, it is possible to argue that Pontardawe may now be a stronger, more focused and better connected organisation as a result of this experience, and that the model they have now put in place will be absorbed into the Centre's core programme.

## **Making an organisation-wide commitment**

It is important that projects involve as wide a range of the organisation's own staff and volunteers as possible. For example, the Redhouse project demonstrates the problems that arise when this doesn't happen. Ultimately, a successful project should result in a sea-change within the organisation's core ethos and operations, and so it needs to ensure the widest involvement from the outset.

Nonetheless, because such projects are also heavily dependent on the prior skills and experience of key individuals or partners, they are very vulnerable to external factors – such as illness, the departures of key staff, or other projects taking priority (for example, an EU-

funded project that proved far more demanding of time than anticipated). This means that both grant recipients and the Arts Council may need to accept higher levels of risk.

***Case Study: Ensuring a legacy -Two Redhouse projects***

The new venue, Redhouse, at the heart of Merthyr Tydfil, was the only recipient of two separate Our Space Awards. Moreover, the opening of Redhouse earlier in 2014 was a very high profile event, bringing back to life a long-neglected historic building, with the aid of substantial Welsh Government regeneration funding. The Redhouse project had particular attractions – it was a ‘new’ facility in an area of known deprivation, and the overall refurbishment project was being managed outside the traditional arts sector (in this case a Housing Association). As such, it offered numerous possibilities for new learning.

However, the member of staff responsible for devising both projects, making the applications to *Our Space*, and then overseeing their delivery, had left the organisation in March 2014. The remaining members of Redhouse staff with were as helpful as they could be in the circumstances, but none of them had had close involvement in the realisation of either project.

There is no doubt that a number of local community groups were involved in the delivery of both projects. However, without surveying such groups directly, it’s not possible to be confident about which of them afforded access to the ‘hard-to-reach’, what impact their involvement has had, and whether this has resulted in any longer term involvement with, or support for, Redhouse.

Both projects were clearly seen by Redhouse as important contributors to the launch process for the restored building, but that does raise the question as to whether such activity should have been built into Redhouse’s core budgets.

## **Supporting change management**

Two recipients referred to opportunity that *Our Space* funding allowed to address wider strategic challenges that they were trying to meet. In these instances *Our Space* investment proved influential in supporting the change process and in accelerating the transition to new ways of working.

***Case Study: New ways of working—Theatr lolo***

Theatr lolo was one of five children’s theatre companies which, as a result of the Arts Council’s 2010 Investment Review, found itself working nationally and with arts venues, where previously the company had had a regional franchise, delivered directly through working with schools.



These companies were not used to working with the venues, the venues had hitherto not included such work in their programmes, and audiences had to become used to the idea that such work was now available in venues, and could be accessed outside schools, (for example, at weekends).

As a result of the *Our Space* investment, Theatr lolo was offered a timely and highly relevant opportunity to undertake practical research into how families used digital media to be informed about, and select, their leisure time activities, and how therefore Theatr lolo's work could be best brought to their attention.

A second strand of the research is considering how best to overcome the transport obstacles which families then have to overcome to go to a cultural venue, rather than having the performers come to their local school.

In the case of Celf, the strategic challenge was to establish the gallery in a new home.

***Case study: Problem solving—Celf, Llandrindod Wells***

For the Celf Gallery, the *Our Space* scheme came along at just the right time, to help address the very real issue of 'making visible' the gallery's new home, as it moved from a prominent street-front location to one which, though in many other respects better, was buried within a larger building complex. Celf, like many arts organisations, is only able to access project funding from the Arts Council, and there is a cap of £30,000 on the amount which it can secure from Lottery funds in any one year. *Our Space*, by drawing on non-Lottery funding funds, offered the potential for Celf to address this issue without having to diminish the amount it secured for its core programme.

That was only the start of the journey, however. Celf aims to contact the genuinely hard to reach: that is, those whose circumstances mean that they have no cultural engagement of any kind. They see the only way to do that as through the local school, the one place where all parts of the local community mix. But the school is itself new, and wholly unused to working with an arts organisation. Moreover, they are working in partnership with Oriel Davies in Newtown, whose Education Officer had to drop out at a crucial period. It is only now, therefore, that the project is getting properly under way.

From the perspective of Trefonnen Primary School, however, the programme is already providing dividends. Even after just one series of workshops, one teacher has stressed the beneficial impact on a particularly challenging Year 5/6 group, which, with 32 pupils, is too big a class to easily do practical art with, in the school. The pupils responded very positively to the different environment, and to the opportunity to be creative in a different context.

The most difficult pupils got the most out of it, which also improved the environment for the rest of the class. The school would not have come up with such a model by itself, without Celf's approach, and the school has no funds of its own to hire in outside expertise, or provide transport to more distant centres.

## Different types of space

One of the issues referred to in the Kirkhill Associates analysis was the concept of 'Third Places' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_place](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_place) as neutral spaces where people gather and interact.

It's interesting, then, that although the term itself was not used, many of the *Our Space* projects were precisely aimed at enhancing the 'Third Place' quality of their venues: WOW and Chapter through creating a welcoming ambience; Llantarnam Grange through both physical and online outreach; Celf through working with a local school; Pontardawe and Redhouse by reaching out to specific community groups. The lessons from the *Our Space* projects contribute, therefore, to a much wider debate about the roles of arts and cultural venues within their communities.

## External factors

In addressing the obstacles to attendance, several projects found that the main issue is often down to external factors beyond a venue's immediate control: the availability and cost of public transport; the cost to individual pupils of participating in school trips; the substantial reduction in, and rising cost of, opportunities for lifelong learning ('evening classes').

This suggests that there might be a wider argument for providing other types of support or subsidy – some form of group transport arrangement; collaboration with other public sector bodies (in health, social care or other sectors); or through other means of better enabling physical access. There might also be a need for wider research into the erosion of lifelong learning opportunities, and the pressure this may be putting on arts venues to 'plug the gap'.

## Potential opportunities and outcomes for the future

Some recipients have noted the potential to generate future earned income as a result of the *Our Space* project:

- Brycheiniog intend to further explore the successful pilot of streaming the 'In a new Light' event online.
- Cariad Interactive are in discussion about the inclusion of the 'Enfys' software on the popular Raspberry Pi software.
- Llantarnam Grange see the potential for extending current charging systems to generate income from schools.

### *Case Study: Making a Splash—Theatr Brycheiniog*

Theatr Brycheiniog has an enviable location in the centre of Brecon, beside a basin on the Brecon and Monmouthshire Canal. The aim of the *Our Space* project was to capitalise on this location by staging an event which would build links with the Canals and Rivers Trust, while also appealing to those who might not be current users of the theatre, and exploring the potential for streaming such high profile, one-off events on line.

This is a valuable example, therefore, of how a one-off event which was not an original creation, but in effect a restaging of an event originally devised for the Latitude Festival, can be used as the basis for building a network of longer term partnerships, raising a venue's local and regional profile, developing ways of working with NEET young people, and trialling an innovative technique of online streaming. In fact, it could be argued that it was critical that the core event was both pre-existing and well-established, to enable it to be a secure foundation for such a range of initiatives. That the project then went on to win recognition for Theatr Brycheiniog in the UK-wide Living Waterways Awards was an unlooked for, but substantial, bonus.

But a potentially even greater bonus may yet be achieved. As a result of the Living Waterways Award Brycheiniog's Director was put in touch with a Danish company which has developed live broadcast technology which can 'beam in' product from/to different venues as well as sell tickets for live broadcast product world-wide. This has potential to assist the wider sustainability of venues and Brycheiniog will be looking to formulate a proposal around piloting the model in Wales perhaps via Creu Cymru or the Circuit and/or another partnership of venues.

Other potential benefits have also been identified:

- Cariad Interactive's 'Enfys' software can contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological importance of performing.
- Celf's work with Trefonnen Primary can demonstrate how opening up a route to a non-academic form of achievement can address significant behaviour problems for pupils from difficult backgrounds.
- Brycheiniog's exploration of live online access may lead to a pilot partnership which has income-earning implications for venues and companies across Wales and beyond.
- Llantarnam Grange's focus on its online engagement may change the way we think about how communities interact with exhibitions.
- Theatr lolo's research may point to practical ways in which online engagement with families can be improved - across Wales and across artforms.

- WOW and Chapter's work is setting a template for the effective engagement in 'mainstream' cultural offerings of women from BME communities.

## Some further issues for the Arts Council to consider

### A scheme with merit

The evidence from recipients suggests that *Our Space* was considered to be timely, flexible, a stimulus to creative thinking, and a means of funding much needed research and development. Its distinctive features — open guidelines, no application form, no deadlines, no set budget, no pre-determined outcomes — have enabled it to meet both the Arts Council's own priorities, and those of the funding recipients.

Kirkhill Associates evaluation of the programme concluded:

*“Our overall view is that the Our Space scheme has been an effective means of enabling ACW to achieve significant outcomes in a key strategic area. On the evidence to date, it has been a fitting use of ACW’s – and the recipients’ – resources, and it should form a continuing part of ACW’s funding portfolio.”*

Kirkhill also offer a range of recommendations for the Arts Council to consider as part of its own assessment of the Programme. These are summarised below:

- *promotion of the Programme* – there could have been greater consistency as to how potential applicants learn about the scheme. This will be addressed in future iterations of the Programme
- *support and guidance at the application stage should be improved* – again there should be greater consistency in how individual applicants are advised, prior to submitting their proposals. This will be addressed in future iterations of the Programme
- *support during the delivery of projects should be improved* – many of the recipients were venturing into areas that were unfamiliar to them - this was the essence of the scheme, after all. The provision of some form of consistent support through the delivery of the projects, which would also bring the individual recipients together as a mutually supportive cohort, is highly desirable.
- One of the means suggested for achieving this is the contracting of a freelance Animateur. We can see the benefit of such an appointment, but given the level of overall funding available we're reluctant at this stage to divert funding from direct expenditure on the projects themselves. This will be reviewed if the scale of the programme is increased. In the meantime, the Arts Council will address these issues itself.
- *grants management, monitoring and evaluation of projects* – whilst not undermining the flexible nature of the scheme, it seems sensible to tighten up some aspects of the management of the programme. In particular, appropriate incentives needs to be in place to ensure the timely production of monitoring and evaluation information by recipients. These issues will be addressed immediately.

## **A bigger strategic issue...**

One of the inescapable conclusions of the pilot programme is that the likely success of projects is significantly improved by having a careful, staged process of Research & Development, supported by appropriate staff. To some extent this is unsurprising – such an approach is adopted selectively in some other Arts Council schemes (for example the Capital Programme and Ideas: People: Places).

The outcomes achieved in these areas underline the value of a more iterative, collaborative approach to project development. And this inevitably raises the question that if the benefits are so significant, why isn't such an approach adopted more widely across other funding programmes?

The sort answer, of course, is capacity. The Arts Council manages some 1,400 funding applications a year and it would be self-evidently impossible to offer detailed support in anything other than a fraction of this number. That said, there are issues here that deserve further consideration and we should be prepared to look imaginatively at our own grants management and funding practices. These issues will, therefore, be considered by the Arts Council as part of its Investment Review process.