

Make Art Happen

Evaluation Report

Appendix : Case Studies

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Case Study 1

Bill Quay Community Farm

Context

Bill Quay Community Farm, is a 25 acre working farm and free visitor attraction, located on the outer edge of urban Gateshead. A charity, operated by a small paid and volunteer staff team, the farm provides educational programmes for schools, families and the local community; accessible green space; and preserves rare animal breeds. The farm was operated by Gateshead Council up to 2013 when it was transferred to community ownership as an alternative to closure.

Prior to MAH, arts projects and activities had been occasionally used at the Farm (when operated by Gateshead Council) as a mechanism for audience development and engagement; and as a way of making small improvements and enhancement to the physical environment (signage etc). At the time of the Make Art Happen project there was a limited existing skill base in the arts. Senior staff and trustees, however, were very open to the possibilities of including the arts within the Farm's activities; and development of the arts was a key objective of their Business Plan, making the project a good strategic fit for both Bill Quay Farm and Helix. Both partners entered into the project aware of the financial stresses facing the Farm, and its reliance on volunteers, who had a limited skill base in the arts. Bill Quay Farm was confident that some existing volunteers would want to take part in the programme, but recognised that an open recruitment could potentially also attract new volunteers, whilst providing upskilling for all.

One member of BQF staff and two existing volunteers signed up to participate; three further trainees, including a practicing artist, were recruited from the local community. The programme was advertised across Newcastle and Gateshead through voluntary sector networks and attracted three further trainees making a cohort of 9.

A survey to a sample of trainees found that there was a clear distinction between the levels of experience and motivations of pre-existing volunteers than those recruited specifically for the project. This created a productive mix of people and approaches that resulted in a dynamic shared learning experience.

Existing staff and volunteers were primarily motivated by their wish to support the organisation in achieving its goals, with practical learning in order to deliver an arts project being the key goal. Personal development was seen as an additional benefit rather than a driver for their participation.

“It was part of the farm's business plan that a new piece of art be installed by the end of the year. The project is perfect for me as I would have had no understanding of how to go about it otherwise.” Existing staff/volunteer member

The motivations of new recruits were linked to professional development and were not entirely framed by a need or desire to learn about the arts.

“I saw MAH as a chance to gain new skills, friends and experiences whilst making up my mind about career choices and future job prospects.”

“I thought the skills would be transferrable to other community projects...and the course would open my eyes to new ideas” New volunteers

Overall, whilst the trainees all had a high degree of education (including post-graduate education), only one had any previous experience of managing arts projects (and this as an artist rather than as an organiser) or awareness of the complexities around this; or prior knowledge or experience of participatory arts before beginning the MAH programme. Several had “a little” experience of the key content areas contained in the course (event planning, budget planning, evaluation and fundraising), and just one had “a good grasp”, though none had previously gained or applied this experience in an arts context.

Mechanism

Make Art Happen at BQF essentially functioned as a pilot for the wider programme. It was the first time that the course materials that had been painstakingly researched and developed using Helix Arts' tried and tested methodologies were put into practice. Trainees provided feedback and course materials were adjusted if needed.

The course consisted of 8 x 3 hour modules that were delivered in a group learning setting at BQF. Through the weekly modules the group was skilfully guided and supported to develop tangible and deliverable plans for their arts project “stART” that would take place at BQF and two other local community settings. Mixed media artist Nicola Lynch was appointed as lead artist to create a series of mosaic “stepping stone” art works for installation at the farm.

At the conclusion of the training, those participants who responded felt that they had developed skills and understanding in most key areas, with artist recruitment being seen as the single most important element, and a competency that they would have had no other means of accessing or developing:

“Information on artist recruitment was central to our decision to undertake open

recruitment and thereby not restrict the creative outcomes of our project”

The project management and budget management tools were highlighted as being particularly useful, and several participants commented that they had already used these in other work contexts:

“Project management and development was brilliant and I have used these skills at work.”

“All the training was excellent”

“It was all relevant, very useful and thorough. I feel like I have all the resources, step by step. It was all really relevant but I don’t think it should have been so detailed”

Others, however, felt that the breadth of the content was possibly at the expense of depth of understanding and consolidating skills:

“All elements were useful, although some felt like more of a taster so I wouldn’t be confident in using the information I learned yet”

“As a beginner, I felt the event planning and financial parts of the course were very useful but I still would not feel competent in doing them unaided in future so maybe some more time could be spent on some areas”.

All respondents articulated some lack of confidence in their preparedness to deliver the live project:

“I have few concerns surrounding the mammoth task of planning an event, within tight budget constraints”

“I think we have the skills to deliver it but my worry is the time element as we have given ourselves not much of it!”

“Doing a project is high intensity and I wish now we had opted for a smaller project that is easier to manage. I think the course would be great without it.”

Whilst some of these reflections were to prove prescient, they indicate a much more strongly developed awareness of the complexities, skills and processes required to successfully deliver participatory arts project in community settings. Other positives taken from the course related particularly to networking, team working and personal confidence.

Outcomes

The “course” element of MAH at BQF was consistently well and enthusiastically attended, with a high level of active communication between group members between sessions and a strong sense of group identity and common purpose. Between the end of training and the delivery of stART, however, 6 of the 9 original project participants dropped out of the process for varied and unavoidable personal reasons. None of these participants declined to participate further for reasons related to the content or experience of the course.

This level of drop-out, however, had a significant impact on those who remained involved in the project. There were suggestions of scaling back the project but this was resisted. Thus the experience of delivering the arts project was very demanding for the three trainees who saw the project through to conclusion.

“The workshops that our group organised for participants went well I believe. We were lucky that our artist, Nicola, was adaptable and relaxed. I think it was well managed, the sessions were interesting and engaging and I felt we always had Kate’s support. “

At the point of writing this case study in February 2016, one of the three trainees who completed the programme is formulating plans to develop and run community crafting workshops elsewhere. Another, a farm staff member, spoke positively about her plans to use the participatory arts again in her work – and feels that the skills she developed during MAH would allow her to do so with a better awareness of the potential issues and pitfalls as well as positive outcomes for participants. BQF continues to offer arts and crafts activities as part of its Events offer. The third team member had moved from a role where she could see a direct potential application of Make Art Happen learning in the short term, but has continued a dialogue with Helix. She felt that she might use the arts in future.

Conclusion

All trainees who responded felt that they had acquired tangible, applicable new skills or developed existing ones and felt overall that Make Art Happen had been a positive experience. We are only able to evidence likely future use of these skills from the three trainees who completed the programme. It is not possible to conclude from this case study alone whether the practical project element of the MAH programme reinforced learning and developed confidence and skill to a greater degree than the “course” element alone. The perspective of trainees regarding the

volume of information and detail in the course materials has been used by Helix to refine course materials.

Case Study 2

Tyneside and Northumberland Mind

Context

Tyneside and Northumberland Mind is part of Mind, the leading mental health charity in the UK. Mind promotes and protects good mental health for all and treats people with experience of mental health problems fairly positively and with respect. Operating from South Shields Library, Tyneside Mind provides a wide range of different services to support people experiencing mental distress across Tyneside.

Tyneside Mind's purpose in participating in Make Art Happen was to respond to requests from service users, and the volunteers that support them, to develop their own art project. The organisation had previously developed some work with artists through an existing relationship with Helix Arts but any progression of this required increased capacity. Make Art Happen, with its training element and live project seemed an ideal mechanism to test the potential, develop the area of work and train volunteers to deliver it.

Three trainees participated. One was employed full time by Tyneside MIND and one was on year long student placement as part of her post-graduate course in psychology. The third was a committed volunteer for Mind living in the community local to South Tyneside Library. The most significant motivations for participation were consistent across the group: to provide creative activities for MIND service users, and to explore the potential impacts on wellbeing. The staff member was primarily concerned with learning the skills to deliver these activities practically: *"Some people I was working with as service users expressed an interest in creative activities to support their mental health recovery. I had no prior experience in designing, developing and coordinating creative activities and didn't really know where to start"*. The student and volunteer trainees placed their own skill development as being of at least equal importance to this, and both saw the course as complementary to their concurrent post-graduate studies. None of the group had any previous experience or any existing knowledge of participatory arts, and only the staff member felt that they had more than "a little" understanding of the other core skills and competencies contained within the course content at the outset.

Mechanism

The small trainee group approached the Make Art Happen programme with a high degree of enthusiasm and professionalism. The group already knew each other and had a positive existing working relationship that enabled a purposeful learning environment based on shared concerns. At the conclusion of the training element the

trainees felt that they had significantly developed their understanding of the potential and value of participatory arts in the context in which they worked. This was made tangible for them through participating in a “taster workshop” as participants and meeting artists with a participatory practice. This proved both transformational in terms of understanding and motivation. In terms of course content, the group were consistently positive regarding their learning and development in all areas, both arts and non-arts specific.

“The course exceeded my expectations. I expected to learn about creating and developing participative arts programmes, but I also learned new skills and best practice guidelines in other areas such as recruitment, consultation, project management and budgeting.”

Artist recruitment was highlighted as the single most useful training module by all three trainees. Each also highlighted other modules of being of particular personal usefulness – these included event management and fundraising.

“What I remember most from the training and what was useful and will be useful is the event management section – what to do before, during, after – we went into quite a lot of detail. It really, really helped me and will be the way I work in the future.”

All commented that the work that was required to take full advantage of the course was significant, and the volume of content was dense, but this was perceived as less of an issue that it might have been in other circumstances due to the degree to which the course chimed with personal and professional development interests.

“It is quite an intense project for volunteers with no previous organisational skills or fundraising background. Therefore, I would recommend more careful volunteer selection for the programme and a smaller group”

The “live project” element of the programme was a key driver for all of the trainees: all wanted to make something beneficial happen for the people they work to support, but this was also seen as a particularly valuable way of consolidating learning. At the end of the training phase, each member of the group was confident in their project, and their ability to manage and deliver it successfully.

“(we’re) definitely ready. No particular concerns other than time and there being more demand than we can cope with. I am just really looking forward to the journey and the seeing the impact of the project on participants.”

“The course was absolutely EXCELLENT!learning about best practice in project management, writing the project and artist brief, project management timelines. Most

importantly, however, we got the chance to learn about the theory and then had the opportunity to translate what we had learnt into practice”

Outcomes

The trainee group were able to develop their artists project brief with precision and clarity: the group had had a shared vision of what they wanted to achieve for participants from the outset and all had a good knowledge of the aims, purpose and ways of working of the host organisation, and the needs and interests of the intended project participants. This was reflected in the brief. Their own response to the aims of the project was sensitive, creative, intelligent as well as practical and realistic. The group remained very aware of what they could and could not do and did not attempt to overstretch themselves, or to expect too much from their appointed artist. They each saw themselves as having an important role to play in supporting project participants, and remained active in the process of delivery.

The artist, Susan Warlock was very complimentary about her experience of working on the project:

“the trainees were highly professional organised and recognised boundaries. They responded extremely well to direction and constructive criticism. Comparing it to working with other agencies was very favourable. I felt well supported and confident in their abilities”,

and that, in addition, the trainees had designed

“an excellent opportunity and developed my skill base in working with adults with mental health issues in a creative setting, with excellent practical and emotional support”.

The arts project was well attended throughout and trainees expressed a deep sense of satisfaction in the quality of participant experience and the positive impact of creative journaling on client wellbeing.

“You could see how well people were, how happy, chatting together, connected, you could feel how well people were doing”

All three trainees felt that they would like, and have the skills and understanding, to use participatory arts in the future, both within the context of MIND, of mental health service provision or within the wider community

“We (MIND) are considering incorporating a participatory arts (creative journaling) aspect into our Jarrow Safe Space group. The timing of our plans depends on how

soon we are able to secure funding, but our MAH project has had a high profile within Tyneside MIND. I would definitely have the confidence to run participative arts project without the support of Helix Arts next time round”

“I would definitely use arts again in volunteering or paid work if relevant. I have clients who are very artistic and I would like to explore this with them”

“I would do it it again if I had the opportunity in the community. A mosaic project would be a great idea or Felt-making project involving young people”

In terms of “soft” outcomes for trainees the following were noted:

- Improved self-esteem and self-confidence
- Networking *“I’ve met so many people at a professional level, and practically if I wanted to do something again I would be know who to speak to.*

Summary/Conclusion

The construction of the training around a real or “live” project can be a significant motivator and driver in terms of learner engagement. All were keen to see their ideas and learning put into practice and to see tangible outcomes of their work.

“What made the programme special was the practical element of it - combining theory and practice. That combination is invaluable”

There existed a strong degree of organisational readiness, together with commitment of staff time and the support of committed volunteers. These elements together with the host organisation placing importance and expectation on the project contributed to a strong set of positive outcomes for all involved.

“It worked so well because of the people – the team and the artist - we will definitely keep in touch, we all had the same approach and worked at it together”

Case Study 3

The Old Low Light

Context

The Old Low Light is a three storey listed building based inside the Clifford's Fort on the Fish Quay in Tynemouth. A former fish warehouse, it was transformed in 2014 as a heritage centre with support from Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust, North Tyneside Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The building is now known as The Net and is managed by a voluntary organisation. It houses an exhibition space, learning area and acts as a base for guided walks and classes. It supports local arts projects and at the point of joining Make Art Happen, there was an aspiration to support traditional crafts. Make Art Happen provided an opportunity to recruit and train volunteers who were interested in supporting events at the Net and to stimulate interest in the local community in regular arts activity. Although there is a stated aim in developing an arts programme at the centre, there had been no arts based funding applications in the previous two years. The Net was in its infancy at the commencement of Make Art Happen, therefore was an opportunity for the project to act as an enabler to build volunteer capacity, to prompt and embed participatory arts within their programme and to generally build capacity and skills in devising and funding participatory arts projects.

A total of 11 participants joined the Make Art Happen programme, of which 8 were existing volunteers with the centre. Other participants included a cross referral from another Helix project, the centre/facilities manager at the Net and a community member. The training element was well attended with 7 participants completing the course. Only 3 participants continued to artist recruitment and project implementation. Dropout causes were captured as:

- Work commitments
- Starting new business
- Mental health issues
- Illness
- Bereavement

Motivations for taking part in the project included a will to engage more people in North Shields in the arts; having a general interest in the arts and art history; filling in time/hobby after retirement; and wanting to develop arts management and curating skills.

When asked to comment about how Make Art Happen could benefit The Net and its target community, participants' responses included:

“Promotion of the venue’s values”

“assist in developing an interest in art”

“pass on the required skills to run an art project”

“an opportunity to network and an appetite to see the project through”

“Improve personal contribution to the Net”

*“To engage a diverse section of the local population
in using the Old Low Light as a place to meet and visit regularly”*

A review of a self assessment in the following areas: motivation, confidence, problem solving, team working, budgetary control, trouble shooting; arts management; demonstrated that most of the cohort were confident in their abilities to take part in the programme and to take the project forward with most participants scoring 3-4 on a scale of 1-5. When asked about experience of participatory arts only one respondent had delivered arts projects in the past, other respondents understood that it was an arts process during which ‘people took part’ and that it involved ‘hands on involvement by the community around some type of art with a product’.

“Beginning the Make Art Happen course I had little (if any) empirical experience of participatory art. I understood this to be a platform to facilitate the undertaking of arts activities irrespective of previous experience or ability with the given medium”

Mechanism

It was clear from pre-course assessment that the levels of motivation both personal and for the host organisation were high. Unfortunately, some of the group were unable to complete the course, with only 7 participants attended the whole training element. By the end of the training programme all participants reported some skill development or improvement. The post course assessment scores completed by 7 participants demonstrated some movement from mid range scores to top range scores, mostly in the areas of motivation, confidence, problem solving

Participants felt that the most useful elements of the training course were the artist recruitment process and finding out about sources of funding. Other comments included:

“The budgeting and brief design sessions were probably the most relevant to the important group decisions we had to make”

When asked to comment on possible improvements to the training course, participants felt that it would have been more effective to have a project idea at the beginning, thus contextualising the training course and making it more relevant. They also felt that talks and visits from artists and arts managers would have enhanced the delivery.

In terms of readiness to deliver project, most respondents were confident at the end of training to take the project forward to the live stage, commenting thus:

“I have great confidence in delivering the project. looking forward to seeing locals engage in the arts at a participatory level”

“I’m most looking forward to working as a group or company, recruitment, evaluation and finding out what we / I can do better next”

Overall, the training programme at The Net was a success, drop out was not significant and those who could attend all the sessions were very committed. There was an overall consensus in confidence in the training course and its content. All who completed the course felt assured and motivated to move forward to the live project.

The live project involved the recruitment of artist Susan Warlock. Alongside the recruitment process the group also carried out some research with the local community to test the appetite for participatory arts, and demonstrating some foresight, also surveyed the local community to ascertain the willingness/ability to pay for sessions and what a reasonable contribution would be. When asked what their personal objectives for the arts project were, responses included:

“To involve those parts of the community in a hands on arts experience who had not been involved in anything similar before”

“To produce an end product (in this case the glass mosiacs) that we could hand in the Old Low Lights Heritage Centre”

“To ensure that the whole process involved with the project happened in a planned and organised way”

“Feel a measure of satisfaction to have converted what I had learnt in the Make Art Happen Training Course to a live and dynamic arts project”

“Make the project an easy and rewarding experience for the two groups taking part”

When asked to qualify how they would envision project success, the group felt that full attendance by participants would indicate success, along with participants having hands on involvement in producing the art-work, thus also ensuring that the artist had delivered effectively against the set brief. They felt successful criteria would include a project delivered on time and on budget, and having positive feedback from participants. The project team felt that they had achieved 90% success against their ideal brief. They acknowledged that they had gained understanding of how a delivery team has to be flexible to ensure that a participatory project is achieved within a community context, in a manner that does not “surrender the fundamentals”.

Outcomes

Working on a live project demonstrated the unknowns and risks associated with participation in general. The team encountered drop out. They also had to find alternative venues which meant adjusting budgets. They gained experience in marketing to different demographics and having to change advertising methods in order to reach their desired group. Furthermore, they had to deal with over-subscription.

Participants agreed that Make Art Happen had prepared them to deal with the barriers and obstacles they faced in the live project stage. In particular, understanding how to plan around a ‘core principle’ but to set specific and related aims and objectives. They all felt that the budgetary training was put to ‘good effect’ and had understood, through practical experience, that comprising on some aspects of delivery is sometimes essential to ensure the overall project is achieved.

The group felt that they did not have the opportunity to put the fundraising training into practice, although one participant will apply this in his professional/personal life and highlighted that Helix had supported him to develop a Heritage Lottery application.

Artist Experience

Artist Susan Warlock felt that the brief set by The Net was detailed and clear however, the theme of Heritage and New Industry was broad and ‘difficult to interpret’. Although timescales were realistic, she felt the budget set for producing a mosaic was not, which promoted her to negotiate for a larger amount.

She was attracted to the project because she felt that it set her a challenge and it could possibly assist her to develop her portfolio of “large scale” work. She also cited Helix’s reputation as a factor in attracting her to apply to deliver the brief - she wanted to work on a Helix project as she felt it would be useful for her profile, and that the experience would be good because of their involvement.

She felt that the recruitment process was well managed and that the interview experience was “enjoyable”. During project delivery, Susan commented that the volunteers were “professionally trained” and made her experience “very positive’. However, she felt that the volunteers were reluctant to be hands on during sessions and in making the art work, despite her encouragement.

Conclusion

This case study has clear outcomes in volunteer development and capacity building and as such could impact on The Net’s organisational capacity to deliver participatory arts and heritage projects. The trainees all had positive experiences and although demonstrated a fairly high skill set from the outset, they all developed skills in arts management and artist recruitment. Although only 3 of the group took the project forward to the live stage and saw it through to completion, they demonstrated competence in planning, recruiting and delivering a participatory project and supporting an artist within the process.

In relation to Make Art Happen evaluation’s overarching themes, from the data reviewed for this case study it can be considered that the Make Art Happen training and support is enabling organisations to develop and manage participatory arts project. The Net has a successful project within its portfolio and also a piece short market research for future planning. It is interesting that the project is all volunteer led with no input from The Net staff team which would demonstrate a new resource for the organisation which could, if nurtured have a significant in kind monetary value.

Case Study 4

The Cultural Spring

Context

The Cultural Spring is part of Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme which aims to increase participation in the arts in areas of low engagement. The Cultural Spring is driven by three partners – the University of Sunderland, the Customs House Trust and the Sunderland Music, Arts & Culture Trust and generates a new, high quality, cross art-forms, in ten wards across Sunderland and South Tyneside, where just 100,000 people are resident and where arts participation is acutely low. The project aims to create significant impact by establishing a new cultural calendar, encouraging participation and providing opportunities for people to enjoy new experiences, discover new passions, and learn new skills.

Cultural Spring commissioned a Make Art Happen project having identified a number of shared aims and approaches within the two programmes. The Cultural Spring's methodology includes Community Panels who participate in decision-making for both small community grants and larger commissions. They have also established an ongoing programme of practical art-making workshops which are popular and well attended. The Make Art Happen project was considered as a way of expanding that offer to include arts management skills. Cultural Spring's aim was to find out whether such a programme could be a way of supporting non-arts professionals to become programmers, promoters and "key agents" in the cultural life of their area. The Cultural Spring team were particularly interested in how Make Art Happen might develop local people's confidence and decision-making skills in relation to the arts; and wanted to explore whether the course could affect a shift from "choosing" from preselected arts offers to active implementing/producing. Cultural Spring had not offered any creative business or professional development programmes and this was also an opportunity to test the water. Success from Cultural Spring's perspective would be judged on the impact on individuals and their ability to deliver projects.

Recruitment for the programme proved challenging. Offered through tapping Cultural Spring networks and open recruitment in the local area, both partners felt that the way the project was communicated initially was unclear. It took time to find the right language and offer to attract the participants who would get the most from the project. A number of those who initially signed up believed that they would be participating in practical creative skills; others misunderstood the offer of project funding to be for each participant rather than as a shared collaborative project budget. Once the actual form and content of Make Art Happen was clearly understood, however, the group able to successfully form with shared purpose.

A core group of 8 began the training course. This group had diverse level of existing skills and understanding in the core competencies to be delivered by the course with a number of trainees already well-versed in areas such as project management, budget management, evaluation and fundraising, though not necessarily in an arts context. Another participant was not initially from an arts background but had become involved in the Cultural Spring's activities through community volunteering. She felt that she struggled quite a lot initially with the course as she hadn't expected something so theoretical but having committed "*I got on with it...and I really enjoyed it*". Others were experienced creative practitioners with more significant arts expertise but little in terms of project management. Most demonstrated a clear understanding about participatory art, from the outset, which might be attributed to the nature of Cultural Spring as an arts-based organisation as their initial point of contact.

"I am a freelance artist with a broad project management background within the NHS. I am now self-employed and I wish to manage arts projects. I participated in MAH to increase my knowledge of project management in this field."

Motivations for trainees were similarly diverse although all were attracted by the arts content primarily: whether to gain arts resources for their local communities; to embed the arts into their own organisations; or to develop their own employability skills in the field. These individual motivations mapped directly onto The Cultural Spring's explicit aims as the commissioning organisation, and the recruitment process had ensured that these were not intrinsically conflicting.

Mechanism

Overall response to the training element of the project was positive, and trainees felt that they had received good quality information delivered by a project manager with a high level of expertise. "*I had no idea what to expect but it was good. I got a lot out of it and learnt new things I had no idea about like budgeting*". A number of the original participants withdrew from the training programme because of a change of personal circumstances (2 took up new employment roles in the arts), or because they found the training too demanding and too great a leap from their skill set. Those who chose to remain involved were committed to seeing the programme through and were finding it valuable, although demanding and intense.

In relation to the training component, participants felt that:

- The knowledge and sensibility of the project manager was as or more important than the technical information; and there should have been less

detailed content, and a lesser volume of content overall. This has been addressed by Helix.

- This cohort missed out on the Fundraising training and in follow ups felt that this was crucial missing knowledge in terms of delivering future art programmes
- The live project element was “of the highest importance” as a component of the course
- At the conclusion of the training element, the group was asked to comment on their readiness to deliver the arts project, and felt broadly confident, with much emphasis on the groups positive dynamics:

“Quite ready. Only concerned about the group still being relatively new as a unit - are we ready to work together to make this happen?”

“I am looking forward to seeing the project happen and supporting the artist in the sessions. I am also looking forward to recruiting the artist as this will be a new experience for me”

“I am quite ready for the project, because there are very talented people involved. I am looking forward for the new experience with all participants and the outcome.”

The Arts Project *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Dreams* was devised by the team as a response to “selfie culture”, with the aim of creating artworks to portray a more layered and complex exploration of “self”. Bethan Maddocks and Laurie Sheppard were appointed as artists through an open recruitment process for a collaborative pair. Workshops took place at Grace House, Southwick, Sunderland, a centre for children with complex needs and their families, although participants were recruited through wider local networks, rather than being aimed at this group. The project consisted of a process-centred workshop programme that invited participants to use variety of different media and art forms to make work that resulted in a collaborative installation piece using visual works, poetry and sound.

The trainees felt that the artists’ project was delivered very successfully. Process-based, the project was ambitious in intent, scope and delivery, with the final work being of a high standard, and very well-received by participants and audiences. The group were happy that the selected artists had good participatory arts experience although not necessarily that of working with people experiencing the difficulties likely to be expected within the commissioning context. The project expected participants to reflect upon themselves quite deeply and whilst this was ultimately empowering and beneficial for most, one person found this too challenging and

decided not to participate further. Some members of the group felt that the processes were perhaps over-complex or that there were too many processes to get through to lead to the end product – and this led to the artists producing elements of the work and less free flow of creativity for participants.

The commissioned artists felt that they were provided with an attractive brief, which contained sufficient direction and clarity without being overly proscriptive. The selected artists had wanted to work together collaboratively before the brief came to their attention, so it presented the ideal proposition. They felt that the recruitment process was rigorous “quite demanding – had we not got the work it would have been frustrating” but that having been offered the brief a good deal of the preparation and development was already in place. They felt that their experience of working with the Make Art Happen trainees was good and everything was well organised. They particularly felt that the trainees were skilled in supporting the participants and this was important to the success of the project. However, at times they felt a little self-managed, and that trainees were “*not entirely sure what their role was: participants, helpers or organisers?*”. The artists had expected more contact with Helix, and this had also been part of what attracted them to the project. This suggests that the significance of Helix’s brokering role in terms of engaging artists of calibre to work in community settings should not be disregarded.

At the conclusion of the project, participants viewed the intensity of the course slightly differently. “*I don’t think that the course would have made sense without the live project, but whilst we were working on it [the project] what we learned fell into place, a whole series of light bulb moments*”.

Outcomes

By recruiting trainees from different backgrounds - some individuals and some supported by organisations: the Cultural Spring project had the potential to impact widely, creating a ripple effect of enhanced skills. This appears to have begun to bear fruit even whilst the training was still in process.

Personal benefits reported by individuals at the conclusion of the training included:

- enhanced confidence in working with the arts broadly
- an expanded social circle with creatively minded people
- an entry point into artistic circles and better understanding of the artistic community, meeting points and networks
- motivation to pursue freelance work as a creative producer, supporting career development and progression.

At the conclusion of the live project, confidence and skills amongst those who were active in delivering the project have increased significantly further.

One participant, Kathryn Thompson has described how she hopes to apply her new skills as a freelancer, developing projects reaching non-participating communities and people. She has also begun to deliver a project with a learning disabled group as a direct result of contacts made through Make Art Happen, with the commissioner of that work having expanded their understanding of the potential of participatory arts through their own learning on the course. Her development trajectory is highlighted in a spotlight section below.

Another trainee, who had been directly invited to take part in Make Art Happen because of her voluntary activities, was beginning discussions with a third sector organisation regarding potential creative projects. *“My new understanding adds a new confidence to my approach.”* Since completing the course she hasn't used the skills directly as a project manager but has been on a panel for the Cultural Spring's local grants and felt she *“had better insight to be able to assess the applications”*. She felt that she had gained a critical perspective on what is offered to communities in terms of arts participation and had a number of new ideas for participatory community projects that celebrate personal and collective creativity. Had it not been for a challenging time in her personal life she might well have applied for own grants to pursue these ideas and intends to do so in future.

A third participant, Karen Parry took a less active role in day to day project delivery but provided both a supportive role to the process and the physical space for the *Ordinary People Extraordinary Dreams* project to be produced and exhibited.

The project has also had a number of unexpected benefits for the Grace House that contribute significantly to overarching Make Art Happen objectives.

Firstly, the project has created useful relationships in the arts sector for Grace House, which is becoming seen as a receptive space for arts projects. Several artists have approached Grace House, with proposals to work with their children, with funding already attached; a number of high quality artworks gifted that enhance the space.

Secondly, the project has created a visibility and awareness of Grace House which has resulted in the organisation becoming better networked with influential people in the cultural and civic realm. As a direct result of their participation, Karen has been invited to sit on the City of Culture Bid Steering Group, which is *“great for the profile of the organisation and the interests of small local charities, as well as how to make sure ordinary people feel a part of it. We are getting to know about other*

opportunities and how the organisation can fit into other plans. People who might not otherwise know about us, now do”.

Lastly, within the organisation itself, thinking about the arts has become more exploratory and “less precious”. Creativity has been triggered by seeing the project in action, and staff are now “seeing the spaces afresh and thinking about new ways to use them”.

For example, Grace House have been working with artists to develop ideas and plans for a multi-sensory space in the grounds, intended to be used by teenagers. The Make Art Happen project helped the team to see how artists using participatory processes might help them to achieve their goals, and lead to more imaginative and engaging proposals might be developed. The team used the Make Art Happen designed methodology and paperwork to develop briefs, and to recruit, contract and manage artists successfully.

At a personal level, Karen feels that she is able to approach creative projects and proposals with more confidence in her quality judgements and is more able to articulate the ways the needs of children in the setting in relation to working with artists. Her only regret was that the cohort had missed the fundraising session, which would have been useful at this point in implementing more activity, specifically with regard to arts funders aims and approaches.

Summary/Conclusion

The Cultural Spring Make Art Happen project delivered training based learning to an initial group of 8, with 3 trainees remaining fully committed to delivering the artists “live” project element, with a further two retaining a connection to the project. Trainee retention was supported by personal or professional interest, whilst those whose participation dropped off was due to external circumstances such as health and job opportunities. Those who led the live project found it demanding, but felt that a larger team would have been difficult to co-ordinate. They felt that they had gained significantly through this element of learning and the artists project delivered was felt to be of a high standard. Participation in Make Art Happen has had significant immediate benefits for two of the trainees, and deferred benefit for a third, which have created both new participatory arts projects and potential for long term impacts against the programmes objectives.

Cultural Spring consider the model expensive by the standards of their other projects and programmes. If they were to commission a second programme they would want to see how more people could benefit, or how the learning could be spread more widely. Considerations include whether individuals might attend on behalf of

organisations and share their learning with others, creating a skilling cascade effect; and whether online resources might be made available.

All of the specific skills that are taught on the course are already held by the Cultural Spring team, and being used on a daily basis: recruiting artists, managing budgets, fundraising. However, The Cultural Spring team would not have the time or capacity to turn their skills and knowledge base into a good training course and this is what contained the intrinsic value for them as a commissioning organisation. Feedback from the Cultural Spring on their perception of outcomes and impacts within their local area is awaited.

Case Study 5

Gateshead Projects

The Birtley and Kibblesworth Project and the Bensham and Teams projects were supported through a successful application to Gateshead Capacity Building Fund. The approach taken in the funding application was to deliver two programmes for participants from multiple community organisations via open recruitment. This was a change in tactic for Helix as previous Make Art Happen courses had concentrated on a single organisation and their staff and volunteer base. The rationale behind an open recruitment across community venues was to maximise the reach of the project, embed skill bases and arts champions across the locality, and to ensure value for money. This successful application also capitalised on the original investment by Esmee Fairbairn and met one of the aims of the grant which was to secure investment for programme rollout. The application also proposed to build capacity across numerous organisations, thereby enabling them to work together on future programmes of work, develop joint funding applications and construct a network of organisations who would better understand each other's area of work and priorities. (see intro B&T section)

Gateshead is an area of high deprivation and a high number of residents suffer from depression and anxiety amongst other health issues. Given participatory arts' proven ability to assist with recovery and improve wellbeing, the argument for funding the Make Art Happen programme in this locality was well founded. Trainees would undertake public consultation in partnership with Live Well Gateshead (a health and wellbeing hub offering assessments for local people concerning a range of health and wellbeing issues and subsequently making referrals to appropriate programmes). The application demonstrated a well thought out strategy to fulfil a number of local agendas, along with meeting personal motivations.

Birtley and Kibblesworth

Context

Seven trainees were recruited via advertisement and six were volunteers at The Hub Resource Centre. One trainee was a volunteer at a local centre for older people; another runs a local wood-carving club. The course successfully recruited active and motivated volunteers, some from highly skilled backgrounds. All respondents to pre-course questionnaires stated that that they wanted to increase their skills and understanding of managing and running arts projects. Some wanted to refresh and improve existing skills. All wanted to make an impact in their local community, enhance provision at their volunteer base and improve their skill base through exploring participatory arts:

“I want to gain new skills and do something amazing”

“Art helps people with additions into recovery by getting them to explore their minds and use their hands”

“I have experience of project management and want to expand that knowledge into arts project management along with learning about fundraising and working with others”

Volunteers were from a range of backgrounds, one had been a journalist and a support worker with homeless people and had worked within the criminal justice system. He had already started a volunteer led creative writing group and was motivated to join Make Art Happen as he *“intended to provide an opportunity especially for those who may be facing social exclusion and/or have mental health issues”*. He demonstrated a thorough understanding of how confidence can be gained through the creative process. Another volunteer had a volunteer role at the ‘Hub’ through which she supported skill development in IT, Employability and CV writing. She is also a carer. All motivations for joining the course showed an interest in making a difference in the lives of others.

When asked what difference Make Art Happen could make to their respective community organisations, volunteers stated they believed it would improve the reach of their volunteer bases; possibly get more people involved; and that the addition of arts to their current programmes of work would extend provision and funding opportunities. The majority of volunteers felt it was important to find ways of bringing the community together and believed that participatory art would be an effective method. One volunteer was keen to network his organisation with artists and musicians.

Personal motivations for joining the course included increasing knowledge and efficiency in co-ordinating and managing arts and craft projects. Most volunteers had some experience of working with communities and running voluntary programmes but wanted to deepen their knowledge and increase their skills. One volunteer is a skilled project manager and wanted to test those skills in a new context. This Make Art Happen course was the first time a volunteer mentioned possible employment or new business opportunities as a possible personal outcome. Moreover, another volunteer saw the potential of creative arts as an additional component to her work as a complementary therapist.

The volunteers held a good understanding and experience of participatory arts, and had taken part in differing workshops and run their own clubs.

Method

As part of the evaluation process, the evaluators observed a training session in project management and the design of artist briefs. They also conducted a short focus group with the volunteers a mid-point in their training course. The volunteers were highly motivated and had been conducting a consultation with residents at Birtley Villas which is a sheltered housing scheme in Gateshead. One volunteer in particular had taken a lot of effort and care to involve the residents in a discussion about their interests and aspirations. The team were keen to involve an artist in creatively presenting oral histories. The observation of the session demonstrated that the volunteers had been excellently supported by the Make Art Happen trainer in developing a consultation strategy and thus to be able to effectively design an artist brief. The group discussions that took place during the training demonstrated an awareness of logistics, discussing that the Villas are a series of low rise flats across a considerable distance and how an artist might manage frailty and mobility issues. The team were very keen to make a project that preserves memories and experiences in a creative way and the team were confident to discuss various art forms and genres that could be effective.

Post training discussion focussed on the content and the quality of the training course to date. All volunteers agreed that the support offered by Helix was remarkable and they had gained a deep insight into the development and management of participatory arts projects. They all felt that the course was “heavy going” and that there was a lot of information to process in a short space of time. Some volunteers spoke about having other commitments and the effort to keep involved and up to speed week by week was proving difficult. The comments concerning intensity of the learning experience however did not distract from the enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment of the programme. All volunteers asserted that they were gaining knowledge and skills were supported throughout by the trainer who is highly motivated and supportive. As with other Make Art Happen training courses, all volunteers commented that they had made new friendships and widened their social networks.

The *Telling Tales* Artist brief was developed from a successful and meaningful consultation with residents at Birtley Villas. The volunteers recruited an initial 35 participants who expressed an interest in getting involved with the project. This is a high level of interest for a small, one off arts project. This level of interest from residents demonstrates the care and stewardship of the volunteers who undertook the consultation in expressing the aims of the project and possible benefits for residents in a motivating and inviting manner. The consultation brought forth information concerning need and interests including craft activities, digital arts, way of celebrating their community and capturing stories associated with the Birtley social identity.

It was clearly expressed in the artist brief that the volunteers wanted to develop a

project that would develop skills, enable residents to express themselves in meaningful way, have a legacy and that the project should provide a contribution to local knowledge. The brief articulated a deep understanding of residents needs: the artist must understand the importance of having a dedicated person who would listen to oral histories, ensure residents felt their stories had value and as thus create feelings of higher self-esteem and self-worth.

Artist Experience: Interview with Effie Burns (Artist/Glass Maker)

Effie was interested in responding to the brief on two levels. Firstly, she had always wanted to work with Helix and secondly, the brief was exciting and inviting. Effie said that recent briefs for participatory work had been limiting and of poor quality for socially engaged artists. She found this brief was loose enough for an imaginative response. She felt that the volunteers had conducted significant engagement research with the older people and wanted to find a way of providing creative sessions that would enrich their current programme of activities and also bring about a mechanism to capture their memories and stories. Effie framed her brief around craft activity and developed an idea concerning how older people used to use their hands when they were younger and more active. Discussion concerning hands and their uses could bring about memories concerning the home, work and leisure.

The interview process was well conducted and it gave Effie a lot of confidence in the skills of the volunteers and also in their knowledge of the residents as gained through their consultation. She took with her glass hands she had previously made to set the context for the project and asked for the panel to draw around their own hands on paper and to decorate the drawing with mixed media. The volunteers immediately understood through first hand experience how Effie would engage the group at the sheltered accommodation and how memories can be told and shared in this participatory process.

Effie delivered 8 sessions with the residents through which, supported by the volunteers, she got to know the residents in creative craft sessions by encouraging them to tell their stories. The venue was welcoming and the residents were involved in the session straight after their lunch, which took place in the same room. Effie commented very positively about the hands on support given by the volunteers through which the anxiety felt by residents seemed to 'drop away'.

Residents told stories about their hands. The sessions created a way of bringing men and women together in a shared activity, which was unusual in the setting. The memory sharing sessions broke down preconceptions residents had held about each other and thus nurtured more positive relationships. The residents shared their old photographs and told stories about fun times. Effie used these memories to source archive materials, in particular about the outdoor lido in County Durham. The project was enhanced with a day out organised by the volunteers, that included visits to

Effie's studio and a local church that was exhibiting a local history display.

Effie was very concerned about quality and wanted to ensure that each resident had a keepsake of the experience that interpreted their stories and their experiences. She cast each group member's hand in glass and then developed enamel transfers of their old photographs, sourcing materials relating to each personal memory including old tennis rackets, images of the outdoor pool and churches where residents had married. She ensured that each piece was deeply personal and held meaning. She even found images of the pit shovel and a Davey lamp.

On leaving the project Effie left a box of good quality craft materials in the communal activity room for the group to use. She felt it was important that they could carry on doing physical making together as it had developed such a positive effect on social relationships and wellbeing.

Effie felt that her experience of working with the volunteers was very successful. They fully understood what support she needed and also the support needs of the residents. She found them well organised and with one exception at the end of the project where someone had to drop out for personal reasons, they were always contactable and attentive at all sessions.

Outcomes

The Birtley and Kibblesworth project successfully delivered against Make Art Happen's outcomes and also the outcomes of the funding application to Gatehead Capacity Building Fund. Helix took a considerable risk using open recruitment and a cross venue volunteer team but this proved more than effective and sourced a highly motivated team of volunteers who produced and managed a high quality participatory arts experience for both the artist and the residents of Birtley Villas.

Post project questionnaires demonstrated the value of having a live project to test skills. Volunteers negatively commented about the amount of paperwork involved in the course but this was balanced by an appreciation of the high quality training experience and the knowledge being shared by the Make Art Happen Trainer.

Bensham and Teams

Context

Five trainees for this programme were recruited via advertisement from the Bensham Grove Community Centre, St Chads Community Centre and the local GP Surgery Health Programme.

The volunteers provided a range of reasons for joining the Make Art Happen programme. They were all active community members who were already committed volunteers in other projects. All stated they wanted to enhance their existing skills and to bring complementary programmes of work to community work in the local area.

“The course will enhance my experience of community engagement, help my personal development whilst making me a greater asset and more flexible employee”

Other reasons stated for joining the course included: learning to fundraise for the community; understanding an arts project step by step; being a local artist and wanting more knowledge of community arts; and wanting to build capacity for arts projects through a love of creative activity.

A volunteer at Bensham Grove was committed to maintaining the organisation’s profile in the community and hoped that Make Art Happen could reinstate Bensham Grove’s previous reputation as a centre of excellence for arts and crafts. He stated that the community centre’s experienced staff who could be involved in the production element of Make Art Happen. Other personal motivations included gaining a better understanding how to design, manage, deliver and also recruit artists. And as stated by one volunteer:

“I will be able to engage people with all other backgrounds in their local communities and boost their self esteem and confidence in their engagements”

A local artist joined the programme and he felt that Make Art Happen could promote his own artistic skills in the local community whilst also increasing his skills in fundraising, budgeting and dealing with challenges.

All volunteers held a good understanding of what participatory arts. One volunteer is a retired teacher and a volunteer at the Baltic, Gateshead. She had been involved in creative films, interactive sessions and computer games. She had a thorough understanding of how participatory arts can build confidence and also bring people together. Her personal motivation was to apply this knowledge and understanding to her current volunteer role with a GP surgery.

Another volunteer had volunteered at Gateshead Library with an artist who had a

jewellery exhibition at Shipley Gallery. She had devised a participatory activity in which attendees told their personal story behind a piece of jewellery they were wearing. The piece was then photographed and exhibited in the library with its personal story.

The local artist had worked as part of Made In Newcastle, an artist run pop up shop, with a gallery and workshops space. He wanted to offer art to a wider audience whilst also “get folk involved to improve health and happiness”. He had worked as a volunteer and a paid artist in exhibitions and projects. He felt that taking the Make Art Happen course would assist him in building his profile locally whilst offering something back to the local community.

All volunteers offered clear descriptors of what participatory arts can be, including:

- *A professional artist, organisation or community coming together to create an art project*
- *To take or have a part in an arts project or an arts event*
- *Get involved, use, develop, improve aspects of yourself*
- *Blow your mind by getting involved and achieving amazing results*
- *Tell a story, improve health and wellbeing*
- *Art that engages the audience and that they can interact with*

Volunteers were asked to score their pre-course experience against the learning outcomes/Make Art Happen course content. Compared with other case studies this group scored relatively highly as a collective skill base. All had some experience of the design, planning and delivery of projects with two volunteers scoring themselves as 4 out of 5 in this area. All had some experience of fundraising and working with artists. The lowest skills and experience scores were within Marketing and Communications, Management and Fundraising. One volunteer was particularly experienced in all aspects scoring herself 5 out of 5 in 6 skill bases.

Mechanism

This Make Art Happen course benefitted from highly motivated and reasonably skilled and active volunteers. All five volunteers completed the course, although one had to drop out during the live project. Overall scores in skill development were high with one volunteer doubling their skill base by the end of the course. All volunteers demonstrated increased skills across all of the learning outcomes. The highest leaps in skill development were in the design and planning, budgeting and management of projects.

When asked to describe 3 things they would take forward to the future most of the volunteers highlighted the need to maintain active communication throughout the project, in particular, speaking regularly by phone with the management team, community venues and the artist. All agreed that they had benefitted from learning how to take on team roles. Their comments demonstrated how effective they deemed the training to be:

“I learned how I should emphasise on the need of the fund whenever I apply for a grant”

“The course reinforced my existing organisational skills and increased my communication and networking skills”

“It provided an insight into managing an arts project and further developed my previous experience”

“Most effective was evaluating the skills of the artist to choose the best one for the project”

“I will take forward how to involve local people and community groups in projects to promote well being and happiness”

The artist recruitment was well thought out and sought to maximise the impact of the funding and the opportunity by advertising for two artists to work together across 4 venues and to provide a collective piece which could be used after the event. The proposal asked for the development of 4 pop up events for mixed ability groups, each group involving up to 20 people. The artist brief was clear in its sensibility, stating clearly that the project had been established to highlight the importance of art in encouraging health and wellbeing, ecology and recycling, and also invigorating community spirit and happiness. The brief demonstrated a clear understanding of participation by emphasising the collaborative element of the project. The brief ensured an element of longevity by creating a sustainable piece or installation for future use.

The brief was responded to by artists Michael Freeman and Chris Folwell. Michael is well known for his ‘Junk Music’ workshops in which he makes musical instruments from anything from ‘dried fruit to plastics’. Chris is a local visual artist. The collaboration provided a learning opportunity for both artists. They proposed to deliver a series of workshops in which people of any ability can create reusable percussion instruments and to make junk music instruments as a project legacy.

The evaluators visited one of the workshops at the Sound Room in Gateshead. The artists were working with a group of people with severe learning difficulties to make

musical instruments including pan pipes from of plastic tubing and rain makers. The artists were particularly skilled in working with this group who were enjoying the session and the multi-sensory elements of the work, even though some of the group were unable to express their thoughts and feelings verbally. It was a good example of participatory creative activity. The artists and volunteers were making the best use of not an entirely perfect space for the group. The atmosphere was warm and inviting and the carers of the participants were also working hard to make the most of the workshop.

During the observation discussions were held with two volunteers who attended the training course. Both were enthusiastic about how insightful the training course had been. We discussed the length and depth of the training programme in terms the amount of knowledge gained and the level of commitment needed to fulfil all learning outcomes. The volunteers felt that the course had been intensive but well worth the commitment. They felt they had benefitted most by being able to put the training into immediate action and to test their learning in a live project. They both agreed that the 'live' art project element of the project was the most useful to them and also to their local community. Apart from a husband and wife 'team' the volunteers had come together for the Make Art Happen project unknown to each other and with differing priorities. We were told at the session that there was some confusion when applying to join the course, as some felt they would get artistic work as a result. Their enthusiasm was such that although they did not benefit as artists, they still took the project forward with positive results.

Outcomes

The Bensham and Teams case study successfully delivered against Make Art Happen's outcomes and also the outcomes of the funding application to Gatehead Capacity Building Fund. Helix took what could have been considered as a risky change of tactic for recruiting to Make Art Happen, conducting open recruitment without a host venue and with volunteers from differing community organisations and as such, with different motivations for developing their skills for their community benefit. However, the project was a success:

- Retention for the training element was 100%
- All volunteers reported skill development in all learning outcomes
- The live project was a success. It ran in 4 venues, with participants who held varying levels of skills and maximised income with the development of musical instruments which are available for venues or groups to use.
- The project provided an opportunity for two artists previously unknown to each other to bring their skills together.
- Project has longevity in all volunteer community venues.

- Volunteers are using their new fundraising skills to make art happen
- The Sound Room had stopped opening their centre to the group who attended the music activity. Since seeing the positive effects of the workshop they have now made the space available one morning a week for anyone who wants to take part in arts and crafts.

In a post project interview with one volunteer it was found that this project has significant longevity. The volunteers have formed the Bensham Teams Art Group and they are continuing to fundraise and to deliver participatory arts project. They have received funds from Gateshead Council outdoor events using the junk music instruments at the Team Valley Festival, 'piggy backing' on the call for activities as part of Carers Week. They partnered again with Michael Freeman for these outdoor events. When the volunteers heard that Helix was offering an opportunity to pitch for a further participatory arts project, two volunteers held their own instrument making sessions and fundraised using a tombola the 10% of funding required to be able to make an application for the funding. They successfully pitched to Helix and are now delivering kite-making sessions with a local artist. The interviewee is a volunteer at the local GP surgery and as inspired health professional from her experience with participatory arts and wellbeing. The surgery is now allowing her to run creative session in the practice setting.

In describing the impact on herself, the interviewee said:

"I got such a lot out of it, volunteering is what keeps me ticking over everyday. The training was great! As a retired teacher I set a high standard for training courses. The course was fun, there was a lot of learning and new things to think about. I made good friendships, it was excellent"