

Creative Change Programme Executive summary – November 2007

Introduction

Norfolk Arts Partnership is a collaboration between Norfolk County Council, Norfolk District Councils and Arts Council England, East. Through its Creative Change programme, the Partnership aims to embed within Norfolk organisations good practice in using the arts to meet a range of community needs.

Platform3 was commissioned in July 2007 to undertake an evaluation of the Creative Change programme. Our brief has been to examine what the Creative Change programme has achieved, and to consider what future impact the work could have.

Creative Change was an ambitious programme that aimed to demonstrate the value of the arts in tackling a wide range of community and social issues, and to establish models of good practice that could be built upon beyond the pilot phase.

The details of the delivery of the programme, and some of its goals, changed during the process, in response to practical considerations including the availability of funding.

Projects

Breckland: improving mental well-being

A model of creative activities for men in the early stages of stress, anxiety and/or depression has been developed and is ongoing in Dereham.

The project artists have successfully raised a small amount of additional income to ensure the continuation of the workshops for three months beyond the period funded by Norfolk Arts Partnership's initial funding (to December 2007).

Lessons learned through the Breckland project will contribute to the work of Norfolk County Council's recently established Norfolk Arts & Health Partnership.

Broadland: reducing the fear of crime

In Teen Ages, a team of five artists worked with a group of young people and older people, on a project that looked at the teen revolution of the 1950s, and considered how things have changed since then.

Having received good feedback from the participants, the artists are keen to continue with this work, and it clearly addresses locally identified needs.

Great Yarmouth: improving social cohesion

SeaChange staged three events at St. George's Theatre. When the theatre was subsequently declared unsafe, the lack of suitable arts venues was identified as a barrier to the development of community arts work. NAP commissioned a review of arts and entertainment venues in Great Yarmouth, which has highlighted the challenges presented and opportunities offered by the town's venues, and is being used as the basis for further development work.

Additionally, NAP is working closely with SeaChange to promote participatory arts activities involving young people and their family members across the community, and plans for this are under development.

Norfolk-wide: developing creative activities for older people

Creative Arts East and artists working on the 'Out of the Box' project successfully piloted a model for delivering high-quality arts activities in day care centres and residential care homes for older people in Norfolk.

Having piloted the idea at the Benjamin Day Centre, the artists have created boxes packed with resources for creative activities.

Creative Arts East is keen to build what has already been achieved, to roll-out this way of providing creative activities for older people in care homes.

North Norfolk: reducing crime and anti-social behaviour

The project focussed on preventative work with young people in two target groups:

- 8-13 year olds, who have come to the attention of the new Youth Inclusion Support Panel in North Walsham
- 14-16 year olds, who have been excluded from school and attend the Pupil Referral Unit, Douglas Bader School, Coltishall.

Both projects involved drama and dance sessions with the target groups over a number of months, culminating in performances at Sheringham Little Theatre.

The project has had a positive impact on the young people involved in the short term; they were more confident, more considerate and caring of one another and worked in an increasingly focused way. Feedback from YISP staff is that they are now able to use this as an example of the benefits of using the arts and drama with young people, when they do presentations on their work.

South Norfolk: giving young people a voice in local democracy

Young people in Loddon worked with artists, collecting information about what young people liked, what they did not like, and the changes they would like to take place, as a way of engaging them in consultation about parish plans.

Three of the South Norfolk artists' group (now renamed 'Channel') have developed and delivered another youth consultation project in Wymondham. Development work for projects in other areas is ongoing, with support from NAP.

NAP has worked with Channel to help market their work to other local councils. As part of its Advocacy and Training programme, NAP is funding Channel to develop a leaflet and website with the professional advice of a freelance designer.

West Norfolk: raising aspirations

The West Norfolk project aimed to help a targeted group of young people in West Norfolk make informed choices about their options for education, training and work after 16.

Four artists worked with a group of around twelve Year 11 pupils from the South Lynn area (Park High School) to produce artwork in a range of media including felt collage, puppetry, photography, mask-making, painting and dance music.

Feedback from stakeholders that the project was successful in sparking the participants' self-confidence and self-esteem, and helping to keep them engaged in school. Several of the students have secured college places or are going on to sixth form to do arts, photography or media courses.

Recommendations

Building on best practice

- Future projects need to recognise and make good use of existing knowledge of target audiences and of best practice, within Norfolk organisations that already deliver successfully in specialised areas of work.

Developing new audiences

- Project planning needs to take into account the time needed to engage new audiences, particularly where the target audiences are not part of any established group.
- Local stakeholders need to be consulted and involved in the early planning stages of projects, to ensure that their knowledge and experience is worked with and built upon.

Internal documentation and evaluation

- Responsibilities for information collection need to be agreed before the start of any project, and updated if project delivery plans change.
- Additional work needs to be done with the three current projects to ensure that, where possible, more consistent qualitative and quantitative information is collected and passed on to the project manager.
- Where projects intend to show 'distance travelled' by the participants, it is important to collect baseline information at the outset.

Project management

- Future project plans need to ensure enough time for consultation with partners who have the knowledge and experience to advise on the most appropriate ways of working.
- A local project manager could be hands-on when necessary, and would have the opportunity to understand better the dynamics of the project.

- Ensure clear lines of responsibility and clear processes to identify and address issues before they become problems.
- Take into account time needed to establish effective partnerships, when there has been no previous contact either between artists in a group, or between artists' groups and partner organisations.
- Offer support and supervision for project artists, and the opportunity to address any concerns.
- Closer working relationships with project partners, in future, would ensure that potential issues or challenges could be flagged up and addressed in advance of delivery.
- Clear, written agreements between project partners help to avoid misunderstandings about roles and responsibilities in a partnership.

Working with artists

- Future projects need to find ways of making the best use of artists' skills and experience.
- Involving lead artists in the recruitment of project artists might help to ensure that artists' teams are well matched.
- Joint training or skill sharing at the project start would help newly formed artists' groups to work together more effectively.
- Training or briefing at the start of projects is needed to ensure that artists have the basic information that they need to enable them to work effectively and safely in different contexts.

Working with children and vulnerable adults

- The offer of creative opportunities and support to the participants needs to be the primary focus of this kind of work – and the professional development needs of artists a secondary aim.

Exit strategies

- Given the potential vulnerability of those participating (eg children and young people at risk, and adults with mental health issues) future projects need to ensure that there is either continuity of support, or plans for an achievable exit strategy.

Conclusion

To date, Creative Change's achievements have been that:

- the programme has engaged with Local Strategic Partnerships across Norfolk, and has addressed social and community aims identified in partnership with them
- individual participants have benefited, some substantially, from the experience of being involved in arts activities that they would not otherwise have had
- artists have benefited from experience in a specialised areas of work – this has been an inspirational experience for some
- NAP, with the support of the artists and stakeholders working on its projects, has been able to respond flexibly and imaginatively to some of the challenges presented by specific projects
- the programme has been partially successful in demonstrating the ability of the arts to address and deliver change in relation to social and community agendas
- the projects have supported new partnerships that can be built on in the future.

This evaluation has concluded that the programme has been partially successful in achieving its ambitious aims. For those projects that are still in progress, the full benefits and possibilities for development have yet to be realised.

In taking on and managing such a substantial and ambitious programme, without working in closer collaboration with those already delivering in these areas, NAP has missed the opportunity to enhance and build on existing work and experience.

As Norfolk Arts Partnership has no immediate plan to continue with any similar programmes of work on this scale, any development of this work will rely on the ability of partners, artists and other stakeholders to carry on and deliver the future work.

However, Norfolk County Council has a continuing, strategic role in brokering interaction between arts organisations and local authority partners, a relationship that will help to make the most of the skills of both. Further support to help artists make links with and work successfully with local councils would also be welcomed.

'Norfolk Ambition', the community strategy for Norfolk 2003 – 2023, highlights that long-term solutions to inclusion are important:

'Solutions must be long term and fundamental to the service providers who will integrate them into their provision on a permanent basis.'