

The value of arts and health

As the Department of Health's Review showed there are many fine examples of good practice and robust research studies.

There is a considerable interest in and support for the effective use of arts in health, and enthusiasm to illustrate widespread good practice. People all over the country are using the arts to make a real difference to health and healthcare.

Many arts and health organisations and initiatives have been established for a number of decades, both in the UK and abroad. They involve individuals, groups and organisations from many different backgrounds including the state, private and not-for-profit sectors, artists, clinicians, arts therapists, occupational therapists and managers. They serve a range of people including those with disabilities, mental health problems, terminal illnesses and long-term health conditions, older people, carers, refugees, and people from a wide variety of ethnic origins. Arts and health is not a new, untested or fringe activity. It has long been delivering robust improvements to our health services.

Many people commented that they were most inspired and convinced of the need for, and possibilities of, arts and health work by seeing live examples, either within their own organisation or elsewhere. Although respondents described several challenges, almost every one of these had been overcome by citing another project elsewhere, which illustrates the value of sharing and networking effectively.

Success factors

The Review of Arts and Health sought views on what were the most important factors in developing and delivering a successful project or programme. Most of those who responded spoke of their own experiences and the lessons they had learnt, and suggested the following pointers for success.



- Having support at a senior level, and the interest and advocacy of those who are willing and able to champion arts and health
- Securing a sustained commitment from all those involved. It often requires great persistence to gain the confidence of colleagues, overcome resistance and find solutions to complex problems
- Taking a patient- or user-centred approach to develop a service. There are many examples of how service providers have transformed their ways of working and outcomes by looking at an issue from the patient's or user's perspective, and realising that there are alternatives to providing the service in the same way it has always been done
- Building partnerships with all types of organisations both within the arts and healthcare sectors, and also with the private sector, local authorities, local libraries, educational facilities, transport services and community groups
- Having people who are appropriately trained and experienced
- Having a dedicated post (which most described as an 'arts coordinator') with the skills and contacts to raise awareness and funding, to provide a focus for the

organisation's arts and health activities and strategy-building, and to engage with artists and outside agencies whose role and approach may differ from that of the NHS and who may find it difficult to understand and access the Health Service, but who have much to offer

- Finding effective ways to communicate the benefits of arts and health, using evidence or real examples to demonstrate what is possible and to communicate more clearly what is planned
- Having a robust strategy for arts and health to provide a clear direction and to show how the programme will contribute to the NHS organisation's overall objectives



Policy implications

The Review identified some barriers to the use of the arts in health, which means there are more opportunities to improve services than are currently being taken. The barriers included a misperception by some that the arts are peripheral to most people and therefore irrelevant to their wellbeing; a lack of understanding of what arts and health work involves; assumptions that it is a minority activity with no place in mainstream healthcare; a view that it is just about 'pictures on walls', and concerns at being criticised for investing in an area that the media, staff or patients might feel is inappropriate for NHS resources or attention; and a lack of ready access to good practice and evidence.

However, the situation is quite different. There is a large amount of effective, innovative activity across the country demonstrating real results for patients, service users, staff, local communities, the NHS and society as a whole. The arts and humanities have an important role to play in supporting and enriching the lives of staff as well as patients, through reducing stress and creating better working conditions, in clinical education, training and service provision, and by building stronger relationships between staff, patients and service users and their families, including improving mutual understanding where there are ethnic differences. A number of respondents



mentioned that arts and health activities were generally warmly welcomed by staff, and were seen as a valuable alleviation of what could sometimes be unrelenting and routine work. Many told the Review that even the most withdrawn patients had 'come alive' and that they had gained a new understanding of and respect for patients who found it hard to communicate, helping them to 'see the patient, not the condition'.

Many arts and health programmes and projects contribute to important objectives for:

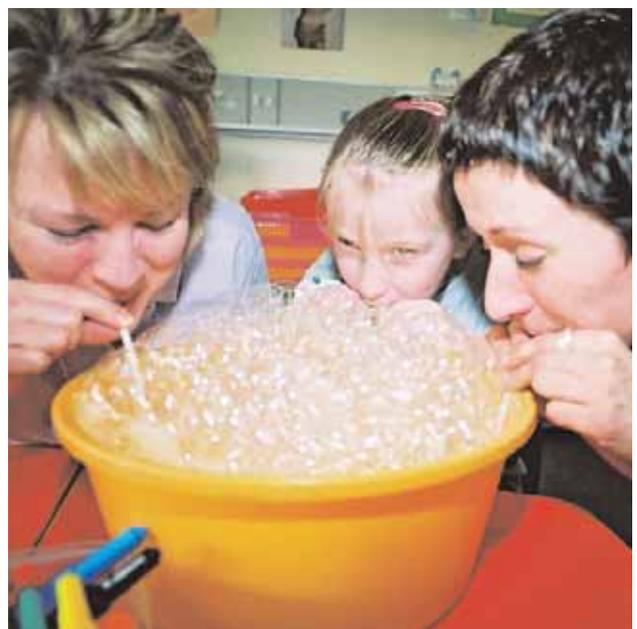
- **The Department of Health** – such as developing more patient-centred care; delivering public health priorities on prevention and promotion, mental health, obesity and asthma; shaping tailored care under the National Service Framework for Older People; promoting self-care; improving

the patient experience through improved clinical outcomes and more homely environments; supporting staff by tackling stress and enabling them to use their skills more fully; and using the humanities to improve training and education and create a better understanding between staff, patients and service users

- **The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)**, which is responsible for arts policy in England, has had a longstanding interest in the relationship between arts and health. Issues of health and social inclusion are at the heart of much that DCMS does. One aim of DCMS is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural activities, not only for their intrinsic value but also for the instrumental benefits they can bring in areas such as health, education and building sustainable communities. Arts and health projects not only promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all but also widen access to arts and cultural opportunities. DCMS is supportive of work in this field and is keen to advocate the benefits to as wide an audience as possible. DCMS and DH have set up a joint working group to look at areas of common interest, such as arts and health, with the aim of working together to ensure appropriate links are made and opportunities identified

Department of Health policy

Arts and health are, and should be firmly recognised as being, integral to health, healthcare provision and healthcare environments, including supporting staff. The arts are, and should clearly be recognised as being, integral to the quality of the experience for patients and service users, and to supporting healthcare staff. They make a major contribution to improving people's lives, their health and healthcare provision, providing high-quality, appropriate healthcare environments and engaging with individuals and wider communities, including hard-to-reach groups. Given the connections between communities, participation, education, health, employment and wellbeing, there are opportunities for the Department of Health and the NHS to use the arts to bring about change in some of the key influencers of health and in the use of the NHS.



Arts Council England policy

It is now widely recognised that experiencing the arts and culture can create a sense of wellbeing and transform the quality of life for individuals and communities. Every day, artists and arts organisations are having a profound impact on people's health in hospitals, health centres, GP practices and across the community.

To complement this prospectus, Arts Council England is publishing a framework for partnership document, which aims to integrate arts into mainstream health strategy and policy making with a view to promoting a role for the arts in healthcare provision across the country, and for a wider remit in terms of healthy living and wellbeing. Arts Council England's five priorities are:

- Healthy communities, which includes objectives in mental health and for older people
- Healthcare built environment, which includes working with primary care LIFT (Local Improvement Finance Trust) and hospital PFI (Private Financial Investment) developments
- Children and young people
- Workforce development, which includes artists working in health and the healthcare workforce
- Campaigning and resource development for the roles of the arts in health