

ARTS AS A YOUTH INTERVENTION

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COMMUNITY
LINKS

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Director's Words

As communities transition from response to recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new normal should include better recognition and investment towards arts as a youth intervention. Adopting a creative approach to address life's challenges has been a growing area of interest and there are now many examples and evidence of the beneficial impact arts engagement can have.

Our initiatives at Community Links have clearly demonstrated the power that arts interventions can have on young people through sustained creative programmes. However, there is still a disconnect between policies and people with central government failure to address the decline in arts engagement for young people. This report identifies the relationship between arts and young people that needs to be amplified, and the ways in which local and national policies could effectively support this union.

If we are ever to achieve our national goal to 'Build Back Better', we need to address the structural challenges within the arts sector and look to young people to support the development of arts interventions. This paper coincides with the launch of our new recording studio, generously funded by the Rolling Stones and others, which will support young people to harness and channel their creativity through music.

Chi Kavindele, Director.

Summary of key points

The COVID-19 pandemic restructured civilian life in an unimageable way and young people are now facing mounting socio-economic disruptions, presenting new challenges to their education, well-being, career prospects and personal development. Amid the chaos of the pandemic, families in the poorest parts of England are suffering the most, with some councils reducing spending on early intervention services by over 80%¹, driving a greater reliance on crisis interventions. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, it is critical to restore hope for younger generations and work towards meaningful change. This timely paper sets out how arts interventions can be positioned to support young people beyond the pandemic and create a secure future.

With a growing body of evidence supporting the link between active arts engagement and positive life outcomes, arts as a youth intervention can aid the development of younger generations. Turning this evidence into action means weaving arts interventions into community practices, making them accessible and affordable for service users. These interventions can then be used to address several difficulties that young people face by supporting career outcomes; expanding informal learning; promoting good well-being; and strengthening preventative and early action strategies that support developmental outcomes. Nurturing arts initiatives can also become a catalyst for local regeneration, increasing community participation and cohesion. In line with the governments Build Back Better initiative, the development of creative placemaking can help strengthen and transform communities.

Investments that empower local authorities to support community arts practices are fundamental to delivering effective creative services. As local authorities respond to years of austerity, the role of the arts in community settings has faded. In efforts to protect key services, the arts and culture sector has seen a massive reduction in funding. A noticeable decrease in youth services and large-scale funding withdrawals from artistic services prevents these interventions from making sustained progress. With young people from marginalised backgrounds being directly and disproportionately affected by budget cuts, creative arts opportunities often cease to exist in their communities. Central to our recommendations is to ensure that arts intervention reaches all young people - particularly those in low-income communities and widens the pool of creative talent.

As the benefits of artistic practices are not being enjoyed equally, a profound rethink is needed to create an inclusive and diverse creative environment for young people. If you are from a BAME background, disabled, come from a lower socioeconomic group, or don't have higher level qualifications, you are less likely to have participated in the arts in the past 12 months². The clear association between socioeconomic status and the likelihood of attendance at arts and cultural events³ means that for many young people from poorer backgrounds, local arts organisations may be their first introduction to the arts.

This publication addresses a range of audiences; parliamentarians, artists, arts organisations, educators, funders, service users and the public. The key to progress will be coming together to address inequalities in arts engagements and promote inclusive interventions for young people.

¹ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/councils-forced-halve-spending-early-help-services-vulnerable-children>

² <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/taking.part.survey/viz/WhoParticipates-Arts/Responsesbreakdowns>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/88445/CASE-DriversTechnicalReport-_July10.pdf

Introduction

Engaging with the arts is an inescapable part of the human experience and an essential part of a healthy community. Evidence supports that arts as a youth intervention has the capacity to positively influence social, behavioural, and educational outcomes for young people. Community arts interventions can trigger meaningful and useful discussions around cultural development that can reshape their environment. From supporting mental health and well-being to improving community relationships, the benefits of arts engagement are wide-reaching. Community Links has a longstanding history of empowering, enriching, and transforming the lives of young people through Deep Value community programmes. *Deep Value* is a term that captures the value created when the human relationships between people delivering and people using public services are effective⁴. This publication considers the contribution of arts interventions rooted in Deep Value in improving outcomes for young people, local communities, and the wider creative economy. The arts are usually an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of creative media and techniques. In this paper, the arts are used as a shorthand for performing and visual arts, dance, crafts, design, film and music.

Despite art overtaking agriculture as an economic powerhouse in the UK⁵, years of austerity has left local arts organisations struggling for survival. A report by the New Local and Arts Council England revealed that between 2010 – 2015 the total spending by councils in England on arts and culture services declined from £1.42 billion to £1.2 billion, a 16.6 per cent reduction⁶. Following these huge central government cuts, local councils have cut their arts budgets⁷ resulting in widespread closures across arts organisations. The pandemic has added to this pressure as local authorities prioritise health essentials necessary to combat the pandemic. Over time, creative community hubs that have a sustained impact on the growth and development of young people have become scarce. Creative and cultural industries are a commonplace for unpaid internships and low-paid entry-level jobs which restrict young people from low-income backgrounds from contributing to the sector and maintain a highly exclusive workforce in creative industries. In 2018 Create London reported that only 18.2% of people working in music, performing and visual arts grew up in working-class households⁸.

Taking race into account only 4.8% of employees in music, performing and visual arts come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, while in museums and galleries these figures fell to 2.7%. For minority groups and working-class households who are significantly excluded from creative and cultural sectors⁹, a new post-pandemic reality will only make things harder. Responding to diversity and inclusion concerns within the cultural sector, Dr Dave O’Brien, co-author of 2018 Create London report warned the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee that following the pandemic, “the winners will be those who already have economic, social, and cultural resources”¹⁰. To stop these growing inequalities, we need to rebalance the offer by reprioritising arts as a youth intervention.

With a renewed focus placed on well-being and community throughout the pandemic, it is clear that a rethink and restructure are needed to promote this at every level. The arts at an individual level have a powerful contribution to our mental and physical health and are often seen as a way of improving well-being¹¹. The relationship between the arts and mental health has been well documented by the What Works Centre for Well-being¹². Evidence from their review shows that visual arts activities, of various kinds, can reduce depression and anxiety and increase confidence and self-esteem¹³. Arts as a social prescription has also become a growing area of interest. There is a significant body of evidence that shows signposting community members to local activities to support their health and well-being can aid recovery and relieve chronic symptoms of illness. The creative health charity Artlift runs an ‘arts on prescription’ programme for adults with mental health challenges. Here, the arts have been identified as having positive health outcomes, allowing adults to re-engage with their everyday lives¹⁴. Their findings suggest that arts as a youth intervention would be well placed to support some of the mental and physical challenges that young people face.

⁴ https://www.thirdpress.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/Deep_Value-1.pdf

⁵ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Economic%20impact%20of%20arts%20and%20culture%20on%20the%20national%20economy%20FINAL_0_0.PDF

⁶ [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20\(Adrian%20Harvey\).pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20(Adrian%20Harvey).pdf)

⁷ https://forthearts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NCA-Index-07-18_-1.pdf

⁸ <https://createlondon.org/event/panic-paper/>

⁹ <https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/news/creative-business/why-theres-absence-of-working-class-people-in-uks-creative-cultural-sectors/>

¹⁰ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/5549/html/>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-power-of-the-arts-and-social-activities-to-improve-the-nations-health>

¹² <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/>

¹³ https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Visual-arts-wellbeing-Jan2018-V2-1_0146661800.pdf

¹⁴ <https://artlift.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018-EJPH-Artlift-AoR-Updated-Findings-from-Ongoing-Observational-Study.pdf>

From a local perspective, arts as a youth intervention contributes to addressing socioeconomic inequalities and building stronger community relationships. Through community-based arts programs, young people can develop soft skills and an enhanced sense of personal agency, contributing to workplace success. In communities with pockets of deprivation, arts initiatives provide young people with a channel to develop skills like communication and collaboration which can be translated to the working world. The CASE review, which aimed to understand the impact of engagement in culture and sport, found that structured art activities lead to increases in transferable skills of 10–17%¹⁵. In effect, this could have profound implications for social mobility. In their Power Up report, Deloitte recognised that transferable skills improve labour market outcomes. Their research into employment data showed that workers with the strongest transferable skills proved to be the most resilient against changing labour market demands¹⁶. Findings from these reports provide strong evidence that arts engagement can lead to social and economic vitality.

In order for arts interventions to be successful, Deep Value needs to be woven into their fabric. Community Links has been at the forefront of championing deep value relationships for public services and understands that effective public services are built on strong relationships. Collaboration, understanding and the transfer of knowledge creates the environment for individual and communal progress. Having arts-based community interventions built on deep value relationships can unlock young people's potential and increase the likelihood of achieving a positive outcome.

By engaging young people in productive creative activities, art acts as a preventative measure that deters them from adopting lifestyles that may be detrimental to their well-being. Within the context of childhood adversity, the early action approach supports at-risk young people by addressing challenges early on. At Community Links, the term 'Early Action' is used to refer to any service that prevents problems occurring or getting worse, tackling their causes rather than their consequences. This approach is particularly relevant in communities with entrenched socioeconomic inequalities. By implementing an early action approach to youth intervention, communities can collectively overcome challenges before they worsen.

¹⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/88447/CASE-systematic-review-July10.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/Innovation/deloitte-uk-power-up-uk-skills.pdf>

Defining youth intervention

Youth intervention can be defined as community-based services that work with young people to build Deep Value relationships within their community, support academic achievements and encourage them to make choices in their best interest. The range of activities that come under the umbrella of youth intervention all has a unifying thread which is to produce positive outcomes for young people. By connecting young people to their community in a positive way we can reduce the need for state intervention.

Deep Value relationships in youth intervention

Many accept that there is value in human relationships, but our perspective pushes this one step further and shows that good quality relationships are at the core of delivering effective services. Relationships that are pressured by targets, lack of time and administration don't allow for deep value bonds to be formed. To have a considerable impact on young people, arts initiatives need to be founded on deep value relationships. For young people living in deprived areas, the opportunities to unlock their potential in communal settings are limited. Despite evidence proving that arts and culture are economic giants¹⁷, government policies still treat the sector as second rate. Youth services have suffered 70% funding cut in less than a decade¹⁸ and public services that could provide a safety net for struggling families are disappearing. In the context of art interventions, effective relationships are instrumental in inspiring confidence, self-esteem and developing empathy. By welcoming deep value relationships, public services can improve the quality and performance of these services. For young people, a supportive environment built on strong relationships can unlock their potential and erode inequality. It is therefore vital that a deep value approach is acknowledged in any policymaking for arts as a youth intervention.

Community Links youth programmes are an example of how forming deep value relationships can contribute to positive outcomes. It's flagship *More than Mentors*¹⁹ programme is a psychologically-based peer mentoring model that takes an early action approach aimed at supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people. School and community-based peer mentoring are used as a preventative tool against the mental and emotional needs of young people. An independent evaluation carried out by the Anna Freud Centre found that the *More than Mentors* programme showed a reduction in mental health difficulties for secondary school children²⁰.

In terms of their perceptions of the impact of their participation in the programme, mentees spoke about a range of positive effects on their feelings, behaviour, school life, relationships with others, and ways of managing emotions and problems that they had experienced since taking part in *More than Mentors*.

Likewise, mentees described how having a mentor who can offer them support, advice and guidance was helpful. This example demonstrates how early action and deep value relationships have a positive effect on youth development.

In addition to the health benefits that can develop through arts engagement, creative interventions can also provide a pathway for young people to re-engage with other services like education and employment. An example of this is the *Community Links Music in the Air* programme which aims to build skills for the creative economy, support resilience and prevent youth violence through combining music participation and enrichment activities. Wraparound support is provided for young people and their families during music workshops to encourage engagement. This programme demonstrates that creative activities with various development opportunities can deliver better outcomes and bridge the skills gap.

¹⁷ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Economic%20impact%20of%20arts%20and%20culture%20on%20the%20national%20economy%20FINAL_0_0.PDF

¹⁸ <https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.community-links.org/youth-employment/more-than-mentors/>

²⁰ <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/More-than-Mentors-evaluation-summary.pdf>

The current arts crisis

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the arts and culture sector made a huge contribution to the UK economy and in 2019, arts and culture contributed £10.47 billion to the UK economy²¹, accounting for 15.7% of all jobs in the UK²². Government figures show that creative industries outperformed the rest of the UK between 2017 and 2018 as it grew more than five times the growth rate of the UK economy as a whole²³. Over the years the UK music industry has grown to become an economic powerhouse. Data from the Music by Numbers²⁴ economic study, found that in 2019 the UK music industry contributed £5.8 billion to the UK economy and employment in the industry hit an all-time high of 197,168. Theatre also continued to be a British success story, attracting more than 34 million visitors in 2018²⁵.

Britain's arts and culture sector has an unmatched global reputation according to 2018 data published in the Arts Newspaper²⁶. The UK has four of the top 10 most visited museums in the world, more than any other country. Employment in the arts sector has also been on an upwards trajectory and in the last 10 years, jobs in the UK's creative industries have grown at three times the UK average²⁷. In addition to the remarkable economic contribution of the sector, the arts also delivered cultural and social success across the UK. The civic role of arts organisations adds value to the wider society through cross-cultural engagement, shaping people's sense of identity and reducing social exclusion and isolation.

In response to the national lockdown measures in early 2020, activities across the arts and culture sector have collapsed. In a July 2020 report, the DCMS Committee warned that the pandemic presented "the biggest threat to the UK's cultural infrastructure, institutions and workforce in a generation"²⁸. This period has seen a decline in revenue for most areas of business, with the arts sector being one of the worse affected during the pandemic. Having the highest portion of the workforce eligible for the furlough scheme²⁹ and activities like theatre productions and live performances coming to an abrupt halt, the arts sector came to a complete standstill.

With much of the industry based on bringing people together in a connected social environment, many organisations could not navigate around social distancing rules and much remains uncertain with the changing government lockdown measures. Additionally, with most arts organisations dependent on earned income³⁰, the total wipe-out of arts activities leaves long-established business models crumbling as they suffer the greatest financial loss. In response, business executives told the government that "the worst-case scenario has become a reality for the arts and culture sector"³¹. In a letter to the UK's Culture Secretary, organisations warned that the arts and culture sector was at risk of "near-extinction"³². With uncertainty on how the sector can reopen safely on a long-term basis, the pandemic will likely leave a deep imprint on how the arts sector functions.

The DCMS Committee noted that the "loss of performing arts institutions, and the vital work they do in communities by spreading the health and education benefits of cultural engagement [would] reverse decades of progress in cultural provision and diversity and inclusion that we cannot afford to lose"³³. The exposed vulnerabilities within the arts sector have created an opportunity to create meaningful, structural change that elevates art engagement at all levels of society.

²¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2022/documents/19516/default/>

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-2019-employment/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-2019-employment>

²³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/959053/DCMS_Sectors_Economic_Estimates_GVA_2018_V2.pdf

²⁴ https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Music_By_Numbers_2019_Report.pdf

²⁵ <https://uktheatre.org/theatre-industry/news/2018-sales-data-released-uk-theatre-and-society-of-london-theatre/>

²⁶ <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/fashion-provides-winning-formula>

²⁷ <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/statistics>

²⁸ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2022/documents/19516/default/>

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-september-2020/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-september-2020>

³⁰ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Private%20Investment%20in%20Culture%20Survey%202019.pdf>

³¹ <https://heartoflondonbid.london/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Letter-to-Rt-Hon-Oliver-Dowden-MP-26-Jan-2021.pdf>

³² <https://heartoflondonbid.london/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Letter-to-Rt-Hon-Oliver-Dowden-MP-26-Jan-2021.pdf>

³³ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2022/documents/19516/default/>

Financial responses to the arts crisis

Following several months of lobbying from music venues, theatre groups and other cultural organisations, the government announced a 5-year culture investment fund worth £250 million for the cultural and creative sector³⁴. In total, the DCMS would be investing an additional £50 million each year in culture and the creative industries across England. This is expected to revitalise the creative economy by supporting existing assets and new cultural developments. On one hand, some industry professionals have hailed this investment as an opportunity to resurrect cultural and artistic talents across England. Nick Serota, the chair of the Arts Council England welcomed this investment and said that “towns and villages up and down England will benefit from investment in local libraries and museums, and in new jobs in our growing creative industries”³⁵. However, others including world renowned composer Andrew Lloyd Webber voiced their frustration with the government’s provisions for creative industries. Webber stressed his six theatres are suffering “acute financial stress”³⁶, losing approximately £1 million a month during forced closure.

In response to the pandemic, creative industries have been hugely creative and highly collaborative. Nesta announced a £23 million social impact investment fund offering loans between £150,000 and £1 million to help organisations in the arts, cultural and heritage sectors build resilience and deliver social outcomes³⁷. Recognising the gap in diverse-led organisations devoted to arts and health, the Baring Foundation has launched a new fund promoting the role of creativity in the lives of people with mental health problems from ethnically diverse backgrounds³⁸.

While these packages contain vital short-term support, they do not solve medium-term pressures on precarious workers, nor does it provide certainty for local arts initiatives that support arts engagement at entry-level. A failure to address systematic issues and provide significant uplift at all levels will challenge the development of arts as a youth intervention.

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-250-million-culture-investment-fund-launched>

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-250-million-culture-investment-fund-launched>

³⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/andrew-lloyd-webber-want-stop-theatre-have-arrest-us/>

³⁷ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/arts-culture-impact-fund/>

³⁸ <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/news-story/new-funding-for-creativity-mental-health-and-people-from-ethnically-diverse-backgrounds/>

Realising the potential of arts as a youth intervention

The role of arts as a youth intervention falls outside traditional metrics and adds value to society through strengthening community relationships, improving social mobility, educational performances and health and well-being.

The dynamic and social environment that art provides, allows residents to develop a stronger sense of place and become more involved in the development of their community. For young people, a heightened sense of belonging within their community can strengthen their ability to relate to others and the world around them. Art has the potential to revitalise local communities by diversifying their economic base and developing strong social capital. In a report by the Creative Industries Federation, they recognised the arts as having the potential to ‘drive and unlock innovation, deliver significant social impact, and invest heavily in the regeneration of communities throughout the UK’³⁹. Engaging in community art practices can improve social enrichment and the strong social bonds made through art can help increase the community’s social capital. Moving into the post-pandemic period, stronger and more resilient communities are needed to overcome the past devastation. Boosting local economies through the arts can develop creative skills, attract visitors and create jobs to support communities to build back better. Investing in local arts initiatives will contribute to maintaining the community’s vitality and developing stronger networks. Arts as a youth intervention has a role in reversing long-standing inequalities and creating a supportive environment for young people to grow professionally and personally.

Arts as a youth intervention creates a pool of creative talent that diversifies career outcomes for young people. Data from the CBI shows that the attitudes and aptitudes which are the biggest drivers of success for young people are resilience, enthusiasm, and creativity⁴⁰ - all skills which are developed while engaging in arts activities. As we move into a period of transition, the governments approach to economic prosperity should include improvements to young people’s career prospects.

As school leavers are pessimistic about getting a job post-COVID-19⁴¹, young people should have access to a diverse range of development opportunities. Local arts programs expose young people to different creative outlets and can create a new pathway into the creative industry. Key barriers to the growth of arts organisations include skills shortages and gaps in the workforce⁴². The creative skills gained through arts engagement can be harnessed as a driver of social mobility. The Social Mobility Commission concludes that in Great Britain ‘for this generation of young people in particular, [social mobility] is getting worse, not better’⁴³. Participation in arts activities can be the bridge between aspiration and achievement for young people. Purposeful participation within their community not only tackles social exclusion but can create conditions where young people can progress. Research shows that students from low-income families who engage in the arts at school are 20% more likely to vote as young adults⁴⁴. As demonstrated by this research, arts opportunities are vital for improved youth development. This will require the government to provide increased resources and funding to school’s creative subjects; a long-term funding plan for arts intervention at local levels; and a reform to existing funding streams.

Alongside strengthening creative talents, engagement with the arts supports educational outcomes. Research conducted by the Cultural Learning Alliance found that for children from low-income backgrounds, learning through arts and culture develops skills that lead to better overall performance in schools⁴⁵. Using evidence from this research it should be noted that local arts activities offer a way to build new capabilities and can improve young people’s performance in schools. World leading educational thinker Mr Schleicher told MPs that “in the fourth industrial revolution, arts may become more important than maths”⁴⁶. For many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the only opportunity to gain access to the arts is at school.

³⁹ <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2018-12/Creative%20Industries%20Federation%20-%20Growing%20the%20UK's%20Creative%20Industries.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1341/helping-the-uk-to-thrive-tess-2017.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/digital-mental-health-services/#headline1>

⁴² <https://creativealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Report-Skills-Needs-Assessment-For-The-Creative-And-Cultural-Sector-CCSkills.pdf>

⁴³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/569410/Social_Mobility_Commission_2016_REPORT_WEB__1_.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CLA-key-findings-2017.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CLA-key-findings-2017.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://www.tes.com/news/teachers-will-need-become-mentors-not-knowledge-deliverers-says-pisa-boss>

However, over the past few years, there has been a decline in arts education in the national curriculum in England. In the 2021-22 consultation on recurrent funding Education Secretary Gavin Williamson proposed to cut funding for arts and design subjects by 50% across higher education institutions in England⁴⁷. For young people at risk of poor outcomes, this becomes an additional barrier to achievement. Community arts organisations can fill this gap where young people are denied participation in arts activities.

The arts have played an important role in promoting health and well-being across communities. Research by the Arts Council England has evidenced that a higher frequency of engagement with arts and culture is generally associated with a higher level of subjective well-being⁴⁸. Access to the arts helps us to live well in our communities⁴⁹ and is a reason for investment. With 1 in 4 people experiencing a mental health problem of some form each year,⁵⁰ and an increased need for support around anxiety and depression for young people during the pandemic,⁵¹ arts engagement can lessen these health challenges. Investigating the direct and indirect impacts of arts and cultural experiences on secondary children, the University of Nottingham found that 45% of students sampled said that engagement in the arts helps them relax and reduces stress⁵². The study brings to light the profound impacts that sustained engagement with arts and culture can have on mental health and how to support the health and well-being of young people.

Mental well-being is linked to a host of social issues, as demonstrated by several services provided at Community Links both targeted at young people and other members of the community. A recent well-being event hosted by the *Help Through Crisis (HTC)*⁵³ team at Community Links, which helps those facing a crisis in their life or severe financial hardship, provided an insight into how place-based organisations can intervene to create long-lasting change. One attendee of the Well-being Week event the Dance and Movement session was “great, for energy and mental relaxation after a busy day”. However, much more needs to be done as mental health as a symptom, can be interlinked to other issues individual’s face, for e.g. those who benefited from the Well-being Week requested further support from other wraparound services such as housing needs and debt relief, which are also services provided at Community Links, supported by the City Bridge Trust, which has aimed to target those on the brink of homelessness, and guiding them towards the most efficient path to alleviate the difficulties they face. These issues, if not tackled as early as possible with our *Early Action* ethos in mind, can have an impact on the lives of young people growing up within such households, and have a ripple effect in their upbringing and local communities.

⁴⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8610a7a4-0ae3-47d3-9129-f234e086c43c/consultation-on-funding-for-ay2021-22-finalforweb.pdf>

⁴⁸ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Value_arts_culture_evidence_review.pdf

⁴⁹ https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017_-_Second_Edition.pdf

⁵⁰ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#References>

⁵¹ <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/digital-mental-health-services/#headline1>

⁵² <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-learning/tracking-arts-learning-engagement>

⁵³ <https://www.community-links.org/advice/help-through-crisis/>

Imagining arts as an intervention

Creativity is part of the UK's national character and provides a new avenue for economic and social growth. For arts as a youth intervention to be effective, the environment created needs to place young people as the participants and not solely observers. Involving young people in the development of arts intervention policies brings a unique perspective that may be overlooked by policymakers.

Young Urban Arts Foundation

Born from passion and creativity, the *Young Urban Arts Foundation*⁵⁴ has taken a preventative approach to promoting youth development by engaging young people in creative music and art workshops. Their mission is to support vulnerable and disadvantaged young people to fulfil their potential by driving creativity. In partnership with DeJaVu Radio, they created the Amplified platform for young people to amplify their voice online and work collaboratively on projects. By expanding the means of communication and liberating imagination, this workshop becomes a dynamic and social way of expression. One service user shared that “collaborating and helping each other along the way definitely helped when it came to being creative”⁵⁵. For young people here, arts participation has opened up a new space to rethink their environment and demonstrates how strong social bonds can be formed through the arts.

Kazzum Arts

Art projects at *Kazzum Arts*⁵⁶ involve a variety of media and functions to engage and empower young people in arts activities. Their creative well-being projects range from engaging young refugees at a high risk of experiencing exclusion in arts participation, to using trauma-informed practice to support young people who've faced childhood adversity. Through various workshops and programmes across London, young people have the opportunity to develop their creativity, overcome social issues and gain confidence in other areas of education. By facilitating innovative and playful projects, Kazzum Arts widens opportunities for young people and creates an environment that encourages social and reflective skills.

Arts Connect

*The Arts Connect*⁵⁷ support cultural opportunities that ensure all children and young people can benefit from engaging with high quality arts and cultural activities. Their diverse artistic projects include an Arts Ambassador Schools programme to develop quality arts and cultural provision across schools. As an art intervention, this initiative inspires young people to become a catalyst for change by realising their potential, building their resilience and developing social and leadership skills. They also support young artists through development training, mentoring and allowing them to get involved in real project experiences.

⁵⁴ https://www.yuaf.org/about?gclid=CjwKCAjwr56lBhAvEiwA1fuqGIC-z15wp2BzWG3ZeYu-6hZILr_d-8oeiXHFwzODi2RJpj2pPljSnBoCTMgQAvD_BwE

⁵⁵ https://e8720784-fdd7-47fb-bdbd-12cdc7912934.filesusr.com/ugd/3b7d08_2d852c0749c44a31a0a5e757fd96eab0.pdf

⁵⁶ <https://www.kazzum.org/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.artconnect.co.uk/>

The power of local arts as interventions

There are many examples of socially engaged arts organisations embedded within the community. The effectiveness of arts-based interventions is seen in community hubs such as Spotlight, Rosetta Arts and Newham Music.

Spotlight

Based in Tower Hamlets, *Spotlight*⁵⁸ is a multi-million-pound creative youth destination. Their services are free for young people and programs include design and broadcasting facilities, alongside performance, dance, boxing, fashion and styling. Borne from inadequate youth facilities in Poplar this organisation puts young people at the heart of what they do as the space is dedicated to growing youth talent and opportunities. The 'Spotlight youth committee' is an example of effective youth participation. This programme demonstrates how young people can become role models that represent the diversity in their local communities. Holding collaborative meetings and workshops to understand the needs of local youth amplifies the voices of young people within the community and creates a sense of belonging. Through these creative activities, young people can reimagine and transform their community.

Rosetta Arts

*Rosetta Arts*⁵⁹ is a fully equipped visual arts centre based in Newham that encourages residents to engage creatively in their community. Their innovative services include a range of artistic activities which include pottery, painting, photography and mosaic making. By having activities for all ages and learning abilities, this creative hub draws in all members of the community. In partnership with Newham's Internally Commissioned Youth Service and Children's Rights department, this programme offers a breadth of activities which include mindfulness and a range of art forms at different entry points.

Newham Music

*Newham Music*⁶⁰ aims to empower and upskill children and young people through high-quality music education. Working alongside local schools, cultural organisations and community groups, this creative hub brings exciting musical opportunities to young people in Newham. Dedicated to building skills and bringing joy, they also have the 'Newham Music Academy', which runs, after schools and on weekends. This vibrant centre of activity demonstrates the potential that arts as a young intervention can have. Interventions such as this help to de-mystify the arts sector by providing creative activities to community members from diverse backgrounds.

⁵⁸ <https://wearespotlight.com/>

⁵⁹ <https://rosettaarts.org/>

⁶⁰ https://www.newham-music.org.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAjwr56lBhAvEiwA1fuqGvhiPcJ7yDwz8-LOcNv8kJ1DKsg87uonX-Z4sBMxc3wdu2C6_ERWIRoC0egQAvD_BwE

Policy recommendations

It is more important than ever that governments, policymakers, and community organisations come together to provide the best outcomes for younger generations. As the arts provide a unique way to strengthen socioeconomic outcomes for young people, adequate arts interventions must be included at the heart of national policies.

The following policy recommendations are a starting point to support arts as a youth intervention beyond the pandemic and into recovery:

1. Ensure that art intervention reaches everyone

The provision of arts as a youth intervention should be widespread. There should be an adequate financial investment in arts initiatives, ensuring that this reaches local communities – particularly in underdeveloped communities. This funding must be supported by government strategies that ensure art and culture reflect the diversity of our country. To make it go further, this should affect funding opportunities for arts organisations.

2. Develop a cross-governmental strategy for engaging young people in the arts

Collaborative and systematic policy work is needed to drive impactful youth interventions. We recommend that the Secretaries of State for DCMS, Department for Education and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government develop and lead a cross-governmental strategy to support the delivery of arts as a young intervention at all levels.

3. Bridge the digital divide

Community arts organisations discussed in this paper demonstrate an unstoppable trend towards digitalisation. As technology changes the way young people interact with the arts, the government and funders must invest in quality digital access. This financial support will bring meaningful connectivity and widen access to the arts.

4. Art as a youth intervention should be among strategic aims to promote growth and social cohesion in communities

Investing in arts generates a clear return in terms of jobs, community prosperity and tourism and have huge benefits in providing well-being, building stronger communities, and boosting economic growth. The Government's objectives of 'building back better' will be advanced if arts as a youth intervention are incorporated in its strategic aims.

5. Enable young people to take the lead on arts intervention programmes

Currently, much of the direction of arts intervention programmes comes from the priorities of funders, whose perspective is often very different from the young people they are targeting. For arts as a youth intervention to be successful, young people must be given more choice and control. By leading the direction of such programmes and using their experience to inspire creativity, there is likely to be more successful engagement with young people.

National government, local government and community organisations must have a genuine commitment to supporting young people and this must be reflected in policies and practices. Our recommendations advocate for meaningful and sustainable changes that break down deep-rooted barriers that prevent young people from engaging with the arts. In addition to policy changes, a cultural shift in attitude is essential for long term systematic change and to provide genuine solutions to young people's concerns in Britain.

This paper has been written by Murshad Habib, Policy and Learning Manager, and Rachael Smith, Policy and Communications Officer, at Community Links. We are grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund for supporting our work.

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